

THE CYPRUS ISSUE AND ITS GEOSTRATEGIC CHALLENGES

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The Italian energy group ENI 'announced on Sunday[August 30th 2015] that it has discovered a super-giant natural gas field off the coast of Egypt, describing it as the "largest ever" found in the Mediterranean Sea' (Associated Press). The new natural gas discovery of 30 trillion cubic feet is considered one of the world's largest natural gas finds according to ENI. Beyond any doubt, the energy map is rapidly changing in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea and with it pre-conceived notions of geostrategic and security issues. This vast natural gas reserve creates conditions of political urgency among major players in the region. This urgency derives from the players' need to re-evaluate their respective position in this particular region in order to re-define their distinct geostrategic interests. Geostrategic fluidity and environmental uncertainty are thus becoming major determinants which condition the re-assessment of foreign policy of regional and global actors alike. Given the emerging complexities of this new parametric framework, the Republic of Cyprus is compelled to address *ab initio* the re-orientation of its foreign policy in order to safeguard its own strategic dividend. Cyprus' geographical proximity to Egypt, but also to Israel and Turkey, requires its government to expedite the re-formulation of its foreign policy. Essentially the Republic of Cyprus is confronted with the tough task to tackle its internal instability, a political derivative of its ongoing political conflict with Turkey and the Turkish-Cypriot community. This predicament constitutes a strategic constraint for the Republic of Cyprus and consequently it vests the Cypriot government with the responsibility to engage in politically enlightened initiatives to minimize its stumbling effects. Henceforth it needs to address issues of regional strategic alliances in an attempt to minimise, to the extent possible, geostrategic threats.

One should not lose sight of the fact, that currently there is a new politically promising effort towards the normalisation of Turkish-Israeli relations. This is a much needed political development which eventually could facilitate the peace process on the island. It seems that both Turkey and Israel acknowledge the strategic imperative of bilateral co-operation in light of the destabilising threat that ISIS poses to both countries. In addition to that, Turkey is confronted with a new Kurdish insurgency that threatens its internal political stability and economic development .It also adds pressure to its territorial integrity and has negative repercussions on Turkey as a member of the G-20. Given this context, the Republic of Cyprus is confronted with the difficult challenge to serve and advance its national interest. That is, if it wishes to have a fruitful participation in these new regional developments, its internal conflict must be resolved *a priori* in order to consolidate a measurable degree of peace and stability. These variables are fundamental criteria for a sustainable economic growth and development. Nonetheless, the risk presents itself to the

Republic of Cyprus, of being eventually squeezed by the extensive operational geostrategic inequality that prevails in the region. This is a circumstance that is unequivocally to its disadvantage, even worse, detrimental to its political future.

Historical, political and socio-cultural factors facilitated close-knitted and multi-faceted relations with Greece. However the present geostrategic predicament of Greece and its dire economic situation have severely compromised the Greek state's organic capacities. This by no means implies, that ties between the two countries should not be cherished and develop further. In light of this and in conjunction with the urgency of the regional conjuncture, the Republic of Cyprus, *ipso facto*, should engage into sincere and frank discussions with the U.K. government. The U.K.'s military presence on the island provides the fundamental prerequisites for the initiation of such a dialogue. This dialogue should aim at the establishment of a sound and reliable strategic partnership between the two countries. The U.K. military presence on the island is tantamount to the only formidable and reliable geostrategic constant of Cyprus, and contrary to populist arguments, provides extensive strategic security to the island. In fact, it is a strategic constant that the Republic of Cyprus cannot afford to overlook or sidetrack due to domestic politics. Needless to point out, before any future settlement, the Cypriot government should undertake the political initiative to revitalise its overall ensemble of relations with the U.K. This initiative should strive to strengthen this ensemble and to upgrade it into a strategic alliance. The primary political responsibility lies with the government of Cyprus. The fluidity of the current geostrategic regional environment necessitates a peaceful and a viable settlement on the island. This settlement should not in any way incorporate issues or provisions that invite, insinuate or entail constructive ambiguities. The island's political culture cannot sustain it and will be inherently destabilizing. Any viable settlement should safeguard the political, economic and social stability of the day after. Any solution of the Cyprus issue should not be perceived as operating in the logic of regional fragmentation of the existing geostrategic interests of major players of the region. Quite the contrary, any peace settlement should promote regional integration of all actors involved, big and small alike. In this new geostrategic design, the Republic of Cyprus should safeguard its historical and institutional memory as well as its political continuity. But most importantly, the juridical, normative and international continuity of the Republic of Cyprus presupposes also the institutional presence and constructive involvement of the British factor. It is a *conditio sine qua non* of any peaceful settlement on the island in the future. The Government of the Republic of Cyprus should acknowledge the need to persuade its body politic of this fundamental requirement. In fact one might logically argue that the primary destabilising factor of the Republic of Cyprus is domestic and it has to do with the way the social masses have been hegemonized throughout the period, before and after the island's independence in 1960.