

CYPRUS ENDGAME*

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Within the next year the tragic division of Cyprus in 1974 will either be brought to an end or confirmed. That is, if UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon or Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan are to be believed.

At a meeting between the two Cypriot leaders, Demetris Christofias and Dervis Eroğlu, in Geneva on 7 July, Ban Ki-moon gave what was tantamount to an ultimatum. "I have every expectation that by October the leaders will be able to report that they have reached convergence on all core issues, and we will meet that month in New York."

The present round of negotiations, which began in September 2008, already clocked up the 100th meeting in March, and before the Geneva summit Alexander Downer, the UN's Special Advisor, said "The last three months have been the worst three months we had since the negotiations began". However, the two leaders have now agreed to intensify talks and hold 19 all-day meetings from 25 July until 21 October.

Furthermore, despite earlier Turkish Cypriot cavilling about the issue of sovereignty, it was agreed that the basis for a settlement would be a bi-zonal and bi-communal federal state. Accordingly, the two constituent states would have the majority of the property and population in their own territory, although 70 percent of the properties in the north prior to 1974 were Greek Cypriot owned.

Turkey has also decided to add momentum to the process. Six days after the summit, in what he later clarified was "an early warning" to the EU, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu stated that if Greek Cyprus took over the EU presidency in July 2012 without a reunification deal, Turkish-EU relations might freeze.

Turkish ultimatum

Prime Minister Erdoğan was more emphatic. Before leaving for northern Cyprus to commemorate the Turkish invasion in 1974, he repeated that Turkey would freeze relations with the EU during the Greek Cypriot presidency and added: "We don't care what the EU thinks". At a meeting with Turkish Cypriot journalists he also declared that if a settlement had not been reached by 2012, Turkey would look for other alternatives.

Erdoğan dropped another bombshell. At the meeting with Ban Ki-moon and Christofias, Eroğlu stated that the Turkish Cypriot side was prepared to discuss

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the issue of territory but without maps, which would be the last subject to be discussed. However, Erdoğan stymied the whole reunification process by declaring Turkey would no longer make any concessions, as it had with the Annan Plan in 2004, and would not return the town of Morphou or make any change in the status of the Karpas peninsula.

The Greek Cypriot president, Demetris Christofias, has earlier stated that there can be no solution to the Cyprus problem without the return of Morphou under Greek Cypriot administration.

In addition, Erdoğan stated that the return of the "ghost town" of Varosha was not on Turkey's agenda, which flies in the face of UN Security Council Resolution 550 and two resolutions from the European Parliament calling for a return of Varosha to its inhabitants. He also adamantly refused to withdraw Turkish troops from Cyprus, claiming that the Greek Cypriots had lost their chance by not accepting the Annan Plan.

The Turkish premier's threat to freeze relations with the EU was met with a low-key response from EU's Enlargement Commissioner, Stefan Füle, who stated "it is not a good time to make such comments". In view of the fact that the EU has suspended eight negotiating chapters because of Turkey's refusal to open its ports and airspace to Greek Cypriot shipping and aircraft, this is no overstatement.

Alexander Dobrindt, secretary-general of Bavaria's Christian Social Union, has called for an end to accession talks with Turkey, and Andrew Duff, Vice-President of the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee, has accused Turkey of clinging to "outmoded hostile rhetoric" and raising an entirely new obstacle in improving relations with the EU.

But there is another side to the matter. The Turkish Cypriots have in two mass demonstrations in January and March demonstrated their dissatisfaction with Turkish rule, and in a letter to Ban Ki-Moon from the Trade Unions' Platform, representing 28 trade unions and 4 political parties, have called for a solution based on the common will of both communities 'For Cyprus, By Cypriots'.

Explosion

Things are not looking too rosy on the other side of the Green Line either. On 11 July a massive explosion destroyed the Evangelos Florakis naval base and the nearby Vassilikos power station, which provided more than half the Greek Cypriots' energy supply, as well as killing 13 people and injuring over 60.

98 containers of munitions had been stacked in an open field since February 2009, after the cargo of a Cypriot-flagged Russian freighter had been seized on its way from Iran to Syria. Apparently the US, Britain and Germany had offered to dispose of the explosives, but at a meeting in August 2009 it was decided that the cargo would until further notice remain at the naval base "as per the instructions of the President".

The explosion has not only devastated the already shaky Greek Cypriot economy but there have been mass demonstrations calling for President Christofias's resignation.

The governor of the Central Bank has warned that unless drastic measures are taken, Cyprus will face a EU bailout. Christofias's coalition partner, the Democratic Party (DIKO), has also withdrawn from the government over differences in handling the economy and reunification talks.

At the beginning of the year Turkey's EU minister Egemen Bağış warned that the ending of Turkey's EU process would be a nightmare for the Greek Cypriots. It could be that their nightmare has just begun.