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Cypriot Presidency in the Context of the Cyprus Question and EU–Turkey Relations

***Abstract:** The main aim of this article is to show how the Cyprus dispute affected the preparations and achievements of the Republic of Cyprus's Presidency of the Council of the EU, and to present its implications with respect to relations between Turkey and the European Union. The author discusses the essence of the Cyprus dispute, namely the occupation of the northern part of the island by Turkish armed forces. Further, he describes the influence of Cyprus's integration with the EU on the EU-Turkey relations in the pre-Presidency period. The main part of the article focuses on the Cypriot Presidency, during which Cyprus did not entangle the other Member States in the problems of the divided island, but acted in the best interest of the entire EU. The reaction of the Turkish government, which boycotted the Presidency of the Republic of Cyprus, is also characterised.*

Introduction

The Treaty of Lisbon has introduced significant changes to the Presidency of the Council of the European Union as an institution. First, it has separated the presiding functions of two bodies – the European Council and the Council of the European Union – and established that the former would have a permanent President. Thus the role of the country holding the rotating Presidency has been reduced essentially to the tasks performed within the Council of the European Union. In addition, the position of the country holding the Presidency has also been limited in the Council itself, as the Treaty of Lisbon has created the position of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, who leads the Council configuration composed of the ministers of foreign affairs (Foreign Affairs Council, or FAC). Therefore, one could get the impression that the role of the Presidency in the system of the

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EU's intergovernmental bodies has been degraded in general. However, this regards only the wording of the treaty provisions, which are not always reflected the same way in practice. The role of the country holding the Presidency in important EU-related events is in fact determined by its strength and position in the EU and in the world. Hence the influence of tiny Cyprus on the EU is naturally much lower than that of Germany or France.

Another important change introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon is the 'trio' rule – three subsequent Presidencies who set out common priorities for the 18 months during which they will hold the office. The main rationale behind this rule was to ensure continuity in the implementation of EU policies by the countries holding the Presidency. Prior to the establishment of the trio, each country performing this function defined its own priorities for its six-month term, and the state which subsequently took over the responsibilities announced its own new priorities, often much different from the previous ones. In principle, each trio includes countries from various geographic regions of the European Union, of different sizes and potentials, and the old members are mixed with the new. The trio established for the period from 1 July 2011 to the end of December 2012 was Poland, Denmark and Cyprus.

It should be stressed that in the context of the economic crisis and the integration processes in the European Union, the members of this trio were not seen as perfect. Neither Poland nor Denmark belongs to the Euro zone, and Denmark and Cyprus clearly do not wish to work in close cooperation within the framework of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (Cyprus continues to apply the non-alignment policy).¹ There are also clear differences in the implementation of the EU enlargement policy, in particular as regards Turkey. Poland is the only country of the trio which officially supports Turkey's efforts towards accession to the EU; Denmark is quite sceptical in this respect, while Cyprus wishes to use its membership in the EU to solve the problem of the divided island and end the Turkish occupation of its northern part.

1. The essence of the Cyprus dispute

The Republic of Cyprus was established in 1960 as a result of the London Conference, which granted independence to the island. For many years before that, Greek Cypriots fought with the British colonisers to implement the idea of *enosis*, i.e. to incorporate the island into Greece. The Cypriots of

¹ M. Hatzigeorgopoulos, *What to Expect from the Cyprus Presidency for the Common Security and Defence Policy?*, "European Security Review", July 2012.

Turkish origin strongly opposed these political plans. They manifested another idea, *taksim* – i.e. division of the island between Turkey and Greece. Consequently, in addition to the United Kingdom, Greece and Turkey became involved in the internal conflict of Cyprus as well. They both supported their respective nationals. The exhausting fights between the British troops and the Greek guerrillas, as well as a desire to settle the conflict between Greece and Turkey, contributed to the commencement of tripartite negotiations between the governments in London, Athens and Ankara. As a result of these negotiations, the three countries decided to grant independence to the island and drew up a Constitution for the new state. The Constitution comprised the Treaty of Guarantee (added as an annex) between Cyprus and the United Kingdom, Greece and Turkey, giving the latter three countries the right to intervene in defence of the constitutional order. It should be stressed that it was an octroyed constitution, which means that it was imposed on the inhabitants of the island, The Greek Cypriots, constituting 80 per cent of the population, were dissatisfied with the content of the act. while the Turkish Cypriots, who represented less than 20 per cent of the population, were satisfied with it.²

The Constitution was never subjected to the judgment of the Cypriots in a referendum. It essentially rejected both *enosis* and *taksim*; it favoured the Turkish Cypriots in public administration and opened a possibility for the Greek and Turkish Cypriots to veto each other's legislative proposals, which consequently paralysed the functioning of the state. After President Makarios attempted to reform the Constitution in 1963, an internal fight started between the two communities living in Cyprus. The conflict was settled in 1964 with the help of the UN. Dissatisfied with the outcome, the Turkish Cypriots withdrew their representatives from all public administration bodies and formed enclaves scattered throughout the island, causing a constitutional crisis.

A breakthrough event in the modern history of Cyprus was the coup d'état inspired by the Athenian junta in 1974. Its main goal was to overthrow President Makarios, and in the long-term, to realise the idea of *enosis*. The government in Ankara treated the putsch as a pretext to interfere with the island's internal affairs. Invoking the Treaty of Guarantee, Turkey invaded Cyprus and took control of 37 per cent of its territory. After Turkey's military attack, nearly 230,000 Greek Cypriots departed to the south, while 40,000 Turks moved to the northern territories occupied by the Turkish army.³ Although

² K.A. Kyriakides, *The 1960 Treaties and the Search for Security in Cyprus*, "Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies", Vol. 11(4)/2009, pp.428-430.

³ A. Adamczyk, *Cypr. Dzieje polityczne (Cyprus. Political History)*, Warszawa 2002, p. 279.

soon thereafter the power in Cyprus was returned to the legitimate authorities, Turkey has not withdrawn its forces from the island. The 40,000 strong Turkish army occupying the northern part of Cyprus has remained in Cyprus under the pretext of protecting the Turkish population.⁴

Since 1974, the two communities on the island have been conducting continuous negotiations to settle the Cyprus dispute. The Republic of Cyprus, backed by Greece, tried to gain support in various international forums in order to end the Turkish occupation. It involved the UN, NATO and US diplomacy in its affairs. After many years of negotiations, it was agreed that the future agreement would be based on two separate zones forming a new federal structure, inhabited by two equally-treated communities. The main demand of Greek Cypriots however, was that Turkey withdraw its occupational forces from the northern part of the island. In 1983, Turkey decided to proclaim the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in the areas inhabited by the Turkish Cypriots (i.e. occupied by the Turkish army). Since then, it has been the only state in Cyprus officially recognised by the government in Ankara, which means that Turkey does not acknowledge the Republic of Cyprus governed by the Greek Cypriots as a subject of international law. Numerous efforts of Cypriot and Greek diplomats have been of little avail in resolving the Cyprus conflict. The main reason for these failures in negotiations was Turkey's inflexible attitude. The occupation was in fact an implementation of the idea of *taksim*. Despite the fact that official negotiations are conducted between the government of the Republic of Cyprus and the Turkish Cypriots, in practice it is Turkey who determines the position of the Turkish community. Turkey's steadfast attitude stems from the fact that it feels strong and important in the eyes of the European countries and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in the Middle Eastern region.

With Greece's support, Cyprus has been trying to find a way to put pressure on Turkey in order to end the occupation of the island. An opportunity appeared when Turkey commenced its efforts to join the European Union. Thanks to Greece's support, the Cypriot government also applied for EU membership and was included in the group of 10 states which were to join the European Union on 1 May 2004. In these circumstances, the UN General Secretary Kofi Annan presented a proposal for a Constitution for a federal state named the United Republic of Cyprus.⁵ This proposal was meant both to end the long-lasting dispute and open the road to Turkey's accession to the European Union as well. Despite the intensified efforts of EU diplomats, in

⁴ P. Polyviou, *Cyprus. Conflict and Negotiations 1960–1980*, London 1990, pp. 16-25.

⁵ A. Adamczyk, *The Cypriot Dispute: The Position of Greek Cypriots in: Turkey and Europe. Challenges and Opportunities*, ed. A. Szymański, Warszawa 2012, p. 144.

April 2004 Greek Cypriots rejected the ‘Annan Plan’ in a referendum, claiming that the proposal favoured the Turkish Cypriots. Even though the Cyprus dispute has remained unresolved, Cyprus has managed to join the European Union, hoping that its accession would considerably strengthen its position in negotiations over the fate of Cyprus.

2. The Cypriot Presidency in the Council in the context of the Cyprus dispute

2.1. The Europeanisation of Cyprus

My analysis of the preparations for the Cypriot Presidency in the Council of the EU, and the achievements of this Presidency, should start with a brief description of the Europeanisation process in Cyprus. After gaining independence in 1960, the Republic of Cyprus was still strictly bound economically with its former coloniser – the United Kingdom. Therefore in 1962, when the UK applied for membership in the European Communities, Cyprus became interested in it as well. When the UK withdrew the application a year later, in 1963, Cyprus followed by suspending its efforts as well. Seven years later the government in London renewed its application for accession, and in 1971 Cyprus also announced its readiness to join.⁶ Clearly the pro-Community policy of Cyprus was more related to a fear of losing its trade connections with the UK than with an awareness of the historic integration process taking place in Europe or the readiness of Cypriot politicians to become part of it. On the other hand, their attitude should not be surprising, considering that after gaining independence Cyprus decided to be a non-aligned state, maintaining friendly relations with the USSR. Consequently, its desire for membership in the European Communities, established by the Western European countries in what was then a bipolar world, was not entirely consistent with the priorities of Cyprus’s foreign policy, as EC membership would jeopardise its non-alignment principle. In the end, the economic pragmatism of Cypriots won out, and in 1972 they signed an Association Agreement with the European Communities, under which a customs union was supposed to be introduced after 10 years. However, the execution of the agreement was suspended because of the Turkish invasion and occupation of the island. Reluctant to get involved in the Greek–Turkish conflict, the Member States of the Communities demanded that the dispute be settled before the Association Agreement would be reactivated.

⁶ J.S. Joseph, *Cyprus: Ethnic Conflict and International Politics*, New York 1997, p. 117.

A breakthrough in the relations between Cyprus and the European Communities was brought about by Greece's accession to the EC in the early 1980s. The government in Athens actively supported the efforts of Cyprus, and in 1987 Cyprus signed a new protocol with the Communities, under which the customs union would be introduced after 15 years of preparation.⁷ In 1990, the government of the Republic of Cyprus submitted an application for full membership in the European Communities. Three years later, both the European Commission and the Council of the European Union issued opinions that although Cyprus had no problems with adopting the *acquis communautaire*, the unresolved dispute with Turkey blocked the possibility of opening negotiations on accession. Once again the government in Athens came to Cyprus's rescue and in 1998 threatened the other EU members with blocking the next accession process if it did not include the Republic of Cyprus.⁸ As a result of this blackmail, the European Union launched negotiations with the Republic of Cyprus. The negotiations were closed a year later, with the European Council deciding that the unification of Cyprus would not be a condition for its joining the EU.⁹ The Republic of Cyprus became a member of the European Union in 2004, and four years later joined the euro area.

In analysing the road of Cyprus to the European Union, it should be stressed that the original motivation behind the pro-EU efforts of Cypriot politicians was the economy and its desire to maintain links with the British market. Later however, in the 1990s, the dominating motives for integration with the European Union were based on political considerations.¹⁰ Already in the second half of the 1980s, owing to its well-developed banking and telecommunications systems and a very liberal banking law, Cyprus became the main financial centre of the Middle East. It was also called a tax haven and a 'flag of convenience' country. The main sources of national income for Cyprus were financial, transport and tourist services. While the island became economically dependent on the UK, the centre of its economic interests was the Near and Middle East. Therefore, we could put forward the bold thesis that economically it was rather unbeneficial for Cyprus to integrate itself with the EU, since the adoption of EU law has

⁷ See more: A.Adamczyk, *Proces integracji Republiki Cypru ze Wspólnotami Europejskimi i jego ewentualny wpływ na rozwiązanie problemu cypryjskiego (Process of Integration of the Republic of Cyprus with the European Communities and its Possible Impact on the Solution of the Cyprus Conflict)*, "Studia Europejskie" No. 4/1999.

⁸ "Cyprus News", No. 87, October 1996.

⁹ See more: G. Kyris, *The European Union and the Cyprus problem: A Story of Limited Impetus*, "Eastern Journal of European Studies" Vol. 3/June 2012.

¹⁰ A. Sepos, *The Europeanization of Cyprus*, Palgrave Macmillan 2008, p. 67.

limited the possibility of carrying on the financial role played by Cyprus in the region.¹¹

On the other hand, we should not forget that the entire political activity of the Cypriot government was focused on ending the Turkish occupation of the northern part of the island. It was ready to sacrifice its economic interests for the higher political goal – unification of the island – and it saw a chance for that in joining the European Union and using it to influence Turkey. Another reason was Cyprus's strong connection with Greece, which was already an EU member and which had repeatedly proved that the EU may be used to put pressure on Turkey.¹²

The EU Member States were aware of the fact that Cyprus's membership would get them involved in the problem of occupation of the island; therefore, some of them opposed its accession. While the Republic of Cyprus fulfilled the 'Copenhagen Criteria', there were also other conditions, not mentioned in the official EU documents. One of them was that the candidates should not burden the EU with problems which might adversely affect the EU's relations with third countries which are important political partners of the EU.¹³ However, in this case Greece also blackmailed the other states and forced them to admit Cyprus in the enlargement of 2004.

2.2. Preparations for the Presidency and defining priorities

Although the process of the island's integration with the European Union was a historic event for Cyprus, from the very beginning the government had problems with establishing the institutions necessary to coordinate EU policies. These problems were related to the Cypriot Constitution, which had been adopted in 1960 and literally named the ten ministries forming the Cypriot government. Considering the magnitude of the process, Cyprus's European policy should have been carried out and controlled at the ministerial level, but any change in the Constitution, i.e. introducing a new ministry, would require the consent of the Turkish representatives, which was impossible due to the ongoing dispute. The Greek Cypriots attempted to change some constitutional provisions by invoking the 'law of necessity', referring to the Turkish occupation of the island.¹⁴

¹¹ Owing to its very liberal banking laws, Cyprus was the regional centre for money laundering.

¹² Greece blocked the financial aid for Turkey from the Communities, making concessions to Cyprus a necessary condition for its obtainment; see: P. Yannas, *The Greek Factor in EC–Turkey Relations* in: *Greece and EC Membership Evaluated*, eds. P. Kazakos, P. Ioakimidis, London–New York 1994, p. 218.

¹³ N. Nugent, *Cyprus and the European Union: A Particularly Difficult Membership Application*, "Mediterranean Politics", Summer 1997, pp. 55–57.

¹⁴ N. Skoutaris, *The Cyprus Issue: The Four Freedoms in a Member State Under Siege*, Oxford and Portland 2011, p. 25.

At the stage of negotiations with the European Union a Ministerial Committee for EU Affairs was established, chaired by the President of Cyprus. This Committee was responsible for drawing up the instructions for the Chief Negotiator.¹⁵ However, it was the Cypriot Ministry of Foreign Affairs that played the most important role in coordinating the European policy of Cyprus. It had horizontal competence in European matters. In addition, the Minister of Foreign Affairs also played the main role in the above-mentioned Ministerial Committee for EU Affairs.¹⁶

Cyprus's engagement in the integration process at the stage of negotiations clearly showed that the country was determined to join the European Union. After 1 May 2004, however, its enthusiasm substantially decreased, as if the most important goal had been reached. We might say that Cypriot politicians were satisfied with the accession and with the resulting strengthening of their position in negotiations over the Cyprus dispute. For the Cypriot Council of Ministers, under the leadership of President Tassos Papadopoulos, the efficiency and effectiveness of Cyprus's European policy faded into the background. Officially, the role of coordinator was fulfilled by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but the effectiveness of its actions left a great deal to be desired. It often happened that Cypriot experts participating in working groups in the Council of the European Union had no instructions from their ministries and had to rely solely on their own knowledge.¹⁷ In fact, the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Cyprus to the European Union was burdened with the entire coordination of Cyprus's European policy. Even the list of future Presidencies until 2020, which was announced on 1 January 2007 and which included the Cypriot Presidency, did not bring about any administrative changes.¹⁸

A turning point in the coordination of European policy in Cyprus took place in 2008, when Dimitris Chritofias was elected President. One of his first decisions was to appoint a Secretariat of the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the EU, the task of which was to supervise the preparations for the Cypriot Presidency.¹⁹ The Secretariat informed both the President and the House of Representatives about the progress of preparations. In addi-

¹⁵ In 2008 the former president of Cyprus Georg Vassiliou was appointed as the Chief Negotiator.

¹⁶ A. Passas, E. Katakalous, *The Cyprus EU Presidency. Riders on the Storm*, Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies, 2012, pp. 29–30.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 31.

¹⁸ Council Decision No. 2007/5/EC, Euratom determining the order in which the office of President of the Council shall be held, OJ 2007 L 1/11.

¹⁹ A. Passas, E. Katakalous, *op.cit.*, pp. 31–32.

tion, special teams for European affairs were established in all ministries in early 2010.

The key decision in preparing Cyprus for the Presidency was the establishment of the position of Deputy Minister to the President of the Republic for European Affairs in 2011.²⁰ This position was assumed by Andreas Mavroyiannis, a former Permanent Representative to the EU and thus someone with a lot of experience in EU affairs. The reason behind the appointment of a Deputy Minister answerable directly to the head of state was that the President had no constitutional authorisation to appoint a new minister – another problem related to the Cyprus conflict. Mavroyiannis was invited to the meetings of the Council of Ministers, but officially without the right to vote. He also held plenipotentiary powers to represent the Republic of Cyprus in the EU institutions. During the Presidency, Mavroyiannis participated in the meetings of the Council of the European Union and chaired the General Affairs Council. The Cypriot government also established a special Committee of Ministers, responsible for preparing and holding the Presidency. It was composed of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Finance, and the Deputy Minister to the President of the Republic for European Affairs.²¹ Public officials taking part in the operations relating to the Presidency were trained by their more experienced colleagues from the Greek National Center for Public Administration.

Taking into account the fact that Cyprus was a country situated at the frontier of the European Union, with a small population and limited financial resources, Cypriot politicians decided to implement the model of a Brussels-based Presidency, i.e. to run the Presidency through its Permanent Representation in Brussels. The main reasons were the considerable distance between Nicosia and Brussels and the inexperience of the Cypriot public officials in this respect. The work of the Presidency was to be based on the General Secretariat of the Council of the EU in Brussels.

After consulting the other countries of the trio, Cyprus defined the priorities of its Presidency and coined the motto ‘Towards a Better Europe’. Cypriots set the following priority areas: Europe, more efficient and sustainable; Europe, with a better performing and growth-based economy; Europe, more relevant to its citizens, with solidarity and social cohesion; Europe in the world, closer to its neighbours.²²

²⁰ www.cyprus-mail.com/taxonomy/term/32184/0/feed (last visited 14.01.2013).

²¹ A. Passas, E. Katakalous, *op.cit.*, p. 34.

²² Programme of the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union 1 July–31 December 2012, www.cy2012.eu (last visited 03.07.2012).

In the context of the Turkish occupation, the last priority, which concerned the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy and in particular the developing of relations with the Mediterranean region, was the most important for Cyprus. The Cypriot government clearly stressed that it would support the EU enlargement process. In the first chapter of its Operational Programme drawn up in order to implement the Presidency priorities, titled 'General Affairs', the Cypriot government expressed its opinion on Turkey's accession: *'Moreover, the reinforcement of Turkey's accession prospect is of critical importance and the Presidency will focus on advancing this prospect, in line with Turkey's Negotiating Framework and relevant Council conclusions.'*²³

The problem of occupation of the island had appeared already in the talks between government officials during the drafting of the programme of the Presidency trio. Working meetings of experts to set the priorities began in early 2010. Many of these meetings were organised in Cyprus, where it was difficult to disregard the problem of occupation. The Cypriot officials stressed that the name 'Cyprus dispute' was inaccurate, as the problem was really one of 'Turkish occupation'. Therefore, according to them, the conflict should be referred to as *'the problem of the Turkish accession to the EU resulting from the Turkish occupation of northern Cyprus'*.²⁴ This means that the literal mention of Turkey in the Presidency agenda was deliberate. By highlighting the strengthening of the relations between the EU and southern countries, the Cypriot government wanted to show that it does not oppose strengthening bonds with its neighbours. The Cypriot Minister of Foreign Affairs, Erato Kozakou-Marcoullis, tried to encourage her counterparts in the Foreign Affairs Council to facilitate the accession processes of Serbia and Albania.²⁵ This may be interpreted as a signal to Turkey that its accession depends largely on the position of Cyprus, which supports the enlargement.

However, to the great surprise of the Cypriot government and the EU politicians, at the beginning of 2011 the Turkish government announced that during the Cypriot Presidency in the Council it would entirely cease its contacts with the European Union. Turkey's position softened a bit when the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ahmet Davutoglu, announced on 1 July 2011 that the non-participation of Turkish officials only concerned those meetings of EU institutions which are chaired by the representatives of the

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

²⁴ This information was obtained from the Polish officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs participating in the preparations of the working meetings of the Presidency trio.

²⁵ *Marcoullis Encourages Albania on EU Membership*, "Cyprus Mail", 2.08.2012; *Cyprus Hopes for Serbia Accession Talks to Begin*, "Cyprus Mail", 8.08.2012.

Greek Cypriots.²⁶ This meant that they intended to work with the European Commission and the European Parliament after all.²⁷

The boycott of the Cypriot Presidency by Turkey forced the government in Nicosia to act. It assumed a new strategy regarding the Cyprus dispute during its Presidency in the Council of the EU. On 1 July 2012, President Christofias stressed that Cyprus would not use its position as the country holding the Presidency of the Council to promote its national interests.²⁸ The Cypriot government set itself the goal to represent the European Union as a whole and not solely the Republic of Cyprus. It announced that it was ready to fulfil the decisions of the European Union in relations with the Candidate Countries, including Turkey, objectively and neutrally.²⁹ Andreas Mavroyiannis, Deputy Minister to the President of the Republic for European Affairs, expressed similar sentiments by stating: *‘During these six months, Cyprus will be given the opportunity to enhance its image as a credible and responsible Member State and contribute to European integration through a results-oriented presidency. Cyprus, regardless of its own political problem, will act in a purely presidential manner during the presidency. Cyprus will not allow its national problem to define the presidency, but at the same time will not allow Cyprus’s right and obligation as a Member State to preside the Council of the EU to be jeopardized by the Cyprus problem.’*³⁰

Both these high-ranking politicians explicitly demonstrated that the Cypriot Presidency and the Cyprus dispute were two separate matters and completely independent processes. The Cypriot government could not let the Presidency of its country be perceived as a ‘second class presidency’ due to the unresolved Cyprus dispute and Turkey’s boycott. Therefore, when holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, they intended to solve only EU problems. Christofias confirmed that by saying: *‘...if we give the message that we are going to exercise the Presidency to the benefit of Cyprus then we have lost the game and we will lose the trust they have expressed in Cyprus in public. Our reply to Turkey is that Cyprus is equal*

²⁶ G. Seufert, *Turkey’s Cyprus Policy in the Context of Nicosia’s Presidency of the European Council*, SWP Comments, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, October 2012, p. 2.

²⁷ L.H. Yeong, *Turkey’s Boycott of the Cyprus EU Presidency: Context, meaning and its consequences*, EU Centre In Singapore Working Paper, No. 9, September 2012, p. 10.

²⁸ *Cypriot President Christofias Denounces Continued Turkish Intransigence and Provocation in a Message to the EU*, The Diplomatic News Website, available at: www.diplonews.com/feeds/free/1_July_2012_353.php (last visited 10.01.2012).

²⁹ Interview with Demetris Christofias, “Turkish Policy Quarterly” No. 1/2012, p. 19.

³⁰ A. Mavroyiannis, *Cyprus will work towards a more efficient and sustainable Europe*, www.theparliament.com/latest-news/article/newsarticle/cyprus-presidency (last visited 09.12.2012).

*member of the EU and will exercise the Presidency as it should do and as it is exercised by all equal EU Member States.*³¹

Cypriots gained the support of European politicians – both the President of the European Council Hermann Van Rompuy and the President of the European Parliament Martin Schulz demanded that Turkey respect the country holding the Presidency as one of the fundamental principles of the functioning of the EU.³² The appeals of EU politicians proved ineffective however.

2.3 The six months of Presidency and the absence of Turkey

As already mentioned, Turkey does not recognise the Republic of Cyprus as a subject of international relations. Consequently, as previously announced the Turkish officials did not take part in any meetings in the Council of the European Union chaired by the Greek Cypriots. The Greek Cypriots, in turn, not wanting to provoke problems, did not invite the Turks to any meetings. In a way, the problem solved itself. Before the Cypriot Presidency, Turkey as a Candidate Country was usually invited to intergovernmental conferences and the meetings of the Association Council. However, intergovernmental conferences with Candidate Countries are organised in the EU only when a chapter of negotiations is opened or closed. Turkey could not open or close any chapter during the Cypriot Presidency, as the negotiations were blocked by decision of the European Council and some other Member States. Therefore, there was no need to call an intergovernmental conference. As regards the Association Council, it usually takes place during the first six-months of a year, and thus no meeting was planned during the Cypriot Presidency, which lasted from 1 July to 31 December 2012.³³

To sum up, it should be stressed that the Cypriot Presidency tried to avoid any confrontations with Turkey at the EU forum which could negatively affect the image of Cyprus as the country holding the Presidency and representing the interests of the European Union. Moreover, the Cypriot government was aware of the fact that the other Member States did not wish to be involved in the Cyprus dispute. Many of them wanted to maintain correct or even friendly relations with Turkey.³⁴ Many EU members are also members

³¹ *Cypriot president says EU presidency not to be used to promote Cyprus problem*, BBC Monitoring International Reports, available at: <http://www.accessmylibrary.com/article-1G1-283936353/cypriot-president-says-eu.html> (last visited 16.12.2012).

³² See: “The National Herald”, 9 December 2012, www.thenationalherald.com/article/55348; www.eurofora.net (last visited 14.12.2012).

³³ L. Najslova, T. Weiss, *Who is Afraid of the Cyprus EU Presidency?*, EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy Working Paper, June 2012, p. 8.

³⁴ An example of this is Poland, which in 2013 will celebrate the 90th anniversary of initiating diplomatic relations with Turkey.

of NATO, where they sit at the same table with the representatives of Turkey. Hence, despite the boycott of the Cypriot Presidency, EU officials still met with Turkish politicians. For example, the head of EU foreign policy, Catherine Ashton, met with the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, A. Davutoglu.³⁵ We could say that Cyprus officially separated the two issues – the Presidency and the Cyprus dispute, which does not mean that in less formal meetings the Cypriot representatives forgot about the Turkish occupation of the island. At one of these informal meetings of the Council, the Cypriot Minister of Foreign Affairs, Erato Kozakou-Marcoullis, stated that the process of Turkey's accession to the EU should be used '*not only as a carrot but also as a stick...*'³⁶ It was also obvious that during the Cyprus Presidency the problem of occupation was mentioned in all international forums where the Cypriot politicians appeared, an example being the speech of the Cypriot Minister of Foreign Affairs in the UN.³⁷ Nevertheless, in this case it is hard to argue that Cyprus was using the Presidency to pursue its own interests.

3. The Cyprus dispute in EU–Turkey relations in the context of the Cypriot Presidency

The Europeanisation of Turkey has been going on for decades. In 1959, the country applied for association with the European Economic Community, and five years later the Association Agreement entered into force. The main aim of the Agreement was to deepen the economic and trade relations between the Community and Turkey and to strengthen its economic development. It provided for a future customs union and mentioned the possibility of obtaining full membership of the Communities.³⁸ Turkey has always been an important economic and political partner of the Western European countries. Encouraged by the members of the European Communities, it conducted many reforms in order to implement democracy, the rule of law, and a free-market economy. Unfortunately, in the 1970s and the 1980s its relations with the Communities worsened as a result of the Turkish invasion of Cyprus and violations of democratic principles carried out by the military coups. Another considerable obstacle on Turkey's road to the European Communities was the accession of Greece to the EU in 1981. The relations between Athens and

³⁵ <http://konflikty.wp.pl> (last visited 14.12.2012).

³⁶ L.H. Yeong, *op.cit.* p.9.

³⁷ *FM E. Kozakou Marcoullis: Cyprus Presidency Opens New Ways for Cypriot Diplomacy*, "Eleftheria", 4.10.2012.

³⁸ Agreement Establishing an Association Between the European Economic Community and Turkey, www.mfa.gov.tr (last visited 7.02.2011).

Ankara were very bad due to the problems with the boundaries on the Aegean Sea. Greece also acted as Cyprus's advocate in the issue of the Turkish occupation of the island.

As a member of the Communities, for many years Greece blocked financial aid for Turkey and the introduction of the customs union.³⁹ Athens lifted its veto against the customs union between Turkey and the EU in 1995, when the Member States made a political decision to start the accession negotiations with Cyprus.⁴⁰ Since then, Ankara continued to strive for full membership in the European Union, but its application was rejected in 1998, partly because of the unregulated Cypriot dispute. Only after Greece and Turkey opened negotiations in 1999 was Turkey admitted as an official candidate for EU membership.

The accession of the Republic of Cyprus to the EU in 2004 has created another serious obstacle for Turkey. Joining the EU depends, among other things, on the consent of all states already belonging to the European Union. It was obvious that Cyprus would attempt to use its potential veto to influence Turkey and force it to end the occupation of the island. In an attempt to avoid the worsening of relations with Turkey, the other EU Member States decided that they would start the accession negotiations with Turkey in October 2005.⁴¹ The Cypriot government agreed to that as well, hoping that this would encourage Turkey to make more concessions in the ongoing negotiations over the island.⁴²

The most serious problem in the relations between the EU and Turkey was the fact that Turkey refused to recognise the Republic of Cyprus as a subject of international relations. The condition for starting accession negotiations with Turkey was that its government sign a protocol extending the customs union with the EU to the 10 new Member States (i.e. those which joined in the 2004 enlargement). Turkey signed the protocol in 2005, but appended to it a unilateral declaration that this extension of the customs union by no means meant that it recognised the Republic of Cyprus.⁴³ As a result of this unilateral declaration, in 2006 Turkey refused to open its seaports and airports to Cypriot planes and ships, despite the requests of Nicosia and the

³⁹ In 1987, the government of the Republic of Cyprus submitted an application for full membership in the European Communities. The Commission issued a negative opinion on grounds of, among other things, the Turkish military occupation of Cyprus.

⁴⁰ A. Adamczyk, *Cypr. Dzieje polityczne*, op.cit., p. 370.

⁴¹ A. Szymański, *Introduction* in: *Turkey and Europe*, op.cit., p. 13.

⁴² P. Osiewicz, *The Cyprus Issue and Its Impact on Turkey's Accession Negotiations with the European Union after 2004* in: *Turkey and Europe*, op.cit., pp. 118–122.

⁴³ K. Sahilyol, *Cyprus Conflict and the Greek Cypriot Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2012*, IKV Brief, Economic Development Foundation, No. 10/2012.

European Commission.⁴⁴ In response, the European Council suspended eight negotiation chapters out of the 35 which are subject to screenings.⁴⁵ The condition for unblocking them was that Turkey opens its ports to Cypriot entities. As of the start of the Cypriot Presidency in July 2012, only 13 chapters were opened and only one (Science and Research) was temporarily closed. The other chapters are being blocked by some of the European Union Member States for political reasons. In particular Cyprus, France, Germany and Austria have made high demands in the negotiations. The Republic of Cyprus has been blocking the following chapters: Freedom of movement for workers; Energy; Regional Policy and coordination of structural instruments; Judiciary and fundamental rights; Justice, freedom and security; Education and culture; Foreign, Security and Defence Policy. On the other hand, it should be clearly stressed that officially Cyprus has never opposed Turkey's membership in the European Union.⁴⁶

With the Cypriot Presidency drawing closer, relations between Ankara and Brussels were becoming increasingly tense. At the beginning of the Danish Presidency, the Danish officials announced that they would pass on the responsibilities concerning the European Defence Agency in the first half of 2012 to Cyprus (as the next Presidency), since Denmark did not participate in this structure. Turkey's reaction was very strict – the Turkish government threatened the EU with withdrawal of its forces from the EU peace-keeping operations in Bosnia.⁴⁷ It may seem surprising that Turkey reacted so late to the planned Cypriot Presidency. After all, as mentioned before, the Council of the European Union announced the order of countries holding the Presidency in January 2007. The answer to this can be found in Turkey's hope that the problems of the divided island would be resolved before the Cypriot Presidency. This positive approach was related to the planned resumption of negotiations between Greek and Turkish Cypriots in 2008.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, the negotiations ended in failure in early 2012 and there was

⁴⁴ Official Website of the Greek Foreign Ministry, The Cyprus Issue, www.mfa.gr/en/the-cyprus-issue/ (last visited 04.03.2012).

⁴⁵ The European Council suspended the following chapters: Free movement of goods; Right of establishment and freedom to provide services; Financial Services; Agriculture; Fisheries; Transport policy; Custom Union; External relations.

⁴⁶ A. Insel, *Boasting Negotiations with Turkey: What Can France Do?*, Policy Brief, Istanbul Policy Centre, No. 4/2012, p. 2.

⁴⁷ *Turkey Warns May Withdraw Forces from Bosnia over Cyprus EU Presidency*, <http://www.cyprusnewsreport.com> (last visited 16.12.2012).

⁴⁸ See more: L. Napolitano, *The Cyprus Peace Process Since March 2008: Short History, State of the Art and What is Next in Store*, IAI Working Papers 1101, Istituto Affari Internazionali, January 2011.

no chance of reaching an agreement before the start of the Cypriot Presidency.⁴⁹

The deteriorating relations between the European Union and Turkey, and in particular the upcoming Cypriot Presidency, forced EU politicians to undertake an initiative allowing further cooperation with Turkey. The governments of the EU Member States were aware that Turkey was one of the most important countries of the Middle Eastern region and a huge market for EU goods. During the Danish Presidency, the members of the Council made a political decision to reopen the accession negotiations with Turkey in 2013, and in particular to facilitate cooperation, including during the Cypriot Presidency. In May 2012, the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs Willy Sovndal announced that one of the key decisions of the Danish Presidency was the institutional readiness to get Turkey closer to the EU. This move was naturally particularly important in the context of the upcoming Cypriot Presidency, which raised the prospect of worsening relations with Ankara. The result of the Danish initiative was ‘the positive agenda’ – a new mechanism announced by the European Commission for cooperation between the EU and Turkey.⁵⁰ The main aim of this initiative was to revive the EU–Turkey relations after a long period of suspension of the negotiation chapters. It was not meant to replace the negotiations but support them and, above all, to make cooperation between Turkey and the EU possible during the Cypriot Presidency. Under the positive agenda, meetings of working groups were held, composed of Turkish experts and European Commission officials. They discussed areas such as: energy, mobility, migration, human rights, justice, and combating terrorism.⁵¹ Owing to these meetings, in the second half of 2012 the Turkish government continued working with the EU through the positive agenda, bypassing the Cypriot Presidency. Of course, Turkish politicians are hoping to intensify the cooperation, and in particular to unblock the negotiation chapters after 1 January 2013.

Conclusions

The Cyprus dispute has been a constant presence in the relations between the European Union and Turkey. Only a few years ago, in 2007, when the order of Presidency was announced, it seemed that Cyprus would use its term of office to force concessions from Turkey in the negotiations concerning the

⁴⁹ “Cyprus Mail”, May 2012.

⁵⁰ S. Handell, *The Danish Presidency and Turkey’s EU Accession: Turning the Page Towards a New Positive Agenda*, GPoT Brief, Global Political Trends Centre, No. 4/2012, p. 4.

⁵¹ S. Ananicz, *Prezydencja cypryjska a Relacje Turcji z Unią Europejską (The Cyprus Presidency and Relations between Turkey and the EU)*, Komentarze OSW, No. 82/2012, p. 2.

divided island. After all, Turkish politicians really wanted to reach a positive conclusion of its accession negotiations and join the European Union. The Treaty of Lisbon has substantially decreased the possibility of influencing the functioning of the EU by the country holding the Presidency, in particular in the field of foreign policy. On the other hand, Cyprus still has the right of veto in the process of admitting new members.

Looking back at the Cypriot Presidency, we can clearly state that Cypriot politicians showed a lot of maturity and responsibility in avoiding the involvement of the European Union in its own national problems. The Cypriot Presidency focused on the greatest challenges faced by the EU – combating the economic crisis and setting out the Multiannual Financial Framework for 2014–2020. It's worth stressing that Cyprus used its international opportunity well and presented itself in a different light than it had previously. Before holding the Presidency, it was perceived through the prism of its conflict with Turkey. During the Presidency, it proved to be a well managed and well organised country, able to effectively lead the Council of the European Union. Hence, the Cypriot Presidency was judged positively, in particular as regards its administrative effectiveness. There is no doubt that the Presidency helped Cyprus strengthen its international position (as far as is possible for such a small country) and improve its image among its EU partners.⁵²

For Turkey, on the other hand, the Cypriot Presidency was another impasse in its relations with the European Union. Its boycott, which might be perceived as a sign of disrespect to the very institution of Presidency in the Council, has shown Turkey in a rather negative light. The positive agenda, which is a form of cooperation between the EU and Turkey, involved only lower-level officials. In fact, Turkey's boycott of the Cypriot Presidency has not brought any positive effects for Ankara. It blocked the negotiation process concerning the island and did not help in reopening the accession negotiations. The government in Ankara is hoping to make up the lost time during the Irish and Lithuanian Presidencies in 2013.⁵³

⁵² *President Christofias: Despite Problems, the Cyprus UE Presidency Has Been a Success*, www.greeknewsonline.com (last visited 10.01.2013).

⁵³ A. Insel, *op.cit.*, p. 4.