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# CYPRUS ISSUE AND THE APPROACH OF EUROPEAN STATES IN THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF TURKISH-GREEK RELATIONS

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## Introduction

For a better understanding of the topic, it is necessary to look at the chronology of the Cyprus Issue. Conquered by the Ottoman State in 1571, Cyprus was under the domination of the Ottomans for 306 years and came under the rule of the English on 4 June 1878 (Vatansever, 2012, p.1490-1491). After World War I broke out on 29 October 1914, the Ottoman State was involved in the war taking sides with Germany and Cyprus was officially annexed by the Greek. Upon entering into the Lausanne Agreement on 24 July 1923, Cyprus was also legally left to the English. After officially falling outside the boundaries of Turkey in 1923, the Turks were forced to live under a heavy pressure. The British rule was decisive to annihilate Turkish Identity in Cyprus and banned all symbols that would evoke Turkey in cultural life, education being in the first place<sup>1</sup>.

After World War II was over, studies to end the protective (mandate) administrations were started in conformity with United Nations resolution. Pursuant to this resolution, England had also started works to leave Cyprus. In accordance with the plan announced by the English Prime Minister Macmillan on 19 June 1958, London and Zurich conferences were held. Pursuant to the agreements made in these conferences, the Republic of Cyprus was founded on 16 August 1960 (Özmen, 2007, p.17). After this date United Kingdom, Greece and Turkey became guarantor states of Cyprus and this structure continued until 21 December 1963 when the republic was virtually ended. In the period between 1950 and 1960, EOKA terrorist organization was formed with dream of Enosis and turned the island into a blood bath in a short while (Keser, 2007, p.15-16).

After 1960, anarchy and terrorism were further increased on the island and for security reasons, the English drew the “green line” on 30 December 1963, which divided Nicosia. As from this date, Turkish Cypriots were exposed to suppression and oppression for 11 years. Upon the coup staged by the Greeks on 15 July 1974, Turkey has exercised its right to interfere as a guarantor state in the 1960 Agreement and launched the Cyprus Peace Operation on 20 July 1974. In the negotiations made after the operation, a line was drawn between two communities and Turkish republic of Northern Cyprus was founded on 15 November 1983 (Özmen, 2007, pp.19-20).

The Cyprus Issue, which has pursued with a sometimes accelerating and sometimes

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<sup>1</sup> The great leader of the Turkish Cypriots, Rauf Denktas, made a speech at a conference at the Faculty of Education in Selçuk University in May 1995 and said; “*When I was a primary school student, we were forbidden to have the colors red and white together on our course materials such as books, notebooks and schoolbags. They were telling us that these colors were the Turkish Flag*”.

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declining speed from that day on, has been the main external relations problem Turkey has been facing in every platform in recent years. Dating back to old times, this issue still plays an effective role in international relations of Turkey. Having a strategically important location, Cyprus Island has always been an agenda item in foreign policies of European states in the international arena. Due to this fact, a mutual understanding that would be regarded as an exact solution could not be reached with respect to the Cyprus Issue until today. The biggest reason for this is that Turkey is not sufficiently determinative militarily, culturally and economically in foreign policy. The history proves that those who are powerful have always come to the fore as determining factors and the winners always had a say on losers following international wars. The reason why Turkey cannot have an active voice in Cyprus Issue is the dominant foreign policies against Turkey pursued by those who steer the world politics.

### **Historical Background of the Cyprus Issue in Turkish Foreign Policy**

It is possible to say that the beginning of Cyprus Issue is the Treaty of Sevres. After being defeated in World War I, the Ottoman State was shared by the victorious states and Cyprus was one of the main items in this sharing. This issue was brought to agenda for the second time with Treaty of Lausanne. The Cyprus Issue was discussed in detail during Lausanne Conference and important resolutions were taken in respect of Cyprus. Pursuant to Article 20 of the Treaty, legal presence of the English rule was officially entered into force on 24 July 1923. In other words, Turkey has recognized with the Treaty of Lausanne that Cyprus is annexed by the English. In the later years, the Cyprus Issue has remained to be a festering sore for Turkey.

Pursuant to Treaty of Lausanne, Cyprus was not a topical issue for Turkey after 1923. However, following 1930s, Turkish administration has begun to view the developments on the island from a distance. After 1936, Turkey has pursued a new balance policy. By force of this policy, Turkey aimed to promote its relations with England (Göktuğ, 1990, pp.49-51).

After World War II, those who were steering Turkish foreign policy tried to pursue a policy parallel to Western states and this approach has borne significant consequences in respect of Cyprus. The Cyprus Issue did not take an important place in Turkish foreign policy in this period. In other words, Turkey has internalized the then-current status of Cyprus and did not remain insensitive to this island and the Turkish population on it to whom it was closely linked with historical, political and geographical bonds.

In response to Turkey's approach, the Greek governments have systematically endeavored to ensure annexation of Cyprus by Greece and continuously announced it. When Greece kept officially enunciating ENOSIS (the ideal of incorporating Cyprus into Greece) at every opportunity, Turkey decided to get into the act with respect to the Cyprus Issue. In

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spite of all these negative developments and demands for ENOSIS, Turkish governments have tried to solve the problem amicably and paid strict attention for not taking Greece and England on.

When Turkey enabled those who were not happy with the English rule due to their prejudiced practices after the island was left to England to acquire Turkish citizenship, 7-8 thousand Turkish Cypriots have migrated to Turkey between the years of 1923 and 1925 (Gürel, 1984, pp.168-169). While the Turkish population on the island was 1/4th of the total population in 1881 census, this ratio changed to 1/5 in 1931 census (Çay, 1989, pp.23-24). This strategic mistake was resulted in nothing but greater problems and making the work of Greek Cypriots easier on the island. This ineffective action of Turkey caused the Turkish Cypriots on the island to get into action. Turkish government broke its silence in respect of the Cyprus Issue for the first time in 1949 with the passive political statement of Necmettin Sadak, the Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time. Sadak stated that there is no indication that England will leave Cyprus and Greece did not officially address to this matter (Armaoğlu, 1985, pp.18-19).

In spite of the approach of Turkish foreign affairs in this direction, Turkish press and public were more sensitive to the developments. This negligent behavior of Turkish government in foreign policy had a wide coverage in newspapers. Due to the growing excitement in the press and public, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Necmettin Sadak made the following statement: “There is no such thing as the Cyprus Issue. Because this island is under the sovereignty and rule of Great Britain. We know that Great Britain does not intend to transfer its rights to another power. No provocation in Cyprus will differ the consequence” (Bağcı, 1990, p.101).

The power changed hands in Turkey on 14 May 1950 and Democrat Party came to power. The new government also did not include the Cyprus Issue in its programme. On the contrary, it has pursued a policy of maintaining good neighborly relations with Greece. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the new government, Fuat Köprülü, answered the questions of reporters about Cyprus contrary to expectations and said that there is no such thing as the Cyprus Issue between Turkey and Greece (Bağcı, 1990, p.102). On the other hand the Greek Prime Minister Venizelos made a speech in the parliament and stated that annexation of Cyprus to Greece is the most sacred wish of Greek nation. He added that they will allow USA and England to set up military bases on the island and grant them privileges if the English give up the island to them (Torun, 1956, pp.101-102). Thus, their dream of ENOSIS was officially expressed. Consequently attention of Turkish public was re-directed to Cyprus Issue and debates were heated.

Greece did not only utter its claims and demands but also pursued an effective policy after 1951 in respect of Cyprus and tried to persuade England with regard to Cyprus.

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In an unofficial statement made by Greece it was alleged that 90% of the population on the island wanted to be incorporated in Greece and 81% of the island's population were Greeks (Cumhuriyet Newspaper-21 December 1951).

In response to Greece's approach, Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that Greece's requests and claims will never be accepted by England (Bağcı, 1990, p.101). Internalizing the Cyprus Issue from the very beginning, Greece went a step further and officially requested annexation of Cyprus in Paris Conference of the United Nations in Paris, in 1951 and laid bare that the Cyprus Issue is a state policy for them.

Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Fuat Köprülü, made a speech on 20 April 1951 and stated that Turkey has strong ties with Cyprus and following the developments closely. During those dates, the issue has become a matter of debates in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. Thus, Turkey gradually considered inclusion of the Cyprus Issue in its foreign policy and engaging with it necessary. On the other hand, Turkey did not want to be at odds with Greece as it was trying to join NATO at that time. Turkey's approach to the incidents in Cyprus and pressures of Greek Cypriots was insufficient.

The Greek government continued its diplomatic attempts and tried to find supporters on the international platform. They took another step and announced that they will bring the annexation of Cyprus into question in the general assembly meeting of the UN in September 1954 (Toluner, 1977, pp.25-26). Turkish government expressed that good relations could not be maintained due to this attitude of Greece and requested that Greece should back down to no avail. Upon request of Greece, the Cyprus Issue was put on the agenda of the UN General Assembly on 24 August 1954 and became an international problem (Gürel, 1984, p.95). Since then, the Cyprus issue has become one of the main subjects of Turkish foreign policy. Especially after the indications came into sight that England was about to leave the island, Turkey demanded that the island should be returned to Turkey as Turkey was the former owner of the island (Oran, 2001, p.602). Turkey's request was not accepted and the English Prime Minister Macmillan suggested a new plan on 19 June 1958 which would determine Cyprus' future. Accordingly, it was decided that Cyprus should be governed by Turkish and Greek communities together based on the collaboration of England, Turkey and Greece (Bilge, 1969, p.747). Later on, Turkey also adopted the idea of establishing a direct rule on the island due to its belief in Macmillan's plan on the ground that it would deliver a solution for the island (Güler, 2004, p.106; Akman and Meydan, 2018).

In order to be accepted as a NATO member, Turkey did not want to have any problem with Greece and in addition, the country has been having economic troubles in the recent years and intending to solve this problem with the aid of USA. Due to these circumstances, Turkey was not able to pursue an effective policy and compulsorily

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took sides with Western states. Finally, Turkey and Greece have agreed upon in the negotiations made in Zurich through the intervention of USA to found an independent Republic of Cyprus. It was stipulated to found an independent federal republic on the island based on collaboration of both communities and having close cooperation with Turkey and Greece. Although the Republic of Cyprus was officially founded in 1960, it didn't last long. When Makarios declared in 1963 that he has unilaterally terminated all treaties, the direct rule on the island came to an end and the events in Cyprus grew violent again. After the escape of Makarios from the island, the pressure on the Turks increased during the period of his successor, Nikos Sampson (Özmen, 2007, pp.19-20).

Suppression and oppression incessantly continued between 1960 and 1974. Many events can be mentioned within this period. The first incident was the Bloody Christmas Massacre initiated by the EOKA member Greek Cypriots on the night between 24–25 December 1963. Memoirs of Nikos Sampson published in Eleftheria newspaper reveal that Greek soldiers and commanders were responsible for brutal murders of Turkish Cypriots. Sampson regards this massacre as a great success and calls it *“the only victory that Greeks have over the Turks apart from the Balkan Wars”* (Özmen, 2007, p.256).

Turkey could not find a political solution to these developments and tried to stop the incidents by mobilizing the Turkish Regiment deployed on the island to maintain security (Özmen, 2007, s.258).

Another incident has occurred in 1964. Attacks of Greek Cypriots against Turks were increased. Turkey has called for to put an end to this suppression and oppression time after time. Greek Cypriots went so far as to request termination of Treaties of Guarantee and Alliance, withdrawal of Turkish and Greek regiments from Cyprus and removal of the rights granted to Turks in the Constitution. Negotiations were made upon this development to no avail. Later on, Turkey has applied to United Nations Security Council on 13 February 1964. Negotiations continued between 26 February and 4 March 1964 and the proposal to form a two-party government was accepted. The Peace Corps formed on March 17 was of no use and when Makarios declared on 4 April 1964 that he has terminated the Treaty of Alliance signed as part of the Zurich and London Agreements, Turkey started to get ready for a military intervention. According to the plans, soldiers were to be landed on June 7. US President Johnson sent a gross and threatening letter on June 5 to prevent this landing. In response, Turkey sent a letter in which it mentioned the circumstances causing this intervention and telling Johnson that his letter was very disappointing. However, this incident caused the intervention to be postponed. No result was obtained in the negotiations within this period (Özmen, 2007, pp.256-272).

Upon the failed coup attempt of Grivas, the leader of EOKA on 26 July 1973 and the following developments, Makarios made a statement in United Nations Security Council

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and charged EOKA and Greece with trying to pick a civil war on the island and destroy Turkish Cypriots. With that, Greece wanted a coup to be staged at the cost of Makarios' death. Turkey condemned this coup on 15 July 1974 strongly and went into action by citing the statement of Makarios as evidence. The coup plotter Nikos Sampson has declared that the Hellenic Republic was founded in Cyprus. After escaping from the island with an English helicopter, Makarios announced that the island was occupied by Greece. Upon these developments, Turkey contacted England, USA and USSR and uttered its reaction. Turkish Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit visited England on Jul 17 and made attempts to ensure a joint intervention but failed. USSR made a motion in UN to condemn the events on the island but it was vetoed by USA. In response, Turkey sent an ultimatum to Greece and demanded from Greece to stop its actions on the island and retract its troops. However, the juntaists who relied on USA as they did in 1964 have rejected this ultimatum thinking that military force will not be used. When these attempts came to nothing, Turkey intervened the island on 20 July 1974, pursuant to Article IV of the Treaty of Guarantee (Özmen, 2007, pp.286-291; Tosun, 2001, p.104).

### **Peace Operations**

The landing operation commenced with fire opened by Turkish destroyers and two jets at 4:40 AM in the morning of July 20. The airborne operation started at 6:05 AM. The operation named as the 1st Peace Operation was ended on July 22 upon acceptance of ceasefire proposal made by Security Council (Koç, 2005, p.227).

#### **The First Geneva Conference**

The Geneva Conference where United States, Soviet Union and UN were present as observers was lasted for 6 days between 25-30 July 1974. Turks suggested establishment of a permanent autonomous administration to rule both communities and formation of buffer zone by Peace Corps in the conference and both suggestions were accepted. Greek Cypriots did not object to these suggestions and accepted them. In accordance with the treaty, occupied Turkish settlements were required to be evacuated. However, this was not put into practice to the contrary of the treaty and they continued to occupy and vandalize. Thus, it was understood that Greek Cypriots were not sincere (Koç, 2005, pp.227-230).

Bülent Ecevit made a statement before the Second Geneva Conference in this respect and stated that it is not possible for two communities live together due to the actions of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots will not live under the rule of Greek Cypriots. He also added that two separate governance are necessary for Turkish and Greek Cypriots. The conference was conducted again under these conditions on 8 August 1974 (Koç, 2005, p.230).

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## The Second Geneva Conference

At the beginning of the negotiations, Turkish delegation has requested enforcement of the First Geneva Treaty and determination of an exact calendar. The USA has commissioned the Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger (Harry değil) and reassured that the rightful requests of Turkey will be enforced.

Greek and Greek Cypriot delegations neither accepted nor rejected these requests. Due to the strategy of Greeks and Greek Cypriots based on stalling for time, negotiations were interrupted on August 13 and the encrypted order previously determined by Turkish Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit and Minister of Foreign Affairs Turan Güneş was issued from Geneva: “Ayşe should go on vacation!” Upon this encrypted order, the Second Peace Operation was commenced at 6:30 AM on 14 August 1974 on the grounds that the principles of the First Geneva Treaty were not complied with (Koç, 2005, pp.230-231).

### Results of the Peace Operation

Following the Peace Operation, Turkey has brought 38% of the island under control. Strongest reactions to these developments were given by USSR and USA. The USA laid an embargo on Turkey on 5 February 1975 and it continued until 26 September 1978. The best reaction to US embargo was the foundation of the Turkish Federated State of Cyprus on 13 February 1975. Sampson was dismissed in Cyprus and replaced by Glafcos Clerides (Tosun, 2001, p.106).

The federation model advocated by Turkey for the island since 1963 was accepted by the resolutions of the UN. While Turkish Cypriots settled in the northern part of the island, Greek Cypriots were settled in the south. The security zone in between and the Peace Corps have prevented the conflicts. Turkey prevented massacre of the persons of the same race with this operation and also demonstrated to the world that it will protect its right arising from the treaties to the full extent. It proved that the Megali Idea (Great Design) of Greece is a dream ensured acceptance of its ideas. The Federation founded after these developments was officially proclaimed as the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus on 15 November 1983 (Koç, 2005, pp.229-245).

We can say that the Cyprus Issue has been approached with a Crusade mentality from beginning to end. Their primary aim was changing the demographic structure in Cyprus as in the Balkans. The West did not utter a word about the oppression and massacre in Cyprus but when it comes to Greek Cypriots, they held a protective position. Although rights and law are important concepts and obligation for them, they disregarded them for Muslim Turks.

These circumstances still continue today and they try to ignore the legitimate rights of Turkish people and In respect of the recent oil and natural gas explorations around the

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island, their mentality has come to the light again. Whereas both communities should have equal rights in territorial waters of the island, only Greek Cypriots are taken as the addressee. Turkey's steps in this context are regarded as alarming by the European states.

Consequently, 1974 Peace Operation of Turkey on an island which is located within the boundaries of the National Pact but politically left to England with the Treaty of Lausanne is the beginning of a significant change in Turkish foreign policy. However, this change is not enough to deliver a solution. Even though Turkey is more sensitive compared to the past, the policy it pursued in respect of Cyprus was in parallel with and under the influence of the policy of European states and this is why the Cyprus Issues was not solved from 1974 to this date.

### **Conclusion**

Conquered by the Ottomans in 1571, Cyprus has remained under Ottoman rule until 1878 and remained to be a legal property of the Ottoman state after that date. Cyprus is only at a distance of 70 km from Turkish coast and at a distance of 800 km from Greek coast and this is the proof that the island is a natural extension of Turkey. Geographically located right in the middle of Asia, Europe and Africa, Cyprus can keep the sea routes in Eastern Mediterranean under control (Gürsoy, 1964, p.7).

Turkey did not pursue a serious policy about Cyprus until the 1950s and even the Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time has stated that "We have no such thing as the Cyprus Issue". Consequently, the Cyprus Issue has become an item in the agenda of Turkish foreign policy after 1955. However Turkey did not try to find a permanent solution to this new issue on the agenda of Turkish foreign policy and addressed this issue depending on the agenda of international politics and its relations with Greece. Consequently, Turkey never had unique solution packages for the Cyprus Issue. The solution packages in the past such as Macmillan plan, Zurich and London treaties, foundation of the Republic of Cyprus, temporary government established jointly by Turkish and Greek Cypriots have been shaped and drawn up without participation of Turkey. Following the conflicts in the newly founded Republic of Cyprus, Turkey has launched the Cyprus Peace Operation. After the Geneva Conference held on 30 July 1974, Turkish Cypriots were settled in the north and Greek Cypriots in the south. Thus, 2 different administrations were established in two different geographical regions.

Even though negotiations to find a solution to the issue were made afterwards, no solution was found and the Cyprus Issue remained unsolved. During this period, relying on European states which have always supported them, Greek Cypriots conveyed the issue to United Nations. European states which were the founding members of the United Nations maintained a political attitude and accepted some drafts to the detriment of Turkey. While Greek Cypriots welcomed these developments, it arose reactions in Turkey

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and Turkish Federated State of Cyprus. The United Nations went further in supporting Greek Cypriots and officially declared that the representative of the Turkish Federated State of Cyprus will not be allowed to give a speech in the General Assembly of the United Nations and only the representative of Greek Cypriots will be allowed to give a speech. Upon suggestion of Greek Cypriots, the Universal Postal Union announced that they don't recognize the stamps of the Turkish Federated State of Cyprus and they are void on 23 September 1979 (Uçarol, 1995, p.769). Due to these developments, the relations between Turkish and Greek Cypriots has become critical.

Negotiations were made in various periods to solve this issue which has become a common problem for Turkey, Greece and European States. The most concrete plan suggested at the end of negotiations was the solution suggestion made by Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations. According to this plan, it was decided to hold separate referendums in the two communities on the solution of this issue and ensure the union. Greek Cypriots, who convey the issue to United Nations at every opportunity have revealed in the referendum held on 24 April 2004 that they don't want a state of two communities on the island. While 65% of Turkish Cypriots have voted in favor of the Annan Plan in the referendum, 75% of Greek Cypriots said "no" to the plan. In consideration of the results of this referendum, it is obvious that Greek Cypriots do not want a bi-community Cyprus state. It is necessary to be very careful so that the sad events of 1974 will never occur again.

In order to deliver a fair and permanent solution to the issue, Turkish Cypriots were in favor of an independent bi-community federation involving Turkish and Greek Cypriots from the very beginning and they wanted this federation to be based on the principle of equality and protect the rights and interests of both communities. The Greek Cypriots, on the other hand, consistently avoided the bilateral negotiations and conveyed the issue to international organizations with the intent of finding a solution in line with their demands. Thus, Turkish Cypriots have become isolated in respect of the Cyprus Issue. The distrust, difference of opinion, objective and attitude between the Turkish and Greek communities have led to a political deadlock in respect of the Cyprus Issue. After Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus' accession to the European Union under the name of Cyprus on 1 May 2004, the problem completely remained unsettled.

This atmosphere and environment of distrust caused by the ongoing struggles and problems among the two communities on the island is the main reason for not being able to solve the problem from the very beginning. Unless this distrust is removed, no solution plan will yield a result. For this reason, an environment of trust should be ensured in the first place. Once this trust is established, this issue will be automatically solved.

In today's globalized world, human-centered policies need to be put into practice as

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soon as possible. If this can be managed, our world will be a more livable place for all communities.

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