

INTRODUCTION

Reconciliation and Citizenship in Cyprus: A Trans Communal Concept for Social Action

This special issue of The Cyprus Review is an effort to rethink the concept of 'reconciliation': is the concept of any use in the context of Cyprus prior to a solution or can we only speak of reconciliation after a solution? Does it offer a common space for citizens' dialogue and action in the current stalemate conditions? Does it open the potential for dialogue relevant to society as a whole beyond the political elites?

The initial debate on the subject took place during a conference in the buffer zone of Nicosia, at the Goethe Centre on 23 July 2005, organised by SYMFILIOSI, IKME and BILBAN. The majority of the articles and commentaries contained in this issue are papers that were presented then and have been reworked since that conference, but the two articles on education, i.e. 'Reconciliation and Peace Education in Cyprus: What Will It Take?' by Laurie Johnson and 'Reconciliation and the Teaching of History' by Chara Makriyianni and Charis Psaltis, are additional papers commissioned for this issue.

The basic idea of this special issue is to take matters further and initiate a broader dialogue between the two communities on the concept as well as the potential for reconciliation in our society today following the rejection of the UN plan and the daunting prospect of a protracted non-solution situation. An attempt to review the concept of 'reconciliation' within the context of the accession of Cyprus to the EU and against a backdrop of uncertainty and rising nationalisms demands serious deliberation over the content, the prospects, the means and methods to be employed. A series of events since the referenda in spring 2004 have adversely affected not only the rapprochement movement but also the prospects of a dialogue at citizen level. The result is that bi-communal activities are limited to symbolic gestures of friendship and common heritage, while the hot issues which today concern and affect the average person from both communities remain under-discussed, unresolved and often fall prey to the politicians' televised discussions. As time goes by it is imperative to critically reflect the past and look to the future.

A number of issues were raised in a discussion paper that was circulated prior to the conference to trigger the debate which subsequently formed the basis for the papers that followed. Moreover, the same issues remain relevant today – the challenge to ignite any mode of spontaneous discussion to produce ideas and think through the concept of reconciliation in Cyprus. Key questions were set as follows:

1. The current situation as regards the Cyprus problem, which is characterised by 'fluidity', disappointment and in some cases even resentment, is 'colouring' every effort to think ahead, as significant sectors of both communities sink into irredentism. How is the potential for reconciliation effected?
2. A large number of people constantly 'cross over', meet and interact; however, there are also a great many people who either still refuse to cross over or remain indifferent. Some even appear content with the status quo that may solidify and consolidate the de facto partition. What does this mean for reconciliation and the prospects for reunification? How can the potential created by opportunity to meet after the partial lifting of the ban of freedom of movement be utilised?
3. 'Tested formulae' on reconciliation in other contexts as well as lessons to be drawn from others' successes and failures are obviously particularly relevant and valuable in opening a debate which has almost reached a deadlock. The familiarisation with initiatives of other communities in conflict can give a new impetus for initiatives and action in Cyprus. However, these also require a serious 'adaptation' to the specific context of Cyprus, if they are to be made useful and relevant to the experience of the island. How do we 'learn' from the experience of others? How do we connect and anchor the historical specificity of Cyprus to the experience, and of other peoples in conflict?
4. The content of reconciliation needs to be developed and articulated in order to define the terms of reference of the necessary dialogue in a new developed 'common public space' between and within the two communities and beyond. Such a dialogue has spasmodically taken place in the past; however, it requires a broadening of its basis and a deepening of its meaning. The social, political, economic, cultural, symbolic and moral dimensions of reconciliation in the particular context of Cyprus need to be elaborated to serve as the broad framework and reference point for potential citizens' actions and initiatives. Indeed, does the concept offer anything at all or should we seek alternatives?
5. The methodologies of reconciliation are a major issue for debate: who are the 'mediators' the 'articulators' and 'agents' of reconciliation? How are they linked to the political structures and processes of Cyprus and what is the role of civil society? Which social forces, strata and groups ought to be targeted and why? What is the role of citizens?
6. What is the role of education in bringing about reconciliation? What systemic changes are required to bring about peace education in the educational systems? More specifically, what sort of history education is required in Cyprus so that it promotes historical understanding, rather than hindering reconciliation and cementing segregation and division?

7. What are the means available to generate a 'common public space' for dialogue? Does it already exist in the 'traditional coexistence' or are the perceived commonalities actually 'ethnocised', partial, positional and thus differential and inadequate? What are the commonalities and differences; what are the limitations and potential for transcending the ethno-national boundaries? Is there a potential for building a normative frame for reconciliation based on the commonalities entailed in 'Cypriotness' and everydayness? Or should we attempt to move beyond such concepts as 'Cypriotness', 'Greekness', 'Turkishness', as concepts with an inherent tendency for intolerance if they become dominant? And what is that quality about the Cyprus problem that renders the public sphere of identity into a source of conflict? What role can "Europeaness" play? Are these concepts best seen as contested points of reference and must they be problematised in terms of the various social differentials? What is the link between the 'local' (i.e. the particularity of the historical specificity of Cyprus) and with 'the universal' (as elaborated in the context of European integration, global movements etc). And finally, what is the way forward for us now, in the post referendum period? Can we chart out an agenda of action for reconciliation as an essential element of reunification?

The answers to the above questions are highly complex; the papers that follow touch upon various dimensions of reconciliation, but they certainly do not exhaust the topic. On the contrary this is only a beginning; the topic is vast and will almost certainly be of major interest to any settlement idea in Cyprus. The aim here is to put together in a single volume, some of these ideas in a serious manner so that we can begin to engage on a subject that has so far not received its due attention.

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