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THE CYPRUS PROBLEM AND THE ASPIRATIONS OF THE GREEK CYPRIOTS
Ideology and Pragmatism

Andreas Theophanous

Admittedly, the Cyprus problem is currently at a critical juncture. Even if the resumption of intercommunal talks becomes feasible, the prospects will not be promising. I note, in this regard, that there are different narratives, perspectives and goals between the two sides. If an agreement is reached, it will be based on a loose federation – perhaps even a confederation. If the outcome is another deadlock, the situation will once again be difficult for the Greek Cypriot side.

It is for these reasons that I have proposed a different approach based on an evolutionary process – setting out guidelines for a normal federal state, along with specific suggestions for cooperation within the framework of a step-by-step approach. Beyond that, I have suggested the continuous enhancement of all dimensions of state power in the Republic of Cyprus. I consider this comprehensive policy to be of strategic importance for the country.

President Christodoulides and a large part of the political system remain attached to a policy and a methodology that have failed. It is important to take into account all relevant information, considering that by definition no society is monolithic. And while this is a given, one of the existing problems is the lack of sufficient rational and fruitful discussion among Greek Cypriots.

This text examines the major pillars of the Cyprus problem from the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus to the present, and evaluates, among other things, whether specialized expertise has been utilized in the decision-making process. It also assesses whether there has been pragmatism in the policy on the Cyprus problem or whether Greek Cypriot political leaders have largely been driven by ideology and/or wishful thinking.

Professor Andreas Theophanous is the President of the Cyprus Center for European and International Affairs and Head of the Department of Politics and Governance of the University of Nicosia.

I. The Early Difficult Years of the Newly Established State (1960-1974)

When the Republic of Cyprus was created, there were no great celebrations – as Stephen Xydis (1973) later wrote, it was a “Reluctant Republic”. Moreover, despite the Zurich–London Agreements, the Cyprus problem took on a different form. Additionally, both sides viewed these agreements as an intermediate step toward other objectives.

The Greek Cypriot side found itself in a highly advantageous position after the legitimization of the Doctrine of Necessity and the failure of the Turkish Cypriot insurrection during the 1963-64 period. The 1965 Report by the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative, Galo Plaza, emphasized that the conditions for establishing a federal system of government, as the Turkish Cypriot side had demanded, did not exist in Cyprus. Instead, Galo Plaza focused on the prospect of a unitary state. The Greek Cypriot side did not take full advantage of this Report, as it should have. This was because the priority was *enosis* (union with Greece), a goal that the Report had also ruled out. This stance was neither rational nor pragmatic.

Over time, when Makarios became convinced that Greece did not want to confront Turkey over *enosis*, he proclaimed the policy of “the feasible”, in other words, working toward an independent unitary state. The Greek-Cypriot far-right accused Makarios of betraying the cause of *enosis* and saw him as an obstacle to achieving this goal. This stance lacked both logic and pragmatism. What happened in the summer of 1974 is well known. However, we do not yet know the final chapter of the Cypriot tragedy.

II. The Acceptance of Federation by the Greek Cypriot Leadership

After the end of the Attila II operation, the Greek Cypriots found themselves in a state of shock. Thousands were dead, wounded, missing and displaced. The social and economic devastation was immense. The occupation of 36,8% of the territory and 58% of the coastline of the island by Turkey was a severe blow. Considering the scale of the destruction – described as biblical by several foreign politicians and observers – and Turkey's continued aggression, the survival of the Republic of Cyprus was a remarkable achievement.

The Cypriot political leadership, with some exceptions, overestimated the significance of international law and the role of the UN. After all, the UN Security Council referred the issue to intercommunal talks for its resolution. Over time, this process created the perception that Turkey was/is a third party to the conflict.

Acting President Glafcos Clerides, encouraged by the US, the UK, Germany and Greece, stated in a speech in early November 1974 in Nicosia that “under the circumstances, the only realistic solution is a biregional, bicomunal federation”. Even if this assessment was correct, it should not have been made publicly without securing any concrete concessions from the Turkish side.

At the meeting between the leaderships of Greece and Cyprus in Athens on November 30–December 1, 1974, federation was accepted in principle. This happened despite the fact that the implications of such an arrangement were not fully understood. There is no excuse for the fact that even today, in various decision-making centres in Athens and Nicosia, there is insufficient understanding and systematic study of the different forms of federation.

Gradually, Makarios was persuaded to reach a high-level agreement with the Turkish Cypriot leader Denktash on February 12, 1977, based on a bicomunal federation and geographical separation. In fact, the Greek Cypriot side submitted specific proposals and a map a few weeks later. However, there was no reciprocity from the Turkish side. Makarios was deeply disappointed. He suffered a heart attack but continued to carry out his duties. On August 3, 1977, he suffered another heart attack and passed away.

Makarios' final political act was the declaration of the “long-term struggle” in a speech on the anniversary of the Turkish invasion on July 20, 1977. As he proclaimed, this was not a choice but a result of Turkish intransigence. Even though none of his successors followed this policy for various reasons, many believe that “the long-term struggle is to blame for the lack of a solution”. This is a major mistake. “The long-term struggle” was never actually carried out. Makarios can be criticized for accepting the federation and the high-level agreements with Denktash without securing any concessions in advance, such as the return of Varosha. It should also be clarified that what Makarios, and later Kyprianou, were discussing differs greatly from the negotiating framework that was established after 1988.

III. The Stance of the Greek Cypriot Community on the Cyprus Issue Today

By definition no society is monolithic. In this context, the following approaches to the Cyprus problem can be noted:

a. Any solution is better than the *status quo*

The proponents and supporters of this approach believe that there were opportunities for a settlement after 1974 that were not taken advantage of. It is also important to note that both the proponents and supporters of this view mostly

see their fellow citizens, who hold different opinions, as the obstacle to a settlement rather than the Turkish side.

The proponents of this philosophy overlook the implications of various issues – such as “virgin birth” (i.e. the creation of a new state and the dissolution of the Republic of Cyprus), political equality, guarantees and troops, settlers, etc. – which could, in the future, trigger the collapse of the new state with very serious consequences. They also seem to take for granted the functionality and economic viability of a bizonal, bicomunal federal state. Additionally, the role and plans of Turkey are underestimated.

Although this trend does not represent a majority view, it is much more organized than the others. From time to time, it has been stated that there was and continues to be multidimensional support from abroad. It is also noted that the proponents of this approach have more access to certain diplomatic missions in Cyprus than others, who constitute the majority.

b. A Bizonal, Bicomunal Federation with the Appropriate Content

The proponents and supporters of this position believe that the historic compromise of federation is the only way to restore the unity of Cyprus. They place significant importance on the high-level agreements between Makarios and Denktash, and between Kyprianou and Denktash. They also consider that subsequent concessions have crossed red lines. According to this view, it is Turkish maximalism that has prevented a solution.

Tassos Papadopoulos was the first to use the term “bizonal, bicomunal federation with the appropriate content”. While some issues were highlighted at the level of general declarations, this term, “bizonal, bicomunal federation with the appropriate content”, – has not been sufficiently and precisely explained at the political level. This constitutes a serious problem that hinders effective policymaking.

Supporters “of any solution” accuse the advocates of “a bizonal, bicomunal federation with the appropriate content” of not genuinely wanting a federal solution and of hiding behind terminology. If there was sufficient understanding of the relevant issues from all sides, a meaningful dialogue between them would have been fruitful.

c. Anti-Federationists

As strange as it may sound, anti-federationists do not form a cohesive and homogeneous entity. There are supporters of a unitary state, of two states, and even of double *enosis*.

It should be noted that a bizonal, bicomunal federation (with any content) is rejected by anti-federationists for various reasons. Some believe that such a solution is not viable. Others focus on the view that it is a racist solution. There are also those who argue that federation is an unfair solution for the Greek Cypriots. Additionally, there is a position that a bizonal, bicomunal federation would lead to the Turkification of the entire island eventually.

IV. A Brief Assessment

It should be noted that the Cyprus problem still involves intense ideological approaches. It is not an exaggeration to say that at various levels there is confusion and insufficient understanding of the situation.

In the past, particularly during the period from 1967 to 1974, the attachment to the idea of *enosis* proved to be detrimental. While this objective may have been just, it was politically non-feasible. Foreign decision-making centres used Greek-speaking officers and *enosis* ideologues to promote their own plans at Cyprus's expense.

In the current context, attachment to the idea of "any solution" carries serious risks which cannot be ignored. The relevant literature underlines that consociational federal systems based on ethno-communal pillars usually do not have a promising future. In Cyprus, the issue is further complicated by Turkey's expansionist goals.

It would not be an exaggeration to note that the bizonal, bicomunal federation has been ideologized by a segment of the population. Moreover, it is reasonable to question whether implementing the bizonal, bicomunal federation as it is currently discussed prevents or rather deepens and legitimizes partition.

Evaluating the anti-federation approach leads to several conclusions. If the focus is on a unitary state, it can be said with certainty that this is non-feasible and out of context. If the goal is for two completely independent states, this should be stated clearly and discussed openly. The same applies to the option of double *enosis*.

Regarding the approach of a bizonal, bicomunal federation with the appropriate content, I think that the political forces supporting this approach should have defined it clearly a long time ago. It is about time that this is done.

V. My Proposal

I believe it is impossible to have any policy that will receive universal support from the population. However, it is possible to have a policy that gains the broader possible support.

The lack of utilizing specialized expertise in managing the Cyprus problem has had, and continues to have, a tremendous cost. This needs to be reversed. Considering all the relevant issues, it is impossible to arrive at a solution that can be implemented immediately – in 24 hours. Therefore, an evolutionary approach is imperative.

It is important to establish guidelines for a normal federal state as well as suggestions that can be implemented gradually. I have already presented a specific proposal toward this direction. These positions can be greatly enriched. The essence is to adopt this particular methodology. This policy has the potential to gain support both domestically and internationally. In short, I believe it is within the realm of “the feasible”.

At the same time, I reiterate the necessity of continuously upgrading and enhancing all dimensions of state power. These include defense, the economy, demographic indicators, and the network of cooperation with other states, among others. Equally important is a narrative that is promoted both internally and externally. Additionally, Nicosia should request Athens and London to work together as guarantor powers for the restoration of the unity and the territorial integrity of the Republic of Cyprus.

All these factors must be considered in formulating a comprehensive strategy, even while uncertainty remains. The *status quo*, which is neither desirable nor static, endures. However, it is also unacceptable to accept an arrangement that would worsen the situation. Cyprus must finally develop a comprehensive strategy for this major national issue.