

Addressing the Future

Impediments to the Solution of the Cyprus Problem

by Glafcos Clerides

Glafcos Clerides was born in Nicosia, Cyprus, in 1919. He volunteered for the British Royal Air Force in World War II. After his airplane was shot down over Germany in 1942, he remained a prisoner until the end of the war. He received his L.L.B. degree from King's College, University of London, in 1948. Among the positions he has held are president of the Cyprus Red Cross, leader of the Democratic Rally Party, and head of numerous delegations addressing the Cyprus problem. He was elected president of the Republic of Cyprus in 1993 and reelected in 1998. He addressed the Seton Hall University community on September 24, 1999.

At the outset, I would like to say to the students of the School of Diplomacy who I met today—don't be disappointed because you will hear how difficult it is to solve a simple problem.

In order to grasp the meaning and the difficulties we face in trying to solve the Cyprus problem, I should give you a very short background of how it came about. Then I will tell you about the situation: the difficulties that were created by military operations and by the invasion of Cyprus. And finally, I will try to give you my feelings about the future and how the problem could be solved.

Cyprus has a very strategic position in the eastern Mediterranean. Most nations from Europe who wanted to conquer Africa or Asia stepped over Cyprus, and most Asian nations who wanted to conquer European countries, again, stepped over Cyprus. And despite all this, the people of Cyprus maintained their language, their culture, and their religion.

Cyprus was a part of the Ottoman Empire, and therefore we have a Turkish community that constitutes 18% of the population of the island; 82% are Greek Cypriots, and there are some Maronites, and some Armenians, among others. In 1955, after a long but unsuccessful struggle to attain their freedom by peaceful means, the people of Cyprus took up arms against the colonial power. The British government, in its attempt to thwart the Cyprus people's aspirations for self-determination, exploited the presence in Cyprus of the Turkish Cypriot minority. Therefore, it sought assistance from Turkey with a view to obstructing the natural trend of events in Cyprus. The Turkish government accepted the invitation to intervene in Cyprus, in defiance of its solemn undertaking under the Treaty of Lausanne, and a section of the

Turkish Cypriot minority in Cyprus became the instrument both of British colonialism and of a new expansionist tendency in Turkey.

The British government threatened that if self-determination were ever to be achieved in Cyprus, it would result in the partition of the island since the Turkish Cypriot minority would be offered the right to self-determination separately. That threat might have been intended to discourage the Cypriot people's struggle for freedom, but its consequences were quite different than expected. Instead, the partition of Cyprus became the objective of Turkish foreign policy, and a number of Turkish Cypriots took up arms against the Cypriot freedom fighters, while the Turkish Cypriot leadership advocated either partition or the continuation of British colonial rule.

A compromise was reached in 1959 when a solution was found by the Zurich and London agreements by which we have become an independent country, with two communities and of course with British military bases. The London-Zurich agreement resulted in an inflexible constitution, which caused considerable trouble in the first years of our independence. In addition, there were many so-called guarantees. That is to say, Britain, Greece, and Turkey were to guarantee the independence, the territorial integrity, and the constitutional order of the Republic of Cyprus. Under those guarantees, the basic articles of the constitution—which were about thirty-six—could not be amended (even if both communities agreed) without the consent of the guarantor powers.

In 1963, the situation between the two communities became quite tense because of the inflexibility of the constitution, and fighting broke out. There have been numerous Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, calling on all countries to respect the independence and territorial integrity of the Republic of Cyprus, and also calling upon the two communities to negotiate the settlement of the constitutional differences. Unfortunately, in 1974, while Greece was under military rule, it decided to launch a coup. Turkey used these events as a pretext to invade Cyprus—not to restore the constitution, not to protect the territory and integrity of Cyprus, not to maintain the unity of the country, but for the purpose of pushing the Greek Cypriot population from the north to the south, making them refugees in their own country. They then tried to change the demographic composition of the northern part of Cyprus by importing settlers from Turkey.

Two young generations are growing up not as compatriots and neighbors but as potential enemies.

Now, this happened in 1974, and since then it has not been possible to find a solution to the Cyprus problem. Let me just enumerate the complications that were created by the Turkish invasion and the continued occupation of 37% of the Mediterranean isle. Aside from the fact that 180,000 Cypriots are kept away from their homes and their properties; aside from the transplanting of settlers and the change in the demography and composition of the northern part of Cyprus, the conflict between the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots has become completely benign, so to speak,

by having an occupation force of 35,000 Turkish troops, which do not allow the Greek Cypriots to go north and meet the Turkish Cypriots or vice versa. So we are getting two young generations, of Greek Cypriots and of Turkish Cypriots, growing up not as compatriots and neighbors but as potential enemies. Another concern is the difference in the per capita income of the two sides. That is to say, in the occupied north, the per capita income is about \$4,000 per annum; in the south, it is \$15,000.

Moreover, because of the presence of the Turkish forces in the north, we found it necessary in the south to create another army—the National Guard, the army of the

Greek Cypriots—and to make an alliance with Greece for the defense of the southern part of Cyprus. These military forces face each other in the middle of the island, and there is a peacekeeping force of the United Nations in the middle, which tries to prevent incidents from escalating and sucking in the whole armies of the two sides, plus Greece and Turkey. It is therefore imperative, not only from the point of view of the Cypriots, Greeks, and Turks, but also for the stability in the region, that we find a solution whereby this confrontation ceases to exist—Cyprus becomes demilitarized and, in order to build confidence between the two communities, we have an international force, authorized by the

Security Council, to intervene if either of the two communities were to adopt plans that put in danger the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the federation and of the agreements reached.

Now, the compromise that the international community saw as a possible solution was that Cyprus should be an independent, sovereign federal republic. And that it should have one single sovereignty, one single international personality, that it should not be allowed to join either Greece or Turkey, and that secession would be prohibited. We have tried several times to find a solution within that context, but unfortunately the Turkish side, led by the Turkish Cypriot leader Mr. Rauf Denktash, insists on two separate sovereign states, and demands that this recognition of two separate sovereign states must actually occur even before we sit at the negotiating table. Mr. Denktash refuses to come to the negotiating table until such time as we give in to these demands.

I believe that if we are going to find a solution to the Cyprus problem, the first thing we want is a change of mentality. We must not—either the one or the other community—repeat mistakes of the past; mistakes have been committed by both communities. Now let me tell you that we are prepared to sit at the negotiating table and talk with Mr. Denktash, who will represent the Turkish Cypriot community, in a spirit of good will, and in a spirit of understanding of their problems, of their difficul-

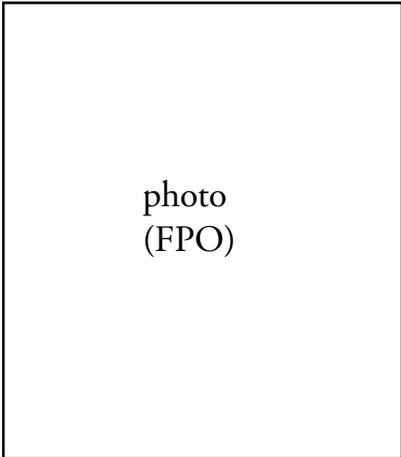


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ties, and that we wish to help them, to raise their per capita income, while at the same time securing for them the rights which all citizens will have. In addition, we will grant them extraordinary rights insofar as the matters of internal administration are concerned, retaining for them the maximum degree of self-administration on internal matters. We also want to invite them to join with us in the European Union, because within the context of the European Union both communities will prosper and it should pacify all their anxieties.

What are these anxieties? Let us outline them. Let us not attempt to examine whether they are reasonable or unreasonable. We must look upon them as real anxieties of the people of Cyprus, whether they are Greek Cypriots or Turkish Cypriots. The Turkish Cypriots fear that we, the Greek Cypriots, being the majority in the island, will one day overrun the island and reduce them to second-class citizens and unite the island with Greece, which I do not want, or make a second Greek state or something close to that.

What are the anxieties of the Greek Cypriots? That Turkey, using the Turkish community as a pretext, will one day expand and occupy the whole of the island. Now, joining the European Union should pacify both communities that their fears would not become a reality, because neither the Greek Cypriots would be allowed to overrun the Turkish community and reduce its members to second-class citizens, nor would Turkey be allowed to invade the south and occupy the whole of Cyprus. As such, if we have the guarantee that there would be an international force in Cyprus, which would have the right, by the authority of the Security Council, to intervene and prevent the one community from putting in danger the other community or violating the terms of the agreements, I think that this would be sufficient. With a sovereign state with one international personality, with one citizenship, and also demilitarized, we should be able to find a solution that would satisfy the legitimate interests of both communities.

Instead of localizing tension, the current pattern tends to export it to Greece and Turkey.

It is important also to avoid having the presence of Greek and Turkish forces on the island. Past experience has shown that those forces take on a central role, where chauvinistic nationalistic elements of both communities create problems. And it is equally important that both Greece and Turkey will continue with the United Kingdom to be guarantors. There should be additional guarantors, however, because if there is tension between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, the Greeks side with the Greek Cypriots, the Turks side with the Turkish Cypriots, and the British remain in the middle without wanting to do anything. And, instead of localizing the tension, this pattern tends to export tensions to Greece and Turkey, creating conflicts between two countries of the NATO alliance.

If there is going to be a breakthrough for the solution of the Cyprus problem, it will greatly depend on the international community: what pressure it would exercise

to bring the two sides to the negotiating table and to help them find a solution to the problem. It is of vital importance that the international community play a role. At this moment, there is an increased interest in Cyprus from the international community. The G-8 issued a statement calling upon the two sides to come to the negotiations without preconditions. We had the same statement from the Security Council of the United Nations. We had a similar statement from the Non-Aligned Movement, as well as a statement from the European Union along the same lines. So there is an international interest to see a solution to the Cyprus problem and to see the process of unification become a reality. But the international community must go beyond just expressing. It must deepen understanding that the side that refuses to follow the views of the international community will face some consequences. Otherwise, the prospects of a solution of the Cyprus problem, or of moving towards a solution, will be very slim.

The side that refuses to follow the international community's views must face some consequences.

Before I leave this podium, I would like to say that there is something that came out of immense catastrophe, and it is regrettable that it should be so. The devastating earthquakes in Turkey and then the devastating earthquakes in Greece showed that the two nations, the two neighbors, have feelings for each other. Thousands of Turks were buried alive under the ruins of the earthquake. Greek teams went over to help, to save Turkish lives, and later, when the Greek earthquakes occurred, we saw the same phenomenon—Turkish teams coming over despite the differences they have politically to help save Greek lives. We salute that human element and we praise both the people of Greece and the people of Turkey for showing these humanitarian feelings and for helping each other. We hope that this new climate will prevail toward finding a solution to the Cyprus problem.

