

# **SOCIAL REGULARITY AS AN ESSENTIAL DETERMINANT OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS A SOLUTION OF THE CYPRUS ISSUE**

*Soteris Kattos*

*(PhD Political Sociology)*

## **Introductory remarks**

Often times social inquiry runs the risk of incorporating structural limitations by confusing social scientific theory with philosophy and belief. As Babbie (1983) points out social scientific inquiry "has to do with what is, not with what should be". Social inquiry "cannot settle debates on value" (p.17). This important observation constitutes a fundamental parameter in order to determine the nature of social regularities in Greek Cypriot society.

A persistent and stable social regularity is the existing social stratification system on the island. That is, a social system based on productive and distributive networks that produces social inequality along the dimensions of class, political power and status. Furthermore, these networks have been institutionalized and have received legitimization by Greek Cypriot society. In other words there is an extensive consensus of approval of the system.

If one wishes to explore social tendencies with regard to prospects for a final settlement, the system of social stratification should be taken up as the most significant antecedent condition in order to explain the consequence. That is, the probability of reaching a viable settlement on the Cyprus issue. A solution simply means an agreement on a new model of peaceful inter-ethnic regulation.

## **Models of regulating inter-ethnic relations**

The Cypriot stratification system exhibits a particular sociological complexity. The system, or the persistent and institutional pattern of social regularity (in the broad sense of the term), apart from being structured along the dimensions of class, power and prestige, it also incorporates the dimension of ethnicity as a significant socio-political dynamic in influencing bi-communal relations on the island. This simply means, that being a member of a specific ethnic group affects the individual's life chances, for better or worse. The Greek community as the largest and the most powerful community imposed distributive networks of valuable resources to its favor, by utilizing ethnicity as a major political determinant in attaining distributive advantages.

## **Constitutional partnership: social pluralism 1960-1963**

Following independence from British colonial rule, the 1960 agreement gave birth to a constitutional partnership between the Greek and the Turkish Cypriots. The system of stratification, manifested as the ongoing

social regularity, essentially remained intact but with a new legal framework in place.

This new polity represented, from a sociological point of view, a new bi-communal consensus based on social and political pluralism which sanctioned constitutionally equal legal status to both communities. This partnership put in place a set of political parameters as the necessary but not sufficient condition, for the emergence of social pluralism which was based however on bi-communality. That was the initial model of managing ethnic relations on the island.

### **The model of segregation 1963-1974**

In 1963 social pluralism collapsed and the partnership broke down. The method used by the Greek Cypriot majority was based on de facto inter-ethnic segregation. Through this segregation, the Greek community assumed absolute political control on the island. Gradually this became a new social regularity along ethnic lines.

The model of social pluralism inherited from the British was replaced by a new stratification system. The politics of national identity and ethnocentrism were re-introduced into the political agenda and a new regulatory framework based on majority-minority, dominance-subjugation, came into effect. This new social regularity which produced unprecedented benefits to the Greek Cypriot majority lasted until 1974.

The 1974 events (Greek coup and Turkish invasion) disrupted and displaced the stratification model which was based on ethnic segregation, by providing through force de facto 36% of the island's economic space to the Turkish Cypriots. That is, segregation apart from being ethnic in orientation, it now also incorporated a geographical dimension that rendered it quite solid.

The de facto occupation set in motion a dynamic process which provided for stable and persistent patterns of social regularity for the Turkish Cypriot community, whereas concurrently it extensively dismantled the stratification system or the social regularity at the time for the Greek Cypriot majority. At the same time, a new social stratification equilibrium emerged in the government controlled area by instituting a new social regularity for Greek Cypriots.

This new political reality based on the de facto partition provided the background for the eventual illegal declaration of "TRNC" in 1983.

### **A new regulatory framework 1983 – present**

The Turkish Cypriots needed a "legal" framework to consolidate politically their new social regularity. They established their own distinct stratification system, the longest in duration, following the 1960 agreements. The Turkish Cypriot collective autonomy was a political

derivative of this "legal" structure. The Turkish Cypriot community has been negotiating since then with the Greek community within the framework of the "TRNC".

Therefore, for the last 40 years or so, the historical development of inter ethnic relations experienced various types of models of regulation. From a short-lived social and political pluralism to subjugation and segregation of the Turkish Cypriots by the Greek Cypriot community until 1974, and from then onwards the longest in time de facto partition between the communities, with each community enjoying its own distinct social regularity. This distinctive attribute has been extensively internalized by each community and it is manifested by two distinct stratification systems.

However, between the two systems lies a fundamental difference; neither in terms of habit, customs and tradition nor in terms of class power and prestige, which by themselves are formidable cultural forces and condition behavioral outcomes, but rather in terms of legitimacy.

The system of stratification or the social regularities in the government controlled areas enjoys both internal and external legitimization. Following accession to the EU in 2004, it has safeguarded its international legitimacy for all socioeconomic strata. This legitimacy is derived from the international recognition the Republic of Cyprus enjoys. In stark contrast to the above, the "TRNC" enjoys only internal legitimization. Although it might be perceived as an extreme argument, the adoption of the euro by the Cypriot government in 2008 has strengthened Greek Cypriots' ethnocentric cultural and political attitudes.

As a fundamental sociological observation stratification systems persist over time, are hardened over time, regulate stability, order and conflict. In fact these systems institutionalize social conflict, regulate the economy and consequently the division of labor.

They regulate production and distribution networks and above all they derive their much needed legitimization from a set of ideological postulates and beliefs. Essentially the issue at hand, is to explore politically and socially the existing potentiality to transcend the current social regularities in the Greek Cypriot community without disrupting through this transition, stability and order. Given the currency of societal trends, the Greek Cypriot community is confronted with two asymmetric but concurrent transitory stages i.e. its current economic adjustment and adjustment to the demands and requirements of a prospective bi-zonal and bi-communal federal solution, a solution that threatens social regularity in both communities.

### **Socially organic trends**

It might be helpful to outline briefly, what I call socially organic trends, in the government controlled area. These trends in my view condition

behavioral patterns and attitudes and influence the Greek Cypriots' collective mindset. And most probably, in like manner, they influence collective attitudes in the occupied north.

1. The notion of social distance is an important organic trend. That is the subjective sense of nearness felt to certain individuals or ethnic category: e.g. the Turkish Cypriots Vs the Greek Cypriots, that is, the level of intimacy. The above is conditioned by the intensity of ethnic identification which conditions the perpetuation of social distance.

It is one thing for a Greek Cypriot to hire the services of a Turkish Cypriot gardener, and it is quite another, to have a Turkish Cypriot as a neighbor to that same Greek Cypriot. The notion of consciousness of kind, that is, ethnic identity reduces social distances for those of the same kind. At the same time ethnic identity contributes to the formation of stereotypes; their stability and persistence eventually leads to prejudice.

This state of mind conditions the cultural estimate that the Greek Cypriots place on Turkish Cypriots. Conflict reinforced by ethnocentrism accounts for much of the hostility against each other and is responsible for the perpetuation of social distance.

2. Greek Cypriots do not favor a common economic system and a new evolving division of labor related to a new ascending social regularity.
3. There is an extensive negative attitude regarding a bi-communal transcendence of the current economic system.
4. Intra-communal class interests seem to assume priority over interethnic relations.
5. There is a strong allegiance towards the current social regularity in each community.
6. The modification of ethnic stereotypes is not likely to occur unless there is a reduction in social distance. The trend in Greek Cypriot society points to the opposite direction. Once a system of ethnic stratification becomes established it tends to be self-sustaining.
7. The memorandum of understanding as a circumstance of economic transition does not delegitimize existing social regularities.
8. There is a widespread negative collective attitude in terms of prospects for overall socio economic improvement via a solution of the problem.

9. There is a strong negative attitude regarding the presence of natural gas as a catalyst to a solution and the commercialization of natural gas via Turkey through a pipeline.
10. There is a strong negative attitude that given current economic conditions, a solution to the problem is not perceived as a priority by the majority of Greek Cypriots.
11. There is a strong negative attitude regarding the acceptance of a number of Turkish settlers in case of a solution.

### **Plan B**

In light of the above the Greek Cypriot community should begin entertaining the idea of elaborating and crafting an alternative approach to the current status quo on the island. This alternative, or PLAN B if you like, which has been extensively demonized by the Greek Cypriot political establishment on the island, should draw from the existing EU juridical and political realities and accumulated political practice. Within the juridical context of the EU Overseas Countries and Territories (OCT) the Republic of Cyprus should examine a set of proposals in order to address its current political predicament. Tentatively, these proposals are:

- (a) The Turkish Cypriot territory should not exceed 25% of the land mass of the island. The T/C territory becomes an EU special overseas territory (*cf Treaty of Lisbon*).
- (b) Protocol 3 and Protocol 10 remain in effect.
- (c) The T/C zone acquires the legal status of an extraordinary constitutional – juridical entity within the EU, under its political and institutional jurisdiction. Concurrently, and always within the legal requirements of Protocol 10, a mutually agreed process regarding the withdrawal of Turkish military forces is reached.
- (d) Within the framework of efficient and effective transitional provisions, implementation of basic freedoms and liberties for all legally residing individuals on the island becomes effective, as these are safeguarded by the *Aquis Communautaire*.
- (e) Institutional provisions that could set in motion a *quid pro quo* process to facilitate a politico-economic convergence between the two communities.
- (f) Foreign policy and defense, security issues, migration and internal affairs, air space, EEZ rights of the T/C community are brought under the direct institutional control of the EU, in consultation and cooperation with the Republic of Cyprus and always within the framework of Protocol 10.
- (g) The Republic of Cyprus should undertake political initiative to communicate its intentions, through institutional and diplomatic channels, to the international community.
- (h) Diplomatic normalization of relations with Turkey.

- (i) An uninterrupted and unhindered EU-Turkey accession talks, with the aim of concluding a successful outcome, i.e. Turkey becomes a full EU member.

As a final comment, existing social regularities on the island should not be evaluated politically as a hindrance to, but as a recognizance of the need to explore a viable peaceful alternative of a solution of the problem to the benefit of all.

Reference: *Babbie Earl, 1983, "The Practice of Social Research", 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Wadsworth Publishing Company.*