

EDITOR'S NOTE – TOWARD A NEW APPROACH

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In Depth Vol. 14, No. 1 is a thematic issue devoted to the Cyprus Question. We should recall that in the last few months high expectations were raised for a comprehensive solution of the Cyprus Problem. The recent round of negotiations on January 9-12, 2017 in Geneva, which culminated in a conference with the participation of the three guarantor powers – Britain, Greece and Turkey – did not lead to a comprehensive agreement. It will be a surprise if the new round of negotiations that is expected to take place in Geneva in March 2017 will lead to a comprehensive agreement. This thematic issue presents perspectives on the Cyprus Problem from various backgrounds as well as schools of thoughts. Our goal is to continue to be a forum for the encouragement of a creative dialogue in which different ideas are presented and discussed.

The prevailing narrative of the recent years was that any solution of the Cyprus problem based on a bizonal, bicomunal federation entails improvement of the *status quo* as well as economic growth and benefits. This position is not substantiated. It is doubtful, if not impossible, for Cyprus to operate in the Eurozone with the implementation of the specific solution framework which is currently discussed. Serious concerns have already been expressed by various circles in Cyprus as well as in the EU and the IMF. In addition, such models which are based on ethno-nationalist pillars, usually lead to malfunction, frictions and frustrations. Bosnia and Lebanon are indeed indicative examples. Even Belgium has its own difficulties. And the circumstances in which the Belgian model functions cannot be compared with the ones in Cyprus.

It is amazing that the proponents of this model for Cyprus have never raised the question whether there could be risks with this particular solution. In this regard it is extraordinary how a recent decision of the House of Representatives to honour the Referendum of January 15, 1950 in favour of *Enosis* assumed proportions beyond any expectation.

It is also important to understand that it is difficult, to say the least, for a solution that supposedly improves the *status quo* for the Greek-Cypriots to take place with the current stance of Turkey, which aims to push aside the Republic of Cyprus and to replace it with a new state entity. Furthermore, one of the risks involved in this exercise is the protectorization of Cyprus by Turkey. In such a case Turkey will have a say in EU affairs via its influence on the new state of affairs in Cyprus after a solution on the basis of a bizonal bicomunal federation with political equality. We should be reminded that there has been a gradual

alignment of the Greek Cypriot positions with the Turkish demands from 1974 until today.

It is also understood though that the existing *status quo* poses serious risks. But because most likely there will be a deterioration of the *status quo* with a solution based on a bizonal, bicomunal federation as discussed today, we must reassess the situation and focus on policy options which may facilitate the interested parties to overcome the deadlock in a constructive way. Indeed, it is important to have alternative approaches that rely on an evolutionary process with a specific roadmap.

The idea for an evolutionary approach is also supported by the fact that, in case of a solution along the lines discussed, it will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to move from one state of affairs to another in 24 hours. This is because there are separate narratives, experiences, perceptions, value-systems and different political, economic and social realities.

One of the issues raised is that there is a process that cannot change. The implication is that the current process must either lead to a comprehensive settlement that will be accepted or rejected in a referendum; alternatively, if there is no agreement the procedure will collapse. New ideas could be discussed subsequently. Given the record of the last few weeks it may be essential to revisit the wisdom of such an approach. My strong recommendation is to take initiatives to avoid a deadlock. Likewise it will be unwise to bring a plan in a referendum that will be rejected by one or by both sides. The time has come to look for an alternative, perhaps, complementary approach. In other words it may be useful to adopt an evolutionary process which will generate tangible benefits to all interested parties. Moreover, if successful such a process will build trust. This in itself may facilitate a comprehensive settlement which will have better chances to survive. Such an outcome will serve the cause of security and cooperation in Cyprus, in the Eastern Mediterranean and beyond.