



How Athens holds 10 nations hostage

Intransigence in Cyprus is threatening the future expansion of the European Union, reports Ambrose Evans-Pritchard in Nicosia

THE Turkish invasion of northern Cyprus in July 1974 came at a very bad moment for Dickran Ouzounian. The Armenian car dealer had just taken delivery of 70 new Toyota Corollas and Celicas at his showroom in the heart of old Nicosia. Each had plastic wrappers over the seats and 32 kilometres on the clock, the distance from the port at Famagusta.

The fleet of cars sits there to this day, dulled with powdery dust, stuck in no man's land between the razor-wire of this divided city.

As fate would have it, his building was right on the United Nations ceasefire line. Nothing has been touched since. Nearby, the opulent Olympus Hotel is crumbling slowly in the heat, a home only to lizards.

British soldiers, at present from the Royal Artillery, still patrol the UN's "Attila Line", once so narrow that Greeks and Turks could spear each other at night with knives fixed on poles. They keep a strict neutrality, though the UN has never recognised the breakaway Republic of Northern Cyprus and does not condone the occupying force of 35,000 Turkish troops.

Until now, the "Cyprus Question" has chiefly been a matter for the 800,000 Cypriots, the Turkish and Greek mother states, Britain, and the UN blue berets.

But as this arid outpost prepares to join the European Union in 2004, it has become a major headache for Brussels too, threatening to derail the "Big Bang" enlargement of 10 states in 2004.

The accession hopes of Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Malta all hang on the fate of Cyprus because the Greek government in Athens has vowed to stop anyone joining unless the island is included. In effect, 80 million people in eastern Europe are being held hostage.

Greek militancy stems in part from a bad conscience. It was the military junta in Athens that triggered the Turkish invasion in 1974 when it overthrew the elected leader, Archbishop Makarios, in a reckless bid for *enosis*, or union with Greece.

Ankara's inevitable riposte led to the seizure of one third of the island and the mass expulsion of 140,000 Greek Cypriots, replaced over time by waves of Turkish settlers from Anatolia. Up to 1,500 vanished in the violence.

The EU knows it is walking into a minefield in Cyprus. It cannot absorb the Greek part of the island as a separate state; that would legitimise the illegal invasion.

But Brussels is loath to swallow the island whole with a festering crisis, although EU leaders nonchalantly promised to do so at the Helsinki summit in 1999. Ankara has since threatened a "hot incident" if they proceed.

So the EU is now frantically cajoling Greek and Turkish Cypri-



Pictures: CORBIS and AP

A city divided: soldiers of the Greek militia survey the Turkish area of Nicosia

Below left: Turkish paratroops drop north of Nicosia during the Turkish invasion in 1974

Below right: the Greek Cypriot leader, Glafcos Clerides, and the Turkish Cypriot leader, Rauf Denktash, at reunification talks



ots to break the deadlock and agree on a joint state – perhaps using the model of Belgium, designed to keep apart the fractious Flemings and Walloons. The deadline is December, when the EU sets a date for enlargement at the Copenhagen summit.

With invasion still fresh in the

collective memory, it is no surprise that Greek Cypriots crave the safe haven of EU membership. "We don't have any Eurosceptics here," said the finance minister, Takis Clerides. "Support for joining is 100 per cent." EU money is not the draw. With GDP per capita above £11,000, Greek Cypriots are

rich enough to become net contributors to Brussels.

Tassos Papapetrou, chairman of the Greek Cypriots' European affairs committee, has been negotiating with the Turkish Cypriots for most of the past 28 years and says nothing ever changes.

"We want one state and they

want two states, and between the two positions no compromise can possibly be found," he said, gazing out of the window at his lost family house across the "Green Line".

But talks go on. Twice a week, the Greek Cypriot leader, Glafcos Clerides, meets his Turkish counterpart, Rauf Denktash, for UN-

organised talks at Nicosia's abandoned airport, where a Trident Sun Jet still sits, riddled with bullets, on the runway. If anyone can cut the Gordian knot it is these two old warhorses, sparring partners for half a century.

The meticulous Mr Clerides, 82, made his name defending the

Greek-speaking Eoka guerrillas fighting British rule in the 1950s. The roguishly charming Mr Denktash, 78, was the anti-terrorism prosecutor in the colonial courts.

Mr Clerides alone seems to be rising to the occasion. A former RAF bomber pilot shot down and held in chains by the Nazis, he is forever haunted by his role in the firebombing of Hamburg, an inferno that killed an estimated 50,000 civilians.

"When you have witnessed that, you begin to have a belief that problems should be solved by means other than war," he said.

He is offering the Turkish minority veto power in a federal state, half the judiciary, half the upper house of parliament, separate police, and demilitarisation.

"Clerides has his eyes on history. He wants to seize it and write it; he has made a real effort to identify the core concerns and address them systematically. But Denktash is not reciprocating," said a senior diplomat.

As Mr Denktash clings to the illegal state he has governed for 28 years, railing about the dangers of another war, the world is changing around him.

The Turkish Cypriots themselves, a political football for mainland Turkish nationalists, are weary of pariah status when the EU beckons with its chests of treasure (£132 million a year) and the promise of Pax Europa. Last year, 7,000 of them defied criminal sanctions at home to apply for Cypriot passports, calculating that the document would soon turn them into EU citizens.

Gungor Gunkan, leader of the social democrats in the North, warned Ankara not to overplay its hand. "We've got an economic crisis. The banks have collapsed. Most Turkish Cypriots want to join the EU, so long as we can get a reasonable settlement, because we know that our life will be much better than it is today," he said. "We're an island people with our own identity, and we shouldn't have to wait for Turkey."

Europe's leaders had always assumed that Turkey would push for a settlement in the end, knowing that its hopes of joining the EU one day would depend on good behaviour.

But the one trump card is not looking like such a certain trump any more. Turkey's own strategic future is on a knife-edge as Muslim nationalists, angered by EU-sponsored reforms, fight pro-secular forces for control of the political system.

The EU is now learning what it is like to be an imperial power with far-flung responsibilities in hazardous parts of the world where the rules are different.

Within a few months it will become clear whether Brussels is a force for progress, helping to pull the eastern Mediterranean into the 21st century, or a bull in a china shop.