I. Introduction

The process of enlarging the European Union (EU) is proceeding at an ever increasing pace. In March 1998 the EU opened accession negotiations with six applicant states: five central and eastern European countries (CEECs) – the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia – and Cyprus. In October 1999 the Commission, in its annual progress report on enlargement (Commission, 1999), recommended that, subject to certain conditions being met, negotiations be opened in 2000 with a further six applicant states: five CEECs – Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Romania – and Malta. The Commission further recommended that, whilst target dates for accessions could not yet be set, the EU should take all steps to ensure that it would be ready to set dates from 2002 and to receive new members from 2003. The Commission’s recommendations were endorsed by the European Council at its December 1999 Helsinki meeting (European Council, 1999b).

Much, of course, still has to happen before accessions can actually occur. Most academic attention has focused primarily on the developments that must take place in the CEECs and in the EU, but practitioners incline to the view that the single most important thing that has to happen is that there must be a

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resolution of, or a decision taken on what to do about, what is commonly referred to as ‘the Cyprus problem’. At the heart of this problem is the division of the island into Greek and Turkish zones, with Greece supporting the Greek zone in its ambitions to see a united island joining the EU, and Turkey supporting the Turkish zone in its wish for independence and its complete opposition to Cyprus becoming an EU member as long as the division of the island exists in its current form. Passions associated with the Cyprus problem are such that they threaten not only Greek Cyprus’s wish to become an EU member but the enlargement process itself.

This article examines the Cypriot application and the problems that it poses for the EU. The article is organized into the following sections: the Cypriot application in the context of the current enlargement round; the nature of the Cyprus problem; the Cypriot government’s approach to the Cyprus problem and to the EU; the difficulties for the EU with Cyprus’s application; the handling and progression of the application; possible scenarios; and conclusions.

II. The Cypriot Application in the Context of the Current Enlargement Round

The current EU enlargement round is much more challenging and difficult than the relatively straightforward round that saw Austria, Finland and Sweden join the EU in 1995.

To become an EU member a country must meet the political and economic entry criteria laid down by the European Council at its June 1993 Copenhagen meeting. The political criteria are stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities. The economic criteria are the existence of a functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competitive pressures and market forces within the Union (European Council, 1993, p. 12; on the criteria, see also Avery and Cameron, 1998).

All of the CEECs, including those with whom negotiations were opened in 1998, are having to make major advances and changes to meet the Copenhagen criteria: economies are having to be rapidly liberalized and developed (wealth in the ten CEEC applicants averages around 40 per cent of EU wealth, with the range stretching from 65 per cent in Slovenia to 25 per cent in Bulgaria); legal frameworks are having to be virtually rewritten (to become an EU member a state has to accept 20,000 or so legal Acts covering 80,000 pages of the Official Journal); and administrative and judicial systems are having to be overhauled (so there is the capacity to implement the EU acquis).

The prospect of CEEC accessions has also created major problems for the EU, because enlargement to CEECs has been seen as requiring major EU policy and
institutional reform. The traditional EU manner of dealing with accessions – modestly adjusting existing policy and institutional frameworks, and accommodating new members within them – was judged by EU member governments from an early stage of the CEEC enlargement process to be no longer possible or desirable. On the policy side, this was largely because the application of some existing policies – especially the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the structural policies – to the CEECs would require a significant expansion of the EU budget, which most Member States were not prepared to entertain. On the institutional side, modest adjustment and accommodation were ruled out for three reasons. First, some EU institutions, notably the Commission and the European Parliament (EP), were viewed as already being big enough and as not being capable of absorbing a large wave of additional members without seriously undermining their efficiency and effectiveness. Second, the larger Member States wanted a redistribution of votes in the Council so that in the post-enlargement Council national voting strengths would be more proportionate to country size. Third, it was generally recognized that an EU of 20 plus, and possibly 25 plus, members could be subject to policy grid-lock in some areas if there was no further significant reduction in the number of treaty articles providing for unanimous voting in the Council.

These policy and institutional challenges have been the subject of extensive attention by EU policy actors since the mid-1990s, mainly via numerous rounds of negotiations in the Council on the Agenda 2000 programme – the package of major policy reforms put forward by the Commission in July 1997 to adapt the EU to enlargement (Commission, 1997). After almost two years, the Agenda 2000 process produced agreement on a number of significant reforms – including to the CAP and the structural policies – at the March 1999 Berlin European Council meeting (European Council, 1999a). The institutional challenges were supposed to be resolved in the framework of the 1996–97 Intergovernmental Conference (IGC), but in the event they were only partly so. Agreement was reached on capping the size of the EP at 700 and on very modest extensions to qualified majority voting (QMV) in the Council, but on the difficult issues of the size of the Commission and voting weights in the Council after enlargement only the outlines of a future possible agreement could be agreed in a protocol annexed to the EU’s Treaties (Official Journal, 10 November 1997). The June 1999 Cologne European Council decided that these two issues and QMV would be the subject of an IGC to be convened early in 2000.

In contrast to the problems raised by the CEEC applications, the Cypriot application is – the Cyprus problem apart – relatively straightforward. The area controlled by the government of the Republic of Cyprus, in whose name the application is made, is in a position to meet virtually all of the Copenhagen criteria without too much difficulty: it is a micro state (with a population of only
620,000), so could be absorbed into the EU’s structures with relative ease (though some existing Member States have specific concerns about the institutional implications of very small Member States, including whether they have the capacity to handle a Council Presidency); it has a well-established democratic system in which the rule of law prevails and human rights are respected; and it has a long-established, and increasingly successful, market-based economy (GDP per head is approaching 70 per cent of the EU average, making it the most prosperous of the countries with which accession negotiations have been opened). The Republic still has work to do before it comes fully into line with the EU acquis – it has, for example, still to transpose a substantial amount of EU legislation, especially in the environment, social, and justice and home affairs areas – but the necessary changes and adjustments are mostly in hand and certainly do not constitute insuperable barriers to membership. Indeed, in the two annual progress reports the Commission has produced on the preparedness of applicant states for accession, Cyprus has been seen as being by far the most advanced in terms of the ‘normal’ entry criteria (Commission, 1998, 1999).

But many important EU policy actors, not least in some national governments, believe that the Cyprus problem does constitute a potentially insuperable barrier to membership. The French in particular have taken this view, with the Foreign Minister, Hubert Védrine, stating at the time of the opening of accession negotiations in March 1998 that, whilst it was correct to start negotiations, it would be a ‘mistake’ to grant EU membership to a divided country (European Report, 1998a, Section V, p. 15). On the eve of the movement of the negotiations from their opening stage to substantial negotiations in November 1998, the French were instrumental in putting together a declaration which the German, Dutch and Italian governments supported, which stated that a political solution to the division and partial occupation of the island must be found as a matter of urgency as the only way to resolve problems that would arise in the accession process (Cyprus News Agency, 1998; see also European Report, 1998b, Section V, p. 10. The concern of the French and other governments is that if Cyprus is allowed to accede before the Cyprus problem is settled, the EU will be importing a deep-rooted security dispute within its borders, will add fuel to Greek–Turkish tensions, and will probably damage the EU’s relations with Turkey.

Tempting though it may be to do so, the EU cannot, however, shelve the Cyprus application until the Cyprus problem is resolved. One reason why it cannot do so is that the governments of most Member States would feel most uneasy about refusing a country accession that meets all the normal entry requirements – especially if that refusal was in effect to be dictated by Turkey, a non-Member State. Another, and potentially more potent, reason is that Greece has threatened to veto CEEC accessions if Cyprus’s accession is put on hold.
It is, therefore, to the nature of the Cyprus problem that attention is now turned.

III. The Nature of the Cyprus Problem

At the heart of the Cyprus problem is the fact that the island is divided into two zones. It has been so since 1974 when Turkey – responding to a right-wing coup that was engineered by the Greek military junta in Athens against the Cypriot President, Archbishop Makarios – occupied the northern part of the island. The line of division between the two zones – known as the Green Line – has been overseen and patrolled by United Nations forces since 1974.

The southern, Greek, zone, which covers two thirds of the island, constitutes the area controlled by the government of the Republic of Cyprus. The government of the Republic is internationally recognized, apart from by Turkey, as the sole legitimate representative of the whole island of Cyprus. The northern, Turkish, zone has called itself the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (‘TRNC’) since 1983. It is recognized only by Turkey, which has some 35,000 troops based in the zone, and it is highly dependent on Turkey for most of its basic needs.

Many attempts have been made since 1974 by third parties – most notably the UN, the EU and national governments with a particular interest in Cyprus – to broker a settlement that would reunite the island. Most of these efforts have been directed towards the sort of solution that has long been backed by the UN Security Council, namely a settlement based on a Cyprus state with a single sovereignty and international personality, a single citizenship, and comprising two politically equal communities in a bi-communal and bi-zonal federation. The European Council has frequently expressed its support for a solution along these lines.

The government of the Republic has consistently been in favour of the UN-sponsored solution, but it has been clear since the proclamation of the ‘TRNC’ that the only settlement Turkish Cyprus really wants is one based on a recognition of the existence of two separate sovereignties on the island. So, for example, in August 1998 the Turkish Cypriot leader, Rauf Denktash, proposed a ‘Cyprus Confederation’, but by this he meant a structure in which ‘the Greek and Turkish sides are two sovereign and equal states, each with its own functioning democratic institutions and jurisdiction, reflecting the political equality and will of their respective peoples’ (Denktash, 1998).
IV. The Cypriot Government’s Approach to the Cyprus Problem and to the EU

The approach of the government of the Republic of Cyprus to the Cyprus problem is inextricably part of its approach to the EU. In the first few years after the 1974 invasion, the hope was that the UN would be able to sponsor a solution. However, as it became increasingly apparent, especially after the 1983 proclamation of the ‘TRNC’, that Turkish Cyprus and Turkey were not interested in the sort of solution favoured by the UN, the government of the Republic was forced to look to other policy options.

The EU option already had a base, for an EC–Cyprus association agreement had been concluded in 1972. For some years after the 1974 invasion, Cyprus’s relations with the EC were largely focused around the association agreement, which provided for the elimination of trade barriers and the creation, in two stages, of an EC–Cyprus customs union. The second stage of the agreement, which had been due to begin in 1977, kept being postponed because of the uncertainties surrounding the division of the island, but in 1987 it was decided to delay no further and a protocol to the 1972 association agreement was signed providing for the second stage to be implemented, in two phases, by 2002–03. (The first stage has applied fully since 1 January 1998, and the second stage is on schedule to be completed by 2002.)

By the late 1980s, however, Cypriot decision-makers were taking the view that they should seek to move beyond the projected customs union to full EU membership. Their motivation was more political than economic. On the one hand, the prospect of EU membership might provide a stimulus to a settlement of the Cyprus problem. At a minimum it would mean that the EU would assume some of the responsibility for trying to find a solution to the problem – as in practice it has. On the other hand – and this would be especially important if no progress was made with the Cyprus problem – membership would provide the Greek part of the island with, if not a security guarantee, a measure of soft security in the form of a protective arm in respect of its relations with Turkey. Accordingly, Cyprus formally submitted a membership application to the EC in July 1990.

The membership application is on behalf of the whole island of Cyprus. This is despite the fact that the authority of the Republic does not, in practice, extend to the north of the island, and despite the fact too that the leaders of Turkish Cyprus completely reject the legitimacy of the Republic’s application. The government of the Republic has applied on behalf of the whole island because that is the territory over which it claims jurisdiction. It does not recognize the legality of, and certainly does not wish to see become permanent, the existing division into two zones. To apply on behalf only of the territory it controls would
be to undermine its claim to be the sole legitimate representative of the whole of Cyprus and could pave the way for the existing *de facto* division to become *de jure*.

Since it became apparent in the mid-1990s that the EU would open negotiations with Cyprus (see below), representatives of the Cypriot government have undertaken an intensive diplomatic campaign in support of their case. As part of the campaign there has been an attempt partially to disconnect the membership application from the Cyprus problem. This has been done by emphasizing three main points: (1) the government of the Republic is the sole legitimate authority on the island and all negotiations should be conducted through it; (2) it would be wholly unreasonable for both Cyprus and the EU to be held hostage by an illegal ‘government’ (that of the ‘TRNC’) and an uncompromising non-Member State (Turkey); (3) the government of the Republic is doing everything in its power to adjust to the EU *acquis* and will be ready for membership when the EU sets an accession date.

**V. The Difficulties for the EU with Cyprus’s Application**

From the EU’s perspective, there are four main dimensions to the difficulties it has in dealing with the application from the government of the Republic.

*The Moral/Ethical Dimension*

Whilst all EU Member States are sympathetic to the Republic’s stance on the Cyprus problem, and no Member State is contemplating recognizing the ‘TRNC’, there is a degree of discomfort regarding the Turkish Cypriot position. In private, several Member State governments are uneasy with at least one of the following: overriding the objections of Turkish Cyprus to the application that is, in effect, made on its behalf; the absence of Turkish Cypriot representatives from the accession negotiations; and the prospect of incorporating the whole of Cyprus – formally, if not practically – into the EU, when part of the island is vehemently opposed to such incorporation. On this latter point, it is recognized that when a state joins the EU there is usually a sizeable proportion of the population that is uneasy about, or is even opposed to, membership – as witnessed with the EFTA accessions, when 34 per cent of Austrians, 43 per cent of Finns, and 47 per cent of Swedes voted in national referendums against acceding. However, the Cyprus case is seen as being significantly different by virtue of both the ethnically and geographically identifiable nature of the section of the population that is opposed to membership, and by virtue too of the fact that the section in question wholly rejects the legitimacy of the national authorities that have initiated and are conducting the accession process.
The Practical Dimension

To be able to judge a membership application fully and conduct accession negotiations, the EU requires an enormous volume of detailed information to be supplied by the applicant state. It also needs to be able to deal directly with relevant politicians and officials from the state. In Cyprus’s case, detailed information can only be supplied by, and politicians and officials are only readily accessible in, the Greek zone. Because it vehemently rejects the legitimacy of the membership application made by the government of the Republic, the self-styled ‘TRNC’ is not co-operating with the EU and, indeed, since the 1997 Luxembourg European Council meeting set a date for accession negotiations to begin, it has ended most of the informal EU–‘TRNC’ contacts that used to exist.

The Turkish Dimension

The EU’s relations with Turkey have been strained in recent years. Amongst the reasons for this are: a discouraging view taken of Turkey’s EU membership application by the Commission in its Agenda 2000 documentation; occasional remarks by EU decision-makers to the effect that Turkey is not in the European tradition and cannot hope for EU membership; frequent criticisms of Turkish human rights policy by EU politicians; and the withholding of EU funds intended for Turkey – usually because of either a Greek veto or EP concerns. The processing by the EU of Cyprus’s membership application is adding to the strained relations, with Turkey objecting very strongly to the prospect of Cyprus becoming a member before it does so itself. The objection is based on a combination of factors, including the open snub that is taken to be implied in respect of its own application, the overriding of Turkish Cypriot views, and a recognition that once Cyprus is an EU member it will have a veto over both Turkey’s application and certain EU funds that are directed to Turkey – a veto that, in respect of the membership application at least, Cyprus (along with Greece) is likely to exercise as long as the Cyprus problem remains unresolved.

The Cypriot application thus threatens to strain further the EU’s relations with Turkey. This is at a time when the EU is anxious, for both political and economic reasons, that these relations be improved. The main economic reason is that Turkey is a very important EU trading partner – the sixth largest. The political reasons arise largely from a belief that Turkey is, and can continue to be, an important bridge between west and east – not least because it is an Islamic country with considerable influence in the Balkans, the Middle East, and several states of the former Soviet Union.
The Security Dimension

Southeast Europe is already an area of high insecurity. The accession of Cyprus to the EU could add to these tensions by further fuelling the long-standing antagonism which periodically threatens to overflow into open conflict between Greece and Turkey. Even if this is manageable, the accession of Cyprus will import a fierce territorial dispute within the EU’s borders – a dispute in which the two sides are ‘protected’ by separate security guarantees from Greece and Turkey.

VI. Progression and Handling of the Application

As with all membership applications that are deemed worthy of consideration, the Commission was instructed by the European Council to draw up an opinion following receipt of the Cypriot application in 1990. The opinion was duly delivered in June 1993 and essentially said the application raised no major difficulties other than those associated with the Cyprus problem. The problem was seen as constituting a major obstacle, but not wishing for that obstacle to be either insuperable or permanent, the Commission recommended ‘that the question of Cyprus’s accession to the Community should be reconsidered in January 1995’ (Commission, 1993, p. 24). The European Council, however, did not wait until 1995 but rather, as part of the enlargement mission upon which it was engaging, stated at its June 1994 Corfu meeting that ‘the next phase of enlargement of the Union will involve Cyprus and Malta’ (European Council, 1994, p. 14; This was the first time that the EU did not link the Cypriot application to a settlement of the Cyprus problem. The Council of Ministers took the process a stage further in March 1995 when it announced that accession negotiations with Cyprus and Malta would open six months after the conclusion of the forthcoming IGC.

In taking this position, the EU Member States hoped that Turkish Cyprus and Turkey would adopt a more flexible attitude towards a settlement of the Cyprus problem. If both were to recognize that they did not exercise a veto over the Republic’s membership of the EU, they might conclude that their best strategy was to accept the inevitable and extract what benefits they could from the EU in that new context. To encourage such thinking, the EU intensified its long-standing efforts to demonstrate to the leaders of both Turkish Cyprus and Turkey that a settlement of the Cyprus problem would be very much in their interests. With Turkish Cyprus, the efforts have been focused largely on demonstrating the economic benefits it will receive from EU membership – per capita wealth in northern Cyprus is less than one quarter of that in the south. With Turkey, the efforts have been directed at emphasizing how a Cyprus settlement will make EU
governments more favourably disposed towards it – which will ease the way for increased levels of co-operation and assistance and, ultimately, for its own membership application (although no one is disguising the fact that there are also other major problems with the Turkish application – including its size (currently 65 million people), its low per capita GDP, and its poor human rights record).

There is no evidence to date that either Turkish Cyprus or Turkey is responding to these efforts (see below). The EU has, nonetheless, pressed ahead with processing the Cypriot application. Accession negotiations were formally opened in March 1998 as part of the so-called 5+1 formula: that is, separate but parallel negotiations were opened with the five ‘most advanced’ CEECs plus Cyprus. Much of the initial work was taken up with what is known as the screening process, which involved the Commission examining detailed information – grouped into 31 chapters – presented to it by the applicants on the extent to which, and the ways in which, they comply with the EU *acquis* and what further measures they need to take. In November 1998 ‘real’ negotiations with Cyprus began on chapters on which the screening was completed and on which the Council of Ministers had agreed common negotiating positions. By December 1999 the screening process had been completed and negotiations had been provisionally closed on 11 chapters – making the Cyprus negotiations the most advanced of all the candidate countries. With the Commission proposing in its October 1999 progress reports that negotiations with applicants should in the future follow a differentiated approach rather than the prevailing parallel approach – that is to say, negotiations should proceed in parallel with a candidate’s progress in preparing for membership – the general expectation is that negotiations with Cyprus will be provisionally completed well ahead of the other ‘fast stream’ candidates. It will, however, not be possible for negotiations to be completely closed before 2002 since the Commission reserves the right with all applications to return to chapters in the light of future developments, and negotiations on the last chapter – on institutional issues – cannot be opened until after the 2000 IGC.

Given the opposition of Turkish Cypriot leaders to the membership application, the accession process is being channelled on Cyprus’s side solely through the government of the Republic of Cyprus. Amongst the voluminous documentation it is obliged to present to the EU, certain general information about the situation in the north of the island is included, but detailed information is necessarily presented only in respect of the part of the island controlled by the Republic. This means that whilst the EU is formally and legally considering an application on the part of the whole island, in practice it is dealing only with the south. The EU has, through both formal invitations and informal channels, sought to encourage Turkish Cypriot leaders to become involved in the process, but to no avail. The reason for this is that the only way Turkish Cyprus can
become so involved is by being attached to the negotiations being conducted in the name of the Republic of Cyprus. This would naturally assist Greek Cypriots in their aim to see the island reunited, but would seriously undermine the Turkish Cypriot goal of independence.

VII. Possible Scenarios

In the current enlargement round, the situation of Cyprus is clearly very different from that of the other applicant states. Whereas they have a range of major economic, administrative and technical obstacles to overcome before they will be ready for membership, Cyprus is already well prepared in these respects. The Commission’s November 1998 and 1999 progress reports on the applicant states make it clear that Cyprus has made most progress in incorporating EU laws, in putting appropriate administrative structures in place, and in creating a market economy that should be able to deal with market pressures over the medium term (Commission, 1998, 1999: Cyprus Reports).

But though Cyprus is well prepared for enlargement in terms of ‘nuts and bolts’ requirements, there are very serious doubts and associated uncertainties concerning the Cyprus problem and its implications for both Cyprus’s application and the EU enlargement process as a whole. There are, in broad terms, four main possible scenarios.

Resolution of the Cyprus Problem

The scenario most desired by EU decision-makers is naturally that there should be a settlement of the Cyprus problem. If this were to happen, the integration of northern Cyprus would not, as the Commission has noted, create major economic difficulties given the zone’s size (the population is only around 200,000) and its potential – especially in respect of agriculture and tourism (Commission, 1998: Cyprus Report – Conclusion). Crucially, a settlement would ease worries about the security implications of a divided Cyprus joining the EU and would allay concerns about the probable damaging effects of Cyprus’s accession on relations with Turkey – not least since it is inconceivable that a settlement could be reached to which Turkey was opposed.

This looks to be an unlikely scenario. Peace efforts continue, but there is little to suggest that the stalemate will be broken in the foreseeable future. Quite apart from a settlement having to overcome deep cultural antagonisms, the situations and positions of the three most directly involved parties – Turkey, Turkish Cyprus and Greek Cyprus – just do not appear to allow room for sufficient compromise at present.
Turkey, which is crucial to any future settlement, is unlikely to adopt a more conciliatory stance unless and until EU membership for itself comes within reach. (Despite rebuffs, Turkey maintains its membership ambitions. In the words of President Demirel: ‘Full EU membership is our right, stemming from the existing agreements, and we will not give up defending it’ [(Observer, ‘Turkey Survey’, 13 June 1999)].) Quite apart from Turkey’s natural identification with and support for Turkish Cyprus, the Cypriot problem is just too useful a bargaining chip to be given up except in exchange for something that Turkey values extremely highly. As matters stand, the Turkish government does not believe that being conciliatory on Cyprus will pave the way for Turkey’s accession to the EU, whilst at the same time it also does not believe that the EU will turn away from Turkey if there is no settlement. Significantly too, as Lauren McLaren shows in her article on pp. 117–29 in this issue of the journal, Turkish elites, rather surprisingly, do not see the Cyprus problem as being one of the main obstacles in the way of Turkey’s admittance to the EU.

The Turkish stance on Cyprus will thus probably remain as outlined in its official position on the Cyprus issue: ‘Surely, for the Turkish Cypriot side to support such an illegal application [by the government of the Republic to the EU] now would be tantamount to recognizing the legality of the said unilateral application and would, in turn, mean the recognition by the Turkish side of the Greek Cypriot Administration as “the government of the whole of Cyprus”, which issue goes to the very root and essence of the Cyprus dispute and which would be a political impossibility and a “non starter”’ (Republic of Turkey, 1999a). This stance is likely to continue to be backed up with political, security, and economic support for the ‘TRNC’, as a resolution of the Turkish Parliament in July 1999 that was issued to mark the 25th anniversary of ‘the Cyprus Peace Operation’ makes clear: ‘Turkey’s guarantorship rights and strategic interests [in Cyprus] will always be preserved. The legitimate rights and interests of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, including that of statehood and security, will not be allowed to be undermined under any circumstances’ (Republic of Turkey, 1999b; similar sentiments are also expressed in a Joint Declaration issued by Turkish government and ‘TRNC’ leaders in July 1999 (‘Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus’, 1999)). Turkey is thus seemingly firmly intent on continuing to exercise its influence on – in practice, its virtual control over – Turkish Cyprus to ensure that there is no settlement as matters stand.

Turkish Cyprus is entwined with Turkey in many ways: a majority of its population are post-1974 ‘settlers’ from Anatolia – people who are regarded in the Republic as illegal immigrants and to whom it is not intended to grant citizenship in the event of a settlement; its currency is Turkey’s currency; it is largely dependent on Turkey for both its imports and exports; and international
ostracization means it cannot have its own postal or telecommunications systems but must use those of Turkey. In consequence it is very unlikely that, quite apart from Turkish influence and direction, Turkish Cyprus will want a settlement of the Cyprus problem, and with it EU membership, until Turkey itself becomes an EU member and is thus able to offer Turkish Cypriots protection ‘from the inside’. This would seem to be confirmed by the fact that the Turkish Cypriot position has hardened as the EU accession process has proceeded: there has been a refusal to meet with Greek Cypriot representatives since the December 1997 Luxembourg European Council meeting stated that accession negotiations with Cyprus (and the five CEECs) would open in the spring of 1998 (although UN-sponsored ‘proximity talks launched in December 1990 may lead to direct talks in 2000); in March 1998 moves were initiated (within the framework of a Turkey–‘TRNC’ association agreement that was concluded in August 1997) to establish a Turkey–‘TRNC’ ‘joint economic zone’ – thus formalizing the virtual de facto position; and ‘TRNC’ representatives have increasingly stated that if Turkish Cyprus continues to be frustrated in its desire for independence it will be left with little option but to integrate fully with Turkey.

As for Greek Cyprus, it continues to insist on a unified island with a single sovereignty, a single citizenship, and a single international personality, and it totally rejects the possibility of there being two states on the island. As President Clerides put it to the UN General Assembly in September 1999, ‘Cyprus must be a bi-communal, bi-zonal, federal republic, with a single sovereignty and international personality and a single citizenship and … the settlement must exclude union in whole or in part with any other country or any form of partition or secession’ (Cyprus News, September 1999, p. 3).

The government of the Republic calls constantly for talks with the leaders of the Turkish Cypriots, but shows no sign of departing from its long-held beliefs as to where a solution to the Cyprus problem is to be found. As the spokesman of the government of the Republic put it in February 1999 following (yet another) attempt by an outsider (on this occasion the Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister) to promote co-operation between the two sides, the government favoured intercommunal contacts and rapprochement ‘in the framework of the legislation of the Republic of Cyprus … on no occasion will anything be accepted that may undermine our entity or recognize the “institutions of the pseudo-state”’ (Cyprus News, February 1999, p. 2).

No Resolution of the Cyprus Problem, Cyprus’s Application is Shelved, and Greece Blocks the Accessions of CEECs

Under this scenario, in the event of there being no settlement of the Cyprus problem one or more of those Member States that have expressed concerns about

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the implications of admitting a divided Cyprus will insist that the accession is shelved. If this were to occur there could be a major EU, and broader pan-European, crisis, with the Greek government acting upon its stated intention of not approving the accession of CEECs if Cyprus’s application is blocked.

Given the increasing momentum of the enlargement process and the immense damage a Greek veto on CEEC applications would cause, this seems to be an unlikely scenario. If the Cyprus problem is not resolved as accession approaches, it is more likely that either Greece will be prevailed upon to modify its position (see the third scenario) or those countries with the most serious reservations about Cyprus’s membership will not press their case to the point of exercising a veto (see the fourth scenario). That said, however, the possibility of Greece vetoing the CEECs cannot be completely ruled out for there is no doubt that any modification in the well-established Greek position would be extremely awkward and potentially deeply embarrassing for any Greek government. The fact is that a softening of its stance on Cyprus would inevitably be portrayed by opponents as a climb-down and a defeat for the Hellenic people engineered by Turkey.

**No Resolution of the Cyprus Problem, Cyprus’s Membership is Shelved, and CEECs Accede**

For this scenario to occur, the Greek government has to retreat from its threat to veto CEEC accessions if Cyprus is prevented from becoming an EU member. It is a scenario that is regarded as a distinct possibility in EU decision-making circles.

One reason why Greece might choose to soften its position is that it can be very difficult for a weak and dependent EU state to withstand intense pressure from larger and determined states. Another reason is that it is very much in Greece’s interests that CEEC accessions do proceed, for it will reduce its geographical separation from the rest of the EU, may well give it political allies, and is likely to offer considerable opportunities for Greek business – especially when second-wave CEECs accede.

Greece could, therefore, be susceptible to inducements and pressures – particularly if Cyprus’s admission to the EU is not put on complete hold but is staged by bringing the Republic gradually into less sensitive areas of EU activity whilst giving decision-makers more time to find a solution to the underlying difficulty. It is true that, in conducting negotiations with the applicants, the Commission has resisted the notion of any states being given partial membership and has stressed that new members must exercise full rights and responsibilities. ‘Abandoning this principle would create severe internal tensions, hamper the EU’s efficiency and damage public confidence’ (Commission, 1999: Composite
Paper). If, however, the situation demanded it, there is little doubt that flexibility could be provided for in this exceptional case.

No Resolution of the Cyprus Problem, but Cyprus Still Accedes

This scenario requires most Member States, and especially those that have been most concerned about admitting a divided Cyprus, to suppress their reservations. The main risk for the Republic of Cyprus if this scenario comes to pass is that the division of the island will become even further entrenched. Possibly the ‘TRNC’ will be formally incorporated within Turkey.

The main risk for the EU in taking this option is that it will further strain relations with Turkey, with all the unwanted political, security and economic consequences that could follow from that. However, how seriously the relations would be further strained depends on a number of factors, not least the extent to which Greece could be persuaded/pressurized as the price of Cypriot accession into being less obstructionist towards opening up towards Turkey and, more broadly, whether Cyprus’s accession could be located within a more positive general framework of EU–Turkey relations.

As regards Greece becoming less obstructionist, there were signs in 1999 that a thawing of Greek–Turkish relations might be possible. There was co-operation between the two countries over Kosovo – with both involved in the humanitarian missions of moving ethnic Albanian refugees and delivering aid – and over relief assistance when earthquakes hit Turkey in August and Greece in September. Senior members of the respective governments were in direct touch with one another over both Kosovo and the earthquakes, and in the wake of these contacts it was decided to develop confidence-building measures in such ‘low level’ areas as trade, the environment and combating organized crime. There was no disguising the fact that basic differences between the two remained, not least on Cyprus. As the Greek Deputy Foreign Minister and Minister for Europe, Yannos Kranidiotis, said shortly before his death in a plane accident in September, ‘the Cyprus issue is one of the issues standing between Turkey and the European Union and Greece believes some progress should take place and then it would be easier to observe a positive stance towards Turkey … unless progress is achieved [on Cyprus], everything will be much more difficult’ (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1999). However, notwithstanding continuing difficulties with the ‘high politics’ issues of Cyprus – disputes over Aegean islands and airspace are amongst other such issues – some movement towards more ‘normal’, or at least less distrustful, relations seems possible. On the question of Turkey’s accession to the EU, the Greek Foreign Minister, George Papandreou, even went so far in September as to say ‘Greece not only wants to see Turkey in the EU, it wants to be pulling the cart of a European Turkey. Contrary to popular belief, it is in
Greece’s interests to see Turkey, at some point, in the EU, rather than having it in continual conflict and tension with the bloc and European standards’ (Guardian, 13 September 1999).

Regarding the creation of a more positive framework for EU–Turkey relations, foundations have been in existence for some time on which such a framework can be built and damage to EU–Turkey relations can be contained. These foundations include: the EU–Turkey customs union, which came into operation on 1 January 1996 and which is important to both sides – for Turkey not least because it is helping to bring about a necessary restructuring of its manufacturing sector (European Report, 1998c: Section V. p. 5); EU assistance to Turkey which, despite the problems with funding programmes, still occurs in various forms – notably via the EU–Turkey association agreement and the Euro–Mediterranean Partnership; the organizational flexibility of the EU that makes it possible for Turkey to be associated with some EU policies and programmes; and the increasingly encouraging signals that have been sent to Ankara about how Turkey can eventually become an EU member. The encouragement to Turkey’s membership hopes have been greatly boosted by two important recent developments. First, at its June 1998 Cardiff meeting, the European Council endorsed a communication from the Commission on a ‘European Strategy to Prepare Turkey for Membership’ (European Council, 1998, p. 24). The strategy provided for a range of measures to enable EU–Turkey relations to develop on a ‘sound and evolutionary basis’. Second, in its October 1999 progress reports on enlargement, the Commission recommended that Turkey be given the status that it had long sought of being considered a candidate country (Commission, 1999: Composite Paper and Turkey Country Report). The Commission indicated that accession negotiations should not be opened until the political criteria of membership had been met, but advised that in the meantime the European Strategy should be built on and that the EU and Turkey should, in effect, agree on a pre-accession strategy. Included in the strategy should be enhanced political dialogue, the possibility of full Turkish participation in EU programmes and agencies, and the adoption of an accession partnership combined with a national programme for the adoption of the acquis. The October 1999 recommendations, which were later approved by the December Helsinki European Council, lay the basis for a new phase in EU–Turkey relations.

VIII. Conclusions

The Commissioner-designate for Enlargement, Günther Verheugen, referred to the problems associated with the Cypriot application when he answered written and oral questions from the European Parliament’s Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights and Common Security and Defence Policy prior to the
confirmation in office of the Prodi Commission in September 1999. In response to a written question he described the accession as being ‘problematic’ given the position of some Member States (European Parliament, 1999a). Developing this description in his ‘hearing’, he stated:

Be under no illusions: neither you nor I is the master of the enlargement process, neither is Parliament or the Commission. It is not even the Council, for the masters are the Member States! … there are a number of big and influential Member States who are already saying that we should not negotiate further with Cyprus because it is clear that Cyprus cannot fulfil the *acquis* in the area of the common foreign and security policy. (European Parliament, 1999b)

Verheugen’s observations illustrate the point that not even informed insiders know what is likely to happen with the Cypriot application. EU decision-makers have never stated whether they will or will not admit a divided Cyprus. All that has been said is that negotiations should continue, and if a solution to the Cyprus problem has not been found by the time the negotiations are concluded, then a final decision will be taken at that point.

At the December 1999 Helsinki summit, EU leaders went closer than they ever have done before to stating that a solution to the Cyprus problem is not absolutely necessary for Cyprus’s accession. However, in deference to those Member States with reservations about admitting a divided Cyprus, they stopped short of declaring that the Republic will be allowed to join the EU in advance of the problem being solved. They key passage in the summit’s Conclusions is this: ‘If no settlement has been reached by the completion of the accession negotiations, the Council's decision on accession will be made without the above being a precondition. In this the Council will take account of all the relevant factors’ (European Council, 1999b).

Most practitioners and observers think that the final decision on Cyprus’s accession will have to be taken with the Cyprus problem still unresolved, for there are few signs that the key actors are interested in a solution to the problem other than on their own terms. The Republic of Cyprus and the ‘TRNC’ seem to be as entrenched in their positions as ever, whilst the partial thaw in relations between the two ‘mother’ states that has followed upon the Kosovo crisis and the earthquakes of August and September 1999 is hardly likely to be powerful enough to move Turkey to pressurize the ‘TRNC’ to cede ground on the central sovereignty issue. It is thus unlikely that a united Cyprus will enter the EU in the foreseeable future.

It is equally unlikely that the Cyprus problem will be allowed to endanger the accession of the CEECs, for the EU is embarked upon an enlargement mission which it does not wish to see stalled. This mission was injected with a new momentum by the Commission in October 1999 when, in its annual progress reports on enlargement, it urged the European Council to give enlargement a
stronger political vision by embracing objectives and principles that would ensure there were no unnecessary delays in accessions. Prominent amongst the decisions it recommended to the Helsinki summit were: a more flexible and urgent approach to the opening of negotiations with ‘slow stream’ applicants (including a specific recommendation that negotiations be opened with all current applicants except Turkey in 2000); a more differentiated approach to be taken in negotiations so as to allow the EU to strike an optimum balance between speed (meeting the expectations of some applicants for early membership) and quality (ensuring new members exercise full rights and responsibilities); and greater emphasis to be given to the inclusive nature of the enlargement process, not least through elevating Turkey’s status to that of a candidate country and confirming ‘the vocation for membership’ of the countries of former Yugoslavia and Albania (Commission, 1999: Composite Paper). With the Helsinki summit accepting the Commission’s recommendations (European Council, 1999b), it is most improbable that a way will not be found to deal with, or perhaps massage, the Cypriot problem to ensure it does not threaten the largest, and in many ways most important, expansion in the EU’s history.

Some version of the third and fourth scenarios outlined above is thus the most likely outcome of the Cypriot application. These scenarios should not, however, as they often are, necessarily be couched in black and white terms. As has been shown, there are possible variations within each of them and at the edges potential overlaps between them.

Under the third scenario, the shelving of Cyprus’s admission would not necessarily mean that the existing state of EU–Cyprus relations would be frozen. Indeed, they can hardly be so since the EU–Cyprus customs union is scheduled to be completed by 2002, and by the very act of having agreed to open accession negotiations the EU has signalled that it wishes to see EU–Cyprus relations moved forward. It is thus almost inevitable that any shelving would be accompanied by a programme designed to establish progressively closer EU–Cypriot relations.

Under the fourth scenario, should the Republic of Cyprus join the EU prior to a settlement of the Cyprus problem, it is probable that the EU’s relations with Turkey would be damaged. However, given the importance of the relationship to both sides it is unlikely that they would be damaged to an extent that could not be handled. To ensure that this is indeed the case, EU decision-makers at Helsinki significantly advanced the developing campaign to meet the challenge of ‘the Turkish problem’.
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