Cyprus Membership in the EU and its impact on international politics

The aim of this paper is to point out the theoretical challenges that the political and institutional development of the European Union poses to the neo-realist paradigm. The structural realists assumptions that: a) small and militarily weak states are not able to exercise any significant influence on international politics, b) that stable and durable international co-operation is not possible due to the fear of relevant gains and c) that international institutions serve the interests of the most powerful states, do not seem to stand within the context of European integration. By using the example of a small and militarily weak state like the Republic of Cyprus, this paper argues that a small state due to its membership in the complex transnational political system of the EU, can exercise significant influence on international politics. Furthermore, this paper claims that thanks to Cyprus membership in the EU, there is still prospect for a fair and viable resolution of the political problem of the island. In order to support these argument this paper will first present the basic points of the neo-realist theory and its explanation of European integration before moving on to present a short history of the Cyprus issue and an account of Euro-Cypriot relations. Then this paper will outline the most recent developments on the island, as far as the resolution of its problem is concerned, and any prospects for resolution that those developments entail. In the last part, the conclusions of this study will be presented focusing mainly on their theoretical and policy implications.

Neorealism and European Integration

Neorealism assumes that states are sovereign unitary rational actors that interact in an anarchic international system characterised by zero-
sum self-help competition. As a result, they draw a strict division between domestic and international politics and they do not attach any significance to international institutions. International institutions are viewed by neo-realists as mirrors of states’ interests. As a consequence, according to neo-realism a powerful state, not to mention a unipolar one, thanks to its position in the structure of the international system, allocated to her by its power accumulation in its effort to achieve security, can interpret international law as it suits itself. This state behavior is due to the anarchical nature of the international system. Within this context, ‘..realists have noticed that whether institutions have strong or weak effects depends on what states intend. Strong states use institutions, as they interpret laws, in ways that suit them’ (Waltz, 2000: 24). In other words, in neo-realist international politics there is no a “theory of justice” to be followed. Close interstate cooperation is unlikely in the fear of unequal gains and autarky is the recipe for survival (Waltz, 1979:106). ‘What is crucial for the Realist is that the imperatives of power are in some sense objectively given in a way that is not dependent on people’s theories about right and wrong’ (Frost: 93: 62). As a consequence, states will not voluntary resort to close co-operation with each other and even more, will never willingly surrender sovereignty to international institutions. Stone notes that: ‘neorealism is a theory of why, in international political society, the establishment of stable norms is either unlikely or impossible, why formal institutions do not develop meaningful autonomy, and therefore why a constitutional international regime is unimaginable’ (1994:449).

Small states on the other hand, despite their willingness to safeguard their independence they consider wise to transfer aspects of it to international institutions following a cost-benefit analysis (Waltz, 1979:106). They do so in their effort to survive or in order to feel secure. Due to their weakness, small states cannot exert any significant influence on the international political system. Robert Keohane, a liberal who in his later work within the framework of neo-liberalism, accepted many theoretical assumptions of neo-realism, defines a small state as “a state whose leaders consider that it can never acting alone or in a small group, make a significant impact on the system” (1969:296). As a result,
small states, despite the fact that they are aware that international institutions serve the interests of the most powerful states, are becoming members of them in order to feel secure or in order to avoid direct attack from bigger states. This bandwagoning policy by small states is the most reasonable route they can take in the anarchical and thus uncertain international system (Walt:2002). As a result, neo-realism would not expect from small EU member states to exercise any influence not only in the EU policy making but also in its external relations. For neo-realism power capabilities determine outcomes.

**Neo-Realism and European Integration**

For neo-realists, European integration during the Cold War was viewed ‘as a mechanism for interstate co-operation that fulfilled the survival imperatives of a group of western European states in the context of an emerging bipolar order’ (Rosamond: 2000:133). Waltz alleges that the European great powers refrained from co-operating with each other in the interwar period (1919-1939) because they were afraid of asymmetrical gains. Bipolarity, Waltz argues, ended this problem of mistrust between the western European states. This is not to say that all impediments to co-operation were removed but that an important one was. The fear was that greater advantages for one would be translated into military force to be used against the others. This can be attributed to the fact that ‘living in a superpowers shadow’, Britain, France, Germany and Italy quickly realised that war among them would be pointless. This was justified on the grounds that the security of all of them came to depend ultimately on the policies of others rather than their own (Waltz: 1979:70-1).

For neo-realists, the disintegration of the Warsaw pact and the resulting power vacuum in Central and Eastern Europe was perceived as a preamble to conflict and instability. They expected the disappearance of the super-power rivalry from Europe would make co-operation among the European states difficult since they would begin to view each other with greater fear and suspicion and they would be worry about the imbalances in gains and the loss of autonomy resulting from integration. Consequently, European integration would not move further (Waltz:
As a result, Mearsheimer argues that with the end of the Cold War Europe would be multipolar, with four or five major European powers, France, United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Russia, and several minor defining the system. The prospects, therefore, for major crises and war in Europe would be very likely to increase significantly. Neither the EU, nor any other international institution nor the spread of democracy can avert this situation. In contrast, EU’s rapprochement with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe will be perceived by Russia as a relative gain and may foster an arms competition in the region. Neo-realists reject the argument put forward since the end of the Cold War that peace can be maintained in a multipolar Europe on the basis of a more powerful EC/EU. For them a ‘back to pre- Second World War period’ is the most likely scenario for the future of European security.

In contrast to the neorealist predictions, however, peace and stability was maintained in post-Cold War Europe, with the exception of the internal conflict in the former Yugoslavia. Co-operation between the EC/EU and the newly independent states of Central and Eastern Europe has intensified and many of them applied for EU membership and eventually joined it. Malta and the Republic of Cyprus also joined the EU. Furthermore, the unification of Germany did not have the destabilizing effects on the continent that might have been expected due to the unequal increase of German power in relation to the other European states, contrary to neorealist expectations. Instead, integration among the EC/EU members has been intensified as manifested in 1992 with the signing of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) or the Maastricht Treaty, with its subsequent amendment in 1997 the Amsterdam Treaty (AMT), in 2001 with the Nice Treaty and in 2010 with the Lisbon/Reform Treaty. The fact that post-Cold War relations amongst the European countries have remained peaceful and open, and economic integration and institutionalized co-operation have actually expanded in very important areas has encouraged many scholars to present the EU as a stabilizing force for the continent.
All these developments constitute a theoretical puzzle for neo-realism. Furthermore, this theoretical puzzle becomes more intense if someone considers Cyprus membership in the EU bearing in mind that its population size, its military power and its severe bilateral problems with a very powerful regional power like Turkey would prevent it from making any impact on European Union domestic and external policies and EU international relations in general. Despite these neo-realists expectations, however, what is observed is that Cyprus can still pursue its national interests by evoking international law, human rights and international norms.

“Small” EU Member States and Neo-Realism

These developments are not expected by neo-realists at any point. A small state like the Republic of Cyprus, 38% of the territory of which is illegally occupied by Turkish troops, by becoming a member of the EU, an institution where also neo-realist do not expect to allow the Republic of Cyprus, to exert any influence, has managed to greatly influenced the foreign policy of a major regional military, economic and diplomatic power like Turkey.

The behavior of the Republic of Cyprus over that particular issue is an indication that its foreign policy has more freedom of manoeuvre in relation to its condition before accession to the EU. This is undoubtedly due to “the regulation of interstate relations through EU rules and institutions (that) radically modifying the small states’ traditional security problems (Thorhallson and Wivel, 2008: 651).

At the same time, small states, despite the fact that they face structural disadvantages due to their limited voting and bargaining power, can exert influence in the agenda setting and policy formulating process of the EU (See, Magnet and Nicolaidis, 2005, Tilikainen, 2006). They overcome those structural disadvantages by promoting institutionalized co-ordination on a regional basis and by formulating strategic partnerships with bigger states (Panke, 2008:8).

As a result, “size” asymmetries between states members of the EU do have an impact on politics in Europe but power and size is not the only
determinant of policy outcomes as neo-realism would argue. “Whether and EU member state is “big” or “small” is not always clear – cut. It depends on whether we look at population size, potential or actual influence on the integration process and its institutions, or how the states in question view their own role and influence in the EU (Thorhallson and Wivel, 2008: 653). In other words, neo-realists determinants of state behavior like power capabilities, anarchy and mistrust do not seem to stand within the context of European integration. European integration provides a clear evidence for a diminishing explanatory power of neo-realism not to mention its claim for primacy in the study of European international relations. This fact, confirms Grieco’s claim that “the most powerful way to test a theory is to determine if the propositions derived from it hold in the circumstances in which they are unlikely to do so, and in which comparable but divergent propositions from competing theories very much ought to be validated” (Grieco: 1997)

**New Prospects for a Settlement of the Cyprus Issue**

Thus, a successful settlement of the Cyprus issue will be for the interest not only for the two communities that live on the island but for the international community as a whole. At the same time, the Republic of Cyprus, despite its size and capabilities, for the first time in its foreign policy history thanks to its participation in the EU, has acquired the ability to exert influence on the international political developments, at least as long as its problem is concerned. In other words, the Republic of Cyprus, is no longer dependent on the balance of power politics of its near abroad and is not afraid in the degree before its accession to the EU, that the invasion of 1974 will continue to the rest of the island by the military and economic giant that still occupies 38% of its territory. This feeling of security will allow her to pursue and negotiate a better solution for its problem that will enable both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots to live and prosper in a stable and democratic political environment. In that way none of the composite communities will be overwhelmed by the feeling of an imposed solution and a referendum will not take the form of a safe valve of refusal, but will be turned into
demonstration of the free will of both communities to live together far away from “guarantees” and far away from the fear of intervention from any party. The free democratic choice of both communities will provide the basis of a “social contract” in the form of mutually and voluntary accepted constitution that will ensure the basis of peaceful and constructive symbiosis between them. To this end, however, some basic prerequisites should be provided. Political determination of all parties concerned, increase of social and economic interactions between the two communities, gradual and symbolic withdrawal of Turkish occupational forces before the new referendum day and a democratic debate and presentation of the proposed constitution for a much longer period than its previous draft.