

## PENDULUM SWINGS IN THE CYPRUS ISSUE: BETWEEN INTERNATIONALISATION TO EUROPEANISATION

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### Abstract

*The Cyprus issue in Turkish Foreign and domestic policy is predominantly considered as a 'national cause' since its significance has often been perceived as having both a security and politic leverage. With the recent exploration of rich hydrocarbons and natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean, Cyprus now also constitutes an economic ascendancy for Turkey. This article scrutinises the changing dynamics of the Cyprus issue from bilateral to multilateral levels. In particular, it seeks to explain how the Cyprus issue has evolved from a Turkey-Greece affair to international relations. This paper identifies three broad periods which set the position of the Cyprus issue globally: Internationalisation (1950-1980); Europeanisation (1980-2004); Hybrid period (2004-2020). By analysing each period, this paper claims that Greece and South Cyprus have knowingly pursued a policy to transform the Cyprus issue from the bilateral level to a multilateral dimension, aiming to legitimise their disputed Cyprus policy by bringing foreign actors into the question. This article concludes that a proliferation of global actors on the Cyprus issue causes an asymmetric relationship which poses a formidable obstacle to reaching a long-lasting resolution over the island.*

**Keywords:** Foreign Policy, Internationalisation, Europeanisation, Turkey, Greece.

## KIBRIS MESELESİNDE SARKAÇ SALINIMI: ULUSLARARASILAŞMADAN AVRUPALILAŞMAYA GİDEN SÜREÇ

### Öz

*Kıbrıs meselesi, sahip olduğu güvenlik ve siyasi önem açısından Türkiye'nin iç ve dış politikasında "milli bir dava" olarak kabul edilmektedir. Bu politikanın oluşumunda adanın jeopolitik ve jeostratejik konumunun yanında, zengin hidrokarbon ve doğal gaz yataklarının bulunmasıyla ekonomik olarak da önemli bir manivela gücü olması yatmaktadır. Bu makale, Kıbrıs meselesinin değişen dinamiği*

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*çerçevesinde Türkiye-Yunanistan ilişkilerinden çok taraflı ilişkilere nasıl evrildiğini araştırmaktadır. Özelde, Kıbrıs meselesinin küresel bir boyut kazanmasını üç farklı dönem ışığında incelemektedir: Kıbrıs sorununun uluslararasılaşması (1950-1980); Kıbrıs sorununun Avrupalılaşması (1980-2004); Kıbrıs sorununun hibrit dönemi (2004-2020). Her bir dönemi mercek altına alarak analiz eden makale, Yunanistan ve Güney Kıbrıs'ın taammüden meseleyi iki taraflı ilişki bağlamından çok taraflı düzeye taşıma politikasının, kendi ulusal çıkarlarını meşrulaştırmayı amaçlayan bir politika olduğunu iddia etmektedir. Kıbrıs konusuna farklı küresel aktörlerin müdahil olmasıyla ortaya çıkan asimetrik yapı, adada uzun vadeli bir çözüme ulaşmanın önündeki en büyük engel olduğu sonucuna ulaşılmıştır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Dış Politika, Uluslararasılaşma, Avrupalılaşma, Türkiye, Yunanistan.*

### **Introduction**

The geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean is once more receiving hot attention in the global order. The wave of political transformations, known as the Arab Fall started in December 2010, following a Tunisian man's self-immolation in protest against the injustices in his country, and erupted across North Africa and the Middle East including Egypt, Yemen, Jordan, Algeria, Bahrain, Libya, Morocco and Syria. The Arab Fall and the discovery of gas reserves augmented the importance of Cyprus for all stakeholders, so paving the way for a hard power strategy on Cyprus (Ulusoy, 2016:393). The political, security and economic leverage of Cyprus, has strengthened the island's geopolitics, and directed to reformulate the Cyprus policy of the concerned parties. Turkey's natural gas exploration activities in the seas off Northern Cyprus in the late 2020s, as well as South Cyprus's unilateral agreement with various regional actors, should be interpreted within the realm of a changing geopolitical dynamic of the region. This trend has resulted in a complex web of relations, departing from the bilateral level to a multilateral dimension.

The island became a regional power hub for a large number of states. While the Turks believe in the possibility of peace by respecting the Turkish-origin people living on the island, in contrast, the Greek Cypriots seek justice, claiming that it has never been maintained (Bryant, 2001:893). Despite the early constructive approach of Turkey and Greece to solve the problem, the Cyprus issue later become the sole obstacle for regional stability due to the latter's uncompromising stance. The present so-called realist and pragmatic Greece and European Union (EU) policy towards Cyprus is counter-productive, undermining all normative principles that the EU adheres to, including promotion of democracy and human rights (Stavridis, 1999:95).

Therefore, Greece and South Cyprus's internationalisation of the Cyprus issue over the last five decades has destabilised Turkey's amicable approaches to both Cyprus and Greece. It is clear that separating the Cyprus issue from the context of bilateral relations and grounding it in a more global dimension will not facilitate a solution.

Based on this background, this paper considers the Cyprus issue in the context of regional and international perspectives. Dividing into three broad periods, the first part of the article concerns the emergence of the Cyprus issue in the Turkish foreign policy realm. The second part of the article reveals how Cyprus became a key factor in Turkey's transatlantic relations with particular focus on the US President Johnson's Letter. This is the period of "Internationalisation of Cyprus". The third section focuses on the "Europeanization of Cyprus issue" period, which started after Greece joined the European Union in 1981. The final part, namely "Hybrid period of Cyprus issue" started in the early of 2000s as South Cyprus sought both International and European level of support simultaneously.

### **1. The Emergence of Cyprus as a "National Cause" in Turkish Foreign Policy**

Turkey's engagement in Cyprus dates back to 1571, when the island became part of the Ottoman Empire until 1879. Throughout the three centuries, the two communities, the Greek and Turkish Cypriots have lived side-by-side without any deep robust confrontation. In 1878 the United Kingdom took over the administration of the Island, first as a protectorate, then as part of the British Empire and finally a colony until 1960 when the London-Zurich accords established the Republic of Cyprus. Three guarantor states, Turkey, Greece and Britain signed a treaty to preserve national unity under the system of a quasi-federal Republic of Cyprus. This treaty also allowed the right of military intervention by any of the guarantors if the conditions of the treaty were threatened (Müftüler-Bac and Güney, 2005:282). Although this accord aimed to set-up a peaceful solution based on bi-national independence, administrative partnership and political equality (Müftüler-Bac and Güney, 2005:282), this agreement, which is the closest to the ideal solution, was not implemented on the ground. Therefore, Cyprus experienced a tumultuous independence movement, launched by nationalist Greek Cypriots, which culminated with intense clashes between the two communities (Camp, 1980:43).

In a broadest sense, there are three basic phases and/or landmark events that intensified the significance of the Cyprus issue globally. Changing the

dynamic nature of the Cyprus issue from the bilateral to international level has come into prominence in these periods. The first phase started after WWII, when the idea of Enosis (unification of all Greek lands) created a catastrophic relationship between Turkey and Greece<sup>1</sup>. Yet, between 1945 and 1952 Turkey pursued the Cyprus issue adopting a low-level engagement, since the Soviets were seen as the main threat in Turkey's security perception. For this reason, Turkey maintained a passive policy on the Greek initiatives due to a lack of political will, accompanied with the belief that the Cyprus issue was perceived as an internal problem of the UK. Yet, after the London Conference on June 30, 1955, Turkey became an official partner to the problem in order to protect the rights of Turks living on the island. Around this time, Greek politicians persistently brought the issue to the international platform, both to the UN (1955) and to the European Human Right Commissions, to gain foreign support and expand its manoeuvring space. Therefore, the first period, from 1950 to 1980, can be considered as the Internationalisation of the Cyprus issue, as the island divided into North and South in 1974.

The second phase started when Greece joined the European Community (EC) in 1981 (later renamed as the European Union with the Maastricht Treaty). Greece's acceptance into the EU without solving historical problems, including the continental shelf and Cyprus issue with Turkey, brought a new dimension to their relationship. As Onis states, "the asymmetry caused by Greece's early incorporation into the EU as a full member continues to pose a major obstacle to the resolution of long-standing tensions in such key spheres as the Aegean Sea and the Cyprus disputes" (Önis, 2001:31). From that time onward, the Cyprus problem ceased to be just a problem between Turkey and Greece, but moved to the EU platform, influencing purposefully with the Turkey-EU process (Bağcı and Uslu, 2006; Mor, 2008). The period, from 1980 to 2004, can be classified as the Europeanisation of the Cyprus issue.

The third phase began with the Republic of Cyprus's official joining to the EU on May 1, 2004, despite the Greek Cypriots overwhelming rejection of the UN proposed and internationally supported Annan Plan. In this period the policy of Greece and Greek Cypriots has been to ground the Cyprus issue both in the EU and International platform. In addition to its possible EU membership in 2002, the South Cyprus started to make Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) agreements with other riparian countries, Lebanon, Syria, Israel and especially Egypt in the Eastern Mediterranean. The final period is referred to as the Hybrid period, since South Cyprus appealed for full support from both the EU and at the International level simultaneously. During each of these periods the issue of Cyprus, as Firat says, made major contributions to Turkish

Foreign Policy. Firstly it helps to understand how the Turkish government is isolated without any support from international circles; secondly the Cyprus issue is being utilized by opposition groups to create a sense of pressure on the government to redirect foreign policy domestically (Firat, 1997:4).

## **2. Internationalisation of the Cyprus Issue: A Focus on President Johnson's Letter**

The world saw an unprecedented wave of democratisation movements in the post-World War II period. Cyprus, which had been subject to British colonial power since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, found a favourable atmosphere to declare its new autonomous governmental system. Upon the British decision to withdraw from the island, Turkey and Greece both declared rights over Cyprus, which set in motion a series of disputes over the island. When Greece failed to achieve its policy, it pursued the issue through the United Nations (UN) to make a decision in its favour in the early 1950s. When Greece failed to reach its Cyprus policy under the UN flag, due to blockage by the UK and the USA, it agreed to negotiate with Turkey in London in 1955. Following a series of unsuccessful negotiations, Greece once more took the issue to the UN platform in 1957 but was again rejected, as the UN General Assembly bid a solution, stating that the Cyprus Issue needs to be handled between co-riparians.

On the other hand, the British government, one of the powerful actors in the Cyprus issue, presented various self-government plans to both Turkey and Greece such as the Radcliffe Proposal (1956), Foot Plan (1957) and the Macmillan Plan (1958). While Turkey gave its full support to the Macmillan Plan, which proposed to share power among the three states (Turkey, Greece and Cyprus) within a transition period of seven years, it was rejected by the Greek authorities (Bolukbasi, 1998:414). One year later, in the London Summit (1959) between Turkey, Greece, Britain and Cyprus, the leaders decided to guarantee the independence of the island.

Despite several local and international initiatives to end political divisions, civilian casualties increased over this period. The establishment of a terrorist organisation known as EOKA (Ethniki Organosis Kypriou Agoniston) in 1955 for the realization of *enosis* created a challenge for the Turkish side and jeopardised the balance of power against Turkey. In response to EOKA's civilian attacks, Turkish Cypriots formed the Türk Mukavemet Teşkilatı (TMT) in 1958 which supported Turkish Cypriot's rights (Yüksel, 2018:311). TMT aimed to protect the minority Turkish Cypriot population, which lacked foreign support and faced a policy of forceful deportation and

killing, orchestrated by nationalist Greeks. In response to attacks on the Turkish community and a coup d'état against the Cypriot government, Turkey launched a military operation on July 20, 1974, in accordance with Article 4 of the London and Zurich Agreement. This operation constituted a new parameter for the regional dynamics where the US's stance over the issue moved to support the Greek side. Previously, when Cyprus achieved statehood, its external supporters the European empires were in decline, and due to the Cold War rivalry with the Soviet Union, the US's foreign policy was in line with Turkey.

In fact, the transformation of the Cyprus issue from a regional issue to a global issue through the involvement of the US goes back to the late 1950s. In this change, Greece and Cyprus utilised an utmost benefit by siding with the US policy. Therefore, the first political cleavage between Turkey and the US on the Cyprus issue occurred in the late 1950s, when the US's reluctance to approve Turkey's aspiration to prevent Greek Cypriots civilian attacks deteriorated the credibility of the US in Turkish policy thinking. In addition to several localised civilian conflicts, the Greek Cypriot's attacks forced Turkish authorities to take actions, but the US always set the limits to obstruct Turkish demands. In particular, following the period known as "Bloody Christmas", which started on December 21, 1963, when a total of 364 Turkish Cypriots died and thousands were displaced, Turkey once more applied a diplomatic solution which failed. Turkish Prime Minister İnönü, in a speech, made it public that the behaviour of the US towards Turkey is hostile, because US authorities prevented Turkey from intervening in Cyprus while the situation in Turkish villages was deteriorating day by day due to attacks by the Greek Cypriots. İnönü's claim that he could not intervene in Cyprus due to US opposition, has also been interpreted as a tactic to excuse his political stalemate. He also stated that if the US continues to act in this manner, the Western alliance (Turkey & the US) will break up (Bolukbasi, 1993:507). This is the first instance, where it can openly be seen, that Turkish policy makers started to change their perception vis-à-vis the US, who until then had been the natural ally of Turkey for years.

In point of fact, the US was always perceived as the natural ally by Turkish policy makers, even the membership of Turkey to NATO in 1952 was considered as making Turkey the US's closest ally in the Middle East. However, this idea began to decline once the Cyprus question came into play. On the one hand, the US's reluctance to play an active role in solving the dispute, on the other, the harsh letter sent by President Johnson to Prime Minister İsmet İnönü, was responded to with a deep disappointment by

Turkey. The feeling on the street was that the US was the main obstacle to Turkey's Cyprus operation, which eventually triggered the anti-American social movements of the late 1960's. Strong public pressure obliged the ruling elites to adopt a harsh political discourse which caused a rift in Turkey's transatlantic relations. İnönü also used the US failure in mediation as a means to ward off criticism on Turkey's defensive foreign policy behaviours.

The greatest anti-American sentiments culminated on June 5, 1964, when Prime Minister İnönü informed Raymond Hare (US Ambassador in Turkey) that Turkey was planning to intervene in Cyprus. Hare immediately consulted with the US and President Johnson penned a letter to PM İnönü. This harsh letter warned Turkey that there would be repercussions if Turkey acted unilaterally without consent of the US, a statement that alienated Turkish policy makers from the US.

I must, therefore, first urge you to accept the responsibility for complete consultation with the United States before any such action is taken... NATO allies have not had a chance to consider whether they have an obligation to protect Turkey against the Soviet Union if Turkey takes a step which results in Soviet intervention... I must tell you in all candor that the United States cannot agree to the use of any United States supplied military equipment for a Turkish intervention in Cyprus under present circumstances.(Johnson and Inonu, 1966).

İnönü's response to this letter also contained some rebukes:

...From the outset we have taken a special care to consult US on this matter... we have informed US... to be answered that US was not a party to the issue... We complied with your request without any satisfactory results being secured at the United Nations (Johnson and Inonu, 1966:388).

Johnson's urgent and cautionary letter included a hidden threat that the US would not help if the USSR were to invade Turkey in the follow-up of Turkey's Cyprus operation (Sönmezoğlu and Bağcı, 1994). In fact, it was not only Johnson's letter regarding Cyprus but also other factors that affected İnönü's disinclination to intervene in Cyprus. As Bolukbasi states there were three factors weighing heavily in İnönü's decisions (Bolukbasi, 1993:519). First, İnönü rather preferred a peaceful settlement by seeking US mediation; second, there was unfavourable global opinion against the unilateral action of Turkey; third, the Greek Cypriot leader Makarios had gained support from the USSR. Therefore, conditions for an early military operation were not prevailing, since it would have borne a heavily political and economic cost for

Turkey, at a time that the Turkish armed forces were not prepared for a solo overseas military involvement (Bolukbasi, 1993:519).

When it comes to the 1970s, Turkish leaders showed a robust will in launching a military action to Cyprus on July 20, 1974 to protect the rights of Turkish Cypriots. The Peace Operation was declared by the former Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit: “The Turkish Armed Forces [TSK] will not open fire as long as it is not fired upon, they are in Cyprus not for war but for peace. [The TSK] is in Cyprus not for an occupation but to stop an occupation. With its operation launched at dawn, [the TSK] will save both Turkish and Greek Cypriots from the darkness of the oppressive regime”(Ahlas, 2019). Turkish intervention in Cyprus in 1974 has enabled Greece to build closer relations with the United States, European Community (EC) and other Non-allied movement countries to increase its security and balance the power in the region (Önis, 2001:34). Since then, the southern part of the country has been under the control of the internationally recognized government of the Republic of Cyprus (also referred to as South Cyprus) and the northern part under the control of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), recognized only by Turkey.

### **3. Europeanisation of the Cyprus Issue**

Turkey applied to the EC in 1987 in parallel with the Greek Cypriot application. The initial strategy of Turkey was to isolate its membership process from the Cyprus issue, as it believed that any linkage could jeopardize Turkey’s military stance on the island. Therefore it tried to separate its European integration from the Cyprus issue during the application process (Ulusoy, 2008:314). However, despite the intensive efforts of Turkish politicians, the Greek side and European leaders insistently handled the issue as a Turkey-EU-Cyprus triple equation. In reaction to such policies the deputy Prime Minister at that time Mesut Yılmaz stated that, “Turkey’s EU membership could not be associated with a settlement of the Cyprus issue” (Kyris, 2011:99).

Turkey’s inflexible stance on supporting Turkish people on the island based on a fair and equitable power sharing (Cankara, 2016:18), continued in the following years. Turkish bureaucrats rejected any attempts to link the process to relations with Greece or the Cyprus issue. By the same token, Denktaş criticised the EU’s unfair and partial approach to the issue, claiming that the EU’s decision to accept Cyprus would impede a solution. As Ulusoy points out, “the governing elite in Turkey tended to interpret the EU’s involvement in the Cyprus dispute as threatening to Turkey’s strategic interest

in the Eastern Mediterranean, if the island became an EU member before Turkey”(Ulusoy, 2008:314).

Nevertheless, a robust turn in Turkey’s rapprochement to the Cyprus issue came about in the early 2000s, when the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) won the elections with a landslide victory, Ankara’s orthodox policy towards the Mediterranean soon changed (Kinacioğlu and Oktay, 2006:261; Kyris, 2011; Ulusoy, 2008:317). From the start of Turkey’s involvement on the island, Ankara tended to pursue a firm policy towards the solution of the Cyprus problem. However, this policy paradigm was moderated, and a flexible foreign policy behaviour was pursued by the newly elected government. This new impetus was accompanied with the Annan Plan, which aimed to find a solution through a comprehensive agreement. The Annan plan was presented by the Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, based on a two-side solution regarded as one of the most all-inclusive agreements. The important point was the creation of a loose confederation<sup>2</sup>, the United Cyprus Republic, with two equal and constituent states. However, all efforts of Annan were in vain due to the uncompromising policy of Greek Cypriots.

In fact, the AK Party opened up a new opportunity for both sides as the traditional hard-line and status quo foreign policy favoured a flexible stance to the Cyprus problem. In January 2003, Erdoğan voiced expressions for renewal, raising his new approach about the Cyprus issue, in contrast to Turkey’s policy over the previous 30 years, sending a message to the world leaders that he was the one who could solve the problem. He even furthered his message, stating: “I’m not in favour of the continuation of the policy that has been maintained in Cyprus over the past thirty to forty years [...] we will do whatever is required of us; this is not Mr. Denktaş’ private matter”(Cumhuriyet 2003). Erdoğan and his cabinet had rather divergent policies, aiming not to stick to the status quo both in foreign and domestic policy (Kinacioğlu and Oktay, 2006). However, unlike some arguments claiming that the AK Party government managed to shift Turkey’s position on the Cyprus problem(Kyris, 2011:98), Ulusoy purports counterarguments saying that even the AK Party utilized the Cyprus issue to manage domestic political problems and it remained at the level of voiced rhetoric rather than structural change (Ulusoy, 2008:327).

Despite the presence of diverse ideological and political views in Turkey, the importance of the Cyprus issue had always been seen as a “national cause”<sup>3</sup> which became the *sine qua non* principle in Turkish foreign and domestic policy for its political leaders. Even, Erdoğan himself defined the Cyprus issue

as a “*National cause*” (Hürriyet, 2003), while advancing an unorthodox approach to the issue. There are several reasons that explain why TFP towards the Cyprus issue significantly changed when the AK Party came to power. First is the domestic factor, as many critics believe that Erdoğan was using the Cyprus issue for the promotion of his own reputation (Kinacıoğlu and Oktay, 2006:264). Since he was considered as the leader of a “moderate Islamic” party, his policy behaviour was noted sceptically by the secular Turkish establishment. That is to say the early conciliatory approach of the AK Party government towards the Cyprus issue was seen as a suitable way to gain wide-ranging support and appeal to public sympathy, to act as leverage to further its position domestically (Kinacıoğlu and Oktay, 2006:263). Moreover, a pro-resolution statement from Erdoğan, in contrast to Denktaş and other leaders, was considered as a means to elevate Erdoğan’s popularity abroad to further strengthen his political position in Turkey (Kinacıoğlu and Oktay, 2006:264).

Another factor which softened Turkey’s political stance to the Cyprus issue was the self-assurance of the newly elected government, which was riding on a wave of popular support even beyond Turkey. Winning the election with great success offered the government the opportunity to change certain structural behavioural patterns, including those related to the Cyprus issue. AK Party, in fact was trying to find its own way of policy implication under the heavy military and bureaucratic oversight, since the political weight of the Turkish military has always overshadowed the decisions of the policy-makers over the previous decades.

This stark deviation of Turkish Foreign Policy on Cyprus created an anti-government response that impacted the Turkish Cypriot domestic political dynamics as well. For this reason, the Turkish position on Cyprus was divided mainly into two camps (Kinacıoğlu and Oktay, 2006:265). On the one hand there were several anti-plan supporters including Ahmet Necdet Sezer (former President of Turkey), the former TRNC President Rauf Denktaş, and the Turkish military. On the other hand, there were pro-Annan plan supporters including Erdoğan’s party leaders and the opposition parties in the TRNC. Erdoğan’s new revisionist approach was welcome in many circles from business to NGOs, from journalists to politicians. All other political parties in Turkey including the Republican People’s Party and Süleyman Demirel continued to support the former policy. Despite Erdoğan’s strong stance on the Cyprus issue, several political figures in his cabinet, including Yaşar Yakış and Abdullah Gül, pursued a moderate approach to ease the tension, demonstrating that the AK Party leader’s Cyprus policy does not need to be interpreted as “give-out-and-disburden”(Akşam, 2003). Therefore, this

polyphonic attitude amongst the AK Party leaders should be interpreted within the real politics, which predicts that any politics will be based primarily on considerations of circumstance.

As of 2004, the linkage between Turkey's membership to the EU and the Cyprus issue became clearer. This was the accomplishment of Greece and South Cyprus, who are confident in the unilateral support of the EU. Turkey's pro-solution statements on the Cyprus issue are in vain as the EU's attitude towards Turkey's membership is openly hypocritical. On the one hand, while the European Council acknowledged that Turkey was a successful candidate in fulfilling the Copenhagen criteria, which urged that negotiations should be opened without delay; on the other hand, they put forward several other pre-conditions, including the requirement to solve the Cyprus question before membership. In this atmosphere, the Cyprus issue underwent a rather interesting twist in 2004. The Turkish government worked hard to accept the Annan Plan, since the political leaders' priorities were to solve the Cyprus issue before the Republic of Cyprus officially became a member of the EU. Therefore, a referendum on the Annan Plan was held on April 24, 2004 with the hope of achieving a lasting solution for the island. In this referendum, the government of Greece was also supportive of the Annan plan, yet the result was surprising for them<sup>4</sup>. Although the Turkish Cypriot's returned a positive vote for the Plan with a 64.9 per cent majority, the Greek Cypriots in the south rejected it with an emphatic 75.8 per cent majority. The result of the referendum was surprising for many EU leaders since they were not expecting a rejection of the plan by the Greek Cypriots. As Kınacıoğlu and Oktay say "the reason why an overwhelming majority of the Greek Cypriots voted "no" was because of their anticipation of a better deal once they became EU members"(Kinacıoğlu and Oktay, 2006:269).

Just one week after this referendum, on May 1, 2004, the Republic of Cyprus as representing the whole island, was accepted as a member of the EU. With membership, the leaders of South Cyprus considered that the EU, as an external power, could compel Turkey to act in favour of their policy. Most importantly, they now had the power to block Turkey's membership to the EU by veto or the option to use the threat of a veto as blackmail while negotiating(Tan, 2016:40). Consequently, despite the majority "no" vote of Greek Cypriots, so destroying the UN and the EU backed Annan Plan, they were rewarded by membership of the EU. There has been a pattern of stalling Turkey in its accession process. Cyprus started official negotiations with the EU by March 31, 1998, after which Turkey was officially recognised as a candidate for full membership to the EU on December 12, 1999. Consequently

within 5 years Cyprus signed the accession agreement on April 13, 2003 and joined the EU on May 1, 2004 just a year later. While Turkey's negotiations for full membership of the EU were not started until October 3, 2005 and yet 15 years later, as of 2021, there has been no significant advancement in the process. Since then, the EU has recognised the Republic of Cyprus as the legitimate government on behalf of the entire island, while the Turkish Cypriot's full support for the Annan plan has given them no benefits. It has been claimed that this achievement of Cyprus is interpreted as victory of Hellenism (Bağcı and Uslu, 2006:271). Predictably, the Turkish public's positive perception of the EU has decreased dramatically, as demonstrated by a poll which reported that the Turkish support for EU membership has dropped from 62% in 2004 to 47% in 2010 (Kyrıs, 2011:103).

In fact, Cyprus's accession process into the EU without solving the problem has constituted the main source of conflict since Greek Cypriots do not appear to favour any permanent solution after having guaranteed their place in the EU. It appears that EU leaders thought that the Cyprus problem could be solved more practically within the EU, that somehow Turkey's overall EU aspiration will eventually force Turkey to recognize the Republic of Cyprus. However, this was a misguided calculation as Turkey's status quo has not changed much. Despite several counterstatements to the EU's Cyprus policy being consistent with Turkish policy, there is no doubt that the positive announcements were aimed to pacify the reaction expected from Turkish side and to recover the EU's credibility in Turkey.

In short, the accession of South Cyprus to the EU was a more beneficial policy for the Greek Cypriot side as they gained legal and institutional leverage that can be used against Turkey in every occasion. It should be remembered that Turkey's positive approaches towards the Cyprus issue in fact worked against its' interests. From this time onward, the Cyprus issue became an impediment for the European Integration of Turkey. Garnering the support of all the European Union (EU) members, the Cyprus issue became one of the setbacks for Turkey's future engagement with the EU. Moving the Cyprus issue from the Turkey-Greece bilateral relations to the EU-Turkey relations level, can be called Europeanization of the issue.

#### **4. Re-Internationalisation of the Cyprus Issue: Hybrid Period**

The re-internationalisation of Cyprus started from the early 2000s when exploratory work confirmed predictions about the existence of rich natural gas resources in the eastern Mediterranean. As of 2002, the Republic of Cyprus has started to make Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) agreements with other

riparian countries, Lebanon, Syria, Israel and especially Egypt. This was a new step, combining international alliance, EU level support (with EU membership in 2004) and regional cooperation. The discovery of rich hydrocarbon reserves in the eastern Mediterranean has led to the establishment of new areas for co-operation between South Cyprus and other regional powers. The most tangible initiative was launched in 2010 as Greece and other states signed an official agreement regarding the discovery of rich hydrocarbon deposits in the eastern Mediterranean. Activity further increased with the influx of large international energy companies to the region, the largest being French Total, Italian ENI, USA's Exxon Mobil and Noble, all engaged in the exploratory activities within the framework of their agreements with Cyprus.

Following this Israel and Egypt signed an agreement to transfer their newly found natural gas reserves in Tamar, Leviathan, Zohr and Aphrodite via a pipeline which passes through Cyprus's southern continental shelf. South Cyprus, Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Italy, Greece and Israel, met in Cairo in January 2019 to announce that they had established the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum. A comprehensive economic and political arrangement through Gas Forum which aims to transform the Eastern Mediterranean into a new energy base should be seen as yet another policy to isolate Turkey in the context of Cyprus, thereby taking the issue to an international platform.

Cyprus's regional base initiatives gathered all regional stakeholders while notably side-lining Turkey and Northern Cyprus, a move which also received strong support from both the US and the EU (BBC News Türkçe). This latest period therefore can be called *Hybridisation* of the Cyprus issue. This term refers to the fact that the Cyprus issue is now on the agenda of the UN, the EU and Regional Block countries. In this equation Turkey, which is one of the leading countries in the Eastern Mediterranean, and Turkish Cypriots on the island, have faced a new exclusion by their supposedly strategic partners, the US and EU. Greek authorities assume that their new strategy has borne fruit, which is the weakening of Turkey's hand. The immediate step that Turkey should take is to involve other powerful actors into this new parameter, including China and Russia, for gas discovery initiatives to stabilise the asymmetric balance of power which has emerged in favour of South Cyprus and Greece.

### **Conclusion**

The Cyprus issue still occupies the top place as one of the most major foreign policy issues for both Turkey and Greece. While Turkey has largely

agreed to ratify the UN-supported Cyprus plans, Greece has tended to claim a unilateral unification of the Island under its' representation. Whenever the tension has been raised between Turkey and the US, the EU and latterly other Mediterranean states, Greece has always found that conditions have evolved which enable it to achieve a favourable strategic gain. Greece and South Cyprus have therefore shifted the geopolitical space to include the US, EU, Israel and Egypt, to further exert their influence over the Cyprus issue.

In response to this change, Turkish has pursued a fluctuating policy regarding the Cyprus issue. For instance, in the first period (1960-1980), Turkey followed a firm stance utilising all means available. However, its policy choice has switched from a traditional hard-line policy to a moderate approach from the 1990s to 2010. Despite Turkey's solution-oriented Cyprus policy, it has gradually become a precondition to Turkey's accession to the EU. It is not surprising that Greece and South Cyprus always seek to take full advantage from their EU membership through exercising their veto power in the course of the Turkey-EU negotiating process. Therefore, it appears that the Cyprus issue will continue to be a major issue in Turkish Foreign Policy in coming years. Due to its strategic location, offering great advantage for military dominance in the Mediterranean Sea, as well its economic leverage for developing states, the Cyprus issue will play a crucial role for Turkey's relations with its neighbours and even further afield.

To summarise, the island's political and security significance has once more been overtaken by the economic dimension. In order to balance the regional power structures, Turkey has utilised both hard-line (as seen in 1970s) and soft-oriented policy (from 2003-to 2006) for the Cyprus issue. However, this flexibility in policy has not received an equitable support from the external actors. Turkey has acted in accord with the UN principles during the referendum and the majority of votes from Turkish Cypriots supported this stance, yet Greek Cypriots responded with a 'No' overwhelmingly, and they were never-the-less accepted into the EU as the representatives of the whole island. The inclination of Greek politicians has been to move from the international platform (UN) to the regional platform (EU), therefore a hybrid strategy can be explained through the rational choice perspective, whereby they would benefit due to the support of like-minded groups in the EU and the UN. The political elite in Greece considered that the Cyprus issue would be a toolkit to level its advantage up throughout the Turkey-EU negotiating process, while having a regional agreement with other states to exploit natural resources, motivated it to legitimate its legal status. At this juncture, the endeavours of Greek Cypriots to appeal for their side at different levels has

boosted their position, while diminishing the chance of a long-lasting solution with Turkey. Recent initiatives on searching for gas and oil within the Cyprus hinterland, pave the way for the re-internationalisation of the Cyprus issue once more, as many global stakeholders are attached to the issue. Within the present parameters, Turkey should manifest a new strategy in order to meet its security and economic considerations with the multiple actors in the region. This strategy prognosis is based primarily on considerations of the best given circumstance and factors.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Armaoğlu, as Greek politicians obtained 12 islands from Italy 10 February 1947, which triggered their embedded desire of Megalo Idea (a great idea that anticipate the reuniting of ex-Greek zone) became much clear, thus, their next objective become to success Enosis, unification of all Greek lands. See more detail,(Armaoğlu 2007:529)

<sup>2</sup> Turkey supports “Belgian Formula” which is based on the Belgian federal model. According to this model a loose federation of strong constituent states.

<sup>3</sup> The term of “National Cause” has often been stated by political leaders, including Rauf Denktaş, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu and several others.

<sup>4</sup> The former Head of EU's enlargement Verheugen said that: “I am deceived by Greek Cypriots”. (Mor, 2008:1016).