

'Developments in the peace negotiations in Cyprus: Finding a solution by Cypriots for Cypriots'

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For the first time both our communities are simultaneously represented by leaders, Mr Christofias and Mr Talat, negotiating with a genuine and vigorous will to reach a just settlement. Their shared political ideals and the history of cross-party negotiations between AKEL and CTP also provide a promising foundation and framework for their negotiations. I believe that there are genuine grounds for optimism.

This optimism is not borne out of naivete. Whilst I am aware of the difficulties of negotiating the interests of all constituencies in Cyprus and the wider geopolitics of the region. I am believe that both leaders, have the statesmanship skills and the diplomatic acumen needed to negotiate between their respective electorates and with international interested parties like Turkey, Turkey's role in all this being crucial; and out of our hands.

One of their primary political tasks (a Sisyphean task to be sure) ought to be the demilitarisation of the island. A programme for a complete demilitarisation of the island, for the removal of Turkish, Greek and British troops and of local Greek and Turkish Cypriot conscription, the cessation of National Service for all Cypriot citizens would be an important starting point for the new republic. Given the ugly role guns have played in our island's history, not just foreign, but also local armies need to be eliminated. National Service serves as a breeding ground for chauvinistic antipathy. Complete demilitarisation of the island will I believe go a long way towards answering the security anxieties of most Cypriots.

In a recent speech (during a rally addressing refugees from Morphou) President Christofias spoke of "a settlement that will reunite our country, our people, the institutions and the economy in the framework of a bizonal, bicomunal federation." Whilst the crucial political and legal details of that framework, defining a solution, rests in the hands of our political leaders let us put our minds to how we can prepare the ground for that solution, and how we can make that settlement work. For our country, our people, our institutions and our economy to become integrated, for the settlement to work, we, that is both Cypriots as individuals and Cypriot society as a collective, must undertake a major cultural task.

Restating and redefining a new Cypriotness is not an adjunct to the political task at hand it is the bedrock on which the settlement will rest –this is not to underestimate the hard work of political negotiation, but without a consensual conviction amongst the majority of Cypriots of the desirability and practicability of a new kind of Cypriotness a settlement is quite simply unachievable.

The Annan Plan failed because there wasn't the appetite to tackle the difficult task of compromise amongst the Greek Cypriot electorate at that moment: the cultural ground for the political task had not been prepared. We must learn from that.

Historically, the left in Cyprus has tried to subvert and circumvent binarised Manichean communal identities by attempting to interpellate Cypriots based on class commonalities. Many Cypriots have found some comforting common ground in the 'we are all victims' discourse which holds outside forces rather than Cypriots responsible for the current mess we're in. It is true that both communities have suffered and we are not all individually responsible for the past but we do all have to take responsibility for mending the fractures of the past if a settlement is to work.

All Cypriots want a just settlement for the Cyprus Problem but unfortunately all Cypriots aren't even agreed on what that problem is. We don't all have to agree, but we do need to give all our multiple, contested and conflicting histories and narratives space to breathe and we have to learn to respect each other, as individuals and as communities. Cypriots who insist that the Cyprus Problem is only one of the invasion and occupation of northern part of the island in 1974 and dream that once Turkey removes its military presence the problem will disappear demonstrate an inability to hear and to respect the anxieties of other Cypriots who locate the problem as beginning half a century ago.

One of the impediments to a new Cypriot identity that respects and safeguards the welfare of all its citizens is that even after Turkey has gone, the hatred of the Turk is likely to remain. The issue of discrimination is a key unease for many Turkish Cypriots. Memories and recounted stories from their older generation (particularly amongst the professional classes) of discrimination against them and second-class citizenship, from the birth of the Republic, can feed a fear of reunification.

I have myself observed how bigotry is often couched as an acceptance of Turkish Cypriots as Cypriots but an unchecked and rabid hatred of all things Turkish is given free reign. This does need to be addressed, all Cypriots need to learn to accept each other, and to celebrate the mixture and multiplicity of our cultural identities: Maronite, Armenian, Greek, Turkish, diasporic Cypriots (there are more Turkish Cypriots in the diaspora now than there are on island).

All the cultures which have contributed to our history need to be acknowledged and respected. I refer you to Dr Papadakis's excellent recommendations for history teaching and for redressing the currently binaristic and chauvinistic nature of Greek Cypriot school history books. Turkish Cypriot history books have recently been rewritten employing a more pluralistic approach to history education.¹ Educational initiatives in the North have paid off, the youth are overwhelmingly pro-settlement in contrast to a more disengaged, less positive reaction amongst youth in the Republic. School books have their part to play in this. We must support Dr Papadakis' recommendations and initiatives like the one recently launched by the Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe, a project aimed at creating and enriching dialogues on history teaching throughout Southeast Europe, including Cyprus.

It might be unpalatable to some but it is an unavoidable truth that many, perhaps most Turkish Cypriots would rather face diaspora, cultural extinction, and local subsumation into Turkey than a return to a situation where they are citizens in a state that they feel disrespects and discriminates against them. We must convince them too that this will be a new era, that archaic prejudices are fast fading, or the settlement won't succeed.

Existing bi-communal educational and cultural activities must be supported, new initiatives launched. We need to articulate a contemporary postcolonial Cypriot identity which provides a healing space for, but also moves beyond, ethnic resentments and embraces not only historical ethnicities also reflects modern immigration to the island (from South East Asia, eastern Europe as well the children of mainland settlers born in Cyprus) and reflects Cyprus' continuing potential as an important cultural meeting point for both Europe and the Middle-east.

I realise that asking Greek Cypriots to rethink their attitude to Turkey will seem offensive to some and a very tall order to all. After all hatred of, and resistance to, Ottoman colonialism has been, and still is, a cornerstone of modern Greek and Greek Cypriot national identities. But for a settlement to work and flourish we do need to change this.

Long after she has withdrawn as a military presence Turkey will remain a major economic player in Cyprus' fate. The economic benefits of peace rest to a large extent on trade with Turkey, and this estimated peace dividend is not inconsiderable. According to economists Mullen, Oguz and Kyriacou in *The Day After*, a report for the International Peace research Institute, Oslo.ⁱⁱⁱ They estimate that the peace dividend is the equivalent of approximately EUR 1.8 billion per year (over CYP 1 billion or more than YTL 3 billion). Translated into the annual dividend per family (household) in Cyprus, it comes to an annual peace bonus of approximately EUR 5,500 per household per year. This is around 20% of the current average salary in the southern part of Cyprus and an estimated 40% of the average salary in the northern part of Cyprus. So there is a strong economic incentive to reach a settlement, more grounds for optimism.

Every Cypriot wants a just settlement in that they want recognition and restitution for their loss but unless we are willing to accommodate and empathise with narratives which contradict our own, to work seriously for reconciliation as much as restitution then we are in trouble. Our leaders must find a way to put into effect a just economic solution, but the settlement does not end with financial restitution. A federal solution that offers all Cypriots a sense of security is also necessary, again no mean political feat. Our politicians, lawyers and economists have their work cut out, but we all have a serious, indeed crucial, part to play in making a settlement and a united Cyprus happen.

ⁱ Yiannis Papadakis, *History Education in Divided Cyprus: A Comparison of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot Schoolbooks on the “History of Cyprus”*, PRIO Report 2/2008 accessed at www.prio.no/upload/Report-History%20Education%20low.pdf

ⁱⁱ Fiona Mullen, Ozlem Oguz and Praxoula Antoniadou Kyriacou, *The Day After: Commercial opportunities following a solution to the Cyprus problem* Prio PCC Paper 1/2008 accessed at www.prio.no/files/manual-import/cyprus/dayafter/ReportThe%20day%20after.pdf