

THE GHOSTS OF CYPRUS*

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Believers in a multicultural society are bound to be disappointed when they come to Cyprus. Apart from Ireland, Cyprus is the only EU state with a dividing line between people of a different religious background. And for that matter, the only EU state occupied by two foreign powers, Turkey and Britain, which together sit on 40 percent of the island.

Turkish president Abdullah Gül confirmed this lamentable state of affairs when he on his first official visit to Cyprus five years ago spoke of “two realities on Cyprus, two democracies, two states, two languages and two religions”. Turkey has defied a number of UN and EU resolutions calling on Turkey to end its occupation of northern Cyprus, which rules out the likelihood of Gül being elected as NATO’s next secretary-general.

The victims of the island’s division are not only the Greek Cypriots who had to abandon their property after the Turkish invasion in 1974 but also the Turkish Cypriots who likewise abandoned their property in the government-controlled areas. They have since lived in a no-man’s land where nobody apart from Turkey recognizes the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus declared in 1983.

At a demonstration in Brussels on 27 June 350 Turkish Cypriots airlifted in from northern Cyprus protested against their isolation and dressed as ghosts, called for direct trade and direct flights to the occupied area. The irony of the situation was that they travelled on passports of the Republic of Cyprus, which they claimed did not represent them.

Intercommunal violence

In reality, the Turkish Cypriots are caught between a rock and a hard place. In 1958 intercommunal violence broke out, provoked by a bomb explosion at the Turkish Information Office in Nicosia, which the Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denктаş later admitted had been placed by the Turks themselves “to create an atmosphere of tension”.

The power-sharing constitution of 1960 provided for an uneasy truce, which both sides regarded as an interim period before they could realize their real intentions. For the Greek Cypriots the aim was majority rule and *enosis* (union with Greece) and for the Turkish Cypriot minority *taksim* (partition) with Turkish support.

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When the constitution collapsed in December 1963, fighting once again broke out between the two communities and the Turkish Cypriots retreated to enclaves all over the island. At the start of the century there had been more than 300 mixed villages in Cyprus but these had been reduced to 40.

More than 20,000 Turkish Cypriots became refugees in their own country and were reduced to conditions of considerable hardship. The Greek Cypriots imposed an embargo, accommodation was overcrowded, housing dilapidated and sanitary facilities were almost non-existent. Furthermore, many refugees lived in tents or caves.

It was for good reason UNFICYP (UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus) commander Aiti Vartiainen later commented: "The Greeks don't remember what happened before 1974 and the Turks can't forget it."

1974 and after

In his pursuit of Greek Cypriot self-determination and *enosis* President Makarios had enlisted the support of the non-aligned movement and the Soviet bloc, which in turn precipitated the Greek junta's coup in July 1974. Turkey, in its intervention, first established a bridgehead and then offered a federal solution with two autonomous administrations. When this was rejected, Turkey implemented the second phase, which led to the division of the island.

After the declaration of the TRNC in 1983, Rauf Denktaş in a letter to the UN Secretary-General in March 1990 spoke of "two distinct and separate peoples" and later that "each side possessed sovereignty which it would retain after the establishment of a federation" including the right of secession. In a letter to Ban Ki-moon in April 2010 the new Turkish Cypriot leader, Derviş Eroğlu, continued the same line, when he stated that "the principle of equal sovereignty of two peoples" was a prerequisite for a solution.

The TRNC's foreign minister Hüseyin Özgürgün has ruled out a federation as unacceptable and like Turkey supports a two-state solution. Last year, an otherwise sensible Turkish commentator, Semih Idiz, was caught up in this hyperbole and wrote of "two nations, with their separate languages, religions and customs". However, deputy chairman of the Turkish opposition party CHP, Faruk Loğoğlu, has declared that recognition of the TRNC is not possible.

Indigenous Turkish Cypriots have long complained of Turkey behaving like a colonial power and the massive influx of Turkish immigrants has reduced their status once again to that of a minority. Or as Turkish Cypriot daily Afrika put it: "The drum is on the neck of every Cypriot, the drumstick is in the hand of Ankara. They play and we dance."

From 2000 until 2003 the Turkish Cypriot Trade Unions' Platform and other organizations under the slogan "This Country is Ours" held a number of mass rallies for federation and against Turkish rule, which led to the downfall of Denktaş and his replacement with Mehmet Ali Talat. Last year two "Communal Existence" rallies were held, calling for civil and labour rights and reunification.

In June, Derviş Eroğlu's chief adviser, Kudret Özersay, resigned and has formed a new movement, Toparlanıyoruz ("We're getting it together"), for Turkish Cypriots to start becoming a community again. The main principles of the movement are a clean society, clean politics and a clean administration and a future which will be based on the will of the Turkish Cypriots.

Another Turkish Cypriot grievance is the imposition of Sunni Islam, including the introduction of Koran classes, and the fact that there are now more mosques than schools in northern Cyprus (192 mosques and 160 schools). The Turkish Cypriot dialect has also been banned on radio and television.

At a joint press conference with Angela Merkel in October 2010, Turkish premier Recep Tayyip Erdoğan declared that "assimilation is putting pressure on individuals to leave aside their customs and traditions and such a behaviour happens to be a crime against humanity". But it is precisely Turkey's policy of assimilation and integration that the Turkish Cypriots are revolting against.