

# Belarusian Sanctions Vetoed by Cyprus Exposes Deep Divisions Between Mediterranean and Northern Europe

By [Paul Antonopoulos](#)

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Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [History](#)

*Yesterday there was a meeting between all of the EU's Foreign Ministers to pass sanctions against Belarus. It created massive controversy and revealed the significant divide between Mediterranean and Northern Europe. The EU has been completely disinterested in Turkey's blatant violations against the maritime space and continental shelf of Cyprus, one of its 27 member states, for well over a year and a half now. However, following the Belarusian elections on August 9, the EU rapidly mobilized to sanction President Alexander Lukashenko and another 40 individuals associated with him. This was on the allegations of electoral fraud and state-perpetrated violence and repression against opposition supporters. To the great frustration of the EU, Cyprus was the only country to veto sanctions against Belarus.*

Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkēvičs [went on Twitter](#) and said that Cyprus is “hostage taking” the EU on sanctions against Belarus, which “sends a wrong signal to Belarusians, our societies and the whole world.” Lithuanian Foreign Minister Linas Linkevičius [said on Twitter](#) that “some colleagues should not link things that must not be linked,” referring to Cyprus vetoing Belarusian sanctions so long as Turkey is not sanctioned. Former Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt, now the Co-Chair of the European Council on Foreign Relations, was especially angered and in a series of Tweets complained that

“Cyprus is profoundly embarrassing the EU with its linking of Belarus sanctions to unrelated issues,” that Cyprus is “misusing” its veto rights, and that “the meeting of EU foreign ministers [...] will unfortunately be remembered for Cyprus again blocking any sanctions on Belarus.”

To be clear, Cyprus, one of the smallest countries in the EU with only 1.2 million inhabitants, is not taking a great moral stand to oppose sanctions against Belarus, which is neither an EU member, an EU member candidate, or a direct threat to any EU members. Rather, Cyprus is making a stand as the EU is prioritizing sanctions against Belarus as they believe it will weaken Russian influence in the Baltics and Eastern Europe. The EU has been very slow in their response to Turkish threats against Greece and Cyprus, with many member states not wanting to sanction Turkey, yet wanting fast tracked sanctions against Belarus. Cyprus will approve sanctions against Belarus as soon as sanctions against Turkey are approved by the other EU member states.

The EU's reluctance to sanction Turkey is curious considering it is militarily threatening two EU member states, Greece and Cyprus, yet wants to prioritise sanctions on Belarus, which as previously stated, is neither an EU member, an EU member candidate, or threatening EU

members. Brussels continues the line of an imagined Russian threat via Belarus against the Baltic countries and Poland, while ignoring the openly and direct threats of Turkey against Greece and Cyprus.

Unsurprisingly, Bildt was exposed in a report by the [Stockholm Center for Freedom](#) in having very intimate and close relations with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, perhaps including indirect funding. Bildt, as a northern European Swede, is not threatened by Turkish aggression due to the obvious restrictions in geography. This is the same reason for the indifferent attitudes of the Baltic countries, Sweden, Germany and other northern European countries for their disinterest in Turkish aggression against Cyprus and Greece. And herein lays the polar differences between Mediterranean and Northern Europe, which is beginning to split the EU apart.

Although Moscow continually announces its desire for cooperation with the EU, Northern Europe, led by the Baltic states and Poland, continue to pressurize Russia because of a perceived threat against these states. Russia, unlike Turkey, does not violate the sovereignty of any EU member state, nor does it make near daily military threats.

Turning Cyprus from a victim of Turkish aggression, especially considering that the latter invaded the northern portion of the island in 1974, to perpetrator, is not only an egregiously injustice to Turkey's history of violations, it also plays right into Erdoğan's endeavour to once again avoid sanctions. This year the Dutch vetoed an EU stimulus package to help European economies struggling with COVID-19 restrictions and the Austrians vetoed Operation Irini to prevent Turkish arms from reaching Libya. Yet, only the Cypriots are being harshly criticized for their veto on Belarus sanctions. The double-standards that characterize the Berlin-led EU foreign policy strategy in dealing with the Eastern Mediterranean crisis exposes [internal inconsistencies](#) within the Union.

What many Northern Europeans refuse to acknowledge is that Cyprus, Greece and the wider European Mediterranean region, do not have the luxury of friendly neighbors like Sweden and Germany do, and rather have to contend with an aggressor state like Turkey that openly announces its intentions to invade Greek islands and the rest of Cyprus, whilst simultaneously being militarily involved in fellow Mediterranean countries like Libya and Syria.

A small state like Cyprus, that does not have a professional military, has very limited options in dealing with such aggression, especially when its EU colleagues rush to shield Ankara from sanctions rather than defend Cyprus from an external threat. This comes to the crux of the so-called *raison d'être* of the EU – a supposed unity between Europe. However, Northern Europe has only demonstrated to Mediterranean Europe that there is certainly no unity, especially when two of its 27 member states are being directly threatened and violated by an external state.

On August 29, French President Emmanuel Macron [announced a](#) “Pax Mediterranea” which can be interpreted as a new Mediterranean order, one becoming increasingly independent of the EU and involves the close cooperation of Mediterranean states. With Northern Europe disinterested with security issues in the Mediterranean as they prioritize their economic relations with Turkey, there is every chance we will see a significant bloc emerge in the Mediterranean that better serves its own interests rather than those of Northern Europe.

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*Paul Antonopoulos is an independent geopolitical analyst.*

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