

# Where is The Movement?

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The first day at school has a challenging optimistic ambience. It always comes as a symbolic relief, to children and parents alike after the long hot summer holiday. There is always an air of anticipation about the future on these days – nothing too heavy – perhaps just speculating to half term or the Christmas play or even what is on the lunchtime menu. Looking round the playground it seems like this is just another school poised to take on the new academic year. It is true, the commonality is there but there is something uniquely shameful about Cyprus in that the political quagmire our children have inherited is just being passed on, unresolved, in a dread motionless state. No progress one could even argue, will lead eventually to a permanent form of partition which many have likened to ‘Taiwanification’. It is not my intention to be a ‘prophet of doom’ in this commentary by talking about ‘The New Asia Minor Catastrophe’. Those words are for the politicians who concoct fear for the sake of winning votes. I do however consider the times we live in historic. There is an increasing sense of the ‘de rigueur’ among people throughout Cyprus because there is nothing worse for Cyprus than the further entrenchment of division. A two state solution will lead to everyone in Cyprus being eternally at odds with each other, on edge and clearly demarcated between the ‘legal’ and ‘illegal’ – at least if we accept the Taiwanification Theory. “I can call you Maria if I want” balked Rauf Denktash a few years ago, reacting childishly to a probing Greek-Cypriot TV journalist who articulated the staid PC terminology “illegal occupied regime”. Lacking any understanding of universal harmony let alone peace, Denktash, arrogant as ever, was painfully right.

As each day passes, more tons of cement solidifies difference even further. The demographics of north Cyprus indicate Turkish Cypriots are a clear minority in their own isolated but self declared statelet – approximately 110,000 out of a total of 320,000. More acts of ending the isolation or recognising the ‘TRNC’ seem to be happening every week. A concerted PR effort for recognition has been happening for decades but it is incorrect to view the present as an extension of Denktashian intransigence. On the contrary, the Talat administration and leadership shows a different face because from the outset Talat has exploited the new political terrain of the EU. After The Republic of Cyprus joined the EU many partners accepted to enter a dialogue concerning ending the isolation of Turkish Cypriots. Quite how this will be done has never been explained, because just like the failed Annan Process, what we seem to always forget in Cyprus is, it always takes two to tango.

In contrast the PR efforts of The Republic of Cyprus have merely repeated the same worn out clichés which have been subsumed in a pointless sea of mythologising and narrow-mindedness post Referenda 2004. Many Greek-Cypriot politicians have defined this approach as their means to put Turkey back on the 'guilty' map as far as Cyprus is concerned. So with one hand we have patted Turkey on the back, with a stance that encourages Turkish EU membership – and on the other – given every opportunity we heave all the 'blame' on the 'occupying Turks' as modern day colonialists and conquerors. This 'hot' and 'cold' technique is weak from the outset because it creates a semiotic fiasco. The delineations between 'good' and 'bad' are always imbalanced. Some take it all a step further – alluding to a European Solution – as a form of divine intervention from Brussels. Given that my maths is still functional, three years after joining the EU, the prized legalistic solution has not arrived yet. There is a similarity between this misguided, even fetishised notion of Europeaness with certain religious sects who preach "the end of the world is nigh". The European Solutionists seem to be waiting with baited breath for that moment – just waiting for it all to happen. Forgive my cynicism on this issue, but frankly it never happened when Ireland joined the EU. It only started to happen when all parties concerned across the border and waves between Ireland and Britain put down the guns and started to engage in a serious peaceful dialogue. Europe had nothing to do with this process so why should it be so concerned with The Cyprus Problem. A response could be "but we (meaning Greek Cypriots) have justice on our side". In fact the legalistic people, who allude to this approach, also tell us that this is all we have on our side. But therein lies a majoritarian problem – how 'we' define justice, what 'we' see as injustice and how 'we' never seem to be able to transcend the 'ego' of Cyprus as **Greek** Cypriot. Yes we have suffered but the story of The Cyprus Problem did not start in July 1974 nor did it end when Turkish Cypriots voted YES and Greek Cypriots voted NO on that historic day in April 2004.

The 'us' and 'them' element of political discourse and nationalist rhetoric, dominant from the time we all went our separate nationalist ways, also blocked the formation of any significant united effort at progress. Every signpost in our recent history of UN negotiations is a clear indication of a never ending 'blaming game' – from the 1960s to the present. Cyprus is the longest standing unresolved intractable international dispute. We or rather our successive leaders have been at the UN negotiating table, on and off since 1963! I will not attempt to elaborate on this, as it would probably require several extended tomes, filling the length of an average university library. But for all those decades virtually nothing has ever been achieved and casting the blame solely on one party or the other is just adding more fuel to the fires of intransigence. I will however focus on why progress has been stifled at the grass roots level.

What has always been missing from the 'formula' for a solution is simply a common movement? Without citizens themselves engaging in a political dialogue, with the aim of creating a common agenda, everything seems so pointless. So where is this movement, this dynamic vehicle for change and why has it never got off the ground? Is it too quixotic to even call for such a move in late 2007? Can this be achieved before it is too late? Virtually all Cyprus based political parties have never really thought beyond the box of nationalist and/or ethnic discourse. Whether they directly or indirectly, intentionally or not pursue a nationalist agenda, when it comes down to the finite details, 'we' always equals a monolithic, homogenous and thus illusive constructed community identity. The illusiveness comes about because 'we' either claim to represent the 'whole of Cyprus' – but we do not – or we claim to represent a separate part of Cyprus – as an independent entity – which we do not. A collective non-nationalist alternative identity has never really been nurtured. A mass people's movement, heterogeneous such as The African National Congress or broader Anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa has never existed in Cyprus. If it had it could be argued that people as citizens of Cyprus on either side of the 'green line' would, by now, have by-passed the redundant formulas of nationalism and set out to solve the Cyprus Problem, autonomously from the ground upwards. Some people believe that South Africa is so different – a view that I share but why is it that we feel Cyprus is so exceptional? I used to be drawn into parables like 'Cyprus the only divided island in the world' as if division, be it class, gender, racial, religious, lifestyle or ethnic does not exist in every country on earth. Parallels can be drawn from many conjunctures round the world, lessons can be learnt and linkages can be made. South Africa – without the ANC and the broader, worldwide Anti-Apartheid Movement, would still be an endemically iniquitous and racist regime. I would like to stress one word again however and that is heterogeneous. The lack of choices on our political horizons has always stifled this from developing organically. We are always content that one can only be Greek at the expense of being a Turk or Turkish at the expense of being a Greek. Or even Cypriot at the expense of being either Greek or Turkish. What I am saying is why not accept all of these, without suppressing individuality or difference. I dislike either/or syndromes because things are not always simply black or white. That sense of narrow-mindedness has colonised our political emotions for decades: 'Left' or 'right', Greek or Turk, and worst of all patriot or traitor. I recall the first time I ever heard these divisions as an eight-year old on holiday from London in Famagusta. People were so divided along political turfs. It was completely alien to me after the four years I had spent in the east end of London. I could understand hostility – in fact it was forced upon me. When I went to school in Walthamstow E17, I was made to feel different by teachers and pupils who were hostile. That sense of 'they' do not like me was frightening at first. In time however I learned to cope with it – despite the constant 'us' and 'them' jungle of life in London. In Famagusta though I found it so strange that Greek Cypriots, many of whom were basically children just

like me were so tribalised by the politics of 'left' and 'right'. Many years later, as a student, fired up by the tragic events of 1974, I engaged in a period of nihilistic sectarianism. It got me nowhere beyond the confines of judging and being judged the moment I engaged in any discourse with Greek Cypriots or on Cyprus. Sectarianism, in its homogenised, fanatic form is what led Cyprus to its chaotic and ambivalent disjointedness. Once realising the servitude one engages in with political parties, a few years later, when I extracted myself from it all my mind felt a sense of liberation. That feeling only people who have lost weight understand when slimming down from being medically 'obese' to an average weight. Sectarianism then is our unwanted baggage – disposing of it, losing it, is like going from slavery to freedom.

Call me a romantic, a dreamer, a person who envisions a different kind of Cyprus utopia. To paraphrase a righteous come-back song by Yusuf Islam (ex-Cat Stevens) "I have dreamt of an open world, borderless and wide, where the people move from place to place and no one's taking sides". It is the perfect rhyming couplet for Cyprus at this juncture. Even if only ten people in the respective colonised, divided, occupied, and polarised societies in which we live agree on this it would be a tiny step in the right direction. Engaging in dialogue and accepting as my Turkish-Cypriot poet friend Zeki Ali states, that the only line we want is the one that is as "blue as the Mediterranean", is a challenging and yet virtuous way forward. At least people would have an alternative to the nationalism that has been eating at our respective souls for decades. The Cyprus Problem remains unsolved, without a common political agenda for all Cypriots to share. Until that time and platform arises, we will remain divided and drift further apart. Worst of all, and the most inexcusable aspect of all this, our children, and their children, given that we remain divided, will only inherit what we all give them – a 'green line' and a gun to still hold whilst doing 'our'/their particularly nationalistic and respective guard duties ... So where is the Movement?

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### References

- 'Maybe There's A World' – song by Yusuf Islam from CD 'An Other Cup' SONY, 2006  
'Mediterranean Blues' – poem by Zeki Ali from CD 'Cyprus Thing Vol. 1' Olive Tree Music, 2004.