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Stars no more aligned for Cyprus' reunification

Stars seem no more aligned for Cyprus' reunification process, after the recent failure of negotiation talks (July 2017). The historical visit of Turkey's president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Athens on 7-8 December contributed to emphasize well-known divergent views on the Cyprus issue, and not only.

Moreover, the island experiences two parallel electoral campaigns and this makes things even more stagnant. Presidential elections are scheduled in the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) for 28 January (possible second round on February 4), while the so-called Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus ("TRNC") will hold elections for the renewal of the 50-members republican assembly on January 7.

In both parts of Cyprus, hardliners voices with respect to the "federal-state solution" are on the rise, shedding light on shifting moods at the elite level.

President Nicos Anastasiades seeks for re-election: according to convergent polls, this would be probable. Although the reunification issue remains central in the public debate, this electoral race is firstly about economy: Cyprus has been lively recovering (according to the IMF, the GDP grew by 3,6% in 2017) after years of painful financial crisis, which also led in 2013 to the first-ever European implementation of the bail-in rule for banks recapitalisation.

With regard to the "TRNC", these political elections will not affect the reunification process directly, since is the president Mustafa Akinçi who has prerogatives on the topic. However, the ballots will give indications about the political direction of North Cyprus. As a matter of fact, "TRNC" and Turkey's officials have multiplied declarations concerning the willingness to pursue official recognition for the "TRNC", thus reviving the rhetoric of partition. [Alexandra Oliveira, WATCH: Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus to seek international status following collapsed peace talks, The Hill, 27 November 2017].

Surely, Greek Cypriots feel almost comfortable with the current status quo, notwithstanding the persisting Turkish occupation of the north, while the hypothetical federal solution could result into a vague security status and a financial burden: this hampers a united Cyprus. But the real obstacle along the reunification road is related to the military role of the guarantors, most of all Turkey and Greece.

During his meetings in Athens with the Greek president Prokopis Pavlopoulos, and then with Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, Erdoğan not only stressed Turkey's recent positions on Cyprus, but reiterated also previous, politically igniting declarations on the opportunity to revise the Treaty of Lausanne [Eleni Chrepa-Selcan Hacaoglu, "Erdoğan Begins First Greek Trip With Awkward Treaty Exchange", Bloomberg, 7 December 2017], which establishes the modern boundaries between Greece and Turkey. Two points of bilateral friction have also to be added: the Turkish violations of the Greek airspace and

waters, occurring on a weekly, sometimes daily bases, plus the extradition of the eight Turkey's military officers escaped in Greece during the failed coup.

Therefore, this is not time for negotiations in Cyprus, but it is likely time for stalemate, or even for unilateral steps.

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