

The Broken Olive Branch: Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict and the Quest for Peace in Cyprus

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An Anatomy of the Protracted Cyprus Crisis

I read Harry Anastasiou's two-volume book *The Broken Olive Branch, Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict and the Quest for Peace in Cyprus* at a time when I had started losing sight of solution prospects. On having read it, I said to myself: As long as there are Cypriots with such a clear mind as the one shown in this book, we cannot lose hope for a leap forward in Cyprus.

The first and foremost asset of the book lies in the fact that it demythologises and demystifies Greek Cypriot (GC) and Turkish Cypriot (TC) as well as Greek and Turkish ethnonationalisms. In a cohesive and comprehensive analysis of unrivalled academic standard and integrity while worded in simple straightforward language that makes a capturing narrative, the author maps the trajectory of ethnonationalism in Cyprus, Turkey, and Greece, by bringing to the surface its birth and complex development path, and by elaborating in its impasses in all three countries, and more particularly among the Greek and Turkish Cypriots. In the core of the author's analysis of ethnonationalism is its ethnocentric, monoethnic vision, which he rightly considers to have been at the heart of the protracted Cyprus crisis, and which still weighs on the soul of Cyprus; first, by its exclusivist totalitarian concept of ethnic identity, and, second, by the incompatibility of the ethnocentric political objectives of large sections of GCs and TCs. In the author's words,

... once the basic parameters of nationalism are laid bare, the Cyprus conflict not only becomes understandable as a political problem but it also becomes intelligible as a major factor that has shaped, structured and conditioned the culture, the psychology, the communication process and the anthropology of Cypriot society. [...] Given the history of the Cyprus conflict, a solution appears viable and sustainable only to the degree that an agreed political settlement is processed and mediated through the deconstruction and dissolution of the nationalist mind.

Nonetheless, despite repeated failures to reach a settlement, owing to the strong roots of nationalism in all three countries involved, Harry Anastasiou sees, in the earthquake diplomacy

and the Helsinki strategy of the late 1990s, in the TC uprising against Denktaş (2000-2004) and in Cyprus' EU accession process, and above all in the EU framework encompassing all three countries, a genuine start that permeates potentially influential civil society groupings in a process of demythologising and deconstructing nationalism.

A second important asset of the book is that it demythologises GC national figures that are still held as taboos among certain sections of the GC community. Makarios' and Grivas' strands of nationalism come within the author's critical approach. The differentiation he makes between them does not leave Makarios free of responsibility for the course historical events have taken in Cyprus.

A third substantial contribution of the *Broken Olive Branch* is that it challenges the conventional approach which connects nationalism exclusively with the Right. By bringing forth conclusive evidence, Harry Anastasiou suggests that, in the course of history, nationalism has vaccinated both Right and Left. With regard to Cyprus, he goes as far as to suggest that even AKEL, with its long history of cooperation with the TCs, cannot be exempted from nationalist influences. As a case study of such influences, he brings forth AKEL's alliance with Tassos Papadopoulos in the course of events that led to the rejection of the Annan Plan.

The second volume explores the shifts away from ethnocentric nationalism and examines the dynamics of peace-enhancing post-nationalist politics that began to emerge since the late 1990s, and which, during the historic juncture of 2000-2004, gave rise to an unprecedented convergence of interests of TCs, GCs, Turks, and Greeks. At this point, the author brings in the Annan Plan, which was submitted by the UN secretary General on 11 November 2002. "The Annan Plan", he states from the outset, "may be characterized as a masterpiece of conflict resolution diplomacy". And through an astute comparative analysis of the Plan's provisions, he proves the above statement to be a challenging hypothesis.

In unfolding the course of events towards the referendum, Harry Anastasiou does not mince his words on Tassos Papadopoulos' and AKEL's responsibility for the rejection of the Annan Plan while he is particularly critical of Papadopoulos for the unrestrained methods he employed in carrying through the NO campaign. Writing on the "negative reversibles" following the GC resounding NO to the Annan Plan, Anastasiou sadly remarks: "If and when the noise of nationalist rationalizations subside, April 2004 may appear, in hindsight, as the most tragic of missed opportunities for a final Cyprus settlement." And, in the form of postscript, the author concludes:

President Christofias [is] now confronted with a historical paradox, namely of fundamentally undoing the outcome of the Papadopoulos presidency that he and his party had helped bring about and sustain since 2003. [...] The great challenge for the new president is to free GC policy and public opinion from the legacy of the Papadopoulos administration and supersede the erroneous notion that the Cyprus problem can be resolved merely as a legal issue in the EU framework and outside the UN process.

Finally, he warns that “the UN and specially the EU ought to assume a more proactive role, reinvigorating their leadership and mediation efforts in pursuit of a Cyprus settlement”. And he pointedly remarks that “this is imperative as it is doubtful whether the Cyprus disputants will be able of themselves to initiate a substantive peace process”.

The critical point the Christofias-Talat negotiation has reached makes this last comment of Harry Anastasiou sound as a prophetic warning to all political leaders and peoples involved.

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