Resolving Cyprus:
New Approaches to Conflict Resolution

Edited by JAMES KER-LINDSAY
I.B. Tauris (London/New York, 2015), xvi + 279 pp.
ISBN: 978-1-78453-000-6 (hard back)

Resolving Cyprus: Such a bold title could evoke two sets of readers' reactions. For those who have not dealt with the Cyprus conflict in detail it could be interest coupled with relief that – finally – a new viable solution could be in the wings. For those who are privy to the Cyprus problem it is more likely to be annoyance or even indignation, as the title could suggest that yet another attempt is being made at seducing readers to finally recognise the injustice of the status quo and to find out how easy it could be to resolve the conflict if only the world recognised the 'facts' and distinguished the 'truth' from the 'lies'. Let there be no mistake: the book contains none of this. It offers neither a clear resolution to the conflict, nor the well-known propaganda of one-sided positions. Instead, it offers a compilation of 30 contributions that attempt to answer a simple question posed in a call for papers about resolving Cyprus: But the question is not '*how* can Cyprus be solved'. Instead, it is simply '*can* Cyprus be solved'. The results are interesting in most, refreshing in many, surprising in some cases. The output is a very diverse collection of approaches stemming from several disciplines. The potential audience is accordingly broad, including everybody interested in the Cyprus conflict as well as those dealing with any protracted social conflicts.

In order to find answers to the question 'can Cyprus be solved', academics, leading practitioners and policy makers as well as civil society activists have dealt with aspects of history, security, with political factors or dynamics within communities, legal dimensions, internal or external parties, gender perspective, and economic or civil society issues. They were asked to contribute with essays rather than scientific articles full of references, so they can present within a few pages their ideas and views on whether Cyprus can be solved. The concept seems to have encouraged some to strip themselves of their usual corset of ideological constraints and to free their mind with bold concessions, perspectives that in the not too distant past would have been decried as heretic or treacherous by any one side to the conflict.

The editor, James Ker-Lindsay, decided to set the contributions into alphabetical order rather than to attempt to group them into disciplinary or argument clusters. This decision makes reading enjoyable and rich in variety. Still, it may be no coincidence that

the first author, Adamides, sets the tone in conceding that finding a resolution to the Cyprus conflict might actually – *gasp!* – not be desired at all. In this regard, the popular double referendum in the wake of the Annan Plan, in 2004, has gone a long way in opening eyes to internationals and Cypriots alike on their attitude on the conflict. 'The conflict, in other words, has become rather comfortable and the stalemate is not particularly painful for either side', concludes Adamides (p. 7). This, according to Stavrinides, is mostly because '[e]ach community's combined assets, goals, political resources and diplomatic capabilities are more or less balanced by the other community's combined assets, resources and capabilities'. This, he claims, has led to a 'kind of static equilibrium [...] which the communities have come to accept on the quiet as the state of the non-violent non-solution of the Cyprus Problem' (p. 263). Of course this attitude has to do with continued mutual mistrust between the two main communities on the island, and therefore with the fear that the costs of a compromise for a solution may just be too high. And after all – for over 40 years there has been very little bicommunal violence in Cyprus. For Holland it remains clear that the missing ingredient for a Cyprus solution is goodwill. It was especially in the 2004 referendum that the Greek Cypriots demonstrated that '[a]t the popular level, there was not that *yearning* for an end to the status quo that characterised feelings in Ulster, for example, at the start of the new century' (p. 125). Christou agrees that 'the political costs of bringing the negotiations to a standstill is negligible' (p. 59). Or as Kaymak expresses it: 'Sadly, it is the members of the [UN] Good Offices mission who appear more affected by failure than Cypriots themselves' (p. 134). After these frank, bold and rather novel claims, Heraclides' fervent call that '[t]oday more than ever before since [...] 1974 [...] a solution is urgently needed and if the two parties do not arrive at an agreement soon, they will both be in dire straits' (p. 113), sounds hollow. He is supported by Skoutaris, however, who from a constitutional law perspective warns that '[w]hat is definitely not a solution is the current stalemate that has led the European Court of Human Rights to characterize Northern Cyprus as a vacuum in the European public order' (p. 229).

Of course, the admission that Cypriots may be giving up looking for a change to the political status quo is supported by recent research of the Cyprus 2015 Initiative, which has illustrated that the indefinite perpetuation of the status quo has been slowly gaining ground as the preferred 'solution' to the conflict within both communities. Not surprisingly, therefore, several essays promote 'soft' ideas for the political future of Cyprus, rather than repeat the respective sides' maximalist propositions. Appeals for emphasis on the common Cypriotness of the island's inhabitants are implored by Ahmet An instead of an ethnic, communal belonging. He is supported by Southcott's contribution that re-emphasises the well-known Friends of Cyprus positions that echo building intercommunal empathy and fostering cross-ethnic cooperation. Meanwhile, Akçali on

the basis of the proverb 'Good fences make good neighbours' urges for efforts at good neighbourliness of the two communities, rather than persisting with fixated efforts at reunification.

Several contributors use the official negotiation basis of a bizonal, bicommunal federation as the starting point for their analysis and further ideas or proposals. Few among them agree, however, that this sort of federation is viable at all. Sözen is one of them, recalling that according to the Cyprus 2015 Initiative a bizonal, bicommunal federation is at least the second-best solution for both, Greek and Turkish Cypriots, while the two communities could never reach nearly as much percentage of agreement with any other solution (the first choice for them being the unitary-state and two-state solutions respectively). On the other hand, Bahcheli and Noel compile arguments for a case against bizonal federation, which according to experience elsewhere (such as Bosnia) is not viable in Cyprus, nor is it desired by most Cypriots even though it has been the starting point for the official resolution concepts of the past decades. Papadakis reiterates the point that Cypriots do not really want federation but prefer the status quo instead. Ker-Lindsay does not go quite as far as excluding federalism. Rather, he adds the ingredient of subsidiarity into the scheme, which declares that political decisions should always be taken at the most appropriate – usually the lowest possible, competent – level. In this manner, Ker-Lindsay claims, Greek Cypriots could be convinced to live in their old villages within the northern part of the island, as they could be allowed to govern themselves, dealing with day-to-day issues on their own. On the other hand, Christou's compromise proposal for a *tri*zonal, bicommunal federation including a zone centred on the capital Nicosia for peaceful coexistence of the two communities does not convince.

Facing a lack of progress or will in solving Cyprus, the island is currently experiencing, according to Constantinou, 'the privatisation of its settlement – meaning *à la carte*, cross-ethnic settlements by Cypriots from all communities transgressing the divide, without authorisation by [...] their respective authorities [who are unable] to stop or control them' (p. 72). Moreover, as Loizides or Vogel and Richmond remind us, Cyprus has experienced a series of bicommunal projects in the past – ranging from an initiative by the two mayors of the divided Nicosia to various civil society organisations – on which new interethnic cooperation could be based.

To such political or social arguments, some authors add the economic dimension of the current state of Cyprus. Faustmann estimates the discovery a few years ago of hydrocarbon off the island possibly providing 'the most promising constellation for a settlement since 2004' (p. 81). But further on he admits that after initial enthusiasm upon the discovery the prospects for a settlement remain bleak and the continuation of the status quo clearly prevails as the most likely scenario. Gürel and Tzimitras agree that in a continued zero-sum game of principles about the Cyprus impasse the incentives for

economic profit coming out of cooperation are not strong enough. Both parties continue to prefer losing money to throwing conflict-related principles overboard. For Olgun the culprit is clear: the continued claim by the Greek Cypriots that the exploitation of hydrocarbons is the Republic's sovereign right is, in his view, 'a hegemonic posture' (p. 213).

Olgun is part of a small group of contributors who cannot refrain from heating up old claims, updating them, and adding blame to a specific side – the usual blame game that most of the contributors have avoided. Of course anything else in a book resulting from an international call for papers on the Cyprus problem would be surprising. Still, conclusions such as the one by Kitromilides ('Cyprus cannot be solved unless Turkey abandons the strategy of division' (p. 157)) leave the reader with impatience, especially considering the boundless volume of novel ideas and approaches throughout the book. And even if a few authors seem to be stuck in the past, at least the world around them has changed. This is where Holland hooks in with his main theory that only a regional crisis, which we are currently witnessing in the Middle East, may have a catalytic effect on the Cyprus impasse. He calculates that based on experience with crucial developments in Cyprus over the past 140 years, progress happens only when dramatic events in the region – in other words an external crisis – push Cyprus negotiators into action out of fear instead of goodwill. The present 'War of Arab Succession [...] defined mainly but not exclusively by Shia-Sunni divisions' could pose such a threat with catalytic effects (p. 125). Probably with a similar threat in mind, McDonald proposes to demilitarise Cyprus in exchange for external security to be guaranteed by an EU force.

Overall, *Resolving Cyprus* makes interesting reading, rich in variety. It demonstrates how the overall fixation on the Cyprus problem has shifted away from obsession with blaming one another and repeating maximalist positions to a much more diverse analysis with frequent insight that resolving Cyprus may have lost its urgency in recent years, as the population of Cyprus has grown tired of their own obsession with the lies and injustices that they are living with day by day.

CLAUDE NICOLET