

CYPRUS PROBLEM AND THE DAY AFTER: FROM CONFLICT MANAGEMENT TO CRISIS MANAGEMENT

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This short piece intends to initiate a new research agenda for the Cyprus Problem. An extended literature, as well as a number of reports and analyses, focus on alternative options for arranging the problem. Little, if any work has been made however on the day after a settlement is reached. Under what conditions a Cyprus settlement will be made viable? When such a question is raised the short answer is that “we can’t work on the day after when the basic provisions of the settlement are not known.” Knowing the details of an arrangement is an important pre-requisite for contemplating on the day after, but such a knowledge is neither necessary nor essential for planning the day after. International experience on post-conflict societies offers a very good basis for designing some contingency plans, as well as for thinking ahead of the day after.

One should not expect that if a settlement is reached the Cypriot society will evade polarization overnight. Neither should one expect that disengagement from third-state influence will be easily achieved. History is tough, but the future of the island must not be based on historic mistakes. Recent developments demonstrate that real or perceived threats across the communities, as well as across other parties which are involved in the Cyprus conundrum, may trigger minor or major crises that could develop into a perfect storm. The 1960s experience must have taught some lessons. Overcoming past and present concerns and reservations for reaching an agreement is very difficult, but putting an agreement into effect is much more challenging.

The most crucial, still least discussed aspect of a political settlement is a successful transitional period. Both policy-makers and people need to know that a settlement will go through a transitional period. It is necessary to envisage the fundamental mechanisms and institutions that will guarantee a successful transition and prevent an unfortunate collapse during such a transition. In the post-Cold War era almost one out of two peace deals fail during the transitional period. Transitional periods in post-conflict societies are very risky. Both the political system and the society are stressed by contingent or intentional crises that, if not tackled at their inception, they may go out of control and the whole structure may go astray.

The post-settlement situation in Cyprus will not be a harmonious one. It will probably evolve around a relatively long period of crises. Bearing that in mind, one should expect that the Cyprus problem will not be settled up until the system will be able to swiftly, effectively and justly tackle these

crises. A comprehensive survey by the Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development (SeeD) demonstrates that there are a number of possible triggers for crises in Cyprus after a settlement (see <http://www.seedsofpeace.eu/index.php/where-we-work/europe/cyprus/security-dialogue-project/interim-research-findings-and-a-new-security-architecture>). On reflection, SeeD team put forth a number of recommendations for a new Security Architecture in Cyprus. That Architecture is based on the principle of endogenous resilience and suggests that both preventive and reactive institutions and mechanisms must be in place from day one. Some of these mechanisms must be in place even before the settlement is put in effect, i.e. during the interim period between a formal agreement and the referenda. At the moment SeeD team is refining propositions for a comprehensive proposal of some Special Transitional Arrangements.

Since January 2017, the relevant parties have opened talks on the security dossier. No comprehensive discussion however was pursued for addressing Cyprus' post-settlement needs in terms of crisis management, security institutions and transitional arrangements. Talks on security are confined to traditional bargaining positions over foreign troops and military guarantees. Any compromise on these issues will be controversial and most of all it will probably not be relevant to the actual (internal and external) security needs of Cyprus in the new era. Serving third-state security interests and priorities may not be compatible with Cyprus' security interests and priorities.

It is high time to delve into these issues in a comprehensive manner with a new methodology. So far the security dossier was mostly discussed among the historic guarantor powers. Community leaders were also engaged in discussions about the role of guarantor powers. That method engenders no progress. Instead it produces more disputes, polarization and deadlocks. A comprehensive discussion on security must be based on a detailed and nuanced threat analysis, as well as on the security institutions –soft and hard security institutions– that will address these threats. Most of all a security architecture for Cyprus must be based on certain principles and a shared vision. To reach such an outcome a democratic participatory method must be followed that will engage the people of Cyprus and all the relevant stakeholders. International organizations, such as the UN, the EU and OSCE should also be part of these deliberations. Historic guarantor powers may offer advice and support, but their role should not militate against a self-sustained and endogenously resilient security architecture in Cyprus.

One should make no mistake. A settlement to the Cyprus problem will not be the end of history. Cyprus and its communities will have to come to terms with the challenges of the day after, domestic, regional and global. The attention will definitely be shifted away from the management of a conflict to the management of post-settlement crises. Serious preparation,

thought and planning are needed to that end. To put that in an aphoristic manner, for as long as there is no commitment to that direction there is no genuine eagerness for a comprehensive, viable and lasting solution to the Cyprus problem. To the contrary, ill-preparation may conceal intentions for a new, post-settlement Cyprus conflict. Cypriots have seen enough in 1960s and 1970s. They should not repeat the same mistakes.