

Turkey and EU held hostage by Cyprus

Published: December 1 2006 02:00 | Last updated: December 1 2006 02:00

Some 43 years after beginning its long courtship of Europe and barely a year after opening entry talks with Brussels, Turkey's bid for European Union membership may have just hit a wall.

Olli Rehn, the EU enlargement commissioner who earlier this year warned the talks could end in a "train crash", said this week his measured response to the impasse in the negotiations meant "there will be no train crash". Rather, "there will be a slowing down because of works further down the line; the train will continue to move". Really? Let us hope he is driving.

Mr Rehn's proposal is to suspend negotiations on eight of the 35 chapters of EU law Turkey needs to adopt before it enters the Union. This is, put overly simply, in response to Ankara's refusal to open up its ports to Cyprus, an EU member. It is harsher than Turkey's EU allies - the UK, Spain, Sweden and Italy - wanted, but has delighted politicians in Germany, Austria, Holland and France who think a poor, Muslim country like Turkey has no business inside the EU in the first place.

In either case, there is a distinct possibility that the Turkish government of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, pressed from all sides but up for re-election next year, will simply walk away.

Irrespective of whether it is any longer realistic to believe Turkey will one day join the EU, that would be a geopolitically catastrophic train wreck.

Europe is the ambition that has held together Turkey's otherwise antagonistic and fiercely secular army with Mr Erdogan's neo-Islamist government, with full but now fast-dwindling popular support. It is also the engine of sweeping reform, especially to en-trench democratic and minority rights. It is, above all, proof that the EU can sponsor a marriage between Islam and democracy, a sort of Euro-Islamism analogous to Christian Democracy that can steer a path to modernity and survive the violent dislocations on the way. Mr Erdogan is leading

democratic change in a region where Islamists have at best provided alibis to despots determined to prevent democracy.

The EU put all this at risk by its irresponsible attitude to Cyprus. In advance of a 2004 United Nations plan for a confederal system to reunite the island, the EU gave the internationally recognised Greek Cypriot government a guarantee of entry. While Ankara cajoled Turkish Cypriots to vote for the peace deal, the Greek Cypriots self-indulgently voted against - and now obstruct Turkey from within the EU.

While demanding Ankara admit Cyprus ships and goods, Brussels has not delivered on its pledge to end the isolation of Turkish Cyprus. The Cyprus issue can be resolved if member states are prepared to put the strategic interests of the Union above the narrow interests of the Nicosia government. On present form, however, the EU is now widely seen to have retreated behind a wall of dissembling waffle and to be acting in bad faith.

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December 24, 2006

Sir,

The December 1 editorial on Cyprus and the European Union by the Financial Times advocates nothing less than allowing the annexation of thirty seven percent of Cypriot territory to the Turks, and allowing the ethnic cleansing of over 200,000 Greek Cypriots to stand. The dangerous precedent set by the British and French appeasement of Germany during the 1930's stands as a

powerful example as to why Europe must ensure that Turkey comply with all conditions put forth

toward Cyprus, or be denied membership. For two hundred years, British and Western policies were

based on appeasing Turkish regimes (Ottoman and Kemalist). The result has been the systematic

genocide and extermination of Armenian, Assyrian, and Greek Christians from their homelands in

Anatolia, and the preservation of a repressive and fanatical military dictatorship in Turkey that has

paved the way for an Islamic takeover through its rigid intolerance.

Abandoning established legal, moral, and political principles of the European Union would be harmful for Cyprus and Turkish democracy alike. The reform of Turkey has been a major issue in the foreign policies of the Western powers for over two centuries. Both the declining Ottoman

Empire and the successor Turkish Republic have remained immune toward reform because Turkish

leaders always understood that Western governments tended to balk when it came to forcing

Turkey to account for its most notorious crimes against humanity which have been manifested through genocide and ethnic cleansing against non-Turkic and non-Muslim populations, torture and murder against Turkish dissidents, and acts of external aggression against neighbors such as Syria and Cyprus.

The conflict in Cyprus is between the internationally recognized Republic of Cyprus which can claim the accords of 1959, numerous United Nations Resolutions, and various rulings of the European

Court of Human Rights to supply the steadfast validity of its positions, and the Turkish aggressor on

the other. Allowing trade or direct flights inside the Turkish occupied territories of Cyprus would bring

about the dissolution of the Republic and leave the population of Cyprus vulnerable to the future whims

and territorial desires of Turkey's brutal political leadership which will either continue to be right wing

zealots among the General Staff, or fanatical Islamic fundamentalists who have established great political power and influence despite decades of incessant apologies by Western politicians and

commentators alike on behalf of Turkey even amidst State sponsored atrocities such as the anti-Greek

pogroms of 1955.

The members of the European Union who insist on holding the line against Turkey deserve praise and

not criticism. If Turkey is not held accountable for its aggression in Cyprus and repressive domestic

policies, history will further repeat itself with Turkey being rewarded for its cruel and inhumane policies.

Turkish reform of its external and domestic policies will not be possible if the European Union bends

the rules in order to accommodate Ankara. It appears that the Financial Times has adopted the ideas of disgraced Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain.

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