



Issue description

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Introduction:

The Eastern Mediterranean is currently fraught with security challenges. Failed states, mass migration and terrorism afflict the region. Amid this turmoil, however, a golden opportunity exists to resolve one issue that has eluded a lasting settlement for decades, referring to the island of Cyprus. My government's vision for its future involves transforming the island into a bastion of peace, stability, cooperation and economic prosperity.

Cyprus's modern history has been dominated by tension between its Greek and Turkish inhabitants. Cyprus has been divided since 1974 when Turkey invaded the north in response to a military coup on the island which was backed by the Greek government. The island was effectively partitioned, with the northern third run by a Turkish Cypriot government and the southern two-thirds by the internationally-recognised government led by Greek Cypriots. United Nations troops patrol the "Green Line" dividing the two parts, and reunification talks have made slow progress. Since invading Cyprus in 1974 45,000 Turkish troops have been stationed in the island's north – territory seized in the invasion – with Ankara boosting public finances and providing vital infrastructure and aid. The country's role as guarantor power and saviour, even today, remains paramount.

Cyprus has successfully diversified its largely agrarian economy into one based on services - including a large tourism sector - and light manufacturing. More recently it has also developed into an important financial hub, especially for investors from Russia and Eastern Europe.

Definition of key terms:

Eurozone crisis: The eurozone debt crisis was the world's greatest threat in 2011. The crisis started in 2009 when the world first realized Greece could default on its debt. In three years, it escalated into the potential for sovereign debt defaults from Portugal, Italy, Ireland, and Spain. The European Union, led by Germany and France, struggled to support these members. They initiated bailouts from the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund. These measures didn't keep many from questioning the viability of the euro itself.



General overview:

The strategic location of Cyprus, an Eastern Mediterranean Island, surrounded by Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Egypt and Greece makes it lucrative for world and regional powers. Its ancient history, dates back to the 10th millennium BC and has changed many hands, ranging from Mycenaean Greeks, Assyrians, Egyptians, Persians, Macedonians, Romans, Arabs, French, Venetians and finally the Ottomans for over three centuries, till Cyprus was annexed to Britain in 1914.

Ethnic communities comprise Greek Cypriots in the majority, followed by 25 per cent Turkish Cypriots, with some Armenians and Maronites. In the 1950s, Greek Cypriots sought independence through violent means. Turkish Cypriots were used by the British to maintain law and order thus undercurrents of ethnic rivalry turned to animosity by the Greek Cypriots. (Déjà vu of the divide and rule policy of the British in India.) Cyprus gained independence in 1960, with a power sharing formula between the Greek and Turkish Cypriots but not before Britain extracted an agreement ensuring the retention of two Sovereign tri-service military bases at Akrotiri and Dhekelia.

Trouble soon brewed after the coalition collapsed in 1963. Programmed ethnic cleansing of Turkish Cypriots to force them into accepting the role of a minority continued for 11 years. Tales of barbarism and genocide resound even today.

On July 15, 1974, a coup d'état was staged by Greek Cypriots with support from Greek military junta in an attempt at enosis, the declaration of Hellenic Republic of Cyprus. This action propelled Turkey on July 20 to exercise its right as a guarantor nation within the parameters of Article 4 of the 1960 Cyprus constitution to intervene in Cyprus and stop the massacre of Turkish Cypriots. About one third of Cyprus, currently Northern Cyprus was liberated till a ceasefire was invoked.

The Greek military junta collapsed and Archbishop Makarios regained power. Overtures by the guarantors: Britain, Turkey and Greece to hold talks in Geneva to restore the 1960 Constitution and the joint rule of Cyprus by both protagonists, the Greek and Turkish Cypriots, failed owing to obduracy of Greek Cypriots of accepting the Turkish Cypriots only as a minority.

The division of the island ended the massacres but international opinion, which had welcomed the Turkish intervention and had been upheld as legal by the UN, began to be questioned by various humanitarian organisations. It was propagated by Greece and its allies that the continued presence of Turkish troops in Northern Cyprus is tantamount to being an occupation force; oblivious to the peril that if Turkey removes its forces, in the absence of regular armed forces in the North, Greek Cypriots would overrun TRNC.

Frustrated by inaction and the growing isolation, Rauf Denkta announced the formation of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus on November 15th, 1983. Initially Turkey, Pakistan and Bangladesh accorded recognition but the US forced Pakistan and Bangladesh to withdraw their recognition.

Various formulas proposed by different UN Secretary Generals failed to bring any amicable solution. In a referendum in April 2004, the prima facie reasonable Kofi Annan plan was accepted by Turkish Cypriots but rejected by Greek Cypriots. To make matters worse, on May 1 2004, the EU, in a violation of its own principles of justice and humanitarianism, confirmed the membership of Cyprus, which effectively makes Greek Cyprus reap all benefits while TRNC is embargoed and prohibited from directly trading with any other country, receive direct flights or ships or even participate or host sporting events.

Deprived of exploiting its tourist or mining potential, TRNC has concentrated on developing 16 world class universities, which earn it revenue otherwise Turkish magnanimity even for clean drinking water supplied from mainland Turkey via undersea pipes sustains them.



The Cyprus issue is complex. The Greek Cypriots forcibly ousted their Turkish Cypriot partners from all the organs of the young state, in open breach of the founding treaties and the Constitution. In 1964, a United Nations Peacekeeping Force was established on the island to protect the Turkish Cypriots from ethnic cleansing. Though negotiations between the two sides commenced in 1968, in 1974 a military junta in Greece attempted to annex Cyprus and prompted Turkey's intervention in accordance with the 1960 Treaty of Guarantee. In 1983 the Turkish Cypriots set up their own republic while still striving for reconciliation with their erstwhile partners in the south. That search continues to this day. The goal is a completely new partnership.

The Turkish Cypriots, with Turkey's support, have consistently worked for a just and lasting comprehensive settlement despite the unjust isolation imposed on them by the Greek Cypriot side. Yet it was the Greek Cypriots who rejected numerous UN-sponsored settlement initiatives over the decades. Today the existing status quo on the island is unacceptable to both sides. A new, prosperous Cyprus without ethnic tensions will thus be welcomed by all concerned.

This new state of affairs can come to life with a successful conclusion of the ongoing UN-sponsored negotiations. Any settlement must fulfil certain criteria in order to be sustainable and just. The two sides on the island must be politically equal; one side cannot dominate the other or incorporate it as a mere minority. Power has to be shared in a bi-zonal, bi-communal partnership. The EU will ensure that the basic parameters of the settlement are legally anchored within its primary law. A balance between Greece and Turkey will be struck, meaning that Turkish nationals will be treated on an equal footing with Greek nationals exclusively on the Island.

Major Parties Involved:

Nicos Anastasiades (President): Nicos Anastasiades of the conservative Democratic Rally won the February 2013 run-off election by one of the biggest margins for many years, promising to do whatever was needed to secure a financial package to rescue the country from the 2011 eurozone crisis. He quickly sorted out a deal with foreign lenders and the European Union. The previous Communist government had first sought aid from Russia before belatedly approaching Europe. Nicos Anastasiades resumed talks with the pro-unity Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci on reunification of the island in 2015, although these ended inconclusively two years later. Mr Anastasiades was returned to office with another decisive win over his Communist opponent in February 2018.

Mustafa Akinci (Turkish Cypriot leader):

Mustafa Akinci, a social democrat, swept to victory in the Turkish Cypriot communal presidential election in 2015, promising to push harder for a peace deal in Cyprus. He beat the nationalist incumbent Dervis Eroglu. Mayor of



the Turkish Cypriot municipality of North Nicosia between 1976 and 1990, Mr Akinci pioneered cooperation with his southern counterpart on practical sanitation and heritage projects. This experience has informed his later support for reunification. He founded the Peace and Democracy Movement in 2003 in support of the UN's Annan Plan for a united Cyprus within the European Union, and has also advocated a policy of greater independence from Turkey in policy matters. The status of Northern Cyprus as a separate political entity is recognised only by Turkey.

Timeline of events:

- 1914** Cyprus annexed by Britain, after more than 300 years of Ottoman rule. Britain had occupied the island in 1878, although it remained nominally under Ottoman sovereignty.

- 1955** Greek Cypriots begin guerrilla war against British rule. The guerrilla movement, the National Organisation of Cypriot Combatants (EOKA), wants enosis (unification) with Greece.

- 1960** Britain grants independence to Cyprus under a power-sharing constitution between Turkish and Greek Cypriots, holding intervention rights over the island along with Turkey and Greece.

- 1963** President Makarios raises Turkish fears by proposing constitutional changes which would abrogate power-sharing arrangements. Inter-communal violence erupts. Turkish side withdraws from power-sharing.

- 1974** Military junta in Greece backs coup against President Makarios, prompting Turkish invasion and occupation of a third of the island. Greek and Turkish Cypriots flee in opposite directions.

- 1983** Rauf Denktas declares a Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which is recognised only by Turkey.



- 2003** Turkish and Greek Cypriots cross island's dividing "green line" for first time in 30 years after Turkish Cypriot authorities ease border restrictions.
- 2004** Cyprus joins the EU, but does so as a divided island.
- 2013** Cyprus negotiates deal to extricate its financial sector from the eurozone debt crisis.

Previous attempts to solve the issue:

Talks to end the 43-year-old political deadlock on Cyprus broke down acrimoniously, as Turkish and Greek cypriot negotiators failed to reach compromises over the security of the island. The collapse of UN-brokered negotiations in the Swiss resort of Crans-Montana brought to an abrupt conclusion attempts to end one of the world's longest frozen conflicts and heal Europe's largest diplomatic sore. "I'm very sorry to tell you that despite the very strong commitment and engagement of all the delegations and different parties [...] the conference on Cyprus was closed without an agreement being reached," announced a clearly crestfallen António Guterres, the UN secretary general. The failure of the talks came despite high-level backing from both the UN chief and Boris Johnson, the Foreign Secretary, as well as the Greek and Turkish governments. The talks were said by diplomatic sources to have ended in "yelling and drama", according to the Reuters news agency, as differences over the issue proved unbridgeable. Britain, the former colonial power in Cyprus and a guarantor nation under a convoluted treaty which granted the island independence in 1960, said it was "enormously disappointed" at the breakdown. "Now is a time for calm reflection and consideration of next steps. Our commitment to a deal remains unwavering," a British government spokesperson said.

The bloody partition of the island sent 165,000 Greek Cypriots fleeing south and 45,000 Turkish Cypriots going north, leaving a legacy of distrust and bitter disputes over how to handle property and land that was seized by both sides.

The last attempt to fix the Cyprus question ended in failure in 2004 when the Greek side rejected a UN-backed plan in a referendum, just as the Greek side was granted accession to the European Union. In the intervening decade, the line between the two partitioned halves of the country has softened, easing day-to-day exchanges, while property issues have become more entrenched, reducing the impetus for reunification according to analysts. In 2015, after both sides elected leaders who were in favour of reunification, Western diplomats had expressed hope that the four decades of deadlock could now be broken, with Cyprus becoming a unified EU country with a rotating presidency. This turned out to be optimistic and, despite the political interests of Nicos Anastasiades on the Greek side and Mustafa Akinci on the Turkish side, the impasse over how Cypriot security should be guaranteed again proved insurmountable.



With visible bad blood on both sides, it was not immediately clear whether any steps could be taken to revive the process, but it was clear it would be in the immediate future. Euripides Evriviades, the Greek Cypriot high commissioner to London, urged a continued search for a solution. “In diplomacy there's no full stop; just a comma,” he said.

Possible solutions and approaches:

If a comprehensive settlement in this general framework is to be achieved, the Greek Cypriot side must finally acknowledge the Turkish Cypriots as politically equal partners, and take their justified concerns into account.

The Greek Cypriots have much to gain if common sense prevails among them. A settlement will bring with it Turkey's friendship and cooperation, from which Cyprus as a whole will benefit. They can supply enough water over and above the requirements of the entire island. Hydrocarbon resources can be freely explored and exploited. New shipping avenues will emerge and trade volumes will rise when Turkish ports are opened to Greek Cypriot vessels. Coupled with a settlement's positive impact on Turkish-Greek relations, these developments will usher in a new era of cooperation and prosperity in our region. There will be no losers here; it will be a textbook case of a win-win situation.

Yet this can only be done with courage, political will, and leadership to take the settlement process forward to a successful conclusion. They can no longer afford to become mired in Sisyphean diplomacy. Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot side are determined to reach a settlement in Cyprus. Now is the time for their sustained efforts to be reciprocated. The time has come to go the extra mile, which is the hardest mile of all.

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