

CRIMES OF WAR AND 'PEACE'

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Undoubtedly the confession by Turkish actor Atilla Olgaç of the brutal murder of Greek-Cypriot prisoners of war during the Turkish invasion of Cyprus shocked public opinion and the political leadership, brought back memories of 1974, and sparked heated discussions in Cyprus, Turkey and Greece. Be that as it may though, for all those who remember 1974 this confession does not reveal anything new as many reports and eye-witness accounts clearly and undeniably document the atrocities committed.

What remains as a matter of extreme importance is the realization that there is a political agenda behind what happened in 1974. Turkey occupied nearly 40% of the territory of the Republic of Cyprus and committed ethnic cleansing, through a forcible exchange of population which led to the creation of two ethnically homogeneous zones. Since then thousands of Anatolian Turks have also settled in the occupied part of Cyprus, resulting in more settlers than Turkish Cypriots residing in the northern part of Cyprus today.

The implementation of Ankara's political agenda in Cyprus ultimately aims at making this island-state its protectorate, despite of it being a full member of the EU. It should be obvious why the Greek-Cypriots cannot and must not legitimize the political outcome of the invasion and crimes of 1974. It should also be clear that the crimes of the Turkish state cannot be compared with the crimes committed by Greek-Cypriot extremists against Turkish-Cypriot civilians between 1963 and 1974. After all Greek-Cypriot extremists devoted most of their energy against their Greek-Cypriot opponents. By the same token crimes committed by Turkish-Cypriot extremists against Greek-Cypriot civilians cannot be compared with the excesses of the Turkish army and Turkey as a state.

However, even if Greek Cypriots find the moral courage to forgive the Turkish excesses of 1974, they cannot accept the Turkish philosophy for the solution of the Cyprus problem. We must realize that Turkey does not even consider discussing its own Kurdish question on the same basis as its philosophy for resolving the Cyprus question.

Turkey aspires to becoming a member of the EU and developing into an important player both in the region and internationally, both of which are legitimate objectives. But Turkey must first come to terms with its own past (e.g. the Armenian genocide, Cyprus), and must thereafter act accordingly. It must also first progress significantly towards democratization of its society (e.g. effectively addressing the Kurdish issue, respecting minorities in general, promoting freedom of the press) and normalize its relations with its neighbors. These are criteria which, in relation to its EU accession prospects, no candidate, not even Turkey, can waiver.

Specifically in relation to Cyprus, for a viable solution it is essential that a political framework which entails a common set of values and a vision for a common future for all Cypriots, Greeks, Turks and others, is found. This vision cannot be based on the outcome of brutal force and injustice, and for that reason it presupposes the withdrawal of Turkish occupying forces from the island. Ankara should also recognize the Republic of Cyprus and normalize relations with its neighboring island-state. These are elements which have been repeatedly stressed; their implementation will enable the people of Cyprus to live once again together, in dignity.