

The case for federation

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And the case for resisting blackmail



FOUR main choices face the Cypriots on their divided island. Either the Greeks and Turks who live on it agree to rub along together in a very loosely federal state. Or they agree to separate formally, with fairer boundaries. Or the present edgy

stalemate goes on, with both sides growling at each other across barbed wire. Or the island's internationally recognised Greek part is inducted as soon as possible into the European Union, with the Turkish bit set aside until its leaders choose to come back to negotiate. All these choices have drawbacks. But the first—loose federation—is still the least bad. With the island's long-serving Turkish and Greek leaders about to meet

So why not recognise partition—and two separate states on the island—rather than seek to persuade two peoples who plainly dislike each other to live cheek by jowl? The notion is by no means ridiculous. The Turks, who made up 18% of the island's population when their mainland cousins intervened in 1974 after a short-lived local coup threatened to attach Cyprus to Greece, now have 37% of the land. The Greeks would rightly deem a settlement that froze that status quo to be grossly unfair and a shocking endorsement of ethnic cleansing besides. But if both sides agreed to a new share-out, if compensation were internationally adjudged and if boundaries were redrawn to both sides' satisfaction, why not then let them live happily on their own? Fine, in principle. But it would be much harder to get that sort of agreement than the elusive, long-mooted, loosely federal one.

More carrots, please

The Turkish-Cypriots' leader, Rauf Denktash, fears that in any federation the Greeks would do down the Turks. Turkey's powerful generals sympathise. Most Turkish-Cypriots, say

for the first time in four years, this is not the moment for outsiders to give up trying to cut a deal.

Why are three of those choices less satisfactory than the first? The present stalemate cannot hold. The poker game over the EU's enlargement—involving Greece's wish to get its island cousins into the club and Turkey's desire to join it some time too—have destroyed the unstable equilibrium of the past quarter century. Many Greeks, and several EU governments, want the internationally recognised Greek-controlled bit of the island brought into the Union, whatever the Turks and others may think. Otherwise, says the government in Athens, it will block the entry into the EU club of ten other countries, an incomparably more important event. If Greece has its way, Turkey, a valued but prickly NATO country, says it may annex Turkish Cyprus outright, imperilling the entire region. ▶▶

pollsters, now want a federal deal to get all of Cyprus into the EU and make all Cypriots richer. In a rare and hopeful step, Turkish businessmen and politicians have begun chastising the rigid Mr Denktash. If they fail to move him, they can bid adieu to any chance of joining the EU in the foreseeable future.

The Greek-Cypriots have moved quite a way in the past few years. They have agreed to have much less sway over the Turks than before the invasion of 1974. They may even, as a helpful gesture, admit publicly that in the decade before the invasion they mistreated the Turkish minority. Still, the EU should refuse to be blackmailed by the Greeks into letting in Greek Cyprus willy-nilly. The UN negotiators, for their part, should ask the Greek-Cypriots to accept not only Mr Denktash's legitimacy as the Turkish-Cypriots' leader but also the reality of his statelet as more than just an outcrop of mainland Turkey. And if Mr Denktash comes out of his long sulk and agrees seriously to negotiate ways of sharing the island rather than partitioning it, the UN should lift sanctions against his bit of the island as a foretaste of EU benefits to come. It is, after all, in Turkey's as well as Cyprus's interest to give ground. ■