

# **Update on the Cyprus Conflict**

**Clement Dodd**

**The Eothen Press, (Huntingdon, Cambs, 2006) iv + 59 + 8 pp**

**ISBN: 0-906719-65-8**

Cyprus has always been contrarian. It is an example of ethnic conflict before its time. It is considered an anachronism in having the “last divided capital in Europe”. And, so it attracts contrarian thinkers. However, contrarian thinking can come full circle and become mainstream. Whether these prospects appeal to Professor Clement Dodd is something he would have to answer for himself, but his view that Cyprus can only be settled through a confederal model is certain to appeal to a wider constituency as time passes. It could be argued that the election of Dimitris Christofias as President of the Republic of Cyprus is a last gasp effort to stave off this eventuality.

Update on the Cyprus Conflict and its Addendum is a compilation of briefings on developments regarding the Cyprus problem provided by Professor Clement Dodd to the Turkish Area Study Group (TASG) spanning from the Spring of 2003 through January 2007. Professor Dodd chronicles the developments related to the failed Annan Plan and its aftermath, the EU accession of Cyprus, and resulting complications in Turkey’s own bid to join the union. Throughout, Dodd remains steadfast in arguing that the optimal settlement for Cyprus would be a confederal system. The Updates have been reproduced in the form of a booklet (and addendum) for dissemination to a broader public.

Dodd remains faithful to the Turkish line that the current Cyprus conflict has its origins in the fateful UN Security Council resolution of March 1964 that granted recognition to a de facto Greek Cypriot government. It follows that the Turkish Cypriots “naturally distrust the Security Council” (p. 1). Dodd appears baffled at the discrepancies that emerged between Turkish Cypriot civil society and officialdom regarding the Annan Plan. How could the Turkish Cypriots have placed so much faith in the UN and other international actors that have failed to acknowledge Turkish Cypriot political equality? His patronising answer is that support for the Annan Plan derived from ignorance and economic scarcity. An educated reading of the UN plan ostensibly reveals how inimical it was in terms of Turkish Cypriot interests. The Annan Plan was not sufficiently confederal.

Dodd’s analysis of domestic Turkish Cypriot political affairs suffers from the conflation of official discourses and Turkish Cypriot political identity. This

assumption of homogeneity stems from the unexplored narratives that favoured federalism over confederalism in the run up to the Annan Plan. It should be recalled that the Turkish side's official stance in favour of confederation in 1998 was in response to the EU's Luxembourg summit strategic decision to admit Cyprus but to exclude Turkey from membership. It follows that opposition groups in northern Cyprus also understood that the EU's reversal through the Helsinki summit decision of 1999 to offer Turkey candidate status required a parallel shift in Turkish policy regarding Cyprus, in turn. The upshot was that Rauf Denktash, the veteran community leader and president of the 'TRNC', came under sustained international and domestic pressure to resume negotiations to solve the Cyprus problem in time for EU accession. Denktash eventually became a lightning rod attracting critics and leading to consternation regarding the failure to finalise negotiations. The period leading to the Annan Plan referendum polarised Turkish Cypriot society, pitting Denktash and his supporters against an increasingly wide coalition of forces that considered him to be among the primary impediments to a settlement that supposedly served the interests of Turkish Cypriots and Turkey alike. Unfortunately this account is entirely ignored in Clement Dodd's analysis.

Professor Dodd's interpretation of Turkish Cypriot domestic developments apparently stems from the official sources that he depended upon to produce the Updates, hence the partisan nature of his analysis. The booklet is littered with adjectives to describe figures and movements opposed to Denktash's policies. Mustafa Akinci and the left wing parties are often dubbed "anti-Turkish". The Chamber of Commerce leadership is referred to as "bourgeois".

The treatment of the failure of the Turkish Cypriot parliament to make a quorum prior to a critical summit at The Hague in March 2003 is telling:

"[Denktash] did not get support from the Turkish Cypriot parliament. Not confident, it would seem, that they would get the parliamentary support needed, particularly from the junior coalition Democratic Party deputies, the two government coalition parties decided not to attend the parliamentary session, thus preventing a quorum" (p. 10).

In fact, the failure to make a quorum on 3 March 2003 actually proved to be a catalyst that consolidated the coalition of forces in favour of the Annan Plan. Henceforth, the holding of a referendum took on symbolic significance aside from the substantive matter of solving the Cyprus problem. Had Professor Dodd scanned Turkish Cypriot media coverage during the period he would have been aware that the failure to make a quorum, far from tying Denktash's hands, freed him to reject the Annan Plan despite popular appeals to hold the referendum.

The shortcomings of Professor Dodd's analysis of Turkish Cypriot domestic politics aside, the ambiguity surrounding the post-referenda developments do not bode well for a federal settlement. Dodd is correct in noting a decided shift in tone and tactics on the part of Mehmet Ali Talat, Denktash's erstwhile nemesis during the Annan Plan debate, and current 'TRNC' president. He is also correct to point out that Talat's legitimacy had initially been bolstered by the EU and international community's pledges to lift the 'isolation' of the Turkish Cypriot community, if not state. Moreover, the price for lifting the embargoes was forsaking secessionism.

Clement Dodd's verdict that the UN Secretary General's report following the Annan Plan entailed flawed logic is also correct. Annan's view that the isolation be lifted given the Turkish Cypriot rejection of the two state solution is as conjectural as his conclusion that the Greek Cypriot "no" implied that the Greeks Cypriots had not only rejected the Annan Plan but any settlement. Indeed, the Turkish Cypriots had not consciously rejected sovereignty, but had accepted what they considered a viable settlement deal. But where Dodd errs is in his conclusion that Turkish Cypriots "voted under duress" (p. 35). To the contrary, many considered their vote to be an act of self-determination, despite the fact that the plan did not provide the community with 'inherent constitutive power'. It is only after the fact that Annan weighed in with his interpretation of the respective "yes" and "no" results of the simultaneous referenda that rendered the Annan Plan null and void.

It is regarding the duplicity of international affairs that Dodd's argument is most persuasive. No doubt recent developments related to Kosovo will reinforce the view that the international community is plagued by inconsistencies. However, Dodd's partisan approach will not win many converts, since Greek Cypriot sympathisers are also capable of pointing to the same inconsistencies or injustices and engaging in attribution regarding their own cause. A proper account would also weigh the contribution of Turkey to the Cyprus problem imbroglio.

But regardless of attribution, what needs to be considered is whether Professor Dodd is ultimately correct in essentialising the Cyprus conflict? After all, is the Cyprus problem not reducible to two ethnically defined sides that pursue incompatible objectives? As with any debate, there are at least two views.

On the one hand, recent evidence supports that the peoples in Cyprus are not too keen on a federal settlement, notwithstanding the implications of the recent electoral defeat of President Tassos Papadopoulos. Professor Dodd points to some of the survey and polling evidence. Problematically, it is the Greek Cypriot majority that is least interested in federalism. Their preferred ideal settlement is based on a unitary state model. Moreover, to the extent that there is consensus in principle on governance, as reaffirmed by the UN brokered agreement in July 2006 to restart

negotiations with the goal of establishing a federal system, 'political equality' (hence power sharing) remains a contested concept. From this vantage point, there may be more homogeneity within the respective communities than division. Hence, the ethnic cleavage dominates and cross cuts all other issues. In this way it is perhaps possible to reduce public opinion to official level discourses and positions, even at the cost of concealing internal ideational divisions and marginalising dissenting voices.

On the other hand, the impasse in Cyprus may have reached a crossroads. Dodd can be excused for downplaying this potential, as polling data and political allegiances in the Greek Cypriot community did not convey a sense of change. The defeat of Tassos Papadopoulos in the first round of voting in the Presidential election of February 2008 was even a surprise among Greek Cypriots.

Professor Dodd notes a growing tendency for some Greek Cypriots to prefer a two-state model to federation, but concludes that "unfortunately, with continuing Greek Cypriot insistence on their sovereignty over the island, it looks at present the least likely option" (p. 38).

But, then again, as we have seen with his analysis of Turkish Cypriot affairs, Dodd tends to underestimate dynamism, failing to recognise the schism between AKEL and Papadopoulos. On the strength of DIKO's showing in the 2006 parliamentary poll, Dodd concluded that "AKEL will probably join DIKO in nominating Papadopoulos as a candidate for a further term in 2008" (Addendum, p. 3).

Papadopoulos' legitimacy was in part contingent on his ability to produce a settlement framework more amenable to the Greek Cypriot community's interests than the Annan Plan ostensibly was. AKEL's decision to support its own candidate, Dimitris Christofias, reflected a growing schism between DIKO and AKEL over strategy amid heightened fears that Papadopoulos' policies were merely cementing division.

If there is belated momentum, the Annan Plan may have been a harbinger of changes to come in thinking on either side of the Green Line. The election of Dimitris Christofias provides a window of opportunity to refocus on substantive negotiations with a view to establishing a federal system in Cyprus. This will, at least for the time being, put the Kososvo 'precedent' on the backburner.

**Erol Kaymak**