

A BREAKTHROUGH EVOLUTIONARY APPROACH IN RESOLVING THE CYPRUS PROBLEM*

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For more than 38 years Greek Cypriots (G/Cs) and Turkish Cypriots (T/Cs) have been trying hard, under the auspices of the United Nations, to solve the Cyprus problem and reunite Cyprus (a beautiful island strategically located in the rich endowed Eastern Mediterranean Sea) under a bi-zonal, bi-communal Federation. Regardless, however, of the various efforts by successive Secretary-Generals of the UN, and the international community in general, to assist the above-mentioned Cypriot communities reach an everlasting agreement of solving the said problem, no substantial result has so far been produced.

Why, however, all these rounds of negotiations to solve the Cyprus problem have failed or have not succeeded yet? Presumably because, via this protracted negotiating process, Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots have always put the cart before the horse. Namely, instead of insisting in creating the necessary conditions for the implementation of a viable solution before any substantial negotiation for a comprehensive solution could be achieved (i.e. trust, confidence, proven record of political, economic and cultural collaboration between the two Cypriot communities) the two Cypriot communities have always attempted to solve the problem without these conditions being in place. Thus the failure!

Based on the above it seems obvious that a new breakthrough and rational evolutionary approach in solving the Cyprus problem is needed. Such an approach should be based on breakthrough thinking, namely to be purpose and solution focused rather than to be analytical and problem oriented.

Moreover, such an approach can derive from rational choice theory. Namely, we will assume that all major actors involved in the Cyprus problem will eventually and shortly, and regardless of current political uncertainties (i.e. the Erdogan phenomenon), make prudent and logical decisions in resolving the Cyprus problem that "will provide them with the greatest benefit and satisfaction and that these decisions are in their highest self-interest."

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To be more specific, after substantial preparation and consultation with all interested parties, the UN Secretary-General ought to call an International Conference convoking the participation of: the three Guarantor powers of the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) that is, Greece, Turkey and the UK), the EU, the five permanent members of the UN, and the two Cypriot communities. The said Conference should aim at leading the two communities to a Provisional Agreement for an evolutionary solution of the Cyprus problem. Such an Agreement should incorporate a preamble which will, inter alia, include the *Joint Declaration* agreed between the leaders of the two sides on 11 February 2014 and which delineates and reaffirms the general framework of the end goal of both sides, explicitly, the adoption of a bi-zonal, bi-communal federal state based on political equality. Moreover, within the said preamble the two communities should commit themselves to refraining from actions that would change the demographic character or would distort the population balance on the island. In addition, a clause may perhaps be included in the Agreement that empowers the UN Secretary-General to monitor its implementation and rebuke any party that *justifiably* violates and/or breaches the said Agreement at any time. Finally, this Provisional Agreement should incorporate a five to ten-year road-map (or until the final status of Turkey's relation with the EU is decided). Within this road-map both G/Cs and T/Cs might *concurrently* implement a series of substantial Confidence Building Measures (CBMs). On the one hand such measures would engage them in a creative, constructive and trustful political, economic, military and cultural collaboration, and on the other hand would satisfy each side's core negotiating interests. The goal of CBMs would be to gradually eradicate the primary causes that have cultivated the Cyprus problem over many years. An indicative list of five *substantial* CBMs might be the following:

First, return by Turkey of the fenced-off section of the Turkish occupied city of Famagusta to the administration of the United Nations and subsequently to its legal Greek Cypriot inhabitants in return for a RoC legitimate approval of the opening of the port of the said city and the Ercan Turkish Cypriot airport (essentially via a commonly accepted implementation of the EU direct trade regulation).

Secondly, creation by the UN (and approved by the RoC) of a bi-communal Steering Committee that should discuss the future of hydrocarbon reserves (i.e. natural gas) recently discovered or will be discovered in RoC's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ, with the aim of proportionally and fairly allocating to the benefit of both Cypriot communities the wealth that will derive from the commercialization of the said natural endowment in the following years and decade, in return for Turkey's avoidance of any threats and actions against the RoC.

Thirdly, implementation by Turkey of "Ankara Protocol" in return for a de freezing by the RoC of the 6 negotiating chapters of Turkish accession negotiations that the RoC has been blocking since 2009.

Fourthly, gradual withdrawal of the Turkish troops from northern Cyprus and approval by Turkey of a demining of the island in return for a gradual reduction of the RoC's National Guard.

Finally, the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots ought to continue and intensify current cultural and educational exchanges, under the UN supervision, in order for them to help their respective societies understand and trust each other.

Such an evolutionary solution could gradually lead Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots (as well as all international players involved in this protracted dispute) into an all-win situation for various obvious reasons. In particular, the G/Cs would be able to: maintain the internationally recognised RoC and reclaim, for first time since 1974, an important piece of now occupied land (Varosha) plus reap the economic and financial benefits (i.e. influx of foreign direct investment plus job creation and so on) that would inevitably result from the reconstruction of this land; experience conditions of tranquillity in the RoC's EEZ and as a consequence make the exploitation of the island's relevant hydrocarbon reserves easier, safer and more lucrative; gain semi-recognition of the RoC by Turkey; save a vast amount of money from the gradual demilitarisation of the Republic's National Guard, and develop confidence with their T/C compatriots – something quintessential for a future comprehensive solution of the Cyprus problem.

Likewise the T/Cs, in return for their signing of the Provisional Agreement would earn the following: the lifting of their so called 'economic and political embargo' by the opening of Famagusta port and Tymbou airport (under perhaps the auspices and legality of the EU); reap the economic and financial benefits of the reconstruction of Famagusta; proportionally enjoy the future remunerations of the exploitation of the RoC's hydrocarbon reserves; indirectly receive reaffirmation by the RoC that they are politically equal with the G/Cs; and develop business confidence with their G/C compatriots.

Moreover, the two communities would, jointly and separately, benefit substantially by pursuing business with the now vibrant economy of Turkey.

In conclusion, years of fear, mistrust, hatred, separation, violence, stereotyping, misuse of national symbols and selective use of historical memory have deterred the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots from coming together. The two Cypriot communities, however, need to free themselves from this past, solve the Cyprus problem and move to the future with determination, imagination and confidence in order for them to commonly build a new prosperous Cyprus. Perhaps only through the above-mentioned evolutionary approach could Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriot satisfy their basic negotiating interests but also create a baggage of trust that would help them renegotiate in the future, with a fresher

angle, a comprehensive settlement of the problem within the framework of a future plan by the UN based again and inevitably on a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation. Perhaps only through such an evolutionary approach will the Cypriots be able to ever reunite their island thus creating the conditions for an everlasting peace and prosperity in this small but significant country situated in the turbulent Eastern Mediterranean region.