

THE CYPRUS PROBLEM, ITS SOLUTION AND THE BROADER IMPLICATIONS*

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Your Excellencies
Distinguished guests
Dear Colleagues
Dear Friends

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to this conference entitled "The Cyprus Problem, its Solution and the Broader Implications". And I would like to thank all our distinguished speakers who accepted our invitation. I am also particularly pleased that we have with us as speakers three Turkish Cypriots colleagues; I have no doubt that their participation enriches this conference. Indeed, this event is very timely given the ongoing new series of bicomunal negotiations.

As I was trying to prepare this welcoming address I saw previous opening statements that I made in relation to similar events on the Cyprus Problem in the past. I must confess that I smiled given that there were phrases and even entire paragraphs that I could copy paste and still be very relevant today.

Obviously there is renewed interest about developments in relation to the Cyprus problem today. And, like in the past, when Christofias was elected as President of the Republic of Cyprus there were high expectations; With the election of Akkintzi last April as the new Turkish Cypriot leader even higher expectations had been created.

Let me share with you what I stated on March 18, 2008:

"I am also tempted to say that there are unduly high expectations. It seems that the underlying assumption has been that the problem was basically in Nicosia and the ex-President of the Republic Tassos Papadopoulos.

President Christofias will meet Talat. The vast majority of Cypriots would like to see a breakthrough. But to what extent can Talat make independent decisions from Turkey? What can we expect? Good chemistry, opening of the Ledra Street and additional CBM's.

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Nevertheless, the key for substantial progress remains in Ankara. The real question is whether at this point in time Ankara will reach the historic decision to let Cyprus go.”

I have no doubt that these statements are valid today despite the good chemistry between President Anastasiades and the Turkish Cypriot leader Akkintzi.

It was since the seventies that the Greek Cypriot side was stressing that the key was/is in Ankara. And the Turkish side was stressing the bicomunal dimension. We all agree that what takes place in Cyprus is important; on the other hand, it would be misleading to ignore the overwhelming influence of Ankara. That means that the process of the bicomunal negotiations must be enriched.

I also stress that after the economic crisis and the extremely punitive Eurogroup decisions Cyprus is in a weaker position than before. One of the issues raised is whether this additional relevant weakness influences the outcome of the negotiations. We should also be reminded that President Anastasiades and other players in Cyprus and elsewhere seem to have the impression that the solution will lead to an economic boom; that it will constitute the necessary positive shock to exit from the crisis. I am afraid though that this thinking is, to say the least, inadequate and superficial. The situation is much more complex in actual fact. For a positive outcome several important conditions must be met.

Another important, I would say critical, issue, both in substance and in symbolism, is related to what will happen with the Republic of Cyprus. The Greek-Cypriot position is that the framework of the solution must secure the continuity of the Republic of Cyprus. The Turkish side puts forward the idea of a new partnership and a new state entity. The UN and other third parties try to create an atmosphere of constructive ambiguities by which the two sides will have the impression that their objectives are met.

An additional issue is how does the ongoing political crisis in Turkey affect developments in Cyprus. This must also be seen within the framework of events in the broader region. I also note that the refugee and the humanitarian crisis has been lately affecting Euro-Turkish relations.

While in the past in Cyprus there were great expectations from the EU, today the strongest EU related sentiments are those of euroscepticism. It will be a pleasant surprise if the EU in these difficult times acts in a way which honours its obligations to a member state and also pursues a policy of solidarity.

I will close my opening statement by noting that I look forward to a very interesting conference with a fruitful exchange of ideas and positions.