

Cyprus and the Never-Ending Search for a Solution

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New peace talks on reunifying Cyprus are due to be launched in early 2014. However, the failure by the two sides to agree on the wording of a joint Declaration outlining the basic principles for negotiations does not bode well. Cyprus has been divided for almost four decades, following the military intervention by the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) in response to a short-lived Greek-backed military coup on July 15, 1974. The conflict resulted in thousands of deaths and a mass population shift. The division of the island has cost Cyprus both economically and politically. It continues to bring instability to the east Mediterranean and to create problems in NATO-EU relations, and has hobbled Turkey's EU membership aspirations. Under the auspices of the United Nations there have been numerous efforts to reunite the island. Unfortunately, there has never been sufficient political will to change the status quo. After 40 years, all the issues have been discussed a thousand times over. Unfortunately, the high price for peace - namely the relinquishment of maximum goals - has proven impossible to obtain. If Cyprus is ever going to be reunited, the process needs to change. There needs to be a genuine commitment to reaching a compromise settlement, which has so far not been the case.



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A new round of talks aimed at reunifying the divided island of Cyprus is due in early 2014. At the time of writing this article, the two sides have not been able, after more than three months of discussion, to agree on the wording of a joint Declaration outlining the basic principles for negotiations. This does not bode well for the future, demonstrating once again what a tough nut to crack the Cyprus problem remains.

Cyprus has been divided for almost four decades, although some people would argue the division dates back further: during the years of British colonial rule, a barbed-wire fence known as the Mason-Dixon Line was erected between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities in Nicosia after bloody inter-ethnic clashes in 1956. The island was “officially” partitioned in 1974 following the military intervention by Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) in response to a short-lived Greece-backed military coup on 15 July 1974 which removed the then President, Archbishop Makarios III from power. Greek Cypriots refer to this as an invasion, while the Turks call it a peace-operation.

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The roots of the Cyprus problem are deeply embedded in the bi-communal structure of the island. The fact that the two communities coexisted side by side for almost four centuries did not change the fact of the division of society into two separate ethnicities. With the outbreak of inter-communal violence in 1963, the problems between the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots were exacerbated. In 1968, the two communities agreed to reach a solution. But the inter-communal talks, within a framework of differing approaches and a general lack of willingness to cooperate, continued without a final result until the Greek coup and the Turkish military intervention of July 20th five days later.

Turkey, along with Greece and Britain, is a guarantor power of the Republic of Cyprus (RoC). This was one of the preconditions to Cyprus’ independence from Britain in 1960. While Turkish and Greek Cypriots previously lived in mixed villages, the result of the military intervention was a Greek Cypriot south and Turkish Cypriot north. In 1974, the island’s population was made up of almost 500 000 Greek Cypriots and 117 000 Turkish Cypriots. Prior to the division most Greek Cypriots (some 80-85 percent) lived in the north, with the majority of Turkish Cypriots living in the South. Almost overnight Cypriots lost everything: homes, businesses, personal possessions. Friendships and communities

were ripped apart at the seams as people were forced to start their lives again from scratch, with many even choosing to leave the island.

The military intervention took place over a period of three weeks in two waves, although many experts believe the second wave was unnecessary and primarily aimed at gaining more territory. By the end, the Turkish military had taken control of 37 percent of the island. Some 40 000 Turkish troops are still stationed on the island today, despite several UN Resolutions demanding their withdrawal. The conflict resulted in thousands of deaths while the mass population shift made Cyprus the nation with the highest number of internationally displaced persons (IDPs) per capita in the world. Sadly, hundreds of people remain unaccounted for, and the search for graves is ongoing.

On 15 November 1983, the then leader of the Turkish Cypriot Community, Rauf Denktas, issued a unilateral declaration of independence, creating the “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC)”, which is recognized by no country but Turkey.

The division of the island has cost Cyprus dearly, in both economic and political terms. It continues to bring instability to the Eastern Mediterranean and to create problems in NATO-EU relations, and has also hobbled Turkey’s EU membership aspirations. Those opposed to Turkey’s accession have used the Cyprus issue as a skirt to hide behind.

Forty Years of Failure

In 1977, the leaders of the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities signed the Four Guidelines, which were based on the notion of a bi-communal Federal Republic and introduced as grounds for negotiations. The two sides committed to a bizonal, bi-communal federation with political equality, as defined by relevant UN Security Council resolutions. The partnership will have a Federal Government with a single international personality, as well as a Turkish Cypriot Constituent State and a Greek Cypriot Constituent State, which will be of equal status. This type of solution was not the first choice for either community: the Greek Cypriots have always sought a unitary state while the Turkish Cypriots and Turkey have been more interested in independence or a confederation.

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since 1964; its Peacekeeping Force there (UNFICYP) is one of the longest-running UN Peacekeeping missions. It was set up to prevent further fighting between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities and to bring about a return to normal conditions. Since a de facto ceasefire in August 1974, UNFICYP has supervised the ceasefire lines (which extend over 180 kilometers across the island), provided humanitarian assistance, and maintained a buffer zone between the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot forces in the north and the Greek Cypriot forces in the south. UNFICYP has 850-plus troops and 60-plus police officers on the ground, based at Ledra Palace.

UNFICYP's Chief of Mission also serves as the Secretary-General's Special Representative in Cyprus, and in that capacity leads efforts to assist the parties in reaching a solution. Over the years numerous Secretary Generals and Special Representatives have worked on the dossier. While some people have labeled the Cyprus problem a "graveyard for diplomats", it still manages to attract heavyweight figures, such as the current Special Representative, former Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer. However, despite the warm Cypriot hospitality and beautiful surroundings, the job of SR is frequently thankless and arduous, with one or other of the two leaders regularly accusing the SR of being biased or over-stepping his mandate. Cypriots, whether Greek or Turkish, are, like Cyprus' donkeys, often very stubborn.

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The key to a solution is easy: political will from both communities and Turkey. However, no such political will has been forthcoming. Rather, after forty years, the Cyprus problem is so intractable that it has become a kind of industry and it often seems as if even the most powerful pneumatic drill would fail to crack it.

Over the years, the issues have been discussed a thousand times over, with hundreds of rounds of talks, technical committees and working groups working to find a solution. Unfortunately, the high price for peace – namely the relinquishment of maximum goals – has proved impossible to obtain. The process has been plagued by the "blame game" and the "zero-sum mentality" and, with a few exceptions, most Cypriot politicians cannot see or do not want a common vision for the future.

There have been many lost opportunities. In 1979, then UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim proposed a Ten-Point Agreement. In 1980, a strong proposal was put forward in the form of the so-

called Interim Agreement. However, then Greek Cypriot leader Spyros Kyprianou refused to recognize Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktas as his counterpart, so nothing happened. Then came Secretary General Perez de Cuellar and his Draft Framework Agreement, which centered on the creation of a federal republic, with bi-zonality and bi-communality. The draft agreement was accepted by Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot community but the Greek Cypriots considered it unacceptable. A further lost opportunity was Boutros Boutros-Ghali's Set of Ideas, which faced the same fate as its predecessors. While both leaders showed an initial willingness to endorse the plan it eventually came to nothing, thanks to the then Turkish Cypriot leader, Rauf Denktas and a hard-liner government in Ankara.

The Annan Plan – Failure from the jaws of Victory

The best and probably most well-known opportunity to end the decades old division was the 2004 Annan Plan. Ankara, along with Greece and the international community, strongly supported the 2004 Plan, named after the UN Secretary General at the time, Kofi Annan. The Annan Plan, which was negotiated over a period of almost three years, was a complex and lengthy document which drew upon all the previous efforts. The final document included the transfer of some territory currently under Turkish Cypriot administration back to the Greek Cypriots, reinstatement of property lost as a result of the conflict after 1963 (and/or financial compensation), a rather complicated governance structure, a new flag and national anthem, a reduction in Turkish settlers, and a phased reduction of military presence on the island with the aim of almost total demilitarization. The two leaders agreed to make Annan the final arbiter, with a mandate to use his discretion to fill any remaining gaps if the parties themselves failed to complete the draft proposal. Unfortunately, this turned out to be a serious mistake, and contributed to Annan Plan's ultimate collapse.

The international community, which had unanimously endorsed the Annan Plan, was particularly disappointed with the then leader of the Greek Cypriot Community, Tassos Papadopoulos, even going as far as to say that he had deceived them. Not only did Papadopoulos accuse the UN of negotiating a Turkey-friendly settlement, despite the fact that he himself had negotiated for the Greek

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Cypriots, he also made an impassioned plea to his compatriots to vote against it. This along with a long-standing distrust of Turkey, pressure from the powerful Greek Orthodox Church in Cyprus and a media dominated by anti-solution propaganda contributed to the “no” vote. Probably the final nail in the coffin was the last minute decision by the Communist Progressive Party for the Working People Party (AKEL) to make a U-turn on its decision to support the Plan because of the refusal by Russia (as a UN Security Council member) to support a UN agreement guaranteeing its implementation. There was virtually no “yes campaign”, with many people believing that once again foreigners were deciding their destiny and that the Annan Plan was unfair, rewarding Turkey for its occupation of their lands.

At a referendum on 24 April 2004, while some 65 percent of Turkish Cypriots voted yes, 76 percent of Greek Cypriots voted no. A few days later, Cyprus became a member of the EU, yet the Turkish Cypriots were left out. The EU never made the resolution of the conflict a pre-condition of membership. Moreover, it had broken one of its cardinal rules: to import the instability of the Cyprus problem rather than export the stability of a security community to Cyprus. In fact, Cyprus’ EU membership made solving the conflict even more difficult. Not only has it prevented the EU from being a neutral player, the Greek Cypriots have been able to use their seat at the EU table to hamper EU efforts to lift the isolation of the Turkish Cypriots. This is something the EU pledged to do following the referendum with the European Commission, drawing up three Regulations: financial aid, direct trade and intra-island trade across the Green Line. After two and a half years of wrangling, the Direct Aid Regulation, worth some 259 million Euros, moved ahead. While the Green Line Regulation

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has produced rather meager results, the Direct Trade Regulation remains blocked by the Greek Cypriots and will probably stay that way. The Cyprus problem has also had a negative impact on Turkey’s EU accession negotiations. The Greek Cypriots are blocking a number of chapters, due to Turkey’s failure to extend its EU-Customs Union to Cyprus (something it is legally bound to do). Turkey has continually refused to do this until the EU delivers on its promise of direct trade to the Turkish Cypriots.

However, one side effect was that Northern Cyprus was “discovered” by the world, which led to a big boost in tourism and construction, principally holiday villas and hotels – although this

was largely on Greek Cypriot-owned land, unfortunately. The Turkish Cypriot authorities continue to justify this process by citing its crucial importance to the Turkish Cypriot economy.

Failure Strikes Again

It took another four years before a fresh round of negotiations was launched. During this time, the argument that if the two communities were left to their own devices they could resolve their differences proved futile. The leadership of both communities resorted to increasingly hostile language, while bi-communal contacts aimed at fostering greater communal understanding tailed off, with distrust increasing.

In 2008 Mehmet Ali Talat and Dimitris Christofias were the next pair to step into the ring. Expectations were high because the two were old friends, with similar views and both their political parties, the Republican Turkish Party (CTP) and AKEL, historically favoring a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation, despite AKEL's 2004 decision to withdraw its support for the Annan Plan.

Unfortunately, once again it was not to be. While talks went on, concessions on difficult issues were not forthcoming, and talk of compromise lost traction. Unfortunately Talat lost the 2010 "Presidential" election in the North, not least because he had failed to deliver a success story. One of the reasons for this failure was that Christofis refused to sign off on a number of issues that he and Talat had agreed on verbally, and which could have helped Talat in his election campaign. Unfortunately, under increasing domestic pressure and his credibility in tailspin, Christofias proved to be too weak to fight for a solution.

Talat's successor was Dervis Eroglu, who has a reputation as a hardliner. The rise of Eroglu, who has always favoured a two-state solution, combined with a weak Christofias refusing to accept any sort of timeframe, pretty much marked the beginning of the end. For the next two years the two embarked on game of political chess, each one trying to checkmate the other.

The Greek Cypriots continued to blame Turkey, insisting Ankara was controlling every move by the Turkish Cypriot leadership, while the Turkish Cypriots and Turkey continued to state that the Greek Cypriots wanted the talks to go on forever, because they did not want to share power with the Turkish Cypriots. The situation was further exacerbated in 2011 with the start of Greek Cypriot oil and gas exploration, which was viewed as uncondusive

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to the talks and resulted in increased tensions in the region, including Ankara sending its navy near to the areas of exploration, which was labeled as gunboat diplomacy.

With Cyprus taking up the EU's rotating presidency on 1 July 2012, in February 2012 in Greentree in the U.S., UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon gave the leaders two months to make serious progress. The optimal outcome was an international conference to discuss external issues related to security and guarantorship which would include the participation of guarantor states, Turkey, Greece and the UK, and pave the way for a referendum in 2013. Not surprising, this proved to be unachievable and the talks were frozen.

Life Goes On

Today, to all intents and purposes, there are two functioning states on Cyprus. Although only one is internationally recognized, Northern Cyprus has established functioning democratic institutions and governance structures.

Nowadays Cypriots mingle on a daily basis, sitting side-by-side in cafés on Ledra Street with many budding friendships between the two communities. This was not the case prior to 2003, when for the first time in three decades the "Green Line" was opened at Ledra Palace, with thousands of Cypriots flocking to both sides of the island. While there was much excitement and emotion, there was not a single aggressive or violent act, generating considerable hope for a future together.

Since that day contacts between the two sides have increased. Thousands of Turkish Cypriots travel to the south every day for work, and have also extensively made use of their rights as citizens of the Republic of Cyprus (RoC), in terms of social services (child allowances, pensions, free health care, etc.). Since 2004, the RoC authorities have spent more than 500 million Euros on the Turkish Cypriot Community. As of April 2013, RoC documents issued to Turkish Cypriot citizens of the Republic include almost 100 000 ID cards as well as almost 70.000 passports. For years the Greek Cypriots provided the Turkish Cypriots with free electricity, and when the South had an electricity shortage a couple of years ago, the North helped them out.

Yet at there is still a high degree of distrust, paranoia and often prejudice. Greek Cypriot newspapers do not carry advertise-

ments for Turkish Cypriot enterprises or products for fear of reprisals and there is little in the way of economic cooperation, even in areas where both parties could gain – most notably in the tourism sector.

Over the years many confidence building measures, as well as bi-communal activities have taken place, although these activities generally tend to involve the same limited number of people rather than society as a whole. Numerous crossing points are now open, for both pedestrians and cars, up and down the Green Line; de-mining has continued in many areas; and there has been excellent cooperation in a number of areas including on missing persons and environmental issues.

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However there is still more that could be done. For example, the withdrawal of military forces from sensitive areas; eliminating the requirement for Greek Cypriots to fill in a “visa” paper to travel to the north; developing police cooperation which is presently virtually non-existent; withdrawal of some Turkish troops (something the international community continues to ask of Turkey).

Earlier this year, the Greek Cypriots once again raised the idea of opening up the ghost town of Varosha, a neighborhood of the Cypriot walled city of Famagusta. In the 1960’s Varosha was the island’s most glamorous holiday spot, a magnet for the rich and famous. The Turkish military “took” Varosha during their intervention, yet chose to leave it uninhabited, and these days Varosha is more famous for being Europe’s last ghost town. A military fence cuts across the beach while hotels line up into the distance, their windows shattered. Villas, churches and cafes also stand empty. The only life to be seen is the Turkish military that patrols the town ensuring nobody sneaks in over the barbed wire fence. Almost 100 percent of Varosha’s population was Greek Cypriot. Thankfully Varosha is protected by a 1984 UN Security Council resolution, which says the empty town can only be resettled by its original inhabitants. This resolution has prevented the Turkish Cypriot authorities from reopening Varosha and developing it for tourism.

The Greek Cypriots have proposed that Varosha be opened – under an international umbrella – to its lawful occupants in exchange for allowing EU trade at Famagusta port and unfreezing certain chapters in Turkey’s accession process. While many Greek and Turkish Cypriots, along with the international com-

munity, support this idea, it continues to be rejected by Turkey, which insists Varosha may only be returned as part of a comprehensive settlement. Yet clearly Turkish and Greek Cypriots working together to rebuild Varosha could be an important confidence building measure.

There can be no doubt that Turkey is key to a solution. | *The Role of Turkey*

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There can be no doubt that Turkey is key to a solution. Until the arrival in 2002 of the current ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), which revolutionized its Cyprus policy as part of Turkey's bid to join the EU, Ankara showed little interest in a solution. Rather, Cyprus was essentially left to the Turkish Armed Forces, which viewed it as "the jewel in its crown". Yet as Turkey's EU bid has slowly been derailed, the resolution of the Cyprus problem has become less important. Turkey continues to state that it did everything it could by backing the Annan Plan, and that there are no further steps or concessions to be made by Ankara; that the ball is principally in the court of the Greek Cypriots.

Furthermore, the growing influence of Turkey both economically and politically in Northern Cyprus is of increasing concern. While Northern Cyprus is not (yet) a province of Turkey, Ankara nevertheless seems to be trying to transform the Turkish Cypriot culture by changing the demographic balance in the North, by settling tens of thousands of people from Anatolia. The Turkish Cypriot identity is being watered down; Turks from Anatolia now outnumber the Turkish Cypriots, although the precise number has never been revealed.

While many Turkish Cypriots are far from happy with the role Turkey plays, there is nothing they can do about it given their financial dependence on Ankara. This was made very apparent in January 2011 during street protests against Turkey's interference in their affairs. Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, reacted very angrily, threatening to track down and punish those that he considered had insulted Turkey, stating that the Turkish Cypriots should be grateful to Ankara. Unfortunately, unless a solution is found soon, it is increasingly likely that one day in the not too distant future they may find themselves with a leader of Turkish origin

Chances of Success?

While most ordinary Cypriots have almost given up hope, the international community continues to insist Cyprus can somehow be glued back together, not least because an internationally recognized independent “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” is not palatable. Hence we are the eve of a new round of talks which will be the tenth in four decades. Yet for the talks to succeed, a spirit of compromise is required. However, as history has shown, this is very difficult to come by in Cyprus.

The new talks started later than expected because the new leader of the Greek Cypriot Community, Nicos Anastasiades (elected in February 2013) had to give priority to the economic crisis which has engulfed Cyprus. The election of Anastasiades gave rise to cautious optimism among the international community. Anastasiades supported and voted for the Annan Plan, and his key negotiating team is composed of men who have supported a bi-zonal, bi-federal solution, including Foreign Minister Ionannis Kasoulides and Chief Negotiator, Andreas Mavroyiannis. However, they still face considerable challenges from the usual quarters, including their coalition partner, the hardline Democratic Party –DIKO – and the church.

While Anastasiades’ counterpart in the North remains Eroglu, a new “coalition-government” came into power in 2013, which includes many pro-settlement personalities, including “Foreign Minister” Ozdil Nami, who has a solid track record, having been Chief Negotiator under Talat.

Anastasiades has also signaled that he is keen for greater dialogue and interaction with Ankara. Consequently Ankara agreed to talk with the Greek Cypriot Chief Negotiator, with Athens agreeing to talk to the Turkish Cypriot negotiator. However, these meetings have yet to take place. The Greek Presidency of the EU is also expected to push the process forward. While historically Greece has preferred to take a backseat in the peace-talks, a stronger role from Athens should be welcomed. Any measures aimed at building confidence between all the different players should be welcomed.

This round would not mean starting from scratch, as many of the agreements reached prior to June 2012 will be preserved, although Anastasiades has indicated he is planning to renegotiate some issues, including weighted and cross-voting in a federal government. Yet if there is to be a success story, the recipe will

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have to change. Giving the two constituent states greater power would probably be the right road to go down, as it would give the two communities more control and fewer issues to disagree upon and bicker over.

Many experts also believe the newly discovered gas reserves in Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone, which as well as being a life-saver for the Greek Cypriots in terms of getting their economy back on track, could be used to promote a solution. It could work to promote regional cooperation, including in terms of transporting the gas reserves in the future, allowing all three states to gain financially and helping to increase regional stability and security.

Further symbolic gestures towards the Turkish Cypriots from the Greek Cypriots that demonstrate they are ready to share the island with them would also be helpful. A major milestone in the history of Cypriot football was reached in November when Greek and Turkish Cypriot officials signed a provisional agreement with FIFA aimed at ending decades of mistrust and disunity between the respective footballing communities. More steps like this, for example allowing them to have observer status in the European Parliament, would be positive.

Furthermore, in order to reach an eventual deal, society needs to feel it is part of the process, to understand what is going to be gained - rather than lost. This will take a huge effort from both communities, but it is absolutely vital.

Unfortunately, despite the initial optimism, the fact that the two sides have been unable to agree the wording of a joint declaration in order to start the talks is a negative development. The Greek Cypriots made this Declaration a pre-condition to starting talks, stating that having a clear framework for the shape of an eventual solution would make the negotiations simpler. Unfortunately, it has so far led to deadlock.

Cyprus may be small, but it does matter. Stability in the eastern Mediterranean will only be guaranteed by a resolution; all those involved would gain economically, Turkey's EU membership bid would receive a huge boost and Cypriots would no longer be hostage to history. Yet time is not on Cyprus' side. Cypriots have been living apart for such a long time that the two communities, for the most part, no longer have any feeling of belonging to a single Cypriot nation. As the older generation dies out, happy

memories of living together will disappear. Therefore, unsurprisingly, more and more people are beginning to question whether the only realistic way forward is an official, permanent separation. It seems more likely than before that if this round fails, a negotiated partition may be the outcome.