

THE CHALLENGE OF THE FIRST HUNDRED DAYS

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When the dust from the Presidential electoral campaign settles down and the votes are counted, the new Cypriot leadership will confront the reality of governing and addressing the critical issues facing the Republic of Cyprus.

Few months ago, the United States went through the nastiest and most expensive presidential campaign in its history. Now, President Obama has no choice but to confront unresolved socio-economic issues, foreign policy challenges and legislative deadlock. At least, in the United States the survival of the American Republic is not at stake. Unfortunately, in the case of Cyprus it is!

Political campaigns are part of a democratic ritual defined by wild promises, apocalyptic rhetoric, expectations for a better future, a desire for change and, in most cases, a desire for political power. Once victory has been declared and the spoils have been divided, the post-election blues set in. The victor has to face head on the political, social and economic reality confronting the country. In the case of Cyprus coming to terms with that reality will not be easy either for its new leadership or for the public. For the first time in its 53 year long history, Cyprus faces an unprecedented economic crisis made worse by the leadership vacuum and the lack of political credibility of the last five years.

Previous Cypriot administrations had the luxury of operating with a domestic economic and political consensus and a strong economy that protected the country from external political pressures and opened the way to the country's EU accession. Domestic mismanagement, along with the American and European economic crisis, have made shambles of the once flourishing Cypriot economy. This has put at risk not only the country's newly found mineral wealth but also the country's political and economic future and independence given the demands of lending institutions and foreign governments. Economic dependence begets political dependence and this could not come at a worse time for the Republic of Cyprus. Will the new leadership be able to rebuild its credibility at home and abroad and the economic and social consensus that brought Cyprus into the EU? Will the new leadership re-engineer its EU image and rebuild its coalitions so as to defuse some of the pressures facing it?

The old adage "to the victor go the spoils" holds true in Cyprus. Fortunately, the Republic does not have any more the luxury of dividing the spoils among those who helped elect the new President. More than ever before, personnel selection for key government and administrative

posts has to be made on merit rather than on political debts. The days of political patronage must come to an end. Time has come to look beyond the political patronage that has dominated Cypriot political, social and economic life since independence.

The public and the private sector must look beyond the political and ideological stereotypes and define new patterns of cooperation to get Cyprus out of its economic mess. The Greek Cypriot public should expect and demand accountability and meritorious performance from its leadership rather than partisanship and political patronage. The economic challenges facing Cyprus cannot any longer be swept under the rug. They can only be addressed by bold measures and consensus among all sectors of Cypriot society. Will the new leadership be bold enough to do so?

The unresolved Cyprus problem remains. For decades the Greek Cypriots have waited for deus ex machina, whether in the form of Kofi Annan and his predecessors or now with Alexander Downer, to cut the Gordian knot. The new President needs to break new ground on this issue as well. Democratically, wisely and freely, the Greek Cypriots decided on 24 April 2004 that their future would not be served well by the 9,000+ page constitutional sophistry known as the "bi-zonal/bi-communal federation" prepared by Kofi Annan and his Anglo-American sponsors. UN mediators and other foreign emissaries have relied on UN Security Council resolutions to promote constitutional constructs that are divisive, dysfunctional and violate European legal and political norms and the European Convention on Human Rights. Ironically, the same countries that opposed the internationalization of the Cyprus problem prior to the end of the Cold War, now find legitimacy in the UN endorsement of the unprecedented constitutional construct of the "bi-zonal/bi-communal federation".

The new leadership of the Republic will need the courage to put forth its own constitutional proposal based on the outcome of the 2004 referendum and the rule of law principles on which the EU is based. That can still be done by appropriate revisions to the 1960 constitution. The Cyprus problem remains one of invasion, occupation and violation of internationally protected human rights. Why not confront Turkey with its own justification of the 1974 invasion, i.e. the restoration of the constitutional order that was disturbed by the coup carried out by the junta ruling Greece at the time?

Countries that respect themselves do not destroy themselves to accommodate the interests of third parties. Time has come for the new leadership of the Republic to face that reality, propose a new way of protecting the democratic heritage of the Republic and the rights of all of its legitimate citizens, Greek or Turkish Cypriot. Cyprus cannot expect others to respect its sovereignty and independence and protect the rights

of its legitimate citizens if the government of the Republic is unwilling to do so itself.

Cyprus, a 53 year old Republic lives in a dangerous neighborhood haunted by revisionist neo-Ottomanist neighbors, the Islamic fundamentalist revival, and the quest for democracy and economic growth. Despite many negative signs, the new political leadership has no choice but to build new political partnerships, capitalize on new economic opportunities, and seek imaginative solutions to old problems. The country's strategic position, newly discovered natural resources, and its EU membership opens the way to an alternative vision beyond the present gloom and doom.

Franklin D. Roosevelt came to power in the midst of the most destructive economic crisis that ever faced the US. In his first one hundred days in office, Roosevelt set the foundations for bold economic and social changes that led the US back to economic growth, to victory in WWII and to its post-WWII world power status. The next 100 days will be critical for the new Cypriot administration as well. This will be the only opportunity for the new administration to define bold new directions to confront the critical issues challenging the very existence of the Republic. Simply stated, there is no more time for "business as usual"!

As a non-Cypriot friend of Cyprus, I hope that the first hundred days of the new administration will become a new and positive turning point in modern Cypriot history.