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IS THERE A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY FOR THE CYPRUS PROBLEM
BEFORE THE END OF THE YEAR?

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The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, will leave office at the end of 2026. Not surprisingly he would like to see either a settlement of the Cyprus problem or at least substantial progress before the conclusion of his term. A key question is whether such an objective is feasible. An even more important question is whether, in the event of a settlement before the end of the year, the content of the proposed solution would constitute an improvement of the *status quo* from the perspective of the Greek Cypriots. It should be noted that the policies pursued by the Greek Cypriot side over the years have not produced the desired results.

Following the disaster of 1974 several ideas and plans were put forward over the years for the resolution of the Cyprus problem. I have repeatedly indicated that none of these proposals would have improved the *status quo* for the Greek Cypriots despite the territorial adjustments that would have taken place in their favour. It is not only the issue of guarantees, the properties and the settlers. Moreover, the Turkish interpretation of political equality is such that it implies that no major decision is reached without its consent.

Any plan for the settlement of a conflict is shaped by the prevailing balance of power as well as by the objectives of the parties involved. In the case of Cyprus, while the settlement process formally centres on intercommunal negotiations, the major actor is Turkey.

It should not come as a surprise that Ankara seeks a settlement that would consolidate and legitimize its strategic control over Cyprus. For Turkey, the Cyprus problem has never been primarily about protecting the rights of the Turkish Cypriots. Rather, Turkey has consistently utilized the Turkish Cypriot community for its own strategic objectives.

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It should also be stressed that in 1974 the Greek Cypriot community experienced an unprecedented shock, the consequences of which have not yet been washed away. For decades, discussions have focused on a federal settlement. Yet there is insufficient understanding and evaluation of the concept of federalism itself. Nor is there adequate appreciation of the fact that there are different categories of federal arrangements. Some are inherently dysfunctional, while others may, under specific conditions, prove viable and sustainable.

It is generally acknowledged that the negotiating framework has moved over time closer to the Turkish positions from the late 1970s to the present day. Yet despite Greek Cypriot concessions, a settlement has remained elusive. This is due in large part to Turkish maximalism.

This state of affairs is, to a considerable extent, the result of the substantial imbalance of power between the two sides. At the same time, the failure of the Greek Cypriot side to systematically utilise specialised expertise on the relevant constitutional, political and strategic issues has had, and continues to have, negative consequences.

It is important to assess whether there is in fact a window of opportunity from now until the end of the year for either a settlement of the Cyprus problem or substantial progress. Apart from the pending conclusion of the Secretary-General's term in December, it has already been suggested that developments within the framework of Euro-Turkish relations may generate incentives for Turkey to make certain concessions. The critical issue, however, is whether there will be a change in Turkey's underlying philosophy regarding the resolution of the Cyprus problem. That philosophy has as an objective the Finlandisation of Cyprus.

Cyprus cannot accept to be placed under the Turkish strategic control. However, rejecting an undesirable perspective alone is not enough. It is imperative that the Republic of Cyprus put forward clear guidelines for a settlement based on specific constitutional proposals as well as an evolutionary process. I have previously presented specific proposals in this direction. Among other things, these proposals provide for the continuity of the Republic of Cyprus.

These proposals also enhance the credibility and strengthen the legitimacy of the state while simultaneously depriving third parties of the argument that "the Greek Cypriots know what they do not want, but do not know what they want." Above all, the adoption of such a policy could create conditions conducive to gradual progress given the dimension of an evolutionary process involving all interested parties. This is particularly important at a time when developments may arise within the broader framework of the Euro-Turkish relations.

It is also worth noting a striking inconsistency in contemporary European affairs. The High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Kaja Kallas, regularly condemns Russian aggression against Ukraine and other countries and calls upon Russia to reduce its military presence. Yet she remains silent regarding Turkey's occupation of the northern part of Cyprus. Instead, Turkey is increasingly presented as an important pillar of European security.

Athens and Nicosia should address these issues in a clear manner. The defence of the territorial integrity of every member state of the EU should become a central pillar of a new European security architecture. It should also be consistently emphasised that Turkey's occupation of the northern part of Cyprus is also a European issue.

Cyprus must have a coherent narrative as well as a policy framework that links its national objectives with broader European and other priorities. Through such an approach it can enhance its credibility, strengthen its position, and create more favourable conditions for the pursuit of its long-term goals.