

CYPRUS: TIME TO THINK AGAIN

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With the appointment of a new Special Advisor of the Secretary-General on Cyprus and the recent fiftieth anniversary of the presence of the United Nations in Cyprus it would be timely to consider how best to move the negotiating process forward in a manner most likely to succeed.

Over the past fifty years, spanning six Secretaries-General, some twenty United Nations Representatives, seventeen Force Commanders, enumerable attempts to work out an agreement, and countless optimistic joint statements, most recently those of February 11, and of September 17, 2014, the fact remains that no solution is in sight.

The issues that make up the Cyprus problem, namely governance and power-sharing, territory, property, security and guarantees, including foreign troops, and settlers or immigrants from Turkey, have been addressed countless times based on the basic principles in the 1977 and 1979 High Level Agreements. However, the two sides have never been able to agree on the definition of these High Level Agreements. Their positions have remained far apart, and no progress has been made toward a common understanding.

Since 1974 and to a large extent since 1963, the two communities have lived apart, have governed themselves, and have had little contact with each other. They have grown comfortable with this arrangement. Over the years they have drawn further apart, with decreasing knowledge of and interest in each other. This is evident in the disappointing and decreasing flow of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots across the green line since the resumption in 2003 of the traffic across the buffer zone. A leading Greek Cypriot personality reminded me some time ago of a significant truism which should not be lost sight of. He pointed out that the current period is the very first time in the entire history of Cyprus that the Greek Cypriots have lived by themselves and have governed themselves. While this fact is not widely recalled in the Greek Cypriot community, it is nonetheless significant. After living alone in a house and then having to share it, even if the house is now bigger, arrangements for joint habitation must be worked out with care. It stands to reason that these changes need to be taken into account when considering the governance and power-sharing best suited for a federal Cyprus.

In addition to their quasi independence over these many years, their historic relationship has been marked by mutual distrust, no tradition of cooperation and compromise, and the absence of a sense of Cypriot nationhood.

After all this time of failed efforts, negotiators should take a hard look at the realities on the ground and consider their impact on a settlement. This is particularly relevant as concerns governance and power-sharing in a federal Cyprus. For thirty seven years negotiations have proceeded as if the situation in Cyprus had remained unchanged. However the situation on the ground has changed dramatically. The state of affairs in both communities is very different from what it was before 1974. The time has come to adjust the negotiation process to reflect the existing realities.

Both sides need to recognize that the status quo is untenable and that the passage of time will make an agreement more difficult and eventually unachievable. The demographic changes will further undermine the process to the detriment of both communities. Neither community's "preferred solution" is a feasible option. The only option is a settlement which, in the words of President Makarios, *is achievable*. That admonition is most pertinent. To continue the process as heretofore will have the predictable outcome. Both sides need to adjust their positions, and move away from the desirable to the achievable.

In order to avoid yet another failed negotiation, the process should begin with a deep introspection on the current situation. An objective assessment should be made of the current political life in each community and its impact on the structure of an achievable federal Cyprus. The federal functions of governance and power-sharing should focus on the essentials needed at the federal level for an effective government within the European Union. This would make it easier for the two sides to get used to working together, minimize frustrations, increase mutual trust, and avoid a dramatic change in the way the two sides run their internal affairs.

The time has come to turn the page, adopt a new approach, look to the future rather than the past, avoid mutual recrimination, and work out an achievable settlement. Or to put it another way, negotiations must discard the past, recognize the present, and develop a firm foundation for a common future. Nothing less will do.