

LIFE AND STRIFE IN MIXED VILLAGES: SOME ASPECTS OF INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS IN CYPRUS UNDER BRITISH RULE

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Abstract

This article examines the political and social conditions and interaction among the Cypriots of different ethnic background, in mixed villages during the British rule. It emphasizes the special conditions relevant to intermarriage between Christians and Muslims and it also examines the peculiar system of administration in these villages, the educational system and the peculiar situation of the co-operative movement. Finally, some aspects of the intercommunal conflict in these villages is also, briefly, examined.

"Sabri¹ was up there, sitting under the leaves contemplating a black coffee, waiting for me with particular information about carob-wood-he had a special load. 'Sit, my dear' he said gravely, and I sat beside him, soaking up the silence with its sheer blissful weight. The sea was calm. (Somewhere out of sight and sound the caique 'Saint George', loaded with arms and some ten thousand sticks of dynamite, was beating up the craggy coast by Cape Arnauti, making for a rendezvous near Paphos). It is so peaceful here, said my friend, sipping his coffee. 'But for these bloody Greeks Cyprus would be peaceful; but we Turks haven't opened our mouths yet. We will never be ruled by Greece here; I would take to the mountains and fight them if *enosis* came!' -
O dear!"²

The above quotation from Lawrence Durrell's *Bitter Lemons* clearly indicates that in the 1950s British officials were not aware of the fact that many Cypriot Turks were prepared for confrontation with the Greek Cypriots. The public records of this period always tried to separate so called "terrorist elements" like VOLKAN and T.M.T. from the vast majority of Turks who, as one Cyprus-Government Clerk once put it, have always been considered "*the only loyal inhabitants*" in Cyprus.³ They were surprised by Turkish national agitation for *taksim* as they were by the occasion of the bomb explosion of April 1st 1955 which marked the beginning of

the armed struggle of the EOKA for the achievement of unification with Greece (*enosis*).⁴ But how "loyal" was the Turkish population to the British-in fact? Of course the Turkish-Cypriot establishment and most of the Turks in government services had been in favour of British rule, and the Muslim members of the legislative council voted on most occasions with the British members. On the other hand there is little doubt that the Turkish Cypriots were not very attracted by the idea of becoming citizens of the Kingdom of Greece.

But all these political considerations can not distract one from the fact that in general life and actual daily politics there was a great deal of common life and interest between the two ethnic groups. The "miners strike" of 1948 might be a good example of political co-operation between Greek and Turkish workers employed by the Cyprus Mining Corporation. The strike lasted four months and four days and was the longest in the history of trade unions on the island. The strike was supported by the Turkish Cypriot leadership (Fazil Kucuk and Rauf Denktash, addressed two mixed rallies at Lefkara) and left-wing Greek Cypriot organisations, like P.E.O. and AKEL. Only the Greek Cypriot right-wing K.E.K. and the rightist Greek Cypriot "New Trade Unions" (Νέαι Συντεχνίαι [*Neai Syntechnia*]) did not support it and organised groups of strike-breakers.⁵

The most remarkable example of intercommunal relations in Cyprus is undoubtedly the existence of over 300 mixed villages on the island. The exact figures were studied by R. A. Patrick⁶ who estimated that in 1891 there were 346 of them. In 1931 the number had fallen to 252, and in the year of Independence (1960) to 114. After the intercommunal fightings of 1963/64 the figure reduced to 48 (1970) and after the 1974 War only one remained (Pyla in the UN-Bufferzone, near Dhekelia SBA). Apart from the catastrophic development of 1963/64, which obviously brought about an end to mixed intercommunal life in most parts of the island, a dramatic decline in the number of mixed villages between 1891 and 1931 is noticeable. As Peter Loizos has repeatedly pointed out, the disappearance of 94 mixed villages, without any sign of significant bloodshed or intercommunal strife within these villages, is worth a closer look.⁷ Patrick explained this as an effect of different rates of ethnic emigration from the villages to the towns of Cyprus and of emigration from the island. Loizos tried to identify other causes. He suggested that the Turks might have been affected by a wave of growing Turkish nationalism from Kemalist Turkey, which encouraged some to form their own villages or to leave for Turkey. On the other hand, he suggested that the events of the Balkan wars of 1912-13 and the Turko-Greek War of 1922 might have had an effect on the communities. He concluded that "*in communities where one group was a majority, there was in the earliest period already a tendency to leave the community to the majority.*"⁶

It is not easy to find out the truth about what brought an end to these mixed villages, but one could suggest that both explanations are two sides of the same coin. There is no doubt that because of economical problems on the island many

people left for better prospects within the Commonwealth or even more likely for other countries where communities of their own nationality already existed. While after 1922, Greece suffered from refugee problems and was surely not open for settlers from Cyprus, Turkey seemed to offer prospects and prosperity for many Turkish Cypriots. Even if it turned out later to be a mistake, it might have attracted young Turks to leave Cyprus and to leave behind the old people in the **mixed** villages where the Greeks were mostly in the majority. This, together with a certain amount of political distress about *enosis* and growing Greek self-confidence, could have had a certain influence on the above development. I doubt that up to the 1940s the vast majority of the Turks in mixed villages really cared much about the new development in Turkey. Their loyalties varied from religious traditions, to family customs, to the feeling that all is fine as long as they remain under British rule. The absence of a Turkish political organisation until 1943 on the island points in this direction. To find out what really happened to the mixed villages it might be helpful to look at some aspects of intercommunal and general rural life and to some changes which had been enacted under British rule.

Intermarriage

There has been a certain amount of intermarriage in Cyprus, and it is most likely that many of those marriages occurred in mixed villages. We know about "love affairs" from old songs and poems like *Tragoudin Moustapha tou Paphiou* (A song about Mustapha of Paphos, who fell in love with Helene) or *Asma Marikkous apo Eptakomi Karpasias* (A song about Marikkou of Heptakomi of Karpas, who fell in love with Ahmed Aga, son of Mullah, etc.). Kyrris took these popular Greek Cypriot folk songs as being a good example of respect and sympathy between Turks and Greeks.⁹ But even if some of them were sung by Turkish Cypriots as well, they always had the intention to show that an intermarriage "must" lead (and always had led) to disaster. Usually the songs culminated to a point where one of the parties was forced to convert to Islam or where a Christian woman, who wanted to marry a Muslim leader had been killed by her own family which could not accept her becoming a Muslim and bringing "shame" to the family. In other cases the Ottoman Aga had issued death sentences.¹⁰ Even if these songs bring about feelings of inter-ethnic discord they are at least a good indicator of the existence of these special forms of inter-ethnic relations on a wider scale. Generally there was only one legal possibility of intermarriage: The marriages of members of the Greek Orthodox Church in Cyprus were governed by the Canon law of that Church which did not permit marriage between a Greek Orthodox and a Moslem. Moslem marriages, on the other hand, were similarly governed by Mohammedan law. With regard to the Orthodox Church it is essential that both the bride and the groom are baptised. Loizos had once asked some priests whether one could be a Christian and a Muslim at the same time and received, of course, a negative answer. But he was advised that, "*when a Muslim wishes to be baptised, not too many questions are asked, and there is no follow-up to make sure he isn't slipping into the mosque occasionally.*"¹¹ Under Ottoman rule there was no interference by the authorities

into the family affairs of the different religious groups in Cyprus, and the British continued this policy.¹² There was no reform of marriage law as there was in Turkey, where in 1926 the *Sheriat* was displaced and civil law and civil marriage was introduced, while religious marriage became a private matter not effecting the legal status of a family. There was no civil marriage in Cyprus under the colonial administration. This caused problems for the colonial administration in March 1935: A young couple from Nicosia, he a Muslim and a chief clerk in government service, she a Greek Orthodox and school mistress, also in official service, went to the British Consulate in Athens and asked for permission to marry under the provisions of the *Foreign Marriage Act, 1892*, which permitted civil marriage within the Commonwealth especially for Non-British subjects of the crown. A dispute broke out between the Colonial Office and the Governor of Cyprus on the one side and the Secretary of State of the Foreign Office on the other side. While the above stated that civil marriage was not permitted in Cyprus,¹³ the latter position was taken, that any marriage which had been enacted within the lines of British law had to be regarded as "legal" anywhere in the Commonwealth.¹⁴ Finally, the marriage was registered in a Registry Office somewhere in England and the question of legality remained open. Following that event, there had been some schemes to amend the Marriage Law in respect to civil marriage, but they have never been put into effect.¹⁵ We know now something about the existence of intermarriage in Cyprus. But how was it generally accepted? There are no signs of major inter-ethnic problems caused by intermarriages, but its worth looking at recent statements on this topic, made by villagers who had lived in mixed villages. The Cambridge Anthropologist Ioannis Papadakis once asked an elderly woman, who had just stated that, in good old times, the Greeks had lived well with the Turks, why there was no intermarriage (in the post-independence years). She answered his question by saying: "Who would want to marry those Gypsies (*kkilintzirus*)?"¹⁶ This indicates that there is a reluctance to admit-at least among the lower classes-that intermarriage took place. Loizos made the same observation when he was told, "it (intermarriage) *never it happens*." Later it turned out that this was meant more in the meaning of "*it ought never to happen*" and, finally, it was amended to "*rarely happens*." After he made some further investigation it turned out that his interview partners knew someone who had done it personally and this was sometimes even a kinsman.¹⁷ So, it is more than likely that some time before the 1950s, intermarriage was not unusual in mixed villages even if it was the exception. We do not have results of field research on this theme within the Turkish Cypriot community up to now, but the existence of intimidation-pamphlets of the T.M.T. against Muslims who were married to Christian women,¹⁸ are a clue that there had been a tendency at least in radical circles of the community to dissolve such relations. Therefore one can further conclude that the political strife, which separated the communities, also effected the common acceptance of intermarriage.

Administration

The British had continued the system of village administration which had been in force since Ottoman times. In a mixed village each community constituted a village council with a *Mukhtar* (Mayor) and four *Azas* (Village elders), who were appointed from 1931 to 1945 by the district commissioners.¹⁹ For matters concerning both communities, the two councils formed a Joint Council. After 1945 an electoral system for the councils was introduced, and for the *Joint Council* it was decided that the "casting vote" should be that of the *Mukhtar* of the majority population, which was in most cases the Greek Cypriots.²⁰ It is quite obvious that this system of segregated administration was not beneficial for the intercommunal political debate on local issues. All questions were first discussed and decided within both communities before they came out on the agenda of the *Joint Council*. There is no sign of joint intercommunal action against decisions of the village councils up to now, and it can be assumed that the prolongation of segregated administration has been counter-productive to the development of some sense of political unity in the mixed villages.

Education

Since Ottoman times primary education in Cyprus has been governed by the different religious communities.²¹ Mixed villages made no exception. While the Greek-Cypriot children went to primary schools which were under the supervision of the Greek-Orthodox Church and the administration of the Greek Cypriot village councils,²² the Turkish Cypriot pupils attended schools which were under the supervision of the *Evkaf* and administered by the Turkish Cypriot village councils.²³ Besides the fact that segregated education did not foster the development of a sense of unity amongst the village children, the main "troublemaking factor" was that the topics within the subjects contributed to the spread of nationalism among the different communities. First, Greek nationalism was introduced through the official Orthodox Church policy of strengthening "Hellenistic self-confidence" through propagandising *enosis* and borrowing schoolbooks, teachers and subjects from the Greek Kingdom.²⁴ After the building of the new Turkish Nation State, Turkish teachers and books came to the island. With them Turkish national feelings spread from nearby Anatolia and did their share in influencing Turkish Cypriot school children. Therefore, growing literacy and improved educational standards made young people aware of being different from their neighbouring Turkish and Greek companions.

Co-operative Movement

The Co-operative Movement is maybe the most advanced example of effective joint action between the two communities. The Co-operative Movement in Cyprus dates back to the early years of British rule. The earliest *Agricultural Association* was formed at Famagusta in December 1883 by Greek and Turkish landowners under the supervision and on the initiative of the District Commissioner Arthur Young. The idea of the Co-operative Movement was to share and buy agricultural

machines, to carry out common cultivation of the land and to sell the products²⁵ The first Co-operative Credit Societies Law was enacted in 1914 and the first societies were registered under that law in 1916. The head of the Movement was always a British Commissioner. He was assisted by a Turkish and a Greek Assistant Commissioner and a Principal Co-operative Officer.²⁶ In 1925 the *Agricultural Bank* was established and in 1938 the *Co-operative Central Bank* started operations. These institutions aimed to finance the members' agricultural progress. In the beginning, there was no thought within the mixed villages to build separate societies and, as far as we know, there was little trouble along ethnic lines within the societies before 1955. In contrast, the colonial administration was very anxious to see the growing influence of the communist AKEL within the Movement, which was well known for its good relations with Turkish Cypriots in general.²⁷ Nevertheless, there was a tendency to found separate Turkish Co-operatives. The number of Turkish societies rose from 113 in 1946 to 120 in 1947, up to 168 in 1956.²⁸ During the Greek-Cypriot fight for *enosis*, the co-operative societies as well were effected by intercommunal strife and some Turkish members of mixed co-operatives formed their own societies, but the Annual Report of the Department of Co-operative Development for the year 1958 judged this not to be a general development:

'There are about eighty co-operative credit societies with mixed (Greek and Turkish) membership and following the intercommunal troubles there were requests from certain areas for the formation of separate societies. In certain other areas a few small Turkish villages previously grouped with nearby Greek societies separated and grouped with the nearest Turkish societies. The Turkish community began to voice a demand to stand on its own feet separately from the Greek co-operative societies. Some other societies where members of whichever community was in the minority had, as a result of Intercommunal strife, to leave their villages, are experiencing difficulties in recovering the loans owed by such members. This is a problem affecting both communities, but fortunately not widespread.'²⁹

In 1959 the united Movement came to an end, and the Co-operative Societies Law was amended in accordance with constitutional provisions³⁰ and the Department was split on a communal basis into Greek and Turkish Departments. There is no indication of widespread opposition to this segregation within the Co-operative Movement and one has to presume that despite all the financial and technical advantages of joint societies, especially in mixed villages, the political friction was too strong to continue the common work.

Strife-The Tide of Intercommunal Life

In 1958 the infamous Geunyeli-Incident³¹ made it brutally clear that the Greek Cypriot fight for Independence against the British had turned to civil war between Greek and Turkish Cypriots as well. The Report on the Incident³² includes a description of the situation in the village of Skylloura (Nicosia-District). Lamentably,

this village seems to be the very model of the crucial situation within mixed villages in those days. Skylloura is situated 12 miles from Nicosia, at the Nicosia-Myrtou Road. The village was made up of a Greek part with 550 inhabitants and a Turkish part with 300 people. Roughly one mile away there is the village of Ayios Vasilios, then inhabited by 436 Greeks and 94 Turks. *On 12 June, 1958*, while approaching the village of Skylloura, Police-Officer Sergeant Gill was confronted with the following situation: *"A number of Turks were armed with sticks and about double that number of Greeks were similarly armed. They were facing each other from their respective community section of the vil/age."*³³ Gill managed to de-escalate the situation and Skylloura remained without major incidents until Independence. It would be right to consider the intercommunal "climate" after the event in Skylloura not to be very invigorating. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that the village remained united until December 1963, when the last 289 Turks left in order to settle in the newly-built enclaves.³⁴ But what was the situation like in a village which had not been connected with intercommunal violence during the EOKA-campaign in the 1950s? Looking at the village of Argaki we had a different picture: Contrary to the data Oberling produced,³⁵ there were still about fifty, mainly elderly, Turks in the village as Loizos started his research in early 1968. According to him, there was very little contact between the two communities left, save some commercial interaction, for example, at the co-operative grocery.³⁶ Besides some good personal experiences they had with their Turkish neighbours, there was a great deal of prejudice against the Turks among the Greek Cypriot population, especially about the view of the historical role of Argaki Turks in retrospect. They were considered lazy and preferring leisure to manual work in Ottoman times and Loizos presumed that this view of the Turks *"might have been little more than a rationalisation of the 1968 status quo."*³⁷

Both examples, the violent as well as the non violent, indicate that common life in terms of "living together", disregarding religious beliefs or different cultural origin of one's neighbour, had disappeared in most of the mixed villages by the end of the colonial period.

Conclusion

Since Ottoman Rule, as well as in the early periods of British administration, life in mixed villages in Cyprus remained peaceful. Greeks and Turks in Cyprus shared fieldwork and village social life. Friendship did not stop at the lines of ethnicity and Greeks were invited to Muslim marriages and funerals and so on, and *vice versa*. There were even some love affairs, as lyrics and folk songs clearly indicate. Inter-marriage was not typical, but it was tolerated in many cases. But the spreading of nationalism first among the Greek Cypriots and later among the Turkish Cypriot population began slowly to weaken feelings of local self-confidence. Supported by segregated education, which brought the *Megalilf Idea* from Greece and Turkish Nationalism from Turkey, the two ethnic communities developed feelings of superiority over the other. Intercommunal political discussion in the mixed villages

died down, and the forming of public opinion occurred within separate communities. The Ottoman tradition of separated village councils facilitated this development. At the dawn of the EOKA-Campaign in 1955, inter-ethnic life in mixed villages had changed to pure co-existence.³⁸ On the eve of the campaign in 1959, much of the communities' volition, even to coexist, had disappeared as well.

Notes

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1. A Turkish Cypriot estate agent who was generally very much familiar with the Greek Cypriots.
2. Durrell, Lawrence, *Bitter Lemons* (London, 1958) p.175.
3. Establishment of elected councils in rural districts 1944-45, Memorandum to Governor Woolley, 19.9.44, CO 67/319/1.
4. Geogios Grivas noted: "The attack took the world by surprise but none were more shocked than the British officials who ran Cyprus. Both they and their military advisers appeared stunned and panic-stricken;" Foley, Charles (ed.), *The memoirs of General Grivas* (London, 1964), p.34.
5. See P.E.O. (ed.), [*O Agonas ton Metallorychon tes K.M.E.J. (The Struggle of the Miners of the C.M.C.)*], (Nicosia 1948), pp.78.
6. Patrick, Richard A., *Political Geography and the Cyprus Conflict 1963-1971* (Ontario, 1976), p.12.
7. Loizos, Peter, *The Heart Grown Bitter. A chronicle of Cypriot war refugees* (Cambridge, 1981), p.41; (same Author), "Understanding 1974. Understanding 1994," *The Cyprus Review*, 6, 1 (1994), pp.7, 10-11.
8. Loizos (1994),op. cit., 11.
9. Kyrris, Costas P., *Peaceful Co-existence in Cyprus Under British Rule (1878-1959) and After Independence. An Outline*, (Nicosia, 1977), p.14.
10. Yiagkoullis K., 'O Xptotoc.pr']c; t t' 'Eµ1vt [*Ho Christophes tze Emine*] (*Christophis and Emine*)';""*Laographike Kypros*, (1972), pp.15-21.
11. Loizos, Peter, *Greek-Turkish Inter-marriage*, (Unpublished Paper presented at an LSE Graduate Student Seminar in November 1967), (London, 1967), p.3.
12. They placed certain laws for the Muslim population, like the 'Marriage Law (1936)', CO 67/270/2 or the 'Turkish Family (Marriage and Divorce) Law 1951, government gazettes, 1951-53, supplement, CO 70/31, but this did not effect intermarriage.
13. Governor (Cyprus) to Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister Sec. of. St. for the Colonies, 5 June, 1935, CO 67/262/9.
14. Under Secretary of State FO to Under Sec. of St. CO, 4 July, 1935, CO

67/262/9.

15. Memorandum Colonial Office, 10 June, 1936, CO 67/270/2.

16. Papadakis, Ioannis, *Perceptions of History and Collective Identity: A Study of Contemporary Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot Nationalism*, Unpublished Ph.D. thesis (University of Cambridge 1993), p. 157.

17. Loizos (1967), p. 7.

18. A T.M.T. leaflet from 7.10.1958, which was distributed in Famagusta warned, for example, to buy goods from Hussein Fikret, because he would buy these goods in Varosha. Fikret himself should have escaped to London in order to live together with his Greek woman, "from which he hasn't been divorced yet;" Turkish Resistance Movement in Cyprus T.M.T, CO 926/952.

19. Memorandum to Woolley, 19. September 44, CO 67/319/1.

20. The Office of the Commissioner (ed.): *A Scheme for the Introduction of local Government into Rural Areas of Cyprus by means of village and Rural District Councils*. By LS. Greening. Printed at the Cyprus Government Printing Office. (Nicosia), 3. April 1945, 7, CO 67/319/2.

21. See Philipou, L., *Ta EAaryv1K6. yp6.μpara tv Kunp<!J Kara rrjv nepiooo rfjc;-roupKoKpariac;- [Ta Hellenika grammata en Kypro kata ten periodo tes tourkokratias} {The Greek Education in Cyprus under Turkish Rule}*, (Nicosia 1930).

22. Maratheftis, M., *T6 Kunp1aK6 sKna1&unK6 auarna [To Kypriako ekpaideutiko systema] (The Educational System of Cyprus)*, (Nicosia 1992), p.5.

23. 'Evkaf Office: Evkaf Report of Delegates on Accounts. Nicosia 29.3.45, *The Cyprus Gazette*, 18 April 1945, 83, CO 70/27.

24. At first the British did not interfere. But after the 1931 uprising, they tried to get control of the primary schools by demanding the introduction of the English language as a school subject and by taking over teacher training. See Maratheftis, *op. cit.*, p.29.

25. See N.K. Lanitis, 'AyponK6. xpto1 Ka[ol cruve101p1oμol tv K(mp(J) KOT6. μεT6.<!Jpamv tK TOO 'AyyA.lKO0 un6 Xp. XpIOTO0OUAOU [*Agrotika chreoi kai georgikoi synetairismoi en Kypro, kata metaphrasin ek tou Anglikou hypo Ch. Christodoulou] (Agricultural Debts and the Agricultural Co-operatives in Cyprus. Translated by Ch. Christodoulou)*, (Limassol 1946), 69-96, p.p.135-212.

26. Between 1940 and 1960 the Assistant Commissioner was a Turkish Cypriot, Mr. Rauf Kanaan, while a Greek Cypriot, Mr. Takis Poulos, was in charge as Principal Co-operative Officer. See Kyrris, *op. cit.*, p.73.

27. R.E. Turnbull (Governor) to J.S. Bennet C.O, 4.October 1947, CO 67/347/3.

28. See "Annual Reports of the Departement of Co-operative Development" for the Years 1946,1947 and 1956, CO 69/47 and CO 69/58.

29. Annual Report of Departement of Co-operative Development for the Year ending 31st December 1958 by W.G. Alexander, M.B.E., 4, CO 69/64.

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30. HMSO (ed.), *Cyprus. Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Defence by Command of Her Majesty*, (London, 1960), p.p.126-127; Appendix D: Draft Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus, Part V., The Communal Chambers, Article 876, 1 (h), Article 89, 1 (b).
 31. *On 12 June*, thirty-five armed Greeks were arrested near Skylloura and Ayios Vasilios, on their way to fight local Turks. They were taken back beyond the Turkish village of Geunyeli and told to walk home. Armed Turks in ambush went after them killing four of them, mortally wounding another four, and severely wounding five more. Fast approaching British Security Forces prevented a worse tragedy. Despite some suspicion from the Greek Cypriot side an inquiry into the incident did not reveal any British involvement in the massacre; The Geunyeli Incident. Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Incidents at Geunyeli Cyprus on 12 June, 1958, CO 926/ 906. For further details see the proceedings of the Commission of Inquiry, *The Geunyeli Incident*, CO 926/907.
 32. Governors Deputy to Governor: Account of Incidents of 7th - 13th June 1958, 25 June, 1958, CO 926/906.
 33. *Ibid.*
 34. Berner, Uwe, *Das vergessene Volk. Der Weg der Zyperntürken von der Kolonialzeit zur Unabhängigkeit*, (Pfaffenweiler 1992), 139 / Appendix I.
 35. He stated that Argaki was left by the entire Turkish Cypriot population (Census 1960 = 72) in January 1964; Oberling, Pierre, *The Road to Bel/apais. The Turkish Cypriot Exodus to Northern Cyprus*, (New York 1982), 240.
 36. Loizos (1981). *op. cit.*, 39-46.
 37. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
 38. It is a piece of "unconscious humour" that Kyrris (1977), *op. cit.*, named his work *Peaceful co-existence in Cyprus* and not "Peaceful co-operation." He adopted a term out of the policy of distraction between East and West in the 1970s and confused unwillingly the prevention of war by de-escalation with the complete harmony between ethnic groups he intended to show.