

## **WHAT SOLUTION FOR CYPRUS?**

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Despite years of intercommunal negotiations and repeated efforts by the international community the Cyprus problem remains unresolved. The overwhelming presence of Turkish troops on the island since 1974 and Ankara's objective to strategically control Cyprus continue to be the most important factors shaping developments. The accession of the Republic of Cyprus to the EU in 2004 in conjunction with Turkey's own European ambitions did not, as expected, lead to any breakthrough thus far. Since the April 2004 referendum on the UN Plan, overwhelmingly rejected by Greek Cypriots but strongly backed by Turkish Cypriots (and Turkish settlers), this issue has become more complicated. The fundamental question remains: what model can lead to a viable solution?

Following President Anastasiades' electoral victory there were renewed expectations for a new process. Given the economic crisis as well as the energy potential this time the overall approach has to consider additional important factors.

The common statement agreed by President Anastasiades and the Turkish Cypriot leader D. Eroglu on February 11, 2014 which marked the resumption of the negotiations revolves around a philosophy with elements of a loose federation and a confederation. According to the common statement sovereignty emanates from the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots and not from the Cypriot people as a whole. Furthermore, President Anastasiades stated that social security will be a function of the two constituent states. And this despite the fact that in federal arrangements social security is dealt with by the central federal government.

President Anastasiades introduced new elements to the process. He stressed that it is important for the two communities to also engage Greece and Turkey. Already the Greek Cypriot chief negotiator met with officials of the Turkish government and the Turkish Cypriot chief negotiator with officials of the Greek government. President Anastasiades indicated that this process engages Turkey directly. His critics state that this arrangement promotes the Turkish position for a four-party process which supports Ankara's long standing stance to upgrade the Turkish Cypriot regime while absolving its own actual responsibility. Furthermore, this process equates the responsibilities of Turkey and Greece and, moreover, ignores the Republic of Cyprus. This particular procedure entails specific implications which affect substantive issues.

Anastasiades has also indicated his preference for an evolutionary process to resolving the Cyprus problem. Within this framework in the absence of a comprehensive settlement there may be efforts toward an interim agreement involving Famagusta and other issues. The perceived merits of such a process are economic benefits for both sides and the creation of a better climate which would eventually contribute to a lasting settlement.

Currently several internal and external players would be willing to exert every effort to reach a comprehensive solution or at least achieve substantial progress. But they ignore that the agreed framework may create more problems than they understand or would care to anticipate. It has been repeatedly pointed out that biethnic and multiethnic societies with consociationalist and ethnonationalist pillars of governance eventually face serious problems. Indeed the records of former Yugoslavia, Former Czechoslovakia, Bosnia, Belgium, Lebanon and recently of Ukraine are not encouraging.

A different approach would have stand a better chance. An integrationalist approach within the framework of the EU could provide a practically applicable framework for a breakthrough. In an era of multiple identities, the EU can provide for all Cypriots the context for a common European identity that would make a unified Cyprus work. In addition, respect for the political structure of a unified Cyprus would be another common bond. Simultaneously, Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots can also nurture their own ethnic and cultural identities. The EU in this respect may play a significant contextualizing role even though it has not yet itself reached its full potential in addressing major regional and international problems. For this to happen the EU must overcome its own weaknesses and thereafter address the growing Euroscepticism. Above all Turkey should recognize the right of the Republic of Cyprus to exist.

Since 1974, Greek Cypriot policymakers have faced increasingly maximalist positions from the Turkish side, which has averted any substantive change in the *status quo*, despite their serious and often painful concessions. Turkish demands over time amounted to the legitimization of the *status quo* post-1974, which marked the strategic control of Cyprus by Turkey and the gradual change of the island's demography by a policy of colonization.

It is clear to all that Turkey pursues a policy of double standards, particularly when comparing how it would like to resolve its own Kurdish question and what it insists on in relation to the Cyprus problem. Ankara would like to merely "offer more rights" to its 15 million Kurds within the framework of a policy of integration. But in Cyprus, for about 100.000 Turkish Cypriots (and almost 180.000 Anatolian settlers) Ankara wishes to advance a completely different philosophy: a loose federation/confederation based on ethnocommunal lines.

Although the bicomunal dimension of the Cyprus question is an important one, the problem entails other aspects which are far more important. The occupation of the northern part of Cyprus creates immense complications as does Ankara's insistence to retain guarantor rights over a full EU member state.

A multi-regional functional federation based on an integrationalist approach may indeed lead to a unified state with viability and sustainability. Nevertheless this option is not on the negotiating table. For years, the basis has been a bizonal bicomunal federation on whose definition and interpretation have been serious intercommunal and intracomunal disagreements. Furthermore, the role of Turkey in the equation is overwhelming. The dilemmas for the Republic of Cyprus in relation to the form of a solution are indeed great.

Addressing simultaneously the Cyprus problem, the current economic crisis in the island as well as the utilization of the newly found energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean could create a window of opportunity. Although this perspective has its merits, Greek Cypriots are deeply sceptical that the current economic crisis could be used to pressure them to acquiesce to unacceptable provisions at a time of changing geopolitics in the Eastern Mediterranean and the broader Middle East.