

"EOKA, Enosis, and the Future of Cyprus"¹

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This presentation involves a look at some aspects of the EOKA struggle during the 1950s. I focus on three obstacles to *enosis*, each relating to a major player outside of Cyprus namely: Britain, Greece, and Turkey. It's not possible to understand the dynamics of the EOKA struggle without investigating the factors outside of Cyprus. This is because the policies of Britain, Greece, and Turkey had a dramatic impact on the course of events on the island during the fight for *enosis*. As a historian, my work focuses on the EOKA struggle during the 1950s and the responses of the British Government. I'm working not only on the struggle itself, but on the broader political and diplomatic context trying to understand the various factors at play. The three obstacles to *enosis* that I'll raise tonight influenced the history of Cyprus. They have also helped to define the present political situation. So I will be discussing the present briefly towards the end.

As most of you will know, the *enosis* movement made a momentous decision to use force in order to achieve its goal during 1954 and the National Organization of Cypriot Fighters, EOKA, began operations against the British in April 1955. The *enosis* movement faced many obstacles, more, I think than the men involved in it knew and perhaps more than they wanted to admit. These obstacles shaped the course of the struggle and its conclusion.

EOKA's war was conceived as a fight against the retreating British Empire. The British presence in Cyprus was the most obvious obstacle to *enosis*. Successive British Governments had opposed *enosis*. They did this because of the

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conviction that sovereign control over all Cyprus was necessary to uphold Britain's strategic and political concerns in the broader Middle East. It's important to remember that after World War Two, Britain was in retreat. The entire Indian subcontinent, Palestine, and Egypt had all been abandoned by British forces. In this climate, the British looked on Cyprus as a place that had to be held at all costs. Cyprus was legally a British territory, modest in size, strategically significant, and had a small population. British control seemed firmly grounded. Even so, there was already a debate within the British Government about what exactly was needed in Cyprus. Hardline imperialists remained convinced that the entire island must remain under British control. More progressive thinkers, including future Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, believed that sovereign bases could satisfy Britain's strategic needs. I should add as an aside that, not surprisingly, once Macmillan became Prime Minister other officials and politicians followed his lead. In 1960, Britain formally abandoning sovereignty over the whole island, contributing to the compromise agreement. Successive British leaders, however, remained uncompromising on the issue of *enosis*. This stance was maintained even though as early as 1951, Greece offered Britain basing facilities in Cyprus and in Greece in return for *enosis*.

A second obstacle to *enosis*, surprisingly, was the attitude of the Greek Government. It has to be remembered that during the Second World War and the Greek Civil War which followed, Britain was Greece's most important ally. Britain devoted enormous financial and military resources to Greece during the war against Germany and in support of the anti-communist side during the Civil War. This created tension within the Greek Government and a need for caution in relation to *enosis*. Politically, the Government of Greece was uncomfortable confronting Britain. It was not until the summer of 1954 that Greece decided to oppose Britain openly over Cyprus. A particular blow came in July of that year. When asked about the future of Cypriot self-government, the Minister of State for the Colonies, Mr. Henry Hopkinson, replied that due to particular circumstances, some territories could never expect to be fully independent. Hopkinson's "never" spurred Greece to raise Cyprus at the

United Nations in the fall of 1954. This decision marked an important shift in Greco-British relations over Cyprus.

Even so, the Greek Government was still not entirely behind the *enosis* movement. Leaders in Athens felt that they could not afford to support an open military movement in Cyprus. A decade of war had left the country in a dire economic situation. Greece was also concerned about how such actions would affect its relationship with Turkey. From the 1930s, Greece and Turkey had cultivated a diplomatic understanding. This newfound peaceful coexistence was further strengthened by the expansion of the NATO alliance in 1952. These new political realities gave Greece extra incentives for caution.

Greek caution meant that the *enosis* cause was driven by Cypriots. Over time the struggle centered on two men: Colonel George Grivas and Archbishop Makarios. The insistence of these two men troubled the more realistic thinkers in the Greek Government. Evangelos Averoff, the Greek Foreign Minister during the EOKA struggle wrote that Makarios "moved heaven and earth to bring the Cyprus issue to a head." During a meeting between the two men in 1951, when Averoff was Deputy Foreign Minister, he tried to slow Makarios's momentum. Averoff highlighted the problems of poverty, hunger, and homelessness in Greece and told Makarios of his concern for the Greek minority in Istanbul. Both the Greek economy and the Istanbul minority would be threatened by pressing the cause of *enosis*. The Archbishop dismissed Averoff's arguments. The liberty of Greeks, he said, took precedence over their living standards; and the Greeks living in Istanbul were doomed to destruction regardless of events of in Cyprus. Averoff was shocked, later writing that Makarios's words had stabbed him in the heart. Konstantinos Karamanlis, the Greek Prime Minister from October 1955, did convey to Makarios his willingness to help, but like Averoff, Karamanlis warned the Archbishop that the outlook for *enosis* was unpromising and that Makarios needed to be more realistic.

These concerns meant that *enosis* was pursued cautiously by the Greek Government. Pressure, particularly from Makarios, boxed Greece into supporting an armed struggle. Although arms and supplies did eventually come to Cyprus from Athens, Grivas, at least according to his memoirs, was never satisfied with the small amounts. He pressured figures in the Greek Government constantly for more material and diplomatic support. Grivas did not, however, pressure the government in Athens for men. The EOKA struggle was conducted entirely by Greek-Cypriots for Greek-Cypriots. Only one or two Greek nationals appear to have been directly involved in EOKA operations in the 1950s. Grivas wanted only Cypriots to participate in the struggle. Grivas explained his choice as follows, and I quote from his *Memoirs*: "I had decided to use only Cypriots in the fight, to show the world that our campaign was purely Cypriot in origin and conduct; I knew, besides, that if I began recruiting men on the Greek mainland, the secret would be all over Athens in a few days."

Grivas had his own clear ideas about what the men would be used for. His views, however, were in apparent conflict with the wishes of Makarios. The historical record shows that the Archbishop favored of a short campaign of sabotage, bombing and harassment. Fighters would be armed only with explosives and grenades and would target buildings instead of individuals. Such operations, Makarios felt, would convince the British to abandon Cyprus. Grivas, however, knew the British better. The colonel planned a long struggle involving guerrilla operations, targeted assassination and political murder. He hoped to inflict real damage on the British security services and to draw a strong response from the British Government. Repressive measures in Cyprus would create international pressure against the British occupation. This "moral defeat," combined with Britain's inability to maintain control of the situation would eventually force the British out. Grivas's assessment was far closer to the mark. However, neither Grivas nor Makarios seemed to take much account of the third obstacle to *enosis* – Turkey and the Turkish-Cypriots.

The twin forces of Turkey and the Turkish-Cypriots were the most formidable forces against *enosis*. Their demands were furthest from what Makarios or Grivas were willing to accept. Of the two, the Turkish-Cypriots seem to have been even less compromising in relation to any potential settlement. Turkish-Cypriots pushed for Turkish arms and Turkish military advisers to create the Turkish Resistance Organization (TMT) in 1958; they renounced partition only with the greatest reluctance in 1959; and they insisted that a detachment of Turkish troops in Cyprus be part of the final peace settlement.

The attitude of Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots towards *enosis* was always negative. Turkish-Cypriots feared that they would become second-class citizens in a Greek Cyprus. Turkey argued that a Greek-controlled Cyprus would complete a hostile encirclement threatening it both economically and militarily. This view was based on the Turkish Government's latent mistrust of the Greek Government both as a former adversary and as a potential communist state. Even though the Greek Civil War had ended in victory for the anti-communist forces, many senior people in the Turkish military and government continued to regard the Greek regime as weak and the communists as waiting in the wings.

In March 1951, the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mehmet Koprulu confided to the British Ambassador in Ankara that the Turkish Government's longstanding policy was to "refuse to admit the existence of a problem" in Cyprus as long as they were assured that Britain would not leave the island. Turkey's relative restraint on the Cyprus issue before 1955 was not indifference, but political posturing. As events in Cyprus picked up, so did Turkey's vocal opposition to the idea of *enosis*. Just a month after Koprulu's statement [April 1951], the Governor of Cyprus, Sir Andrew Wright reported that a Turkish-Cypriot delegation had requested an interview to express their "anxiety... over *enosis* and 'to request whether anything could be done' to alleviate the great uneasiness felt by local Turks on this account." Once violence began in April of 1955 the Turkish position hardened. In Turkey there was open hostility towards *enosis* and concern that the British Government

would abandon the Turkish-Cypriots by making unfavorable concession to the *enosis* movement.

The concerns of Turkey and Turkish Cypriots represented real divides between the Greek and Turkish Cypriots and between the Greek and Turkish Governments. I believe that these divisions have been minimized by many contemporary historians in favor of the more standard view that British manipulation led to the conflict between Greek and Turkish interests over Cyprus. I would make two points on this. First, on a grand strategic level, the British wanted to avoid conflict between Greece and Turkey at all costs. Cyprus was a potential flashpoint for this. Any Greco-Turkish hostility was a threat to the stability of the Eastern Mediterranean, to NATO, and to Britain's position in the Middle East. Britain took a particularly strong stance over Cyprus because of their larger goals in the region. It is illogical to argue that they would actively undermine this position by drawing Greece and Turkey into conflict with each other. Various members of the British Government did encourage Turkish officials to speak up about Cyprus in the international arena. This was done to soften the effect of Greek action at the United Nations. It's hard to imagine that this sort of diplomatic maneuvering damaged Greco-Turkish relations (including the relations of Greeks and Turks in Cyprus) more than the violence initiated and carried out by EOKA.

It's often argued that the British recruitment of Turkish-Cypriot policemen was unambiguous evidence of divide and rule. I want to mention the following facts about the Cyprus Police Force to get a full understanding of the situation. First, Turkish-Cypriots represented a disproportionate percentage of the force from the time the British took control of the island. Under the Ottomans, security was exclusively in the hands of the Turkish minority. The British brought Greek-Cypriots into the force. If they had wanted divide and rule, they would have left the force entirely Turkish as they found it. At the end of 1954, 61% of the force was Greek-Cypriot, well below the population majority of 80% but still a substantial majority.

When the EOKA campaign began, Greek-Cypriots began leaving the force in large numbers. Some left because they sympathized with EOKA, others because they feared EOKA. By the end of 1956, the proportions had essentially been reversed and 60% of the regular force was Turkish Cypriot. This inversion happened in spite of slight increases in overall police strength because too few Greek-Cypriots volunteered for service. The British Government in Cyprus needed to increase the size of the police force to deal with EOKA. With almost no Greek-Cypriots to recruit they accepted many more Turkish-Cypriot applicants. British policymakers were not happy with this outcome and actively recruited British policemen from across the Empire, including from Britain itself. By the end of 1957, Turkish-Cypriots had decreased to less than half the force while British policemen had increased to 18%. By the end of 1958, only 47% of the force was Turkish and 22% was British.

Finally, it is important to remember that the violence between the two communities during the summer of 1958 was not sparked by the British. A bomb planted by Turkish-Cypriots at the Turkish ministry of information sparked the violence in the summer of 1958. Britain and Greece were appalled by the cynical and dangerous act. Turks naturally blamed Greek-Cypriots, but British and American intelligence had evidence that Turkish-Cypriots had planted the bomb. Rauf Denktaş has subsequently admitted this fact. It is another example of how Turkey and Turkish-Cypriots were genuinely against *enosis*. They were willing to do anything to defeat it. In the end, a combination of fear, violence, diplomacy and political expediency defeated the *enosis* cause in Cyprus. The agreement of 1960 prohibited *enosis*, but the cause was not officially abandoned until after the invasion of 1974.

The three outside obstacles to *enosis* that I've mentioned all have corollaries in today's political landscape. Although the British Government gave up sovereignty over the whole island, it has kept sovereign bases. They remain an important component of projecting British power in the region. The Suez crisis of 1956 showed that Britain cannot necessarily act in the region against

the wishes of the United States. It can act with tacit American support or in support of American operations, as in the two Iraq wars. Britain also relies heavily on its alliance with Turkey for leverage in the region. In solving the Cyprus problem, the importance of that relationship, as in the 1950s, will tilt Britain towards the Turkish position.

Greece retains the caution towards Cyprus that it demonstrated in the 1950s. As a member of the EU and NATO it has worked hard to improve relations with Turkey, especially in recent years. Greece has adopted the view that if Turkey meets EU entry conditions fully then it will have the full support of Greece for membership. Greece is once again in the position of balancing its sympathy for the Greek Cypriot cause with its desire to maintain good relations with Turkey. Greece's relationship with Turkey is a priority for the government in Athens. It will be interesting to see how that priority is balanced with achieving a solution in Cyprus.

Turkey's position today is even more complicated. The invasion of 1974 allowed the Turkish Government to create the de-facto partition of the island that it had hoped for since the 1950s. Turkey's continued military presence in Cyprus, the issue of settlers and property have created thorny problems for both Turkey and the EU. Turkey's bid for EU entry has factors much larger than Cyprus, but Cyprus remains a key part of the equation. Simply put, the EU will have enormous trouble continuing to move forward with the entry of a country which occupies part of a member state. This will be a test of strength between European and Turkish resolve over the importance of Cyprus. I would be cautious, however, about thinking that the EU will automatically solve the Cyprus problem in favor of Greek-Cypriots. After all, Turkey was not prohibited from beginning its negotiations because of the occupation of Cyprus. A solution, if it comes, may not be the kind of solution that most Greek-Cypriots hope for. The final version of the Annan Plan of 2004 was emphatically rejected by Greek-Cypriots even though the EU (including Greece), the United States, Turkey, and the Turkish-Cypriots were all in favor of it. And Greek-Cypriots were openly criticized in these circles for their vote. This indicates that the rest

of the world defines a 'fair' compromise in ways significantly different from the majority of Greek-Cypriots.

It remains to be seen just what Turkey's goal in Cyprus will be moving forward. Some are content with the status quo – de facto partition. Painting Greek-Cypriots as rejectionist after the referendum in 2004, these forces are gradually moving to end the isolation of the north. They have little desire for a solution that would return sovereignty to a Greek-Cypriot majority. Demographic changes in the north based on high birth rates and immigration from Turkey represent another problem for Greek-Cypriots. With each passing year, immigrants from Turkey become more a part of Cyprus. Getting them to leave is progressively more difficult. The 80/20 population split is a thing of the past. Many European leaders are skeptical about Turkish entry in the EU for reasons beyond the Cyprus issue. It serves their interest to use the Cyprus problem cynically, drawing it out to prevent Turkey's accession, while avoiding more controversial issues such as Turkey's religion or poverty. In many ways, Turkey is facing key decisions. Obstinate militarism and the occupation of an EU member contradict Turkey's attempts to portray itself as a modernizing and progressive nation which truly belongs in Europe.

As in the 1950s, Cypriots face several options. Some are more realistic than others. *Enosis* in 1955 was unrealistic. I believe Cypriots paid a high price for pursuing that course. Confronted with the political realities of today, Cypriots will have to choose a more realistic approach than in the 1950s if the problem is to be solved in their favor. Membership in the EU and the reluctance many European countries have about Turkey's EU membership are positive starting points for the Greek-Cypriot position. However, the obstacles should not be discounted. Turkey remains an important ally for many European countries and for the United States. There is a de-facto partition of the island, 40,000 occupying troops, and deteriorating demographics. If Greek-Cypriot political leaders do not wish to accept the status quo, they face three basic choices. The first is to put their faith in the EU. Cypriot politicians can hope that the EU will support better terms than what has previously been offered by the United

Nations. Perhaps Brussels' entry requirements for Turkey and rulings in favor of Greek-Cypriots, combined with diplomatic pressure will force Turkey to compromise. Second, Greek-Cypriot politicians can try and return to the plan rejected in 2004. They can try to generate public support for it, arguing that the familiar, if flawed, terms of the Annan Plan are better than an unknown solution at an unknown future date. Third, they can chart a new course, create new alliances and partnerships and press to change the balance of opinion about Cyprus globally. It would require enormous diplomatic work and effort, but perhaps countries could be shifted away from Turkey and towards the Cypriot point of view.

The choice, in the end, is one of values. In the 1950s, most Greek-Cypriots supported EOKA in a struggle for *enosis*. *Enosis* was pursued because becoming part of the Greek state was more valuable to Greek-Cypriots than their security, their prosperity, or peace. The cause was defeated largely because the goal of *enosis* was uncompromising and out of step with the realities of the situation. The choices of today are also a question of values: the importance of a Greek identity in Cyprus, the trust in the EU and its institutions, and the willingness to reach out to new partners to solve an old problem.

Whatever the course, it should not be chosen lightly. The problems confronting Cyprus today are real. A poor choice could lead to another fifty years of turmoil. In spite of this, the right approach, if it can be found and pursued, promises security, stability, and prosperity in ways that Cypriots have never known.

Thank you.