

The Impact of the Cyprus Conflict on Turkey's EU Accession Process

Abstract: *This study aims to analyze the impact of the Cyprus conflict on Turkey-EU relations while considering several factors: 1) the EU conditionality approach, 2) Turkish-Greek relations, 3) component problems of the Cyprus conflict 4) the recent developments in the Eastern Mediterranean and their impact on Turkey-EU relations. The main focus is on the documents and decisions of different bodies of the EU and how they link the Cyprus conflict to Turkey's accession process and how Turkey reacts to them. For this purpose, a content analysis of documents, decisions, and protocols issued by the European Council and Commission and Progress Reports on Turkey is conducted. The conclusions drawn from the research are the following: 1) the Cyprus conflict and Turkey's tense relations with Greece have negatively impacted and continue to impact Turkey-EU relations, 2) Turkey, to some extent, conformed to EU conditionality when it did not refer to the Cyprus conflict, 3) the problems of rights to ports/airports of Cyprus and the issues of property and IDPs shape the strained relations between Turkey and the EU, and finally 4) the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean concerning rights to hydrocarbons currently and in the near future will determine the geopolitical dynamics in the region.*

Keywords: *Turkey-EU relations, Cyprus conflict, Greece, conditionality, “TRNC”, accession.*

Introduction

As of 2021, Turkey has been attempting to join the European Union for sixty-two years. Due to the strained situation in the Eastern Mediterranean and the democratic backslide in the country, the relations between the EU and Turkey are at a historic low point.

To join the EU, Turkey has to comply with the rules and standards of the Union. Along with political and economic problems, the Cyprus conflict is considered to be one of the major obstacles for Turkey on its way to the EU. As of 1974, approximately 37% of Cyprus's territory is occupied by Turkey. Over the years, efforts have been made to find a solution to the conflict. However, the complicated problems and several stakeholders have brought the negotiation process to stagnation. In the beginning of the 2000s, Turkey tried to implement a balancing policy attempting to hasten the accession process to the EU without completely abandoning its “national cause” – Cyprus.

The Cyprus conflict did not immediately become a precondition for Turkey's EU accession. Several major factors contributed to the formation of the Cyprus conflict as a condition for Turkey's accession to the EU. Considering the historically complicated relations between the major players – Turkey, Greece, the European Community (later European Union) and Cyprus – this study is trying to find out the historical turning points and the circumstances of the Cyprus conflict and the ways it has impacted the Turkey-EU relations. This study tries to contribute to the study of EU-Turkey relations and the Cyprus conflict presenting EU conditionality as an effective mechanism to contain Turkey's antagonistic actions and to balance the interests of Turkey, Greece, and Cyprus. The study consists of three chapters: the first chapter reflects the historical perspective of Turkey-EU relations in the framework of the Cyprus conflict; the second chapter addresses the component problems of the Cyprus conflict; and the final chapter focuses on the current contradictions and disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean while trying to analyze their historical implications.

Historical Perspective of Turkey-EU Relations and the Cyprus Conflict

During the Cold War, all countries were faced with the choice of allying with either Soviet or the Western bloc. Both Greece and Turkey started strengthening their ties with Europe by joining various Western institutions. As a result, both countries joined NATO on the same day in 1952¹ clarifying their position in the bipolar world. Being to some extent protected from the Soviet threat, Turkey and Greece started thinking of diversifying their external economic ties through integration into European economic institutions². This opportunity was suggested by the newly founded European Economic Community, which had an ambitious goal of creating an “ever-closer union among the peoples of Europe³”. Thus, a month apart, first Greece⁴ then Turkey applied for admission to the European Economic Community (EEC)⁵. It is vital to mention that besides economic,

¹ NATO Member Countries. (2020). North Atlantic Treaty Organization. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_52044.htm

² Öniş Z., *Greek-Turkish Relations and the European Union: A Critical Perspective*, Mediterranean Politics, 6(3), (2001), 31–45

³ The Treaty of Rome. (1957). https://ec.europa.eu/archives/emu_history/documents/-treaties/rometreaty2.pdf

⁴ Greece's Course in the EU. (2020). Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs. <https://www.mfa.gr/en/foreign-policy/greece-in-the-eu/greeces-course-in-the-eu.html>

⁵ Müftüler-Baç M., *Turkey's Accession Negotiations with the European Union: The Long Path Ahead*. In *Turkey-European Union Relations: Dilemmas, Opportunities, and Constraints* (Lexington Books, 2008), 115–133

political and historical reasons, Turkey had other important incentive to join the EEC. Having opposing interests with Greece in Cyprus and the Mediterranean region in general and being outside of an institution that would provide great economic development and advantages to Greece was not in Turkey's interests.

In 1963, Turkey signed the Ankara Agreement with the EEC. However, Turkey-Europe relations became strained after 1974 when Turkey occupied the north of Cyprus. The invasion was carried out in two phases – the first in July and the second in August⁶. The first invasion by which Turkey occupied 3% of Cyprus was not condemned by some members of the international community and did not impact Turkey's relations with Brussels as it was understood in the context of actions by a guarantor power. However, the second phase of invasion was universally condemned⁷. After the 1974 Turkish occupation of the northern part of Cyprus, Turkey became a more tangible security threat for Greece, pushing the latter towards closer relations with the European Community (EC)⁸. On 12 June 1975, Greece applied for full membership to the EC⁹ and was included in the EU's Mediterranean enlargement and joined the EC in 1981¹⁰.

In the beginning of the 1980s, the relations between Turkey and the EC became even more strained; for the first time the “just solution” of the Cyprus conflict and “the restitution of the Republic of Cyprus's sovereignty” were presented as preconditions for improvement of the relations between the European Community and Turkey¹¹. Meanwhile, Turgut Özal's newly elected government started implementing economic reforms and gradually took steps to ease the tension between the EC and Turkey. Taking all positive developments into account, Turkey applied for full membership to the EC in 1987.

In December of 1989, Turkey received the Commission's response to its application. The Commission's opinion was focused on economic and political problems in Turkey which hindered Turkey's accession to the EC. Besides underlining the economic backwardness of Turkey, the EC also touched the human

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 231

⁷ Lacher, H. & Kaymak, E., *Transforming Identities: Beyond the Politics of Non-Settlement in North Cyprus*, *Mediterranean Politics*, 10(2), (2005), 147–166; *Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular*, (Belgeler, Yorumlar) [Turkish Foreign Policy: Facts, Documents, Comments from the War of Independence to Today] (Vol. 1)

⁸ Öniş, *Greek-Turkish Relations and the European Union: A Critical Perspective*, 31–45

⁹ *The History of the European Union - 1975*

¹⁰ Greece's Course in the EU. (2020). Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs. <https://www.mfa.gr/en/foreign-policy/greece-in-the-eu/greeces-course-in-the-eu.html>

¹¹ European Parliament Working Documents 1982-1983. (1982). <http://aei.pitt.edu/-62731/1/B2472.pdf>

rights situation and the minorities of Turkey. Most importantly, the decision declared that “the dispute between Turkey and one Member State of Community, and also the situation in Cyprus” have negative effects on the accession¹².

Even though the EC rejected Turkish application, it decided to suggest measures to strengthen the EC-Turkey relations and to move forward towards the Customs Union. For this purpose, a cooperation package was suggested in 1990 to accomplish a Customs Union by 1995¹³. However, as with everything in that period until 1995, this initiative was also vetoed by Greece. Meanwhile, on July 3, 1990, the Republic of Cyprus applied for full membership on behalf of the whole island¹⁴.

To bypass Greece’s negative impact on the enlargement process, the EU began using the principle of compromise – for each compromise made to Greece, the latter had to make compromises on other issues that the EU raised¹⁵. As a result, on 6 March 1995, a “package” decision was made, according to which the Customs Union agreement with Turkey would be considered along with the accession negotiations with the Republic of Cyprus¹⁶. Due to the EU’s approach, Greece finally lifted its veto¹⁷. As a result, Turkey and the EU signed a Customs Union agreement on December 22, 1995¹⁸. The lifting of the veto by Greece did not mean that the relations between Greece and Turkey were improving. In the second part of the 1990s, their relations became tense because of the crisis in Aegean – the Imia-Kardak crisis in 1996 – around some islets¹⁹ and the Greek

¹² Commission Opinion on Turkey’s Request for Accession to the Community (20 December 1989). (1989). https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2005/2/4/4cc1acf8-06b2-40c5-bb1e-bb3d4860e7c1/publishable_en.pdf

¹³ Nas, Ç. & Özer Y., *Turkey and EU Integration: Achievements and Obstacles*, (Taylor & Francis, 2017)

¹⁴ Sertoğlu K. & Öztürk İ., *Application of Cyprus to the European Union and the Cyprus Problem*, *Emerging Markets Finance & Trade*, 39(6), (2003), 54–70.

¹⁵ Suvarierol S., *The Cyprus Obstacle on Turkey’s Road to Membership in the European Union*, *Turkish Studies*, 4(1), (2003), 55–78

¹⁶ *Cyprus and the Enlargement of the European Union*. (n.d.), last modified March 1, 2021, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/enlargement/briefings/1a3_en.htm

¹⁷ Grigoriadis I. N., *Greek and Greek Cypriot Views of Turkey’s Accession to the European Union: On the Endurance of a Spectacular Paradigmatic Shift. In Turkey-European Union Relations: Dilemmas, Opportunities, and Constraints*. (Lexington Books, 2008).

¹⁸ Decision No 1/95 of the EC-Turkey Association Council of 22 December 1995 on Implementing the Final Phase of the Customs Union (96/142/EC). (1995). https://www.avrupa.info.tr/sites/default/files/2016-09/Custom_Union_des_ENG_0.pdf

¹⁹ Kramer H., *A changing Turkey: The challenge to Europe and the United States*, (Brookings Institute Press., 2000), 169

Cypriots' decision to purchase S-300 missiles from Russia²⁰. If it materialized, it would mean jeopardizing the relative stability on the island. Moreover, it meant having powerful surface-to-air weapons which could put Turkey's security under threat as well. Even though these missiles were deployed in Crete²¹, they heightened the tension among Turkey, Greece, and Cyprus.

Some positive developments during 1999 – mainly the “earthquake diplomacy” - resulted in a consequential change in Turkey-EU relations. The European Union's Helsinki Summit on 10 and 11 December, 1999 discussed Turkey's progress and decided to grant Turkey candidate status. From 2001-2002, Turkey prepared and adopted harmonization packages to reach the goals defined in the National Program and align with the standards of the EU²². The process especially accelerated after the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002. As the meeting of the European Council in Copenhagen was approaching, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who was not the Prime Minister of Turkey yet, started a tour in European countries in November-December, 2002. Even though Erdoğan was just the leader of the AKP at that time, he was welcomed by the leaders of the European states because he was perceived as the de facto or unofficial leader of Turkey²³. The time of the tour was not a coincidence; it was deliberately chosen to boost the chances of Turkey in the upcoming meeting in Copenhagen. Within a month, he visited sixteen European countries assuring European leaders that his party does not perceive the EU as a Christian club²⁴. Learning that the Cyprus conflict is one of the biggest impediments on Turkey's way to the EU, Erdoğan began to pressure Rauf Denktaş to accept the Annan plan as a basis for negotiations. Moreover, he created a picture that the problem was Denktaş and his policy arguing that the conflict “is not Denktaş's personal business²⁵”.

²⁰ Hannay D., *Cyprus: The search for a solution*. (I.B.Tauris., 2005), 70

²¹ Grigoriadis I. N., Greek and Greek Cypriot Views of Turkey's Accession to the European Union, 155

²² Oran B., *Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar* (2013). [Turkish Foreign Policy: Facts, Documents, Comments from the War of Independence to Today] (Vol. 3), p. 347. İletişim Yayınları.

²³ Economy, EU and Cyprus Priorities for New Turkish Government. (2002, November 18). Euractiv. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/elections/news/economy-eu-and-cyprus-priorities-for-new-turkish-government/>

²⁴ Henley J. & Black I., *Turkey Demands Talks on Joining EU*, The Guardian. last modified November 27, 2002, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/nov/27/turkey.eu>

²⁵ Smith H., *New Turkish Leader Seeks Deal in Cyprus*. The Guardian, last modified January 3, 2003, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/jan/03/cyprus.turkey>

The elections in the “TRNC” in December were a major factor before the referendum. As a result of the elections, opposition parties (pro-status-quo) had an equal number of deputies as the pro-Annan plan parties in the parliament. Taking the outcome of elections and Ankara’s pressure into consideration, Denktaş agreed to restart the negotiations within the framework of the Annan plan²⁶. In January 2004, Erdoğan met with Annan and assured that he would support the restarting of the negotiations. This was the beginning of Turkey’s “one step ahead” policy on Cyprus. The final version of the Annan plan was prepared by the end of March and it was decided that the twin referenda would take place on 24 April 2004²⁷. The results of the referenda were quite surprising: 64.9% of the Turkish Cypriots voted ‘yes’, meanwhile, 75.8% of the Greek Cypriots voted ‘no’. As experts explain, under Turkish pressure the majority of the Turkish Cypriots voted for the plan because it was essential for Turkey’s advancement towards the EU. On the other hand, the RoC voted against the plan because it was going to join the EU a week after the referendum in any case²⁸. This became the first time that the Turkish Cypriot side was not blamed for the negative result. Leaders of different countries and the European Commission welcomed and congratulated Turkish Cypriots’ for their “courageous” ‘yes’ vote²⁹. Despite the outcome of the referendum, the Republic of Cyprus joined the EU on 1 May 2004.

The 2004 Progress Report welcomed Turkey’s October 2 decision to add Cyprus to the list of countries to which the Customs Union regimes would apply. In December 2004, the European Council meeting decided that the accession negotiations with Turkey would start on October 3, 2005³⁰. As it was planned, on October 3, 2005, the accession negotiations were opened. The Negotiation Framework defined the principles governing the negotiations. It was mentioned that Turkey’s progress should be measured by Turkey’s compliance with some requirements: the settlements of disputes, including the comprehensive settlement

²⁶ Kınacıoğlu M. & Oktay E., *The Domestic Dynamics of Turkey’s Cyprus Policy: Implications for Turkey’s Accession to the European Union*, Turkish Studies, 7(2), (2006), 261–273

²⁷ Oran B., *Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular*, (Belgeler, Yorumlar, 2013). [Turkish Foreign Policy: Facts, Documents, Comments from the War of Independence to Today] (Vol. 3), p. 657. İletişim Yayınları.

²⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 661–663

²⁹ Excerpts from Statements and Decisions/Resolutions Following the Referenda Held in Cyprus on 24 April 2004. (2004). Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey. <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/what-the-world-said-after-the-referenda.en.mfa>

³⁰ European Council in Brussels. (2004), 8, https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/_files/Zirve_Bildirileri/PresConc_17122004.pdf

of the Cyprus conflict and the normalization of relations with the EU member states, including the RoC. This means that the Cyprus conflict was included as a precondition for Turkey's full membership because any serious breach of the principles on which the Union was founded would lead to the suspension of negotiations³¹.

Component Problems of the Cyprus Conflict

The RoC's membership to the EU not only did not bring about a solution to the Cyprus conflict but also deepened the isolation of Turkish Cypriots. Despite its promises to contribute to the economic development of Turkish Cypriots by adopting the Green Line Regulation in 2004, which aimed at managing the movement of goods and people from North to South³², the "TRNC" economy is greatly dependent on Turkey. In fact, the "TRNC" is neither inside the EU nor outside of it. No country besides Turkey recognizes the "TRNC" as a sovereign state, so there is a problem of transport and communication between the world and the north of Cyprus. Since the "TRNC" is not recognized, there are no direct flights there. The International Civil Aviation Organization rejected including the Ercan Airport in the northern part of Nicosia in the Regional Air Navigation Plan because the government of the RoC – the only sovereign state on the island – had not requested it³³. There are two options to reach the "TRNC"; to travel to the RoC and cross to the North by a car which became possible only after 2003 when the "TRNC" opened two of the checkpoints, or to take a flight to Ercan Airport. However, the planes have to stop in Istanbul and only after that fly to Ercan³⁴. Meanwhile, the RoC considers entrance to the island by using this airport as illegal and may fine for it. It is vital to mention that the only direct flight to the Ercan Airport happened in 2005 from the Heydar Aliyev Airport in Baku when a plane

³¹ *ibid.*

³² Council Regulation (EC) No 866/2004 of 29 April 2004 on a Regime under Article 2 of Protocol 10 to the Act of Accession. (2004). <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:02004R0866-20150831&from=EN>

³³ Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus. (n.d.). Illegal Flights to the Territory of the Republic of Cyprus which is Under Turkish Occupation. last modified May 2, 2021, [http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/highcom/highcom_pretoria.nsf/all/E27E244E590AAC3FC2257A4D0037CD39/\\$file/ILLEGAL%20FLIGHTS%20TO%20THE%20TERRITORY%20OF%20THE%20REPUBLIC%20OF%20CYPRUS%20WHICH%20IS%20UNDER%20TURKISH%20OCCUPATION.docx?openelement](http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/highcom/highcom_pretoria.nsf/all/E27E244E590AAC3FC2257A4D0037CD39/$file/ILLEGAL%20FLIGHTS%20TO%20THE%20TERRITORY%20OF%20THE%20REPUBLIC%20OF%20CYPRUS%20WHICH%20IS%20UNDER%20TURKISH%20OCCUPATION.docx?openelement)

³⁴ Eyüboğlu A., *Uçuş yasağını delen formül*, (2014). [The Formula that Breaks the Flight Ban]. *Milliyet*. <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/cadde/ali-eyuboglu/ucus-yasagini-delen-formul-1881029>

with ninety passengers flew directly to the “TRNC”³⁵. The principle of “one nation, three states” can explain Azerbaijan’s steps towards the “TRNC”. In 1992, the parliament of Nakhijevan decided to recognize the “TRNC” but as the parliament of an autonomous republic did not have such a mandate, the decision had no legal validity. At that time, Heydar Aliyev was the Chairman of the Supreme Assembly of Nakhijevan³⁶. If Azerbaijan recognized the independence of the “TRNC”, it would have become a basis and a precedent for other states to recognize the independence of Nagorno Karabakh.

Another problem is that the ports of the “TRNC” are only open to Turkish vessels and there are restrictions on Cyprus-flagged vessels; the same is true for aircraft. This is a breach of the Customs Union agreement between Turkey and the EU. Moreover, it is against the *acquis* of the EU on the free movement of goods. As a result, in 2006, the Council of the European Union decided to suspend negotiations on the eight chapters concerning the restrictions imposed by Turkey on the RoC (see Table 1) and not close the other chapters until Turkey implements all its commitments³⁷. Since then all progress reports on Turkey defined that as long as those restrictions were not lifted, Turkey would not be able to implement the *acquis*.

*Table 1: Chapters within the context of the Negotiation Framework between Turkey and the EU blocked or suspended with regard to the Cyprus conflict*³⁸

Chapter title	Status	Reason
Free Movement of Goods	suspended	Turkey's restrictions on the RoC
Free Movement of Capital		
Financial Services		
Agriculture and Rural Development		
Customs Union		
External Relations		
Fisheries		

³⁵ Sayarı S., *Kuzey Kıbrıs’a doğrudan uçuş* (2005, July 28). [A Direct Flight to the Northern Cyprus]. Deutsche Welle. <https://www.dw.com/tr/kuzey-k%C4%B1br%C4%B1sa-do%C4%9Frudan-u%C3%A7u%C5%9F/a-2524266>

³⁶ Tahiroğlu Y., *Azerbaycan’daki Kıbrıs heyecanı*, (2004, April 25). [Excitement in Azerbaijan over Cyprus]. NTV-MSNBC. <https://web.archive.org/web/201401042128-18/http://arsiv.ntvmsnbc.com/news/267258.asp>

³⁷ GAERC, 2006, p. 2

³⁸ Directorate For EU Affairs, Current Situation, last modified July 20, 2021, https://www.ab.gov.tr/current-situation_65_en.html

Transport Policy		
Energy	blocked	by Greek Cypriots
Judiciary and Fundamental Rights		
Justice, Freedom and Security		
Education and Culture		
Free Movement of Workers		
Foreign, Security and Defence Policy		

One of the problems addressed in the “Human rights and the protection of minorities” section of progress reports on Turkey concerns property rights and refugees. As a result of the intercommunal conflict and military actions of 1963 and 1974, many people had to be uprooted from their homes and move from one side of the island to the other. Consequently, there are around 228,000 IDPs (both Greek and Turkish) on the island³⁹. The displacement of people caused loss of property for both sides and after the precedent set by the *Loizidou v. Turkey* case, some IDPs began presenting a claim to their properties in the north of the island. By the *Loizidou v. Turkey* case Turkey was claimed to be responsible for compensating the damage done to applicants. After its success, many Greek Cypriots began to apply to the ECHR and to avoid similar applications to the ECHR, the “TRNC” introduced a “Property Compensation Commission” in 2003 as a domestic remedy to be exhausted before applying to the ECHR⁴⁰. However, it did not work properly so in 2005 the “Law for Compensation, Exchange and Restitution of Immovable Properties” was adopted which defined that all natural and legal persons could apply to the Immovable Property Commission (IPC) “requesting restitution, exchange or compensation” for their property⁴¹. As of April 2021, 6,825 people have applied to the Commission and it has paid around €366 mln as compensation⁴².

In general, the problems originating from the Cyprus conflict – communication and transportation, the property problem, and IDPs – have also

³⁹ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. (2019). Cyprus: Country Information. IDMC. <https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/cyprus>

⁴⁰ *Xenides-Arestis v. Turkey* (admissibility), No. 46347/99 (European Court of Human Rights 2005), 23, <https://sites.manchester.ac.uk/aog-judgements/wp-content/uploads/sites/155/2019/10/Xenides-Arestis-decision-2005.pdf>

⁴¹ Law for Compensation, Exchange and Restitution of Immovable Properties, no. 67/2005 (2005), 2, <http://www.tamk.gov.ct.tr/dokuman/67-2005yasaING.pdf>

⁴² Immovable Property Commission. (2021). Immovable Property Commission. <http://www.tamk.gov.ct.tr/english/index.html>

shaped Turkey-EU relations. As this analysis has demonstrated, these problems have been included in the progress reports on Turkey and as long as Turkey has not fulfilled the conditions attached to these issues, it cannot implement the EU acquis.

Developments in the Eastern Mediterranean and Turkey-EU Relations

The hydrocarbon discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean in the past decade indicate new geopolitical dynamics in the region, especially determining the course of Turkish-EU relations in the framework of the Cyprus conflict. With the increasing energy and security cooperation between several East Mediterranean states – including Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, and Israel – and the gradual isolation of Turkey from regional projects, the tension in the region has intensified considerably. Energy and security is just one side of the problem in the East Mediterranean. Historically complicated Turkish-Greek relations, especially the Cyprus conflict, contribute to the tense situation as well. Overall, some trends are visible regarding the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean – the growing cooperation and energy forums which leave Turkey out, Turkey's reactive and aggressive responses to the regional developments, and the EU's milder rhetoric after the recent escalation of tensions between Turkey and Greece in 2020.

Since 2013 a new point was added to the progress reports on Turkey regarding Cyprus's rights to exploit hydrocarbon resources in its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)⁴³. As the Republic of Cyprus is the only recognized sovereign state on the island, it has rights to the resources of the island. However, Turkey claims that Turkish Cypriots also have rights to those resources and the profits from exploitation should be shared between the two communities⁴⁴. As a result, starting from 2014 when Italian Energy Company ENI began drilling in the waters southeast of Cyprus, Turkey sent a research vessel and navy ships there⁴⁵. The escalation of tension between Turkey, Greece and Cyprus over the drilling in the Eastern Mediterranean became the new dimension of the Cyprus conflict. Just to clarify that the tensions because of energy resources have not just appeared recently, it is vital to mention that at the end of the 1980s Turkey and Greece had a similar conflict, as well. The first drilling in an area which included disputed waters between Turkey and Greece was carried out by a Canadian-controlled oil

⁴³ Turkey Progress Report, 2013

⁴⁴ Stergiou A., *Turkey–Cyprus–Israel relations and the Cyprus conflict*. Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies, 18(4), (2016), 375–392 <https://doi.org/10.1080/194489-53.2016.1195994>

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 377

company⁴⁶ which escalated the situation in the Aegean. To prevent possible Turkish-Greek confrontation, the “Davos Declaration” was reached between Turkey and Greece in the Economic Conference in Davos in 1988⁴⁷. However, the “Davos spirit” and the negotiations between the two countries did not last long. This drilling was the first of the conflicts that emerged between Turkey and Greece concerning the disputed territorial waters. However, only in the past decade did the search for hydrocarbons become a cause of crisis and began shaping the political situation in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The hydrocarbon discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean created a solid ground for energy cooperation among several East Mediterranean countries. One of the results of this cooperation is the East Mediterranean pipeline project which intends to connect the gas reserves of Israel to Greece via Cyprus⁴⁸ and from there provide natural gas through Italy to Europe. On January 2, 2020, Israel, Cyprus, and Greece signed the final agreement on the pipeline⁴⁹. This possible project brings about several problems for Turkey. First of all, the project bypasses Turkey which was hoping to become a part of the bigger project of delivering natural gas from the Eastern Mediterranean to Europe⁵⁰. If this project realizes it will decrease the significance of the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline to some extent which is an alternative for the natural gas imported from Russia. Moreover, if Turkey became a part of the EastMed pipeline project, it would become a substantial energy hub and a corridor Europe⁵¹, thus, having more bargaining power against the EU.

⁴⁶ Hale W., *Turkish Foreign Policy 1774-2000*, (2002), https://books.google.am/books?hl=en&lr=&id=_xLgtpBsovWC&oi=fnd&pg=PP8&ots=DYIIRT1i8f&sig=uECOGv6fmbigZPusFRTv4NsdhAQ&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false

⁴⁷ Background Note on Aegean Dispute. (n.d.). Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey. last modified March 28, 2021, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/background-note-on-aegean-dispute.en.mfa>

⁴⁸ Dalay, G. Turkey, Europe, and the Eastern Mediterranean: Charting a Way Out of the Current Deadlock. Brookings. last modified January 28, 2021 <https://www.brookings.edu/research/turkey-europe-and-the-eastern-mediterranean-charting-a-way-out-of-the-current-deadlock/>

⁴⁹ Koutantou A., (2020, January 2). *Greece, Israel, Cyprus Sign EastMed Gas Pipeline Deal*, Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-greece-cyprus-israel-pipeline-idUSKB-N1Z10R5>

⁵⁰ *ibid*

⁵¹ Dalay G., *Turkey, Europe, and the Eastern Mediterranean: Charting a Way Out of the Current Deadlock*, (Brookings, 2021, January 28). <https://www.brookings.edu/research/turkey-europe-and-the-eastern-mediterranean-charting-a-way-out-of-the-current-deadlock/>

Besides being isolated from energy cooperation, such regional projects include two EU member states – Greece and Cyprus – with which Turkey has conflicts. The conflict of hydrocarbons and EEZ between Turkey and Greece and Cyprus deteriorates the stability of the southeastern fronts of the EU. In order to protect the rights of its two member states, the EU imposes sanctions on Turkey which negatively impact EU-Turkey relations. Mainly after the 2019 unauthorized drilling in the west and northeast of Cyprus, the Council of the EU adopted conclusions that imposed several sanctions on Turkey. Most importantly, one of the conclusions touched upon the settlement of the Cyprus problem once again underlining that Turkey should commit and contribute to the settlement⁵². This development shows that the Cyprus conflict continues to be an obstacle for Turkey in its relations with the EU. In its turn, Turkey claims that it represents the rights of the Turkish Cypriots living on the island who should have their share of the natural resources found off the coast of the island⁵³.

However, the recent developments in the East Mediterranean regarding the deployment of Turkish Oruç Reis seismic research vessel in the disputed waters claimed by both Greece and Turkey and the EU's response to it showed that the EU's stance towards Turkey is not definite. The hardliners of the EU – Greece, Cyprus, and France – were disappointed with the moderate decisions of the Council of the EU⁵⁴ which were limited to imposing sanctions on some Turkish individuals and companies. Meanwhile, in contrast to the hardliners of the Union, Germany suggested to keep “the door open” for Turkey⁵⁵. The decision of the Council of the EU in December mentioned that the EU has a strategic interest in developing cooperative relations with Turkey. However, once again the EU reaffirms that Turkey should be ready to resolve the differences with the EU member states “through dialogue and in accordance with international law”⁵⁶ which obviously refers to the Cyprus conflict and Greek-Turkish relations.

⁵² Council of the EU. (2019, July 15). Turkish Drilling Activities in the Eastern Mediterranean, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/07/15-turkish-drilling-activities-in-the-eastern-mediterranean-council-adopts-conclusions/>

⁵³ Khadduri W., *East Mediterranean Gas: Opportunities and Challenges*, Mediterranean Politics, 17(1), (2012), 111–117

⁵⁴ Wintour P., *EU Leaders Approve Sanctions on Turkish Officials over Gas Drilling*, The Guardian. last modified December 11, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/11/eu-leaders-sanctions-turkey-gas-drilling>

⁵⁵ *ibid*

⁵⁶ European Council Meeting Conclusions. (2020). <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/47296/1011-12-20-euco-conclusions-en.pdf>

Overall, the conflict of hydrocarbons between Turkey, Greece and Cyprus deteriorates the stability of the southeastern fronts of the EU. As the exploration for hydrocarbons continues off the coast of the Republic of Cyprus and Turkey continues to be isolated from regional projects, the tense situation will continue in the Eastern Mediterranean, occasionally causing crises. In order to contain Turkey's aggressive actions, the EU should utilize other mechanisms (e.g. conditionality) than sanctions as it did in the second half of the 1990s and early 2000s.

Conclusion

This study aimed to understand how the Cyprus conflict impacted the EU-Turkey relations and Turkey's EU accession process, analyzing the conflict and its impact since 1960. Based on the analysis of documents, reports, protocols and statements made by different officials, generally, it can be inferred that the Cyprus conflict played and continues to play a crucial role in the EU-Turkey relations determining the direction of the relations.

The analysis of developments demonstrated that the impact of the Cyprus conflict can be divided into three time periods: 1) 1960-1974, when the conflict had no influence on the EEC-Turkey relations and the main factors were domestic politics and the developments in the country considering the 1960 and 1971 coup d'états; 2) 1974-1979, when after the Turkish invasion of Cyprus, the EEC limited itself by just condemning the invasion and nothing else. So, in these two periods, the Cyprus conflict had no tangible impact on Turkey-EU relations. The last period began in 1980 and continues till today. Starting from 1982, the Cyprus problem gradually began to be incorporated in almost all documents and reports issued by the EC/EU. As a result, the resolution of the conflict became a precondition for Turkey's accession process.

The analysis demonstrated that despite criticizing and condemning the link between Cyprus and the accession process, Turkey, to some extent, conformed to the conditions imposed by the EU. The Özal government's economic reforms, the harmonization packages and reforms enabled Turkey to comply with the EU acquis. However, one of the substantial conditions was the Cyprus conflict to which Turkey never fully adapted. Despite the fact that due to EU conditionality Greece lifted its veto, the Customs Union agreement was reached, and accession negotiations started between Turkey and the EU, Turkey did not abandon the Cyprus conflict as its "national cause".

The EU conditionality also enabled Turkey to deal with the Greek impediment while moving towards the EU. The conditionality and "compromise for every compromise" approach imposed by the EU both on Turkey and Greece enabled the

former to overcome the Greek obstacle. However, the EU was not the only factor of rapprochement between Turkey and Greece. Several other developments such as “earthquake diplomacy”, more moderate and reformist governments of both Greece and Turkey and the direct talks and negotiations between the two countries contributed to overcoming the Greek impediment occasionally.

The contradictions over the economic isolation of the “TRNC” and the failure of the EU to implement its promises of ending the isolation of the north, the problem of transport and communication, the restrictions by Turkey on the usage of ports, and Greek Cypriot rights concerning their property in the “TRNC” shape the present relations between Turkey and the EU. The analysis demonstrated that all the above-mentioned points were included in the progress reports on Turkey and resulted in the stagnation of Turkey’s EU accession process, because based on these restrictions several chapters of the negotiation framework were blocked or suspended. Moreover, if Turkey does not lift the restrictions, it will not be able to implement the EU acquis, and the resumption of the accession process will be impossible.

Finally, the recent developments in the Eastern Mediterranean also display that the Cyprus conflict with its component problems (e.g. rights to natural resources) still play a tangible role in shaping Turkey-EU relations. Most probably this trend will continue in near future considering the ongoing explorations and drilling in the disputed waters of Greece, Turkey, and Cyprus. The role of the EU is crucial in easing the tension in the Eastern Mediterranean by using the mechanism of conditionality and compromise which effectively balanced the situation in the 1990s and early 2000s.

Generally, the discussion of these sub-questions leads to a comprehensive understanding that the Cyprus conflict, as a precondition presented by the EU due to Greece’s efforts, has negatively impacted Turkey’s EU accession starting from the 1980s. Even though Turkey was able to adapt to the EU conditionality to some extent and take certain “positive” steps towards solving the Cyprus conflict, the latter remains one of the fundamental problems that obstruct Turkey’s EU accession process.

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