

PERPLEXING NEGOTIATIONS

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As the negotiations between Greek and Turkish Cypriots continue, there is a growing sense that the former are behaving like the whales that lost their way and are heading for a beach to die. Negotiations, we are told, are about give and take; they are also about cost and benefit. As such, the Greek-Cypriot negotiating stance is perplexing, and one has the impression that reunification has become an *idée fixe* that is leading the Greek Cypriots toward their metaphoric beach.

It is true that not all the details of the negotiations are in the open, but much of it is known, and fundamental elements of the positions of the two sides are diametrically opposed. In fact, they have been so for decades. Yet, and this is essentially the problem of the Greek-Cypriot side, concessions have been made steadily since 1974 in the hope of a resolution to the impasse. The price, however, is made repeatedly steeper by the Turkish side. Indeed, the Greek-Cypriot view of what a solution should look like, and which has become psychologically synonymous with 'reunification,' raises major questions, both about the viability of the sort of deal that is being discussed and the price that the Republic of Cyprus (i.e. the Greek Cypriots) will be asked to pay.

What we do know is that the discussions are about a solution that is essentially an "Annan V+." In other words, it is what the Greek-Cypriots did not support in 2004, only worse. One notable way in which the framework now being discussed is worse revolves around the current narrative which presents the negotiations as seeking a "Cypriot solution." In other words, the previous Annan Plan was justifiably rejected by the Greek-Cypriots because it was 'imposed by foreigners.' On the other hand, the current plan is 'entirely' local, worked out between 'brethren' who have a better understanding of each other's ways than the outsiders and are keen to preserve each other's interests as compatriots. This claim is a misrepresentation and is devoid of

reality, serving only one purpose: making the pill easier to swallow for a particular Greek-Cypriot constituency which sees foreign intervention (not always mistakenly) everywhere, and is satisfied with lip service to Cypriot independence.

A genuine 'local' initiative is something the Greek-Cypriots should undertake with determination, energy and creativity, with the aim of convincing their interlocutors that the framework of the negotiations to date has been undemocratic, in violation of fundamentals of both the United Nations and the European Union, and ultimately unworkable because it burdens the Greek-Cypriot side excessively while ignoring the detrimental role of Turkey in the equation.

Indeed, not only are the basic elements of negotiation taken entirely from the previous compilation of mediation efforts – with all the colonial blueprints of yesteryear - but the current process ignores the responsibility of Turkey in the current situation in Cyprus, and is both deaf and blind to Ankara's insistence that, at least in terms of security, the island is, and will remain a Turkish protectorate. Moreover, to a greater or lesser degree, the negotiations imply that the two sides have enough in common to resolve the issue in the framework of a reunified island. Indeed, there are those who believe that after 35 years under direct Turkish rule, and 45 years apart from Greek-Cypriots, the Turkish-Cypriots have retained enough of their Cypriot character to overcome obstacles, like Ankara's agenda. In all possible parameters of measurement this is simply wishful thinking: the latest elections in the north have shown what has been known for some time, that the Turkish-Cypriots are a minority in a sea of Turkish settler; and with the exception of a handful of courageous, stubborn ideologues, the overwhelming majority of Turkish-Cypriot political leaders, across the political spectrum, hold views that primarily serve Ankara's interests, which they consider to be the best safeguard for their community's position on the island.

Without going as far as to say that the Turkish-Cypriots no longer exist as a political community, it is important to comprehend that the Greek-Cypriots are not really negotiating with their compatriots but, through proxy, with a very large and aggressive neighbor, whose view of Cypriot independence is at best dim. In no uncertain terms, Prime Minister Erdogan has recently made clear the sort of solution that he expects in Cyprus: two politically equal states (with everything it implies, including rights to independent foreign relations, and an independent central bank), linked in a loose arrangement under a new federal state, with Turkey retaining all security rights (including its very generously interpreted status as 'guarantor'). In his magnanimity, Erdogan even offered Turkish protection over the 'whole' people of the island. Moreover, a recent Turkish Foreign Ministry document revealed what was tacitly implied in *Annan V*, that Turkey is also demanding that Turkish citizens enjoy in Cyprus the rights of European Union citizens – not only for the settlers already there, but for the 82 million and growing Turkish mainland population!

One could argue that these are maximalist positions adopted for the sake of negotiations. Certainly Mehmet Ali Talat would make that claim. Unfortunately that is not very convincing, since the history of the negotiations in Cyprus has shown that Turkish maximalist positions have held their ground and become the standard, providing the framework of a 'solution' to the Cyprus conflict. It is imperative for the Greek-Cypriots to make clear, to the Turkish side but also to the international mediators and other interlocutors, that unless the offer has advantages also for the Greek-Cypriots, there is no point in proceeding further along the current framework of negotiations. Moreover, the Greek-Cypriots must stress that agreeing to a bizonal, bicomunal, federation, is a massive concession – historical in fact – which outweighs significantly any of the concessions the Turkish-Cypriots will be asked to make.

It is all really a simple accounting exercise – a matter of gains and losses:

Bizonal: In the bizonal format, the Turkish side has made a major gain, one which had been its aim at least since 1958, and which the invasion and ethnic cleansing of the Greek-Cypriots from the north completed in 1974. It legitimizes the ethnic separation of Cypriots, ostensibly providing the Turkish-Cypriots with greater security, but in reality making their separatist claims more viable. Moreover, recognition of this bizonality legalizes the gain achieved illegally by force of arms.

Bicommunal: Arguably the Republic of Cyprus had a bicommunal constitutional structure from the start, so neither side makes any gains. Hawks on both sides may argue that they are conceding gains achieved by the de facto dismantling of the bicommunal nature of the state, but that is easily countered by suggesting that the subsequent federal structure compensates for that loss.

Federal: On the face of it, this one is clearly a compromise aiming to retain the unitary character of the country externally. For the Greek-Cypriots it is meant to provide a semblance of continuity from the previous structure, a say in the actions of the Turkish-Cypriot state on matters that affect the federal state, and a barrier against Turkish-Cypriot secession. For the Turkish-Cypriots, the federal structure does three things: it keeps their hand (Turkey's hand) in the governing structure of the Greek-Cypriot constituent state; it guarantees funding from the central finance structure of the state; and it appears to offer a concession – going from self-declared independence to semi-independent.

Property and Territory: If we go by what Alexander Downer had to say, the Turkish reaction to the European Court of Justice ruling on the Apostolides/Orams case, and recent statements by President Demetris Christofias on “coming to terms with certain realities”, the Greek-Cypriots will have only losses. In the worst case scenario, the Greek-Cypriot tax payers may have to pay for their own compensation. Anyone who is serious about these negotiations and does not take a hard nosed, economic approach to this

issue, going to great lengths to ensure that individuals feel confident that their rights will not be violated, will not win the peace.

Finances and Economy: One of the gravest dangers for the Greek-Cypriot economy is that unless there is a central monetary control, not only will general economic growth suffer, but it may contribute to political friction between the two sides. If the German reunification is anything to go by, a great deal of money and time are necessary to carry out this form of reunification of economies, and in the case of Cyprus the wealthy side is going to suffer a drop in its quality of life in order to boost the poorer side. Again, the Greek-Cypriots lose.

Security: The Turkish position on this is clear – they want Turkish troops on the island and the continuation of the Treaty of Guarantees (i.e. rights to intervene). Presumably they also want to have exclusive control over the international borders in the Turkish-Cypriot constituent state. If we consider 1974 a watershed, arguably the Greek-Cypriots can claim that though their security was severely undermined by the invasion and continued occupation of the Turkish army, by harassment and threats (FIR violations, over flights by Turkish air force jets, the S300 episode, etc.), the new state of affairs upturned the Treaty of Guarantees and voided it. If the Greek-Cypriots fail to alter the guarantor status of Turkey, by broadening the security arrangements into a framework in which the federal state has equal say with Greece, Britain and Turkey (i.e. a NATO framework), this will be added to the losses column.

Legitimacy/Recognition: This is perhaps the most important gain for the Turkish side and a massive concession on the part of the Greek-Cypriots. Indeed, on the basis of this concession the Greek-Cypriots must demand significant improvements on issues of property, security, the role of the central finance mechanism, as well as safeguards for the implementation of the agreements and the withdrawal of the vast majority of Turkish army and settlers. Essentially, a solution to the Cyprus problem will grant the Turkish-Cypriots legitimacy, whitewash the Turkish invasion, introduce a clearly

Turkish element into the European Union automatically, and provide the Turkish-Cypriots with the political equality they crave.

The Greek-Cypriots, on the other hand, have held one major advantage over the Turkish side: their monopoly on international legitimacy through the Republic of Cyprus. On that legitimacy they have managed to rebuild their economy, society and polity since the 1974 catastrophe and achieved major recognition in the Cypriot accession to the European Union. Indeed, relinquishing this monopoly, undermining their international legitimacy, and their membership in the European Union and United Nations, is tantamount to removing a protective mantle – their only form of real security against Turkey's imperial urges. Once the Greek-Cypriots agree to dismantle the Republic of Cyprus they are risking the possibility that in the absence of sufficiently powerful safeguards, at the first sign of crisis – inevitable in view of the difficulties of reunification even under the most advantageous circumstances – the process will stall. This will leave them vulnerable, without clear international identity, and at the mercy of their powerful neighbor. As such, it is of the utmost importance for the Turkish side to appreciate that if it is legitimacy they wish, which can only come about if the Greek-Cypriots agree to relinquish the Republic of Cyprus, their primary defensive weapon which guarantees the continued existence of the Greek community in Cyprus, then serious concessions must be made elsewhere, increasing the value of the deal.

This basic and superficial 'accounting' exercise suggests that the Greek-Cypriots stand to lose a great deal more than they can possibly gain, at least in the negotiations as they are currently being held. Any Greek-Cypriot leader who has set "reunification" as the ultimate goal, must reevaluate what reunification means, what needs to be surrendered and the risks. For their part, Turkish leaders, on the island and in Ankara, must understand and accept that Cyprus is not part of the Turkish dominion, and should appreciate that with the correct structure, in which Turkey is one of the countries genuinely contributing to real Cypriot independence, the island can flourish and gradually

overcome acrimony, hostility and socio-economic difficulties that will emerge during reunification.