

The case of Cyprus

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Cyprus emerges as the paradoxical paradigm of contemporary European inclusion-exclusion dynamics, deeply intertwined with the inner contradictions and unfolding opportunities of the European integration process.

Moreover, Cyprus still holds one of the most challenging physical and geopolitical definitions of exclusion in contemporary history: a standing wall separating two communities in a shared territory. Indeed, the fall of the Berlin wall did not at all mean the disappearance of actual walls within the European defining community, especially of invisible ones based on inherited prejudices, discriminations and instrumental divisions and sub-divisions that evolve according to pendulum-like needs and contexts. Hence, walls such as that of Ceuta, separating desperate life conditions from fear of mass migration and that of Cyprus, prolonging inter-communal conflict and instrumental external interests reminds us about the persistence of a principle of exclusion within a space that underwent an integration process whose founding and seeming objective was that of transforming conflict into cooperation and walls into bridges.

Coming now to the analysis of the case study of Cyprus, it is important to bear in mind its colonial past and the fact that the Republic of Cyprus gained its independence from Britain as recently as 1960. Three years later, "inter-communal violence between Turkish and Greek Cypriots broke out. Since 1974 the island is de facto divided after a *coup d'état* supported by the military junta in Greece against the Cypriot President Makarios and the subsequent intervention of the Turkish army"^[1]. The Greek Cypriot community in the South of the island became the Republic of Cyprus and Turkish Cypriot community in the North of the island was denominated Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, being internationally recognised only by Turkey. When the Republic of Cyprus applied for EC membership in 1990, the Community had to confront the challenges of this partition within the complexities of the structural geopolitical challenges posed by the end of the Cold war and a hopeful yet uncertain new beginning in the EC's relations with the wider world.

When the EU opened accession negotiations with the Republic of Cyprus, there was an open acknowledgement on behalf of EU representatives of the risk of perpetuating the division only the Southern part of the island entered the Union simultaneously. At the same time, when Turkey opened accession negotiations with the EU, there was a worry that the challenges of the division in Cyprus could complicate even more the negotiations. In this context, the Annan plan and the referendum on the unification of the island offered an unprecedented opportunity to solve the issue before the EU 'big bang' enlargement of 2004. Nevertheless, due to the fact that 75,83% of the Greek Cypriots voted against to the Annan Plan, in contrast to the favourable vote of 64,91% of Turkish Cypriots made impossible to reach a consensus. The Republic of Cyprus acceded the EU and the *acquis communautaire* was suspended in the North of the island, thus deepening the dramatic cleavage between both communities.

Since accession, the EU has created a framework to provide financial aid to the North of the island (estimated in 57 million euros since 2000), which suffers from a remarkably disadvantaged economic situation. At the same time, Turkish Cypriots refer to the EU as a defining community and request dialogue opportunities to reach a possible solution. Apart from this EU framework programme for the building of institutional capacity, as well as for the search of economic cohesion, different communal initiative are present in both sides of the island in order to explore potential rapprochements.

In any case, this continuing extreme case of division within the EU territory clearly presents numerous legitimacy problems

within the EU institutions, numerous frictions with Turkey as an EU candidate country and notable uncertainties for the future, especially taking into account the socially painful consequences of the debt crisis at the Republic of Cyprus. Such context clearly makes reconciliation within the island and cooperation within the EU and within the global arena even more difficult, creating a paradox in the theoretical definition of the European integration process as a process of radical transformation from conflict to cooperation and, subsequently, to the deepening of all possible integration dimensions.

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[1] <http://europa.eu/about-eu/countries/member-countries/cyprus/> [on-line 03.05.2013]