

THE CYPRUS TALKS: ON THE ROAD OF NO RETURN?*

Van Coufoudakis

Rector Emeritus, University of Nicosia

Professor Emeritus and Dean Emeritus, Indiana University-Purdue University

After thirty-six years the consequences of the Turkish invasion are still evident in Cyprus. Witness the continuing occupation of nearly 37% of the territory of an EU member by a country aspiring to become an EU member. Witness the continuing and documented violation of human rights and Turkey's total disregard of its international obligations. Witness the absence of any sanctions for Turkey's misconduct. Witness the tragedy of the missing. The recent identification of some remains may have brought closure to few families but has not brought to justice those responsible for their murder.

The UN sponsored talks have been part of this continuing drama. This is a good time to assess where the talks are headed and what needs to be done to save Cyprus from destruction on the same year the troubled Republic will be celebrating the 50th anniversary of its independence.

The problems confronting the UN sponsored talks are not new. They originate in international hypocrisy that has led to unimplemented unanimous UN Security Council resolutions and continuing Turkish violations of international law. Kissinger's "5 Points", Clark Clifford's 1977 verbal acrobatics and false promises that entrapped President Makarios in the "constructive ambiguity" of the "bi-zonal bi-communal federation", and continuous Greek Cypriot concessions without reciprocity from Turkey, have brought Cyprus to the dilemma facing it today. The late President Papadopoulos had the political courage to call for the rejection of the 2004 Annan Plan, once he realized how the US and the UK used the UN in their effort to dissolve the Republic of Cyprus in order to appease Turkey. The Annan Plan, born of threats and bribes and based on the principle of Turkey's appeasement, would have brought Cyprus under Turkey's and Britain's hegemony on the eve of its EU accession. No self respecting European country would have accepted to dissolve itself and live under the scheme proposed by Kofi Annan.

In the Cypriot presidential elections of 2008, Dimitris Christofias presented himself as the president who would solve the Cyprus problem. He acted as if his predecessors had not wanted a functional democratic solution that restored human rights, the rule of law and freed Cyprus from Turkish occupation. Christofias, eager for American and British support, indirectly legitimized Turkey's arguments that blamed the victim for the lack of a solution. I do not question the President's commitment to the reunification of Cyprus. The question remains how he has gone about achieving this elusive goal. Once the talks got under way between President Christofias and Mr. Talat, a public relations mythology was generated intended to create a positive climate for the talks. Domestic and foreign media, in addition to the new UN Representative Alexander, the "not so Great", Downer contributed to this

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mythology. It was intended to mask the resurrection of the Annan Plan, despite its overwhelming rejection by the Greek Cypriots in 2004. Having learned from the post-mortem of the Annan Plan about the causes of its rejection, the new mythology stressed that this would be a "Cypriot solution", arrived at without artificial deadlines and externally imposed schemes. The rhetoric and some of the tactics may have changed but not the substance of the proposed solution. The new euphoric mythology also advocated that a solution would be feasible because of the ideological and personal friendship between the "two leaders". In a convenient case of amnesia these observers forgot earlier claims that the personal and family friendship between President Clerides and Raouf Denktash would solve the Cyprus problem. These observers appeared unaware that Turkish policy on Cyprus is not made in occupied Nicosia but in Ankara, and that Turkey's objectives on Cyprus had not changed.

Major tactical and political errors were committed from the start of the Christofias-Talat talks. Instead of negotiating from a zero base, the Greek Cypriot side was willing to open talks based on the ideas of the rejected Annan Plan because "so much work had already been done". In order to start the talks on a positive point, the Greek Cypriot side, much as it had done before, made new concessions without any reciprocity from Turkey. President Christofias stated that fifty thousand settlers would stay in Cyprus; agreed to the Turkish demand for a rotational presidency, and abandoned the strong Cypriot legal position on the property issue. Instead, he agreed that the critical property issue would be solved through political negotiations and not through legal means. This is exactly what Kofi Annan had demanded. In a classic case of be careful of what you wish for, recent European Court of Human Rights decisions appear to follow the government's political wishes. Now, the Greek Cypriot side complains that the European Court of Human Rights may have "sold out" Cyprus.

As if these mistakes were not enough, the Christofias government attempted to delegitimize its domestic critics by questioning their democratic right to challenge the President's policies, while accusing them of rejecting the island's reunification and of promoting the partition of Cyprus. It also relied on disinformation to create public support for the proposed "bi-zonal bi-communal federation". A pamphlet glorifying this abstract constitutional construct failed to tell the public that the principles on governance emerging from the talks created a confederation of two "constituent states" and not a true federation. The devil was in the details but the public was deliberately kept in the dark.

Once Mr. Eroglu became the new Turkish Cypriot leader, the President of Cyprus, who had actively supported Mr. Talat for re-election, found himself literally begging Eroglu to start the talks where his predecessor left off. Ankara decided the issue, but the Cyprus government celebrated Eroglu's acceptance as a diplomatic victory. Eroglu may have returned to the talks but his great caveat remains that while the talks continue all issues are back on the table. In contrast, the Greek Cypriot side remains faithful to the concessions it has already made.

Downer and Turkey are now pushing for an acceleration of the talks and have introduced the end of the year as an implicit deadline. Downer, Turkey and their Anglo-American cohorts use a variety of incentives and threats to reach this goal. This includes the probable reduction of UNFICYP (even though the government of Cyprus covers the major part of its cost), the attribution of responsibility by the Secretary-General in November if there is no progress in the talks, the upcoming elections in Turkey, Turkey's next EU evaluation and the need to open new chapters in the Turkish-EU accession talks, the direct trade between the EU and occupied Cyprus, and the implied threat of the recognition of the "TRNC" by newly acquired Islamic friends of Turkey in the Middle East and Central Asia. What is even more dangerous is their push for an international conference on Cyprus. Any Greek Cypriot seriously considering this idea should first read and understand the tactics, the objectives and outcomes of the 1995 Dayton conference on Bosnia.

Yes, this is a critical time for Cyprus! After thirty-six years the government does not appear to fathom Turkey's regional objectives and their effect on the survival of the Republic of Cyprus. These objectives are clearly stated in Foreign Minister Davutoglu's latest book. While the government of Cyprus for political reasons may not walk away from the talks, it needs to reevaluate its negotiating objectives and tactics and listen to its critics at home. Turkey's policy on Cyprus has not changed. On the contrary, its intransigence has been enhanced by recent theories and actions of the Erdogan government that no one seems to take seriously in Nicosia. Wishful thinking, ideological appeals, continuous concessions and accusations against government critics have brought Cyprus to the brink.

The Cypriot situation presents a challenge to the Greek-American community. Unfortunately, the glory days of 1974 are gone. Our community, for various reasons, may be tired of the various problems facing Cyprus and Greece. But if we do not care, who will? Our apathy will only increase Anglo-American schemes to appease Turkey by sacrificing Cyprus. Looking back at the history of the post-1974 talks, we often hear the myth of the "lost opportunities" for the solution of the Cyprus problem. The only opportunities lost, starting with the spring 1964 NATO Plan, have been those aiming to destroy the Republic of Cyprus. On this 50th anniversary of the independence of Cyprus, we ought to be looking at ways to strengthen the Republic, restore the rule of law and human rights and remove the occupation forces from Cyprus instead of being tempted by plans aiming to turn this successful democratic EU member to a Turkish vassal.