

Symbolic Dates—Substantive Issues

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The end of 2009 marked twenty years since the symbol of the Cold War, the Berlin Wall, came down. Twenty years later the “Wall of Shame” dividing Cyprus since the 1974 Turkish invasion remains intact thanks to international apathy and a dynamic Turkish foreign policy whose narrative continues to manipulate the changing international environment.

The end of the Cold War was greeted by the enthusiastic rhetoric of a “New World Order” based on the rule of law and human rights. However, this empty rhetoric proved to be only a mobilizational device, while “realpolitik” remained the order of the day in international politics as various crises in the Middle East, the Caucasus and elsewhere have shown.

The new year 2010, marks another important date that of the 50th anniversary of the Republic of Cyprus. As a non-Cypriot, I have observed and participated in the uphill struggle of the Republic of Cyprus to consolidate its independence and protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity. No other Western European state since the end of WWII has faced such a struggle. Born of a valiant anti-colonial struggle, the Republic of Cyprus was burdened from the very first by an externally imposed dysfunctional constitution that foreign constitutional experts have described as “unique and unprecedented”. Over the last five decades this Republic has survived external subversion, foreign invasion and occupation, the economic dislocation caused by the Turkish invasion, and the lack of political experience in national and international affairs after centuries of foreign rule. Cyprus never experienced the political and economic forces that shaped modern Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries. And yet, today, the Republic of Cyprus represents a remarkable case of a stable and economically vibrant democracy that is a member of the EU among other international organizations.

However, the challenges to the continuing existence of the Republic of Cyprus have not ended. In 2004, the Greek Cypriot public proved remarkably astute when it overwhelmingly rejected the so-called “Annan Plan” that would have dissolved the Republic of Cyprus and replaced it by a loose confederation of two largely autonomous mini-states. That plan essentially legitimized the outcome of the 1974 Turkish invasion. This was neither the first nor the last time that an external attempt was made to destroy the Republic of Cyprus under the guise of “resolving” the Cyprus problem. This would have been the effect of the 1964 NATO plan. This was the objective of the 1964 Acheson Plan. This remains Turkey’s constant objective in the UN sponsored talks. Under the guise of “reunification” Turkey seeks to promote the replacement of the internationally recognized Republic of Cyprus with a new loose confederal entity of two ethnically cleansed Cypriot states.

It is imperative to seek a solution addressing all aspects of the Cyprus problem, domestic and international. However, no self respecting European Union member will dissolve itself to placate the interests and demands of Turkey and its allies. A series of decisions by the European Court of Human Rights, the European Court of Justice, reports by the European Commission of Human Rights and various resolutions by international organizations confirm Turkey's continuing violations of international and European law. While welcoming the renewed effort to resolve the Cyprus problem, we must not forget that substantive issues remain on the table. They include but are not limited to:

- Turkey's demands for guarantees by Turkish forces with intervention rights;
- Turkey's failure to comply with its international obligations including the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights on property and other human rights issues;
- Turkey's systematic and deliberate effort to alter the demographic balance of Cyprus by the introduction of large numbers of illegal settlers that outnumber the native Turkish Cypriot population by a ratio of 2:1;
- The definition of functional and viable governance arrangements that will enable the Republic of Cyprus to meet its international obligations and comply with the European Convention of Human Rights which is now part of EU law;
- Governance arrangements that maintain the continuity of the Republic of Cyprus;
- Governance arrangements that do not deprive any native Cypriots, Greek or Turkish, of their rights under the European Convention;

These are some of the major challenges that will face the Cypriot public in the weeks ahead. No government or international mediator can deprive European citizens of fundamental rights under the guise of "resolving" the Cyprus problem. Putting "realpolitik" considerations above the rule of law will not resolve the Cyprus problem or restore stability to the Eastern Mediterranean. No other European country would accept conditions such as those included in the failed "Annan Plan" or in its current resurrected version. Why should Cyprus be expected to accept such terms?

The European Union claims to be founded on the principles of the rule of law, democracy and human rights. Cyprus is asking nothing more of itself or of the international community as it seeks a resolution of its long standing problem. The 50th anniversary of the Republic of Cyprus presents both a challenge and an opportunity to show that the principles on which the EU is founded on are a reality and not empty rhetoric.