

Political and geopolitical games in the Cypriot labyrinth: a Greek-Cypriot perspective

Costas Melakopides | Associate Professor of International Relations (ret.) at the University of Cyprus

Theme

Cyprus's 'bi-communal negotiations' have collapsed once again but in a manner that reveals diplomatic cacophony, deceptive international 'diplomatic' practices and serious mistakes by both the Greek and Turkish Cypriots themselves.

Summary

The immediate reason for the latest collapse in Cyprus's 'bi-communal' negotiations is their interruption in late February 2017 by the Turkish-Cypriot leader Mustafa Akıncı.¹ Meanwhile, Turkey's Erdoğan Administration has undergone a profound crisis caused, among other reasons, by the country's regional overextension, leading to manifold failures in Syria and Iraq and new problems with Washington and Moscow. But the Turkish crisis is also associated with Erdoğan's desperate attempts to 'impress' conservatives and nationalists on account of the constitutional referendum of 16 April. Thus, Ankara is resorting to blackmail against the EU as regards the refugees, causing friction and conflicts primarily with Austria, Germany and the Netherlands but also with Denmark and Sweden, provoking Greece (in the Aegean Sea) and Cyprus by verbal and non-verbal actions, and blatantly manipulating the Cypriot 'bi-communal negotiations'.² It follows that the Greek Cypriots, instead of calling for an immediate return to the negotiating table, should opt for a new strategy and new tactics.

Analysis

The recent analysis on Cyprus by the Elcano Royal Institute's Associate Analyst William Chislett ended as follows: 'The progress made so far and the political will of the Cypriot leaders suggests that a settlement is within reach, but Cyprus has been here before and hopes have been dashed'.³ One purpose of this paper is to evaluate whether a settlement is, after all, within reach, to determine the real nature of 'the political will' of 'the Cypriot leaders' and to show that, under present conditions, hopes for a settlement are bound to be dashed.

¹ The text will make clear that the interruption has been perceived by the Greek-Cypriots as a device that might allow the Turkish-Cypriot side (and Turkey) to extract more concessions from the Greek Cypriots. See note 12 for the 'immediate cause' of Akıncı's departure.

² It is well-known in Cyprus, and is admitted by the Turkish-Cypriot leadership, that Mustafa Akıncı pronounced on the form and content of the discussions only after preliminary visits to Ankara.

³ See William Chislett (2017), 'Cyprus's elusive reunification: so near to a solution, yet so far', ARI nr 6/2017, Elcano Royal Institute, 19/1/2017.

Background

For most Greek Cypriots, the so-called 'bi-communal negotiations' are not meant to (just) 're-unify' the Island-state but, rather, to solve the country's 'political-legal-ethical problem' in a fair and functional manner. The obvious difference consists in distinguishing between (a) a 're-unification' that could easily be both unfair and non-functional and (b) the proper resolution of the situation created, essentially, by the 1974 Turkish invasion and the ongoing occupation of 37% of Cypriot territory.

To begin with, what is the ongoing 'political-legal-ethical problem' of Cyprus? Based on the established principles of international law and international ethics, here is the most laconic account possible. Exploiting a coup d'état of a still obscure origin perpetrated by the Athens junta –a regime inspired if not created, but then tolerated and openly assisted, by Washington and NATO–, Turkey invaded Cyprus twice in the summer of 1974 and occupied more than a third of its territory.⁴ Ankara's attempted rationalisations of the invasion were universally rejected. Hence the regime imposed by Turkey on the occupied territory remains unrecognised by the entire world –except for Turkey–. For 43 years, the illegality has solidified a political and ethical tragedy, since the occupation constitutes a protracted violation of elementary human rights, primarily of the Greek-Cypriot overwhelming majority. Moreover, since Cyprus became an EU member state in 2004, Turkey's occupation of Cypriot territory amounts to occupation of EU territory. Given, however, the stark asymmetry in population, size of territory and geo-economic significance between Cyprus and Turkey, the latter has been favoured by the 'international community' (including the UN, Washington, London and lately the EU) in their efforts to 'resolve' the Cyprus problem. Hence, the notorious 'Annan plan', engineered by the UN Secretariat (and guided by Lord Hanney) attempted to exculpate Turkey in order to 'reunite' the island-state under manifestly unfair and unworkable conditions.

Therefore, as I showed in my 2008 Elcano paper,⁵ one can easily understand why 76% of the Greek-Cypriot majority rejected the 'Annan plan' in the May 2004 referendum. Now, according to that very plan, should either Cypriot community reject it, it would be 'null and void'. And yet it was 'revitalised' by the UN Secretariat, under Ban Ki-moon, and by the former State Department official Victoria Nuland, who reportedly imposed a new 'resolution framework' on President Nicos Anastasiades and then Turkish-Cypriot leader Derviş Eroğlu, on 11 February 2014. Thus, Cyprus's 'bi-communal negotiations' were energised yet again but, on reflection, they have amounted to a protracted performance

⁴ The relevant bibliography is, of course, massive. For informed and persuasive analyses see, *inter alia*, Lawrence Stern (1977), *The Wrong Horse: The Politics of Intervention and the Failure of American Diplomacy*, Time Books, New York; Christopher Hitchens (1997), *Hostage to History: Cyprus from the Ottomans to Kissinger*, Verso, London & New York; Donald Payne (1998), 'The Cyprus Problem: A Need to Defend Principles', *Mediterranean Quarterly*, vol. 9, nr 2, p. 9-15; William Mallinson (2005), *Cyprus: A Modern History*, I.B. Tauris, London & New York; and Perry Anderson (2008), "The Divisions of Cyprus", *London Review of Books*, vol. 30, nr 8, 24/IV/2008.

⁵ Costas Melakopides (2008), "The Moral Grounds for the EU's Obligation to End the Occupation of Northern Cyprus", ARI nr 9/2008, Elcano Royal Institute, 10/I/2008.

(cont.)

akin to Theatre of the (politically) Absurd. We therefore need to evaluate this performance and reveal the deception perpetrated under the formal auspices of the UN.

Cyprus's 'bi-communal negotiations'

Put succinctly, Cyprus's 'negotiations between the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot communities' represent a multiple misnomer. First, the negotiations could not be called 'bi-communal' because, manifestly, the Turkish-Cypriot are not autonomous or free, since they operate as proxies for Ankara which is the unmovable mover of the 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus', the illegal and hence unrecognized regime.⁶

Secondly, these 'inter-communal' discussions cannot be labelled 'negotiations' either: for they are taking place under Ankara's psychological warfare and its constant threats, and under the barrel of the guns of 40,000 Turkish troops illegally stationed on the Island since the 1974 Turkish invasion.

Third, the so-called 'negotiations', allegedly conducted by the UN, constitute a veritable international scandal. As two Cyprus experts wrote in December 2016:⁷

'... the situation in Cyprus is worse than what one imagines, considering that America, is calling the shots in these negotiations that are masquerading as UN-sponsored. All one has to do is check the CVs of the UN representatives (past and present) in the talks to understand who is behind these negotiations.'

Among other things, the 'framework' being negotiated not only echoes unmistakably the overwhelmingly rejected 'Annan plan' but arguably contains many worse features. For Nuland's framework, although endorsed by the UN Secretariat, boldly contradicts cardinal legal principles and ethical norms of the UN Charter. Suffice it to say that the framework commits the gigantic fallacy/deception of treating an international problem – that is, a problem of invasion, illegal occupation and violation of human rights– as if it were a domestic issue of two communities in conflict. Manifestly, the goal remains to evade the historical, legal and ethical record in order to exculpate Turkey for the invasion and the occupation.

Fourth, in August 2014, the Norwegian politician Espen Barth Eide was appointed Ban Ki-moon's Special Adviser on Cyprus. Eide began his Cyprus appointment on the wrong footing. For it transpired that he: (1) had limited, hence distorted, the understanding of the real nature of the Cyprus problem; (2) had only superficial knowledge of the UN's resolutions on the Republic of Cyprus; (3) had a penchant for misinforming international institutions and world public opinion (as when he kept insisting that, given fast-approaching final agreements, the referendums would take place in March 2016); (4) made vigorous efforts to elevate Mustafa Akıncı, the leader of the illegal and unrecognized TRNC to a level equal to that of the Cypriot President; and (5), even more ominously, quickly endorsed some of Ankara's mythological claims. Thus, he once

⁶ See UN Security Council Resolutions 541 (1983) and 550 (1984) that condemned the unilateral declaration of independence by the Turkish-Cypriots (ie, Turkey).

⁷ See Dr Aris Petasis & Professor William Mallinson (2016), 'Friendly Cyprus Now Needs Russia's Voice More than Ever', *Defend Democracy Press*, 10/XII/2016.

insisted that 'for the Turkish Cypriots' the Republic had been 'usurped' by the Greek-Cypriots in 1964. He revealed, therefore, that he ignored that UN Security Council Resolution 186 of March 1964 had determined that the Nicosia Government was the incontestable legal representative of the Republic of Cyprus. Therefore, Resolution 186 condemned by clear implication the December 1963 Turkish-Cypriot rebellion that had aimed to partition the island. Progressively, Eide, succeeded in angering Greek-Cypriot civil society and infuriating independent analysts and opposition political elites. And yet, the Anastasiades Administration, permanently intimidated by Ankara and scared to stand up against international diplomatic manipulation, has resisted endorsing the sustained calls to declare the Special Adviser *persona non grata*.

Fifth, Mustafa Akıncı's emergence in April 2015 as leader of the Turkish-Cypriot community generated optimistic expectations among many Greek-Cypriot, convinced that he possessed Social-Democratic moderation and, as an architect, civility and sophistication. Nicos Anastasiades himself started showering him with enthusiastic friendship and even brotherly affection, insisting that the two of them were 'sharing a common vision'. But while naïve Greek-Cypriots were imagining that such a vision embraced a fair and functional Cyprus settlement, Akıncı seemed to be hiding some cunning under his polite demeanour. For he soon demonstrated that he was unwilling to resist succumbing to Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's diktats. In fact, he progressively became Erdoğan's mouthpiece, uttering all manner of demands, showing yet again that, for Ankara, a Cyprus 'settlement' can only be envisaged as long as it was tailor-made by Turkey for Turkey's own (and not even the Turkish-Cypriots') interests. It was, therefore, becoming crystallised that the so-called 'bi-communal' negotiations were taking place between a partially occupied state and its occupier and not between two free and autonomous communities.

Finally, these negotiations represent an additional political anomaly. For the President of the Republic, in the eyes of most Greek Cypriots, the centrist opposition leadership and the established open-minded columnists, has not been 'negotiating' but is essentially 'surrendering' to Turkey's demands. Indeed, Nicos Anastasiades has been gradually abandoning most traditional Greek-Cypriot 'red lines', either created by the National Council or expressed by rational centrist political elites in order to shape *sine qua non* conditions for a fair and workable type of resolution. Instead, Anastasiades has been unable to resist the escalating Turkish demands, allegedly fearing that to end these 'negotiations' might generate a blame game that his (as the weaker) side would lose.

Immediate implications

It has thus transpired that Nicosia's present government seems imprisoned in an untenable position resulting from its having relied on unfounded and unfulfilled promises by international actors, including the UN Secretariat, Special Adviser Eide, Victoria Nuland, 'philhellenic' former US Vice President Joseph Biden and a number of capitals that have been misled by Espen Barth Eide into believing that the negotiations are nearing a happy completion. But Anastasiades and his allies in handling the Cyprus 'negotiations' (ie, the Conservative Democratic Rally and the 'communist' AKEL) have simultaneously been victims of their own delusions regarding 'resolving' the country's problem at a time of manifold Erdoğan failures and intensified belligerence. Therefore, what is urgently required is objective rational analysis to set the record straight and to

prevent, *inter alia*, the unpalatable implications for the weak side of yet another failure to 'unfreeze' the Cyprus problem.

As regards 'setting the record straight' on the nature of the Cyprus problem and the manipulative diplomatic engineering of recent years, my recent book on Russia-Cyprus relations may be profitably consulted.⁸ For it reveals that, whereas London, Washington and Ankara have failed Cyprus repeatedly since the mid-1950s, Moscow has stood up, almost without exception, for the Greek-Cypriots' rights and needs. The book demonstrates that, because of mutual interests but also shared principles and values (including international law and international ethics), Moscow defended Nicosia diplomatically, politically, militarily and 'psychologically' (as when threatened by Turkey in 1964). In this manner, the book can, *inter alia*, explain the Greek-Cypriots' deep gratitude to Moscow and the Russian people. It also demonstrates their constant expectation that the Russian Federation will keep coming to their defence, through verbal and non-verbal action, in the Security Council (as, famously, with its May 2004 veto) as well as in other ways. In this connection, it should be emphasised that, despite repeated and clear expressions of Russian and French interest in taking part in the January 2017 Geneva Conference on Cyprus, Espen Barth Eide succeeded in blocking their participation.

It should also be underlined that 'the Nuland framework' –that is, an even more problematic version of the rejected Annan/Hanney plan– was condemned from its inception by the centrist political opposition, distinguished columnists, academics, legal experts and the majority of Greek-Cypriots. Opposition to the framework and the ongoing 'negotiations' is expanding and is accompanied by anger and frustration at the stubborn insistence on pursuing them. For periodic revelations about the emerging 'converging positions' of the two sides keep disclosing that the framework of the 'bi-zonal and bi-communal federation' and Anastasiades' unending concessions, have led the Turkish Cypriots –who, before the illegal colonisation, were only 18% of the population–⁹ to demand 'political equality' in nearly all the institutions of the new 'federated' state. In addition, their demands include: (1) the omnipresent right to veto by the Turkish-Cypriot minority; (2) a rotating presidency (at a rate of 2:1); (3) the survival from the 'Annan plan' of the importation of foreign judges to resolve administrative impasses; (4) the continued presence of Turkish troops even after the 'settlement'; (5) the continuation of Turkey's 'guarantees' (ie, the right of intervention in an EU member state); and (6) the one-sided treatment of the properties issue, including the Turkish demand that the 'user' (ie, the illegal settler) should have priority in many instances over the legal owner. It follows already that, precisely like the Annan plan, the 'framework' has rendered the 'solution' totally toxic and unfair and, therefore, condemned it to be demonstrably unworkable.

It should also be made clear that the cost of the transition to the 'United Cypriot Federation' remains impossible to calculate, since it depends on the final settlement of the properties issue. Moreover, it is also indeterminate to date who (apart from the Greek-Cypriots themselves), and how, will pay the estimated colossal costs. Finally, an

⁸ See Costas Melakopides (2016), *Russia-Cyprus Relations: A Pragmatic Idealist Perspective*, Palgrave Macmillan, London.

⁹ See Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly (2003), *Colonization by Turkish Settlers of the Occupied Part of Cyprus*, Rapporteur Jaako Laakso (Finland), Doc. 9799, 2/V/2003.

ever-present fear of most Greek-Cypriots is whether Turkey will keep its word in the event of a 'solution', even though, as demonstrated, the 'framework' was manifestly designed in its favour. In other words, should the unfair 'resolution' end up being actually non-functional, the question arises as to what will become of the Greek Cypriot 'constituent state' when the Republic of Cyprus no longer exists.

Searching for alternative strategies and tactics

In view of the above, the centrist political elites and like-minded analysts, columnists and academics have been offering rational prescriptions. Among their proposals, pride of place belongs to the demand that the failed appeasement stance of Nicos Anastasiades and his followers should be abandoned, to be replaced by a strategy that asserts Cyprus's rights. It will emphasise the real nature of the Cyprus problem (as a problem of invasion, occupation and violation of human rights) and will demand costs from Turkey instead of giving the latter benefits. Such costs include ending immediately the generous pre-accession aid that Turkey has long been receiving and even ending Turkey's accession negotiations. In addition, international campaigns that expose Turkey's deleterious Cyprus record are being periodically proposed.

It remains to submit some further modest suggestions regarding Cyprus's dramatic *cul-de-sac*. First, Espen Barth Eide should be removed by appealing to Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who appears more competent and perceptive than his predecessor. This may not be that hard to attain given the reported tension between the two following the January 2017 diplomatic fiasco in Geneva. Moreover, after holding a secret gathering of Ambassadors in Nicosia in mid-March 2017, the Norwegian claimed that 'the key to the solution should not be searched outside Cyprus but within it'.¹⁰ Yet again, therefore, he showed his inability to understand and accept Turkey's role in the Cyprus problem. Hence, Nicolas Papadopoulos, President of the centrist DIKO party, commented regarding Eide's new *faux pas* that he is apparently the only person in Europe who does not perceive Turkey's problematic behaviour, adding: 'Unfortunately some persons gave Mr Eide the tools to repeat the Turkish propaganda and the well-known narrative that responsible for the non-solution of the Cyprus problem is not Turkey but the Greek Cypriots'.¹¹

Secondly, Cyprus' presidential election is fast approaching (February 2018). Already, Greek-Cypriot public opinion is abandoning the current conservative President while the left-wing AKEL has refused to support Anastasiades' re-election. And given AKEL's ongoing political weakness, following Dimitris Christofias' disastrous administration (2008-13), Greek-Cypriot civil society will most probably mobilise an electable centrist politician. He or she will stand for the correct nature of the Cyprus problem and the need to shape alternative –anti-appeasement and anti-exculpation– strategies founded on the assertion of the violated rights of the Republic of Cyprus.

Third, Greek-Cypriot and Greek analysts and politicians should end their navel-gazing and begin, at long last, to inform Europe and the world about the persistent deception

¹⁰ Costas Venizelos (2017), 'We reveal What Eide Said to Foreign Ambassadors', *Phileleftheros*, Nicosia daily, 19/III/2017.

¹¹ Cyprus News Agency (2017), 'N. Papadopoulos: Eide is repeating Turkish propaganda', 19/III/2017.

and manipulation perpetrated against the Republic for narrow-minded, self-regarding foreign interests, including geopolitical aggrandisement, the acquisition of Cyprus's energy resources, the exculpation of Turkey and the appeasement of Erdoğan.

Finally, Greek-Cypriot civil society and the centrist political elites should continue to demand a greater involvement of the Russian Federation and France in the future discussions regarding a Cyprus settlement. For despite the constant assertion of Russian and French interest in becoming involved, Eide and Anastasiades have resisted it to date for reasons that should be clear by now.

Conclusion

Nicos Anastasiades' eagerness to re-start the 'negotiations' that were interrupted capriciously by Mustafa Akıncı seems incomprehensible.¹² First, having shown that the Turkish-Cypriot leader is not autonomous, one has only to consider the policies of Erdoğan and Ankara in recent months and weeks to conclude that this is perhaps the worst possible time for any attempt to 'resolve' the Cyprus problem. Secondly, lest one supposes that Ankara may be willing to come to a fair and workable agreement at this stage –in order to gain 'a diplomatic victory' as argued sometimes–, it should be stressed that Turkey has proved repeatedly that, after 'pocketing' Greek Cypriot concessions, it concludes that more pressure will yield even richer benefits, given the defeatist approach of Anastasiades' policies.

Third, in recent weeks, Ankara has been provoking Athens in the Aegean Sea by repeatedly violating Greece's airspace and FIR. Therefore, Greek-Turkish relations, that constitute part of the broader geopolitical landscape where the Cyprus problem is situated, are undergoing a negative phase.

Fourth, at the time of writing, Turkey has been conducting military exercises –with live ammunition– in both the Aegean Sea and just outside Cyprus's territorial waters (near Pafos and Akamas). The last two points should suffice to demonstrate not only the absence of any 'political will' by the Turkish side for a fair Cyprus settlement but also that Turkey's current bellicosity is deeply disconcerting. It seems to follow that the Greek-Cypriots should crystallise a new strategy that will engage authentic assistance by EU institutions and by the new UN Secretary General.¹³

¹² Akıncı asserted that he abandoned the 'bi-communal' dialogue in mid-February 2017 on account of a decision by the Cyprus Parliament (on 10 February) to ask Cypriot schools to begin commemorating, 'for a few minutes', the January 1950 Referendum in favour of Union with Greece. Whereas the 1950 Referendum was an act of resistance against British colonialism, Akıncı and members of the Erdoğan government have been pretending that the parliamentary decision demonstrated the Greek Cypriot wish to pursue Union with Greece at present.

¹³ To be sure, Brussels has begun recognising the serious danger involved in Ankara's ability to manipulate EU policies via the Turkish-Cypriot 'constituent state' in a possible Cypriot 'bi-zonal and bi-communal federation'.