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CYPRUS:

IS PEACE EVER POSSIBLE?



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By Baroness Hussein-Ece OBE

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Last week the All Party Parliamentary Group on Conflict Issues, held an event in Westminster.

The meeting introduced a new concept where a network of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot civil society organisations (CSOs) were calling for a shake-up of the Cyprus peace process. They made a strong case to include a more central and active role for civil society, women and young people to work in tandem with negotiations between the leaders of the two communities.

Their argument is that experience from other conflicts shows that widening the dialogue to include a broader range of opinion, especially from relevant civil society groups, can loosen negotiating log-jams.

Since the beginning of the Cyprus conflict, there have been a large number of direct and indirect negotiations between the two sides to reach a solution.

After 44 long years these have been unsuccessful in formulating an answer to satisfy, or to bring the two sides together in a lasting agreement.

Like many of us from a Cypriot heritage, who have been directly affected by decades of unrest, and conflict, we have gone through the various stages of emotion: fear, despair, loss, hope, and then more despair. There was a time a few years ago, following the failure of the

Baroness Hussein-Ece gave a public lecture on 22nd May on the controversial topic of peace in Cyprus. The lecture was hosted by the Centre for Peace and Reconciliation Studies (CPRS) at Coventry University and took place as part of the Centre's Turkey Peace and Security Studies lecture series. Focussing on the peace process in Cyprus, Baroness Hussein-Ece questions whether peace in Cyprus is actually achievable.

biggest opportunity – the Annan Plan and ensuing Referendum that I effectively gave up, and simply wanted nothing more to do with the ‘Cyprus Problem’.

It would never be resolved, so why expend energy only to be rewarded by more frustration and disappointment?

But on entering the House of Lords in 2010, and observing the various groups who purported to represent the interests of all Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities, I changed my mind.

I realised it has become something of an industry. For some factions the Cyprus problem, and political lobbying methods here in the UK, it has become a campaign to preserve the status quo – to keep the focus on the past, so that there is no solution. I must stress these groups are in my view, a minority, but nonetheless, they are a vocal minority, who are adept at lobbying Parliamentarians who usually have little background knowledge and experience of Cyprus, and simply listen to the loudest voices.

This is not helpful, and only seeks to polarise opinion and reinforce divisions. I decided I should use my role and position as a Parliamentarian, being the only person from a Turkish Cypriot background, to attempt to bring about more light and less heat. Like others I have direct experience of the conflict – relatives that are missing; my family’s property lost.

I have endeavoured to bring more equality and justice to the discussions. All Greek and Turkish Cypriot people have suffered in some way. There are victims on all sides.

Cyprus is not currently at the top of any international agenda, since there has been relative peace for a long time. There are more pressing problems in the world.

But at a time when both national and international interest on the Cyprus Problem appears to be waning, in lieu of presumed deadlock ahead of the Cyprus EU Presidency due to start in July, perhaps the time is ripe for the adoption of a more participatory framework to include a wider group of stakeholders in the peace process; an approach which could inform efforts to reach a comprehensive settlement.

The ‘Cypriot-led, Cypriot talks’ have failed. They have resolved nothing. If anything they have retrenched divisions. Since the latest round of UN

sponsored talks in January held in Greentrees, the Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon, has announced the talks are over for the foreseeable future.

The Greek Cypriot Republic of Cyprus, will have a very busy and eventful year, with the end of talks, assuming the EU presidency in July, and the presidential elections in early 2013. The President of the Republic of Cyprus, Demetris Christofias said that he would not seek re-election if he cannot bring peace to communities of Cyprus, and recently in a televised address to the nation, he admitted that he "sees no solution to the Cyprus problem in sight", and since then has announced he will not seek re-election as president.

We are back to the status quo.

With the failure of these latest reunification negotiations, which have been under way since 2008, we are at an impasse. Many of us now believe that dramatic and creative steps are needed. As the stalemate continues, the costs for Greek and Turkish Cypriots, are growing.

Neither Greek Cypriots nor Turkish Cypriots can fulfil their potential on an island whose future is divided, uncertain, militarised and facing new economic difficulties.

In order to unblock the situation on the island and in Brussels, the silent majority, together with their political leaders' should take confidence- building steps – unilaterally if necessary – to build trust, without prejudicing the outcome of a comprehensive settlement.

And so the initiative openly advocated at last week's meeting by NGO's, argues that by focusing solely on the talks at the leadership level, we are losing out on real opportunities to achieve society-wide mobilisation and reconciliation away from the confines of the negotiating room, and is based on the notion that a culture of peace can be fostered through dialogue and cooperation.

They are saying there is not one Peace Process.

Two men locked in a room, until they agree on all key points has not worked.

The group highlighted the role that civil society can play both as an example of how cooperation can be achieved, and how this sector can drive the process forward, in order to overcome the practical obstacles imposed by division.

However, such efforts must be supported by a variety of players in order to broaden participation to include marginalised groups such as women and youth.

As a member of the UN Gender Advisory Team said last week:

“The concerns of women and youth in Cyprus cut across community lines”, we care about equal and fair representation, the same way we share the same worries for our future employment opportunities. It is time we demanded that this be reflected in a comprehensive path to a solution.

There is also a generational dimension in seeking to overcome the past, and look to a future.

The history is a long and painful one, rendering it difficult for many who lived through these turbulent times to reconcile or to overcome.

Following independence from the British in 1960, and the breakdown of the power-sharing government, there was the inevitable outbreak of civil war in 1963. Greek attacks on Turkish areas allowed them to relocate Turks from the south of the island. By 1964, 60% of Turkish Cypriots lived in enclaves controlled by Turkish officers, and the UN had established a peacekeeping force, which remains there to this day.

The passage of time is making it ever harder to reunify the island, divided politically since the Athens backed coup, which overthrew the president, Archbishop Makarios’s government and led to the Turkish intervention in 1974.

Greek Cypriots living in the north then fled south, while the remaining Turkish Cypriots in the south fled to the north.

After nearly four decades, the two sides remain far apart even on the meaning of the talks’ agreed goal, a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation. While there has long been peace, and relative freedom to interact since 2003, trade and visits between the two communities across the Green Line are decreasing. A lack of a settlement damages everyone’s interests and keeps frustrations high.

A referendum on the Annan Plan was held in the Republic of Cyprus, and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus on 24 April 2004. The two communities were asked whether they approved of the fifth revision of the United Nations proposal for reuniting the island, which had been divided since 1974. Whilst it was approved by 65% of Turkish Cypriots,

it was rejected by 76% of Greek Cypriots. Turnout for the referendum was high at 89% amongst Greek Cypriots and 87% amongst Turkish Cypriots.

We are told that the European Union had been counting on approval of the Annan Plan so that Cyprus would join it as a united island, and expressed disappointment at the Greek Cypriot rejection of the Plan.

The EU had already agreed that the Republic of Cyprus would become a member regardless of the result of the referendum, and so on May 1, 2004, Cyprus joined the European Union together with nine other countries.

With regard to the Turkish Cypriots, the European Union stated the following:

“The whole of the island is in the EU. However, in the northern part of the island, in the areas in which the Government of Cyprus does not exercise effective control, EU legislation is suspended in line with Protocol 10 of the Accession Treaty 2003. The situation will change once a Cyprus settlement enters into force and it will then be possible for EU rules to apply over the whole of the island. However, the suspension does not affect the personal rights of Turkish Cypriots as EU citizens. They are citizens of a Member State, the Republic of Cyprus, even though they may live in the northern part of Cyprus, the areas not under government control”.

So the Turkish Cypriots are cut off from the EU, and the wider world, without the means to trade or travel there directly, although they are EU citizens.

Significantly, the Greek Cypriots have used their membership since 2004 to help bring the EU/Turkey relationship to a standstill, blocking half of the chapters in Turkey’s accession negotiations.

A “European solution” would have been a desirable goal of both Cypriot communities and of Turkey, even if they define it differently. Instead Brussels has been stymied since 2004, when it accepted the Greek Cypriot-run Republic of Cyprus as a member, even though Greek Cypriots rejected the UN-sponsored Annan Plan that envisaged a unified island.

Days before the Republic of Cyprus joined, the Council agreed on three measures acknowledging the unfairness of Turkish Cypriots’

exclusion and to help bring their zone, which it considers part of the EU, up to EU standards.

These included a €259 million Financial Aid Regulation; a Green Line Regulation for handling the passage of people, goods and services on the front line between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots; and a Direct Trade Regulation (DTR) to ease the isolation of Turkish Cypriots due to Greek Cypriot trading restrictions.

The Financial Aid Regulation was delayed, mainly by the Greek Cypriots, but implemented after eighteen months. Greek Cypriot objections have blocked the DTR.

So what did the 'No' vote achieve?

It is perhaps worth looking at what the 'no' camp achieved and what the Annan plan could have done. Those opposed complained that the plan stopped short of enabling all refugees to return to their villages, but the no vote prevented 100,000 from going home. It objected to the presence of the 950 remaining Turkish soldiers, but effectively leaves the 30,000 to stay on Cyprus. It criticised the decision to naturalise 45,000 Turkish settlers in the north, many of whom were born on the island, but rejecting the plan leaves the way to further emigration by Turkish Cypriots, countered by settlers from Turkey moving in, and is silent at the significant numbers of Russians settled in the South.

And for the 65% of Turkish Cypriots in the north, who voted for a united future, doing so against the position of their President Denktash, and in favour of Europe, life remains bleak and isolated.

It could be argued these Cypriots who took a leap of faith, are true Europeans, who have been deprived of their future by their compatriots.

And so we have seen four decades of peace talks with:

- **6 UN Secretary Generals**: U-Thant, Kurt Waldheim, Perez de Cuellar, Boutros Ghali, Kofi Annan. Now Mr Ban ki Moon...
- **6 Greek Cypriot leaders** – Makarios, S. Kypriano, G. Vassiliou, G. Clerides, T. Papadopoulos - now Mr. Christofias...
- **3 Turkish Cypriot leaders** - Denktash, M. A. Talat - now Mr. Eroğlu...

All based on a Bi-communal; bi-zonal federation based on political equality of the two communities where there will be two equal constituent states

All alternatives within the existing UN framework/within the existing basis are exhausted.

- Almost impossible to calculate, the cost in manpower and resources.
- Since September 2008, for the last three and a half years, there have been more than 250 meetings.

All methods have been seemingly been exhausted:

These include:

- Arbitration
- Direct talks/ Proximity talks
- Mediation
- Working breakfast, lunch, dinner, etc.
- Experts level/ technical talks
- Enhanced UN involvement
- Talks at leaders level

All pointing to an agreed, **Cypriot-owned** and **Cypriot-led process**

- “With the **Cypriots** taking responsibility for reaching a settlement...”
- Whatever steps to take place, either on substance or modality, needing to have a “**concurring will**” of the two sides.
- UN cannot decide to do something without the consent of the parties
- **Leaders:** We have exhausted Leaders from all political spectrum’s (worked with all)
- **Meetings:** We cannot make more meetings
- **Arguments:** We cannot develop other arguments
- **Models:** We cannot develop completely different models within existing UN parameters

What remains of - A **Cypriot-owned** and **Cypriot-led process?**

This last method has been used for the last 3+ years (since 2008)

- If we cannot resolve the problem, then soon this method will also be completed, and a failure.
- In the absence of a comprehensive settlement, what we have is the "*status quo*"

On 8 July 2008 - Papadopoulos-Talat set out principles with the:

"Recognition of the fact that the *status quo* is unacceptable..."

International Community (particularly the EU):

- Separate simultaneous referenda- 8 years ago
- 2004 promises given to Turkish Cypriots - lifting the isolations
- Could be said that the Talks are being used as an "excuse" not to honour promises

Greek Cypriot Leadership:

- For any meaningful cooperation, they could show leadership in the field of Hydrocarbon reserves discovered off the island's coast. These resources could be used as a unifying force. At present Turkish Cypriots are excluded, and instead it has become a source of further conflict.
- Could be using talks as a tool to hide the lack of "representative government" and suspension of half of the constitution.

Turkish Cypriot side:

- Delaying everything which necessitates difficult reforms:
- Political class is detached from most ordinary people's lives.
- Freezing life and economy in places which have been discussed in the past on the table.
- **In time, these talks have turned into the most important instrument to maintain/preserve the *status quo* in Cyprus.**
- If the talks continue as they are now, then this becomes an excuse for the suspension of normal life for Turkish Cypriot's with many leaving.

The status quo is not as unacceptable or at least as unbearable (at least now) for the GC Community

- Therefore where does this lead the 2008 statement of the two leaders, on the **unacceptable “status quo?”**
- As one diplomat recently said, in the absence of “concurring will”, the Cypriot-led, Cypriot-owned process will turn into Cypriot-killed process...
- This process cannot continue as it is, with no deadline and time-frame, and go on for another 40 years, with “talks just for talks”
- **Lack of confidence:** “we don’t trust each other” in further negotiations.
- **Lack of Incentive:**
- **Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot ideal solution - unitary state--two states.**
- **The Greek Cypriot side is able to enjoy a unitary state as a solution, even in the absence of comprehensive settlement.**
- Without a solution, and a “representative government” with EU membership, and EU presidency, and the exploitation of “**common reserves**” (hydrocarbon) is possible.
- What is being increasingly asked is why should the Greek Cypriot side accept a “compromise settlement” What is the incentive and what leverage does the EU/ UN have left?
- Why change the status quo?

Which brings me back to the urgent need for what many of us believe is needed:

The Way Forward – creative thinking!

The current situation, of, all agree or no agreement, has singularly failed. But when we talk of ‘peace talks,’ there must be other models.

Many Cypriots, generations have grown up divided from their neighbours, and many people, old and young, do not seem to want reunification..

Recently, a significant group of Turkish Cypriot NGOs based in Cyprus and overseas signed an agreement calling for an end to the UN talks, and for the International Community to take steps to accept the division, and to recognize each community.

With the failure of the talks, it is now inevitable that there are many voices accepting the status quo, and calling for separate entities, with

reference to models used with former Yugoslavian states. There are fears expressed that Turkey may move to annex North Cyprus, although there are no signs that this will happen. But in the vacuum created by the failure of UN talks, it appears that all options remain of the table.

In the meantime, I believe we have to be creative for a mutually acceptable negotiated settlement, regardless of its title/label etc. But until and unless there is agreement on the way forward instead of confining our hopes to the continuation of endless futile talks, we should focus on cooperation and confidence building, and consult more widely on what we should mean by 'peace'

Whatever we do, it must aim at bringing the inter-communal relationship forward, not backwards.

Some suggestions:

Greek Cypriots should cooperate with Turkish Cypriot administrative bodies, pending a political settlement.

The UK, as a key guarantor, and the European Union, should continue to serve as an honest broker to secure agreement on interim steps. We're told "Britain watches with sensitivity both sides", but believe that Britain, as a guarantor power, should follow a more active policy and play a more constructive role in the Cyprus issue."

Leaders of EU member states should avoid partisan statements.

Many parties need to contribute to confidence building measures.

With the stalling of the UN Peace talks, and freezing of any further UN initiatives, the field is wide open for new initiatives led by civil society, and NGO's.

Surely it would be seen as positive for the new EU President country to take steps to repair relations between its own communities, within its own backyard?

It is ironic that It is unilateral gestures that have worked in the past, like the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot decision in 2003 to open part of the front lines borders, so Cypriots could cross freely, and the Greek Cypriot decisions since 2004 to offer individual Turkish Cypriots living in the North some citizenship rights, including free health care in 2003 and EU passports since 2004.

There have been missed opportunities since the failure of the Annan Plan of 2004.

According to many observers, President Demetris Christofias and Mr Talat hesitated to capitalise on the progress that had been achieved at the time 2008-10.

Talat was replaced by Dervis Eroglu as leader of the Turkish Cypriot community in April 2010, and the new round of talks proceeded to start from scratch.

The U.N. leader Ban Ki-Moon said back in January that he would call an international conference on ending the division of Cyprus this year if the leaders of the rival sides make "decisive" steps to overcome disputes.

By April this year, Ban Ki Moon concluded that despite efforts undertaken until the end of March, the progress reached did not justify convening an international conference to conclude the peace talks.

The Turkish side has repeatedly said it would not negotiate during the six-month period of the presidency. They wanted an international conference called but the Greek Cypriot side said there is no point in holding such a conference until internal issues have been resolved in the talks.

The economic situation on both sides is a cause for concern. With the Greek Cypriots affected by what's happening in Greece, and with Turkish Cypriot's facing chronic economic difficulties, after years of embargoes, this is not a time for complacency.

So I would advocate seeking a culture of peace, with wider participation that can be fostered through dialogue and cooperation. I look at the stage where peace talks have taken place for decades, usually with two older men. I see no women, or young people. The two leaders were often isolated in these talks, unable to be influenced, or consult with the wider societies, who in effect were shut out.

Einstein said: "Insanity is doing the same thing, over and over again, but expecting different results."

We need to step outside this circle of madness, and seek to build a new framework.

Youth Power, a Cypriot based network group, whose mission is to inspire, energise and strengthen the youth's efforts to shape a

peaceful and sustainable future, for a multicultural Cyprus, have said this will be achieved by making the peace process more transparent, more inclusive and representative of public opinion, and by creating direct links between the process and politically under-represented groups, such as youth.

The University of the West of England, last year, conducted research on 'Reconciliation and Peace Economics in Cyprus', which aimed to promote a better understanding of issues affecting trust and perceptions of mutual interest between the two communities.

The general household survey addressed questions of trust and has shown that the general levels of trust within the community are low, with Greek Cypriots having lower levels of trust than Turkish Cypriots (80.9% vs. 56.8% respectively said that other people would definitely or probably try to take advantage of them). Trust between the communities is also very low with about two-thirds of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots both responding they do not trust the other community.

The recommendations suggested that, with the UN set to downgrade its presence in Cyprus within the foreseeable future, the EU could and should take a more active role in the peace process. But researchers cautioned to be aware of Russia as an international player given its influence within the Greek Cypriot community.

These findings confirm the difficult context within which international players work towards peace-building, where the local population has come to view them with suspicion.

With so much distrust on all sides, there is an opportunity for an enhanced role for the EU, seen as more neutral.

It would also be important for the minority of British MPs who take an interest in Cyprus to honour these principles, and not indulge in divisive tactics.

The key challenge is **strengthening** and making Cypriot civil society more effective.

Here we need to see assistance with developing the infrastructure, forming partnerships, and developing networks.

Capacity-building and helping other organisations to become more effective.

Promotion – reaching out to the public, promoting active communities, citizenship.

The researchers further recommended:

What international bodies can do:

- Support educational initiatives/materials
- Support independent media
- Support community relations strategies
- Support island wide alliances, activities
- Support contact across Green Line
- Influence change in political culture

I would add joint sporting/ cultural activities.

So far we have seen little in the way of these initiatives.

The EU and the UK in particular, have I believe a particular responsibility to support efforts and aspirations of a new generation of Cypriots, as well as the old, in pursuing innovative ways to end the stagnation and years of distrust.

I would like to see them:

Supporting and providing further opportunities for engagement with bi-communal activity, as we've seen with the organisations led by young people. And better channels of communication established with decision makers.

And as many of you here involved in teaching or studying peace and reconciliation studies at Coventry, will be all too aware, there will be a need to promote greater tolerance, so that people can start to let go of the past, and look to their future.

For the sake of future generations, we need to create structural conditions that can promote reconciliation.

So, the UN peace talks as we know it have come to a natural end, they've run their course. In reply to the question posed for this lecture – Is peace ever possible? The answer is yes, it is, peace is always possible - but not necessarily according to the UN formula of reunification. Peace comes in many shapes and forms. It can co-exist, without necessarily sharing political institutions. I am not advocating two separate states, in effect what the status quo accepts, but

rethinking models of accepting how to build bridges and ensure greater equality until an eventual political solution.

Many now – on both sides- want that.

I believe it's time for a brand new approach, a new framework, based on universal norms: democracy, tolerance, human rights and the rule of law. We need to move towards a civic state which guarantees equality of citizenship to Greek and Turkish- Cypriots, and includes them in shaping their own destinies.

The status quo is unsustainable, unjust and unequal.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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