

TURKEY AND CYPRUS REVISITED

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On July 13, 1974 the two constitutional experts, M. Dekleris and O. Alticacti from Greece and Turkey respectively, finalized a draft for a comprehensive settlement on the Cyprus problem which was to be ratified on July 16, 1974 by the two negotiators, G. Clerides and R. Denktash. This agreement was on the basis of a unitary state with elements of local and communal self-administration on issues of low level politics. But the media at the time was not focusing on the prospect of an imminent solution of the Cyprus problem, but on the clash between President Makarios and the Greek Junta.

On July 15, 1974 the Greek Junta overthrew Makarios. The putschist regime in Nicosia announced "that the change was an internal affair of the Greeks of Cyprus only." Furthermore, it was announced that the intercommunal negotiations would be continued in order to find a solution on the already agreed and existing basis. The Turkish-Cypriot leader R. Denktash also stated (initially) that what happened was "an internal affair of the Greek Cypriots." For Ankara though, it was a window of opportunity to be exploited as both the Greek Junta in Athens and the putschist Sampson regime in Nicosia were isolated and under strong international criticism.

On July 20, 1974 Turkey invaded Cyprus. Ankara stated that "its intervention was intended to reestablish the constitutional order and to protect the Turkish Cypriot [minority] community." On July 23, 1974 the Greek Junta collapsed and C. Karamanlis returned to Athens in the early hours of the following day to lead the country to the reestablishment of democracy in the land of its birthplace and to a new era. Likewise, the putschist regime in Nicosia

collapsed and G. Clerides – as Speaker of the House of Representatives – assumed duties of Acting President in accordance with the constitution. He immediately suggested to the Turkish-Cypriot leader R. Denktash the return to the 1960 constitution. R. Denktash and Ankara declined.

With the reestablishment of democracy in Greece and of the constitutional order in Cyprus, international public opinion changed. Both Karamanlis and Clerides enjoyed respect and credibility throughout the world. Nevertheless Turkey continued its military operations despite the negotiations (involving Greece, Turkey, Britain, Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots and the UN) for a peaceful resolution. On August 14, it launched a second massive attack against Cyprus by land, air and sea after the rejection of its ultimatum to the Republic of Cyprus to surrender about 34% of the land. The Greek-Cypriot civilians were expected to leave this territory and allow the Turkish army to deploy itself accordingly. By August 16, 1974 Turkey had occupied 38% of the land of the Republic of Cyprus, having committed unmentionable atrocities and violations of human rights.

Had Turkey stopped its military operations on July 23, 1974 very few people would have questioned its stated reasons for intervening. Retrospectively though, there is no doubt that Turkey committed ethnic cleansing, did not reestablish the constitutional order in Cyprus, occupied 38% of the land of this island-state, has set up a puppet/protectorate regime and has pursued an ambitious policy of colonization. Currently, there are more Anatolian Turkish settlers than Turkish Cypriots in the area it occupies which calls itself the “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” (“T.R.N.C.”). And there has been a systematic destruction of the cultural heritage as well as a massive exploitation and usurpation of Greek Cypriot properties.

Despite the initial outcry and various resolutions of the UN and other international institutions, in essence no action has been taken against Turkey. In November 1974, the General Assembly of the UN passed a unanimous resolution (3212) for the respect of the territorial integrity, sovereignty and

independence of the Republic of Cyprus and for the withdrawal of all foreign troops. Ironically, Turkey voted in favour of this resolution. Subsequently, the UN urged bicomunal negotiations to address the problem despite the fact that the issue is a complex one with several dimensions and with the bicomunal aspect not being the most important one. Not surprisingly, successive years of bicomunal negotiations did not lead to any results.

It is important to recall that since 1974, whenever Turkey confronts major decisions such as dealing with the American arms embargo in the 70's and in its EU relations recently, they are accompanied by major initiatives to resolve the Cyprus problem. Yet the record suggests that international pressures are then directed toward the weaker side and not toward Turkey. Not surprisingly, to the present day Turkey has not altered its policy. It has not even implemented the minimal obligations toward the EU and Cyprus undertaken in December 2004 when a positive decision was reached to begin accession negotiations with the Union. The Turkish narrative projected today is about "the Turkish-Cypriot isolation." And according to this narrative the term occupation (of the northern part of Cyprus) is a politically incorrect term!

Following the end of the Cold War and Bill Clinton's election to the Presidency in 1992, the US adopted a new policy perspective which emphasized that the Cyprus question as well as Greco-Turkish problems should be resolved within the EU. The underlying assumption was that Turkey would be accepted as a member of the Union. Undoubtedly, the US had been and continues to be a staunch supporter of Turkish membership in the EU. But not enough attention has been paid by the US to the requirements for such membership. Perhaps the strong support that Turkey enjoys from the US and other countries (including Britain) has led Ankara to believe that it has a largely blank cheque that does not require the resolution of several issues, including the Cyprus problem.

Ankara claims that it acted responsibly when the UN submitted what came to be known as the Annan Plan (V) in April 2004 as a comprehensive solution to

the Cyprus problem. The Turkish Cypriots (and the settlers) voted YES (65%), while the Greek Cypriots rejected the plan overwhelmingly (76%). The Turkish side stressed that the Greek Cypriots did not want to share power and wealth with the Turkish Cypriots. In actual fact the Greek Cypriots rejected a plan which would have legitimized the outcome of the 1974 invasion and would have made Cyprus a Turkish protectorate - not to mention the possibility of dramatic demographic changes given that it provided that the settlers would stay.

Furthermore, Greek Cypriots felt that the provisions of the Annan Plan reversed many of the gains of the then imminent EU accession. Moreover, they also felt that there were inadequate guarantees in relation to the inflow of more Turkish settlers let alone that Turkey would (again) be a guarantor power. In sum, the Greek-Cypriot rejection was not the outcome of a nationalist attitude - on the contrary the (Greek-Cypriot) objective has been and still is an integrated Cyprus. It was more the outcome of the perception that the implementation of the Annan Plan V would deteriorate their situation, nullify the Republic of Cyprus and also endanger their own existence as Greek Cypriots.

It is worth noting that Turkey pursues a policy of double standards, comparing how it would like to resolve its own Kurdish question and the Cyprus problem. Ankara would like to "give more rights" to the 15 million Kurds within the framework of a policy of integration. But in Cyprus, for about 100.000 Turkish Cypriots (and almost 180.000 Anatolian settlers) Ankara wishes to advance, using its leverage, a completely different philosophy; a loose federation/confederation based on ethnocommunal lines. It is also notable that recently the Turkish Foreign Minister A. Davoutoglu stated regarding the Balkans that Turkey hoped that the EU would implement policies that covered the entire region and that did not exclude any ethnic or religious groups. The Turkish message was clear: policies should not be based on ethnic and/or religious criteria. Yet in Cyprus, Turkey contradicts itself as it pursues a philosophy based on separation along ethnic and religious lines.

To the present day and despite its European ambitions, Turkey remains a very difficult neighbour to say the least. The Cyprus problem can only be resolved if Turkey recognizes the right of the Republic of Cyprus to exist, if it withdraws its occupation troops and puts an end to its colonization policy. Such a shift would definitely strengthen the European credentials of Turkey and would also serve the cause of long-term peace, security and cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean and beyond.