

GOBBI'S POSITION AND AN ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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In a letter that was published in the Cyprus Mail on 26 February 1998, Hugo Gobbi, the former special representative of the UN Secretary General in Cyprus, refers to his new book on Cyprus entitled *Contemporary Cyprus* and puts forward views that were also expressed in his previous book *Rethinking Cyprus* (1993). The central message of Gobbi's views is that the solution of the Cyprus problem should be based on partition. Among other things, Gobbi essentially suggests a two-state solution based on the Ghali or Gobbi maps in order to avoid possible future friction.

Gabbi's conclusion that Cyprus should be partitioned is based on wrong assumptions. One such assumption is that the Cyprus problem is primarily an inter-communal problem and that the two communities cannot live together. But this is not so. The main reason for the present situation in Cyprus was not inter-communal strife but foreign intervention culminating in the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974 and the continuing occupation of 40% of the island. The inter-communal aspect is just one of the many other dimensions of the Cyprus problem. Among these are the geostrategic dimension, Greco-Turkish antagonism and Turkish expansionism. Consequently, even if Gobbi's suggestions were adopted, the Cyprus problem would not be solved but would rather enter a new phase. Gobbi himself recognizes in his letter that Turkey is behind the Turkish-Cypriot community. As he puts it " ... *the Turkish Cypriot community is like an iceberg, a small piece of ice over the waves of the sea. But under the surface is a tremendous block of ice in the form of Turkey ...*". Consequently, the solution that Gobbi proposes far from resolving the problem will rather aggravate it as it will legalize the presence of Turkey in Cyprus with negative consequences both for Cyprus and the broader area.

On the basis of its maximalist policy on Cyprus, Turkey does not tolerate the sovereign exercise of independent policies on the part of free Cyprus, especially in matters of foreign affairs and defense. Turkish efforts to thwart the accession of Cyprus to the EU, the completion of the common defense dogma and the deployment of the Russian S-300 anti-aircraft missile system, are indicative of the intentions of Turkey. One of the questions that Gobbi should answer is whether, in the case the Greek side consented to a two-state solution, Turkey would tolerate the exercise of the right of self-determination of the 'Hellenic Republic of Cyprus' for union with Greece.

A two-state solution will indeed increase tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean since it will lead, among other things, to the extension of the Greek-Turkish borders to Cyprus and the intensification of the antagonism of the two countries in the Eastern Mediterranean. At this point it should be noted that, while during the Cold War period NATO considered that Western interests were better served with a divided Cyprus, today in the post-Cold War period Western interests as well as international law and regional and international peace are better served with a united Cyprus. For such a scenario to materialize though, Turkey must change its policy regarding Cyprus.

Furthermore, there are additional arguments which contradict Gobbi's views. Specifically, if Mr. Gobbi's suggestion about the partition of Cyprus into two states is adopted, then a very dangerous precedent will be created in international relations. The message that will be clearly given is that a homogeneous population is a necessary prerequisite for the existence of a state. This is very dangerous especially when almost all the states in the world today are multinational. The recent break up of states that were multinational, (e.g. the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia), developments that Gobbi indirectly invokes, is not the rule. If this becomes the rule then we will have the dissolution of many states not to mention the possibility of a series of bloody conflicts. Again we should be reminded that currently in Europe and in America as well as in other parts of the world there are no homogeneous populations. In addition, if today's de-facto separation in Cyprus, which is a result of aggression and continuous infringement of international law, becomes de-jure, i.e. becomes legalized, it would mean that, far from being punished, expansionism and aggression are rewarded.

Gobbi invokes the negative experiences of the past following the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus on the basis of the Zurich-London agreements as an element that probably indicates that a federal settlement will not be viable. It should be noted though that friction and inter-communal strife were the result not only of the lack of common objectives of the two communities, as Mr. Gobbi suggests, but of systematic foreign interference and interventions as well. In addition, it should not be forgotten that the constitution itself was a source of friction while at the same time the two communities did not even have the necessary experience and political maturity for exercising power and solving problems.

It is indeed true that following a federal solution to the Cyprus problem there will be problems. But there would be more problems with a two-state solution or a confederation. Bizonal federation is not the ideal solution for Cyprus. But it is the product of a historical compromise. Ironically, the Turkish Cypriot identity can be maintained only within the framework of a United-Federal Cyprus, member of the EU. Security for Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots as well as for other parties involved, could effectively be promoted by Cyprus' membership in a collective security organisation. The challenge is to create a framework which will maximize on the

one hand the advantages from the reunification of Cyprus and on the other hand minimize the cost. This prospect is in line not only with the interests of all Cypriots but also with international law as well as with the promotion of regional and international peace and stability.