



Cyprus: Reunification Proving Elusive

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Summary

Attempts to resolve the Cyprus problem and reunify the island have undergone various levels of negotiation for almost 40 years. Prospects for a settlement that would end the political division of Cyprus appear to have reached a stalemate and may now enter a period of retrenchment possibly dominated by harder-line views by both sides and more difficult negotiations.

Despite a positive and concerted effort over the past 18 months and through 60 meetings between Cypriot President Dimitris Christofias, a Greek Cypriot, and Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat to reach some type of acceptable solution, time and politics appear to be no longer on either's side. On April 18, 2010, Turkish Cypriot leader Talat faces reelection as "president" of northern Cyprus; by all accounts by observers of the Cyprus issue, he could have a difficult time winning. Polls taken in late March show Talat at least 15 percentage points behind his rival. His likely successor, Dervis Eroglu of the National Unity Party (UBP), while insisting that negotiations would continue, appears to have taken a harder-line posture toward a negotiated settlement, and there are even some in his party who are advocating a permanently divided island and international recognition for the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC).

For his part, Republic of Cyprus President Christofias has recently experienced his own internal political difficulties as one of his governing coalition partners, the Socialist Party (EDEK), quit the governing coalition on February 9, 2010, reportedly over disagreements with the President's negotiating strategy. Almost immediately following the EDEK decision, hard-liners in the other coalition partner, the Democratic Party (DIKO), forced a vote of the party's central committee on whether to abandon the coalition as well. DIKO hard-liners had also criticized Christofias for what they considered to be too many concessions to the Turkish Cypriot side. In the end, DIKO voted to remain in the coalition, but the outcome of both votes seemed to indicate that Christofias was no longer guaranteed support for whatever negotiated solution he could have achieved in the near term.

Despite these political setbacks, and although both sides appeared to remain far apart on the most critical issues for any settlement, both Christofias and Talat pledged to continue the negotiations right through the end of March. With the last formal negotiating session on March 30, Talat left the negotiations in order to step up his political campaign in a final attempt to win reelection. Some observers were hoping that at the last negotiating session a joint statement would have been issued by both sides outlining the extent to which progress has been achieved on the major issues under consideration. And, while both sides did issue a statement at the conclusion of the session, it did not contain any details or outline of the "important progress" both sides continue to refer to.

The United States has long maintained a position of strong support for a negotiated settlement. This has been reaffirmed by the Obama Administration. Many Members of Congress have continued to maintain their interest in Cyprus during the 111th Congress, partly due to keen constituent concern. Hearings could be anticipated on the future of the negotiations in the aftermath of the April elections in northern Cyprus. This report will be updated as developments warrant.

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Background¹

The island Republic of Cyprus gained its independence from Great Britain in 1960. Of the estimated 780,000 Cypriots living on the island, approximately 77% are of Greek ethnic origin, and roughly 18% of Turkish ethnic origin. (Maronite Christians, Armenians, and others constitute the remainder.) At independence, the Republic's constitution defined elaborate power-sharing arrangements between the two main groups. It required a Greek Cypriot president and a Turkish Cypriot vice president, each elected by his own community. Simultaneously, a Treaty of Guarantee signed by Britain, Greece, and Turkey ensured the new Republic's territorial integrity, and a Treaty of Alliance among the Republic, Greece, and Turkey provided for Greek and Turkish soldiers to help defend the island. However, at that time, the two major communities aspired to different futures for Cyprus: most Greek Cypriots favored union of the entire island with Greece (*enosis*), while Turkish Cypriots preferred to partition the island (*taksim*) and possibly unite the Turkish Cypriot zone with Turkey.

Cyprus's success as a stable, new republic lasted from 1960-1963. After President (and Greek Orthodox Archbishop) Makarios III proposed constitutional modifications in favor of the majority Greek Cypriot community in 1963, relations between the two communities deteriorated, with Turkish Cypriots increasingly consolidating into enclaves in larger towns for safety. In 1964, Turkish Cypriots withdrew from most national institutions and began to administer their own affairs. Intercommunal violence occurred in 1963-1964, and again in 1967. On both occasions, outside mediation and pressure, including by the United States, appeared to prevent Turkey from intervening militarily on behalf of the Turkish Cypriots. On March 4, 1964, the United Nations authorized the establishment of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) to control the violence and act as a buffer between the two communities. It became operational on March 27, 1964, and still carries out its mission today.

In 1974, the military junta in Athens supported a coup against President Makarios, replacing him with a more hard-line supporter of *enosis*. In July 1974, Turkey, citing the 1960 Treaty of Guarantee as a legal basis for its move, deployed its military forces in two separate actions to the island, and by August 25, 1974, had taken control of more than one-third of the island. This military intervention² had many ramifications. Foremost was the widespread dislocation of both the Greek and Turkish Cypriot population and related governance, refugee, and property problems.

After the conflict subsided and a fragile peace took root, Turkish Cypriots pursued a solution to the conflict that would keep the two communities separate in two sovereign states or two states in a loose confederation. In February 1975, the Turkish Cypriots declared their government the "Turkish Federated State of Cyprus" (TFSC). In 1983, Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktaş declared the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" (TRNC)—a move considered by some to be a unilateral declaration of independence. At the time, Denktaş argued that creation of an

¹ Parts of this report are drawn from a more comprehensive history of the Cyprus negotiations found in CRS Report RL33497, *Cyprus: Status of U.N. Negotiations and Related Issues*, by Carol Migdalovitz.

² Turkey officially refers to its action as a "peace operation." The Greek Cypriots and much of the international community refer to it as an "invasion." According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance—2009*, Turkey still has 36,000 troops on the island. However, the Greek Cypriots claim that the figure is 42,000 to 44,000. "Defense Committee: UNFICYP Figures on Occupying Troops are False," Cyprus News Agency, February 6, 2009, BBC Monitoring European.

independent state was a necessary precondition for a federation with the Greek Cypriots. However, he ruled out a merger with Turkey and pledged cooperation with United Nations-brokered settlement efforts. Twenty-seven years later, only Turkey has recognized the TRNC.

Between 1974 and 2002, there were numerous, unsuccessful rounds of U.N.-sponsored direct and indirect negotiations to achieve a settlement. Negotiations focused on reconciling the two sides' interests and reestablishing a central government. They foundered on definitions of goals and ways to implement a federal solution. Turkish Cypriots emphasized bizonality and the political equality of the two communities, preferring two nearly autonomous societies with limited contact. Greek Cypriots emphasized the freedoms of movement, property, and settlement throughout the island. The two parties also differed on the means of achieving a federation: Greek Cypriots wanted their internationally recognized national government to devolve power to the Turkish Cypriots, who would then join a Cypriot republic. For the Turkish Cypriots, two entities would join, for the first time, in a new federation. These differences in views also affected the resolution of issues such as property claims, citizenship of Turkish settlers who had come to the island, and other legal issues.

Annan Plan

Negotiations for a final solution to the Cyprus issue appeared to take a dramatic and positive step forward when on November 11, 2002, then-U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan presented a draft of The Basis for Agreement on a Comprehensive Settlement of the Cyprus Problem, commonly referred to as the Annan Plan. The plan called for, among many provisions, a "common state" government with a single international legal personality that would participate in foreign and EU relations. Two politically equal component states would address much of the daily responsibilities of government in their respective communities. The Annan Plan was a comprehensive approach, and of necessity addressed highly controversial issues for both sides.

Over the course of the next 16 months, difficult negotiations ensued. Turkish Cypriot leader Denktash was replaced as chief negotiator by a more pro-settlement figure, and newly elected "prime minister," Mehmet Ali Talat. Greek Cypriot President Glafkos Clerides was replaced through an election with, according to some observers, a more skeptical President, Tassos Papadopoulos. The Annan Plan itself was revised several times in an attempt to effect compromises demanded by both sides. Complicating the matter even more, on April 16, 2003, the Republic of Cyprus signed an accession treaty with the European Union to become a member of the EU on May 1, 2004, whether or not there was a settlement and a reunited Cyprus.

Finally, after numerous meetings and negotiations and despite a lack of a firm agreement but sensing that further negotiations would produce little else, on March 29, 2004, Secretary General Annan released his "final revised plan" and announced that the Plan would be put to referenda simultaneously in both north and south Cyprus on April 24, 2004. The Turkish Cypriot leadership split, with Denktash urging rejection and Talat urging support. Greek President Papadopoulos, to the dismay of the U.N., EU, and United States, but for reasons he argued were legitimate concerns of the Greek Cypriot community, urged the Greek Cypriots to reject the referenda. On April 24, what remaining hope existed for a solution to the crisis on Cyprus was dashed as 76% of Greek Cypriot voters rejected the Plan, while 65% of Turkish Cypriot voters accepted it. In his May 28, 2004, report following the vote, Annan said that "the Greek Cypriots' vote must be respected, but they need to demonstrate willingness to resolve the Cyprus problem through a bicomunal, bizonal federation and to articulate their concerns about security and implementation of the Plan with 'clarity and finality.'"

For roughly the next four years, to little avail, Cyprus muddled through a series of offers and counter-offers to restart serious negotiations even as the Greek Cypriots solidified their new status as a member of the EU, a status not extended to the Turkish Cypriots despite an EU pledge to try to help end the isolation of the north.

2008—New Hope

On February 24, 2008, 61-year-old Dimitris Christofias of the Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL) was elected to a five-year term as President of Cyprus. Mr. Christofias was educated in the Soviet Union and is a fluent Russian-speaker. He joined the communist-rooted AKEL party at the age of 14 and rose through its ranks to become leader in 1988. Christofias was elected president of the Cypriot House of Representatives in 2001 and won reelection in 2006.

Christofias's election had the backing of the Democratic (DIKO) Party, and the Socialist (EDEK) Party. Christofias, in part, tailored his campaign to opposing what he believed was an uncompromising approach toward the Turkish Cypriots by Papadopoulos and the stagnation in the attempt to reach a just settlement of the Cyprus problem. Although serious differences existed between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot sides over a final settlement, Christofias took the outcome of the vote as a sign that Greek Cypriots wanted to try once again for an end to the division of the island. In his inaugural address, President Christofias expressed the hope of achieving a "just, viable, and functional solution" to the Cyprus problem. He said that he sought to restore the unity of the island as a federal, bizonal, bicomunal Republic, to exclude any rights of military intervention, to provide for the withdrawal of Turkish troops and, ultimately, the demilitarization of the island. Christofias also reaffirmed that the 2004 Annan Plan was null and void and could not be the basis for a future settlement.

After Christofias's election, Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat, a long-time acquaintance of Christofias, said, "a solution in Cyprus is possible by the end of 2008."³ He also declared that "the goal is to establish a new partnership state in Cyprus, based on the political equality of the two peoples and the equal status of two constituent states."⁴ As early as 2004, Talat, as Turkish Cypriot prime minister, was credited for helping convince the Turkish Cypriots to support the Annan Plan and had been seen as perhaps the one Turkish Cypriot leader who could move the Greek Cypriots toward a more acceptable solution for both sides. For his efforts at the time, Talat, on April 17, 2005, was elected "president" of the TRNC over the UBP's Dervis Eroglu, receiving 55.6% of the vote in a field of nine.

On March 21, 2008, Christofias and Talat met and agreed to establish working groups to address issues related to a comprehensive settlement, including governance and power-sharing, EU matters, security and guarantees, territory, property, and economic matters. They also created seven technical committees to address day-to-day issues of crime, economic and commercial matters, cultural heritage, crisis management, humanitarian matters, health, and environment. The two leaders also decided to meet in three months to review the work of the committees and groups and use their results to start direct negotiations under U.N. auspices. As a first confidence-

³ "I am Hopeful about a Solution, TRNC President Talat," *Anatolia*, February 25, 2008, BBC Monitoring European, February 26, 2008.

⁴ Letter to the Editor, *Financial Times*, March 5, 2008.

building measure, they agreed to reopen the Ledra Street crossing between the northern and southern parts of Nicosia.

On July 2, 2008, the two leaders met and agreed in principle on a single national sovereignty and citizenship and decided to start full-fledged negotiations on September 3. On July 18, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon named former Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer to be his Special Advisor on Cyprus and to lend the good offices of the U.N. to the negotiation process. On July 20, 2008, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, perhaps recognizing that Turkey's own future as a potential member of the EU was very much tied to a successful settlement on Cyprus, extended full support to Talat and said that "a comprehensive solution will be possible in a new partnership where the Turkish Cypriot people and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus will equally be represented as one of the founder states. This new partnership will be built upon such indispensable principles as bizonality, political equality, and Turkey's effective guarantorship."⁵ The last part of that statement sent red flags throughout Greek Cyprus and reignited the ongoing debate over the continued presence of some 30,000 Turkish military forces on the island and the intense desire on the part of the Greek Cypriots to have all Turkish troops removed. Nevertheless, on September 11, 2008, substantive negotiations on governance and power-sharing began.

2009— Storm Clouds

While the negotiations between Christofias and Talat appeared to get off to a fast start, the differences in positions quickly became apparent and the talks, although held on a regular basis, started to bog down. Talat wanted to pursue negotiations on the basis of the provisions of the old Annan Plan, while Christofias, mindful of the Greek Cypriot rejection of that plan, was keen to avoid references to it. Old differences quickly resurfaced. For instance, both sides differed over how a new united Cyprus would be created. The Greek Cypriots assumed the new unified state would evolve from the existing Republic of Cyprus. The Turkish Cypriots wanted the new state to be based on two equal "founding states." While the two sides seemed to agree on a 48-member Senate and a House proportionally based on population, they differed on how the executive would operate and what powers it would have. Greek Cypriots proposed the election of a president and vice president on the same ticket in a direct election for a six-year term. The president would be a Greek Cypriot for four years and the vice president would be a Turkish Cypriot; they would then rotate offices, with the Turkish Cypriot becoming president for two years. Turkish Cypriots proposed that the executive have two alternating presidents elected by the 48-member Senate. Turkish Cypriots were opposed to a single list of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot candidates to be elected by all of the people because then the Greek Cypriots, by virtue of their majority, would elect the Turkish Cypriot candidate.

Property issues also plagued the negotiations. Greek Cypriots who lost properties in the north insisted that the legal owner must have the right to decide how to deal with his property, while Turkish Cypriots believed that the current inhabitant must have priority and that the issue should be resolved through compensation, exchange, and restitution. The question of territory was also in dispute. The Turkish Cypriot side of the "green line" included approximately 37% of the island and included several areas, such as Varosha, Morphou, and Karpas, that had been almost 100%

⁵ "Erdogan Warns Against Attempts to Water Down Parameters of Cyprus Settlement," *Turkish Daily News*, July 21, 2008.

Greek Cypriot inhabited before the 1974 division. Greek Cypriots wanted that territory returned, which would have left the Turkish side controlling about 29% of the territory.

Next to the property issue, the issue of security guarantees continued to be one of the most difficult bridges to cross. The Greek Cypriots had long argued that all Turkish military forces would have to leave the island. They argued that the European Union (EU) could offer guarantees to all of its member states and even offer guarantees to third countries. Therefore, once north Cyprus was part of the EU, they saw no reason for guarantees from third countries (Turkey).⁶ Turkish Cypriots and Turkey maintained that the 1960 Treaties of Guarantee and Alliance must be reaffirmed in any settlement and Turkish security guarantees should not be lifted until Turkey joined the EU because, without guarantees, the Turkish Cypriots would feel insecure due to their history with ethnic violence on the island in the 1960s.

As the negotiations dragged on well into 2009, it appeared that impatience, frustration, and uncertainty were beginning to mount against both Christofias in the south and Talat in the north. In March 2009, the Democratic Party (DIKO), one of the main coalition partners of President Christofias's AKEL, held party elections. Hard-line candidates won all three posts contested—deputy leader, vice president, and general secretary. After the elections, some wanted their party to withdraw from the coalition. The outcome of this vote left many wondering whether Christofias would face difficulties in gaining approval for any agreement he would reach with Talat. In the north, parliamentary elections were held on April 19, 2009. The opposition UBP won 26 out of the 50 seats in the parliament. Talat's Republican Turkish Party (CTP), in alliance with the United Forces (BG), placed second, with 15 seats. While some claimed that the outcome of the vote could be attributed to popular disenchantment with the slow pace of the settlement process, economic issues and the government's failure to end the international isolation of the north also played a significant role. The election also propelled UBP Party leader Dervis Eroglu into the forefront of the presidential elections scheduled for April 2010. Eroglu had already staked out what seemed to be a harder-line approach and said that he was not against negotiations with the Greek Cypriots, but that the process should be based on the "reality that there are two equal sovereign states," adding that "our people are not condemned to unite with the Greek Cypriot side. Our right to separate is just as valid as our right to unite."⁷ Interestingly, it was reported that on April 21, Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan and other Turkish leaders, perhaps sensing a more difficult time ahead in the negotiations and the EU's concern that Turkey needed to play a more constructive role in helping the negotiations, said that it would be wrong for the new government (of northern Cyprus) to end the negotiations or to continue the negotiations on a basis different from the one that has been followed so far and that they would not support a move that would weaken the hand of Talat.⁸

Those two political events in the spring of 2009 seemed to have hamstrung the ability of either side to take the dramatic steps needed to boost the negotiations into a final phase. Mr. Talat, on the one hand, now had a less sympathetic parliament to deal with, one whose disapproval of any agreement would likely play an important role in any referenda in the north. Mr. Christofias, on the other hand, had one party of his governing coalition already shifting toward a more hard-line

⁶ "Cypriot FM: No Derogations from Acquis During a Solution," Cyprus News Agency, November 14, 2008, BBC Monitoring European, November 17, 2008.

⁷ Jean Christou, "Eroglu Back on the Scene with Return to UBP Head," *Cyprus Mail*, December 2, 2008.

⁸ Comments of Turkish President Gul and Prime Minister Erdogan as reported in *Radikal*, April 22, 2009 and cited in *Cyprus: Reunification or Partition*, International Crisis Group, September 30, 2009.

stance that could restrict his ability to offer the kind of concessions needed for a final deal, and another that was complaining that it was not being adequately consulted on the President's negotiating strategy.

For the remainder of 2009, Christofias and Talat continued to meet and, for some, gave the appearance that they both still held out hope, against mounting odds, that a settlement could be reached. There were at times some small signs of movement. Christofias seemed to become a little more flexible on the idea of a rotating presidency, and in September 2009, Talat seemed to have made a significant concession in agreeing to accept the Greek position for a president and vice president even though he continued to have doubts about direct popular voting, preferring that the president and vice president be elected by the Senate.

By the end of 2009, however, perspectives on both sides of the island seemed to have begun to change. Some suggested that the Greek Cypriots sensed that the talks could not produce a desired outcome before the April 2010 elections in the north and thus the negotiations were likely to have to begin anew, possibly with an entirely different Turkish Cypriot leadership. Under that scenario, many Greek Cypriots, including members within the political parties of the governing coalition, seemed leery of weakening their hand by offering further concessions. Although there were some who feared that Christofias, in an attempt to help his friend Talat secure reelection, would offer too much to the Turkish side, it was unclear whether Christofias was willing to risk his political standing for something even he had begun to feel was unattainable. Some Turkish Cypriots, on the other hand, appear to have begun to think that the Greek Cypriot side would not offer Talat a negotiated settlement, betting from the opinion polls in the north that Eroglu would win the April elections and would pull back from serious negotiations, at least for a while as he consolidated his new government and re-ordered his strategy. The Greek Cypriots could then blame the anticipated hard-liners in the north and their presumed patrons in Ankara if the talks collapsed.

2010—Declining Expectations

As Cyprus entered the new year, it appeared that the window of opportunity to reach a final settlement, at least between Christofias and Talat, was closing fast. Despite the fact that the two sides had been in negotiations for almost 18 months and in close to 60 meetings, they appeared to have very little to show for their efforts. In his new year message to the Greek Cypriots, Christofias suggested that while some progress had been made in a few areas, the two sides were not close to a settlement. Despite the initial gloom, he pledged to continue to hold intensified discussions with Talat.

In what appeared to be a curious move, on January 7, 2010, Turkish Cypriot leader Talat tabled a new proposal apparently intended to represent the Turkish Cypriot negotiating position in advance of the new round of talks. Reports indicated that although it appeared that Talat may have agreed to several additional Greek proposals, including cross-community voting, the Greek Cypriot side was apparently taken somewhat by surprise at Talat's remaining proposals because they appeared to differ from what had been on the negotiating table up to that point. For instance, the Talat proposal called for a 3:2 rotating presidency (three years for a Greek Cypriot president and two years for a Turkish Cypriot president) instead of the 4:2 proposal on the table. Similarly, the Turkish Cypriot proposal for a cabinet included a 7 (Greek Cypriot):5 (Turkish Cypriot) split instead of a 6:3 split. The proposal also called for basic freedoms for all Turkish settlers who had come to the island and two separate flight information regions (FIRs), or air traffic control centers, instead of one for the entire island. The press reported that while President Christofias

shared the proposals with his coalition partners, he would not even discuss them in public, indicating to some that he was disappointed that the talks might actually be moving backward.

Although seen by some as intended to jolt the negotiations into high gear, there has been some other speculation as to why Mr. Talat would have offered a proposal that he knew would likely be deemed unacceptable to the Greek Cypriots. One theory was that Ankara felt its own best chance to keep their accession talks with the EU alive was to have Talat win reelection as president of Turkish Cyprus. To do that, Talat needed to look as if he were taking a more realistic and perhaps, for some, a harder-line position in advance of the elections in the north. Another theory was that while Talat himself was not wedded to the provisions of the proposal, he knew that if he offered them and they were rejected by the Greek Cypriots, he could argue that the harder-line negotiating position advocated by his opponent Dervis Eroglu would not only not produce a positive outcome for Turkish Cypriots, it could very well cause the collapse of the negotiations altogether.

Despite what appeared to be a setback for the negotiations, both Christofias and Talat agreed to schedule six negotiating sessions through the month of January, although the backlash against the Turkish Cypriot proposals began at the same time and Christofias admitted that there was no aim to solve the [Cyprus] problem before the April vote in the north. The lack of public discussion of the Talat proposals by Christofias, however, was not the case with others. A spokesperson for the DIKO Party said that the Turkish Cypriot proposals fell outside the defined framework and “effectively torpedoed the negotiations.”⁹ Others suggested that the proposals were written in Ankara and forced on Talat, which once again revealed the true position of Turkey in the negotiations.

The intensive dialogue between Christofias and Talat resumed on January 11, 2010, but after three sessions the talks seemed to be at a standstill. On January 20, Christofias sent a letter to the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and heads of the EU member states complaining about the new Turkish Cypriot negotiating positions. In his letter, Christofias stated that the Turkish Cypriot [proposals] “show that the Turkish Cypriot side supports positions which contravene the agreed basis and sensitive balances which have been shaped during decades of negotiations. It is not possible to expect the Greek Cypriot side to accept positions which are beyond the balances.”¹⁰ Interestingly, in his letter, President Christofias, in arguing against each of the provisions of the Talat proposal, argued how they differed not from a Greek Cypriot negotiating position, but from the 2004 Annan Plan, which Christofias had insisted could not necessarily be the basis for an agreed settlement. For some, and although Christofias referred to “sensitive balances” in addition to the Annan Plan, this raised the question of whether the Greek Cypriot position on, for instance, governance was in fact the Annan plan.

Shortly after the Christofias letter was sent to the Security Council, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, perhaps sensing that the talks were about to stall, announced that he would travel to the island. On February 2, 2010, Secretary-General Ban arrived in Cyprus amid cautious speculation as to the meaning of the visit. In his arrival statement, Ban said that he was there to provide “personal support” because it was “important to recognize how important it is to continue to build momentum on what the leaders have achieved up to now” and that both sides needed more

⁹ “Backlash against Turkish side’s proposals begins,” *Cyprus Mail*, January 9, 2010.

¹⁰ Letter of the Greek Cypriot President Christofias to the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council and heads of EU member states, January 20, 2010.

“courage and determination in the period ahead.”¹¹ In his comments at a luncheon for the Secretary-General, Talat stated, “time is working against the settlement ... external developments as well as growing disillusionment among Turkish and Greek Cypriots make the solution more complex and difficult to attain.”¹²

Although the visit of the U.N. Secretary-General failed to produce any tangible results, the two Cypriot leaders kept the negotiation process going with an agreement to meet at least four or five times through March 2010. However, it was clear that the gap between their respective positions seemed to be insurmountable and domestic political troubles continued to mount for both. In the north, opinion polls continued to suggest that Talat might not win reelection. In the south, Christofias’s coalition partner EDEK threatened to quit the government over the very fundamental issue of whether a new, united Cyprus should have a rotating presidency, an issue long on the table. On February 9, 2010, EDEK’s central committee voted to leave the coalition, claiming that, in their opinion, “the President has been following a mistaken strategy which the other side is using to its own advantage.”¹³ EDEK argued that the concessions Christofias made regarding a rotating presidency and the acceptance of 50,000 settlers had to be withdrawn. Soon after the EDEK decision, some factions within the DIKO party, the other member of the governing coalition, began agitating for a similar vote to leave the government, citing very similar reasons, including their disagreement over a rotating presidency. On February 23, the DIKO central committee met but decided to remain in the coalition for the present.

At the same time that the coalition parties were wrestling with their own internal politics, on February 19, 2010, the Greek Cypriot House of Representatives adopted a decision that essentially rejected the Turkish Cypriot and Turkish position that the 1960 Treaties of Guarantee and Alliance should remain in any final settlement, once again reiterating that no Turkish military forces could remain on the island after a settlement and that Turkey would no longer have a right to intervene in Cyprus. This action prompted a counter-resolution in the Turkish Cypriot parliament on February 24 accusing the Greek Cypriots of acting in bad faith and taking an unacceptable approach.

Near the end of February and in early March, two interesting developments took place related to the Cyprus issue. Perhaps sensing that the negotiations were not progressing favorably and in reaction to the accusations by some Greek Cypriots that the proposals presented by Talat in January were driven by Ankara, Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan invited Greek Cypriot media representatives to Turkey to meet with him to discuss Turkish views on the Cyprus peace process. During the meeting, which was unprecedented, it was reported that Erdogan spoke about his support for a bizonal, bicomunal federation; the eventual withdrawal of Turkish troops from the island; and a pledge of Turkish support for a “lasting comprehensive settlement” at the earliest possible time.¹⁴ Erdogan’s comments were mostly seen as positive support for the continuation of

¹¹ Remarks of United Nation secretary General Ban Ki-moon at a joint press conference at the Nicosia airport, February 2, 2010.

¹² Comments of Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat at the luncheon for U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, February 2, 2010.

¹³ “EDEK quits government,” *Cyprus Mail*, February 9, 2010.

¹⁴ Account of the press conference between representatives of Greek Cypriot media and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan as reported in the *Cyprus Mail*, March 2, 2010.

the negotiations and read by some in Cyprus as an indication that even if Talat was not reelected in April, his successor would not be allowed to “walk out of the talks.”¹⁵

On March 11, a second development with potentially significant impact occurred. After returning from meetings in Ankara, Turkish Cypriot “foreign minister” Tahsin Ertugruloglu broke with his UBP party and announced his intention to run for president. While some believe Ertugruloglu has little chance of winning, his candidacy could pose a threat to Eroglu’s voting base and raises the question again of Ankara’s preference to see Talat reelected, as few believe Ertugruloglu would have made the decision to enter the race without, if not the approval, at least the acquiescence of Ankara.

On March 30, the last formal negotiating session between Christofias and Talat until the elections in the north concluded with apparently no new developments. In the run-up to the final session there was some speculation that both sides would issue a joint statement assessing the negotiations up to that point and perhaps even announcing some of the areas in which agreement between Christofias and Talat had been achieved. Speculation was that Talat, trailing his election opponent by 15 points in a poll taken on March 30, had wanted something positive to take into the final days of his reelection campaign and had presented Christofias a report summarizing what the Turkish Cypriots understood to have been achieved. Christofias, however, was already under pressure from his coalition partner, DIKO, and former coalition partner, EDEK, not to issue such a statement. Leaders from the opposition DISY party said they were not supportive of issuing such a statement until it had been reviewed by the Greek Cypriot National Council at a meeting scheduled for April 7.

On March 30, Christofias and Talat issued a short statement suggesting that they had indeed made some progress in governance and power sharing, EU matters, and the economy, but they did not go beyond that. Although this may have been the last time both Christofias and Talat would meet, they stated that they were confident that they could overcome their divergent options and “reach a comprehensive settlement.”¹⁶ In what appeared to be a final friendly jest to Talat, Christofias announced that he would like to see Talat at the negotiating table after April 18. Perhaps as a sign of just how difficult things will be for Christofias down the road, his comment was immediately criticized by the leadership of EDEK as lending support to an illegal election in the north.

Assessment

As March 2010 began, little progress had been achieved or, at least, had been acknowledged by both sides. In a March 19, 2010, speech to the citizens of Cyprus, President Christofias admitted that “the negotiations had not yet produced the anticipated result ... and that while the convergences have been achieved in the governance chapter, fewer have been achieved in the economy and EU chapters and even less in property.”¹⁷ And, with only a few negotiating sessions remaining before the April 18 elections in the north, few observers expected much to happen between then and the agreed final formal negotiating session before the break for the elections, which was scheduled for March 30.

¹⁵ “What was the meaning behind Erdogan’s words?,” *Cyprus Mail*, March 7, 2010.

¹⁶ “Leaders convinced they can reach a settlement,” *Cyprus Mail*, March 31, 2010.

¹⁷ Public address to the people of Cyprus by President Christofias, March 18, 2010.

The election of President Christofias in 2008 ushered in a period of higher expectations for a settlement than at any time since 2004, when the Annan Plan was considered by both Cypriot communities. The personal relationship between Christofias and Talat and their personal commitments to finding a solution to the Cyprus problem suggested that if these two leaders could not achieve a negotiated settlement, not perfect for either side but acceptable to both, then it might take a long time before two like-minded leaders would again find themselves in a position to find a way to unify the people of Cyprus.

Yet, after 18 months and more than 60 meetings and despite the strong commitment, good intentions, and warm relations between the two leaders, progress in the talks seems to have fallen victim to the harsh realities of almost four decades of separation, mistrust, misunderstanding, and in some cases, indifference to the need for a final settlement and unification of the island. Even a possible change in leadership in the north, and thus perhaps a different negotiating strategy and more uncertainty for the future, did not appear to be enough of an incentive to overcome the differences to find a final solution.

The inability of these two pro-solution leaders to reach an acceptable accommodation has led some observers to question whether a settlement can actually be achieved at all. In fact, the International Crisis Group (ICG), in a report published in the fall of 2009, suggested that after all the fits and starts of the current round of negotiations, “the island may be accelerating a slide toward permanent partition and that some elements in both communities given 36 years of futility and the wide differences of opinion over each item on the table from property rights to Turkish settlers to governance, may be willing to concede the possibility of a permanently divided island.”¹⁸ Such a final outcome is one many observers feel would be a disaster for all sides on the island, as well as those with direct interest in a solution, such as the EU and Turkey. In his March 18 speech to the nation, Christofias referred to such talk and stated that abandoning the negotiations “would be a disastrous mistake ... and that he would not seek reelection to a second term as President if there was no solution to the Cyprus problem by 2013.”¹⁹

Some say the lack of a final settlement would not necessarily affect the benefits enjoyed by the people of the Republic of Cyprus as a member of the European Union and thus there is less of an incentive to negotiate away parts of their authority and power to govern. Yet, without a settlement, it would seem that potential economic opportunities and growth across the entire island may not materialize. In addition, Greek Cypriots will be less likely to reclaim contested property in the north or at least receive fair compensation for it. A recent decision by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) to recognize the Immovable Property Commission (IPC) in the north means that all efforts to settle claims for compensation or restitution by Greek Cypriots who fled to the south as a result of events in 1974 and lost their property would have to be exhausted in the IPC before claims could be filed with the ECHR. This decision by the ECHR, however, could force many Greek Cypriots who had hoped to avoid dealing with Turkish Cypriots or Turkey in seeking compensation or restitution for their property, to now demand a political settlement that includes remedies for property claims. Finally, the failure to reach a settlement would mean that Greek Cypriots may forever face a large and powerful Turkish army just a few kilometers away from infamous “green line.”

¹⁸ *Cyprus: Reunification or Partition?* Europe Report 201, The International Crisis Group, September 30, 2009.

¹⁹ Op. Cit., speech by President Christofias.

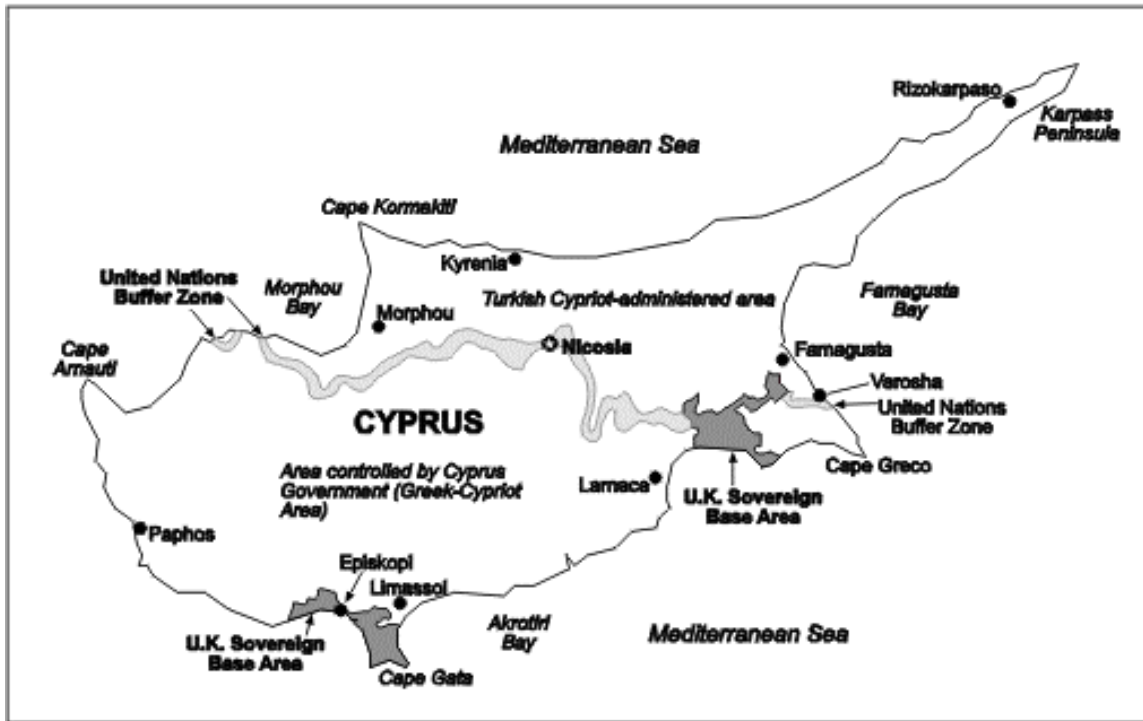
For their part, the lack of a settlement for Turkish Cypriots could likely mean further isolation, little or no recognition for the TRNC, no EU membership, and continued dependence on Turkey for financial assistance.

For some on both sides, these may be risks worth taking. As the ICG pointed out in its report, there appears to be a growing younger generation on both sides of the island who have never interacted with the other and see no reason to, do not have as much of a stake in the property issue, and may not wish to face the uncertainties and potential problems that a settlement neither side likes, but accepts, could create.

Outside of the island, no one involved in the Cyprus issue wants to see the negotiations end or take such a significant step backward that it would take years to return to where the negotiations currently stand, even if many are not sure just how much progress toward a solution has actually been achieved. These interested third parties certainly do not want both Cypriot sides to conclude that maybe a permanent separation is the least painful solution because such an outcome will likely affect not only Cypriot-to-Cypriot relations but also Cyprus-Turkey, Greece-Turkey, EU-Turkey, and NATO-EU relations. Earlier in the month, Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan had suggested that, as a way to move the negotiations forward, a five-party international conference be held to try to help settle the major differences between the two Cypriot sides. The initial Greek Cypriot reaction was that such a conference was not needed and that a solution would have to come from the Cypriots themselves. However, in his March 18 speech, Christofias did seem to suggest that an international conference that included the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, the EU, Greece, Turkey, and the two Cypriot sides could focus on what he termed the international aspects of the problem, namely troop withdrawals, settlers, and future security guarantees.

Now that the formal negotiations have ended all interested parties will focus on the April 18 elections in the north and, depending on the outcome of those elections, will continue to express the desire for the talks to resume as soon as possible after that. But even after the outcome of the elections in the north determines who will be seated at the negotiating table and when the negotiations will resume, the difficult work of finding the elusive settlement will begin anew and will not likely be any easier.

Figure I. Map of Cyprus



Source: Map Resources. Adapted by CRS.

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