

Reuniting Cyprus

By Bruce Fein
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Cyprus is perched for a voluntary and mutually beneficial reunification between Greek Cypriots in the south and Turkish Cypriots in the north after decades of division. New Greek Cypriot President Demetris Christofias and Turkish Cypriot President Mehmet Ali Talat have agreed to direct negotiations within three months.

Mr. Christofias' predecessor displayed no interest in a partnership approach to reunifying the island. But success will crown that endeavor only if the United States and European Union play a catalytic role by honoring what they previously promised years ago in 2004: ending the punitive isolation of Turkish Cypriots that makes stalemate irresistible to Greek Cypriots.

A few pages of history illuminate the political dynamics and equities at work on Cyprus. In 1963, Greece Cypriots destroyed the equal partnership Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus. Violence, political convulsions, and military clashes punctuated ensuing years. By 1974, a de facto separation of the island between Turkish Cypriots in the north and Greek Cypriots in the south had hardened. Passions on both sides awakened by these events make any attempt to assign blame counterproductive.

The two sides resolved to fashion a comprehensive unification scheme in 2004 under the aegis of the United Nations secretary-general. Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot views received equal billing during intensive negotiations. A reunification plan - the so-called "Annan Plan" - was finalized by the secretary-general on March 31, 2004. It respected bizonality, political equality of the two peoples and equal status for the two constituent states.

The plan was submitted to separate simultaneous referenda on April 24, 2004. Turkish Cypriots endorsed reunification by a margin of 2 to 1, whereas Greek Cypriots balked by a 3-to-1 margin.

The Greek Cypriot nyet was disappointing, but politically compelling for them. Turkish Cypriots had been laboring under an international embargo (sans Turkey) for decades. A 1983 Security Council resolution had called on all states to deny recognition to any Cypriot state other than the Greek Cypriot south.

The stalemate continued by the Greek Cypriot shipwreck of the Annan Plan prolonged the Turkish Cypriot economic strangulation while Greek Cypriots prospered from lavish international assistance, trade, and investment. Despite their intransigence, Greek Cypriots were obtusely rewarded by the European Union with a grant of membership on May 1, 2004.

In the aftermath of their conciliatory endorsement of the Annan Plan, Turkish Cypriots were promised their economic isolation would end. The reasons were threefold: to reward parties to conflicts who follow U.N. recommendations; to encourage Greek Cypriots to accede to reunification by knowing time would no longer work to pinch Turkish Cypriots financially; and to narrow the per capita income gap between Greek Cypriots (\$27,000) and Turkish Cypriots (\$13,000) to avoid the financial stresses of reunification experienced by Germany in 1990.

On May 28, 2004, Secretary-General Kofi Annan declared: "[The Turkish Cypriot] vote has undone whatever rationale might have existed for pressuring and isolating them. ... I would hope [the Security Council] can give a strong lead to all states to cooperate both bilaterally and in international bodies to eliminate unnecessary restrictions and barriers that have the effect of isolating the Turkish Cypriots and impeding their development, deeming such a move as consistent with Security Council [nonrecognition] resolutions."

A treasure trove of pledges to Turkish Cypriots was forthcoming. The Council of the European Union was emblematic: "The Turkish Cypriot community has expressed their clear desire for a future within the European Union. The Council is determined to put an end to the isolation of the Turkish Cypriot community and to facilitate the reunification of Cyprus by encouraging the economic development of the Turkish Cypriot community." U.S. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher echoed that Turkish Cypriots would not be left "out in the cold."

Four years later, these promises have proven as valueless as a munificent bequest in a pauper's will. Nothing has been done to lift the embargo.

That ignominy must end. The United States and the EU should pioneer the opening of direct trade, travel, communications and investment with the Turkish Cypriot side. Like Taiwan, Turkish Cypriots should be granted admission to the World Trade Organization without undermining a "one Cyprus" policy.

Greek Cypriots need a reason to abandon their complacency with the status quo that cripples Turkish Cypriots. Even a Demosthenes would find difficulty in persuading Greek Cypriots to reunification if intransigence carried economic and political advantages.

Turkish Cypriots have kept reconciliation alive. They have promoted an additional sixth crossing point between the two sides at Ledra-Lokmaci. They have established a new secondary school for Greek Cypriots in Karpas despite the absence of Greek Cypriot reciprocity schooling opportunities for Turkish Cypriots in the south.

Turkish Cypriots have established a tribunal approved by the European Court of Human Rights to adjudicate Greek Cypriot property claims in the north. Greek Cypriots have not reciprocated with an impartial property tribunal to hear Turkish Cypriot claims in the south. Turkish Cypriot President Talat, nevertheless, declared last month: "I believe a

settlement to be in the interests of my people, of the Greek Cypriots, of the island as a whole and of the European Union and the wider international community."

The United States and EU should give Greek Cypriot President Christofias a reason to be equally enthusiastic. They should end the economic purgatory of Turkish Cypriots.

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