

Contemporary Social and Political Aspects of the Cyprus Problem

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This book was born after a workshop in the context of the 2012 conference of the International Society for the Study of European Ideas in Cyprus. It brings together 12 papers, which the editors have divided into four ‘Parts’, each revolving around a unifying theme (identity and perceptions, contemporary political issues, comparisons with other countries, and new approaches towards resolving the Cyprus Problem). As a consequence of its origins, the units do not systematically and comprehensively cover the major important social and political aspects of the Cyprus Problem; for instance, Part I on ‘Identity and Perceptions’ does not adequately deal with the way ethno-national identities in the two communities have been changing in recent decades; in Part II there are good analyses of the political economy of the north, its dependence on Turkey and the impact these changes have on Turkish Cypriot politics – but no similar treatment is offered of the political economy of the south, the financial crash and the consequent, significant impact on Greek Cypriot politics. Similarly, Part III on ‘Comparisons’, juxtaposing Cyprus to Belize and Sri Lanka, seems quite random, and one could imagine much more interesting comparisons (with other deeply divided societies, other European states hosting minority nations, other countries which have recently introduced federal elements in their political systems, and so on). Despite such limitations, the book contains interesting and well written articles.

Part I starts with a paper by D. Lovell, who tries to contextualize the Cyprus Problem by pointing out that ‘protracted social conflicts’ seem to be ‘difficult to resolve because they tend to involve matters of identity’ and trust. He rightly underlines that building this trust needs patience and time, and the forging of a common sense of peoplehood. Yet he seems to get it wrong when he proposes that ‘the fundamental problem in Cyprus is that it has not been allowed – it was not given a chance – to build a Cypriot nation after its independence [...] in 1960’. But who didn’t allow the Cypriots to build their own nation? They are the ones who strongly opposed that, believing themselves to already be parts of two other nations; indeed, the 1960 Constitution recognizes this, spelling out that the Republic of Cyprus is inhabited by Greeks and Turks of Cyprus – and not by Cypriots! The issue in Cyprus is not how to create a new nation, but rather how two ethno-national communities can co-habit in a multi-national state or federation. The issue is how two

national communities can form one people.

The next paper of this section, by Michalis Kontos, provides an illustration of the importance of local beliefs in how developments are received; it looks at ‘foreign interventions’(namely USA ones) and how these are viewed with suspicion by the local communities (in this case the Greek Cypriots), who tend to interpret current political moves on the basis of ‘pre-existing beliefs’ and what they assume to be the given geopolitical realities. That is why foreign interventions, even if well meant, may be unsuccessful and ‘counterproductive’ to the cause of the solution of the Cyprus Problem.

Part II hosts two articles on the issue of Cyprus hydrocarbons and the politics around these; another two papers deal with the evolving relationship between the Turkish Cypriot community and Turkey; and one more article (which is really a misfit) deals with changing modes of peacekeeping in Cyprus by UNFICYP.

The two papers on Cyprus hydrocarbons and the possible impact on the Cyprus Problem are superbly written and complement each other quite well. The first one, written by Turkish Cypriot Ayla Gürel, is more pessimistic, arguing that the discovery of natural gas has acted as an ‘anticatalyst’ in efforts for a settlement; the related politics ‘has increased tensions, undermined mutual confidence between the parties and led to a hardening of stances’. Part of Gürel’s pessimism stems from a realist analysis which demonstrates the merits of ‘a Cyprus – Turkey pipeline’ with which ‘gas revenue could start flowing well before the end of the decade’. Yet she despairs at the realization that the political positions of the two sides will not allow this happy outcome. Greek Cypriot Melanie Antoniou, on the other hand, doesn’t seem to be totally pessimistic. She proposes a shift away from a narrow realist-power analysis, towards a more liberal perspective, which advocates facilitating inter-state cooperation via the ‘introduction of law enforcement agencies in international political life’, and the inclusion of ‘the Turkish Cypriots ‘perspectives’. Antoniou reminds us that Cyprus and Turkey are both members of the Energy Charter (EC), ‘while Palestine, Syria and Egypt are observers’; furthermore, the RoC is a member of the EU and Turkey is a candidate for membership. In this context, ‘the RoC carries important understandings of new forms of consensual and co-operative relations’, and as such could and should take the lead in using consensual norms to take steps towards regional inter-state co-operation.

Equally enlightening are the two papers on Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots. Nicos Moudouros analyses the efforts of Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the Justice and Development Party (AKP) to present Turkey as ‘an archetype for the modernization of the Middle East and the Arab-Muslim world’ – focusing on the implications of AKP policies on the Turkish-Cypriot community in Cyprus. One of the factors he emphasized relates to the ‘further opening up of the Turkish Cypriot economy’ to Turkish/Islamic capital, which is seen as ‘the key element of modernization’ – the consequent changes in the power structures within the Turkish Cypriot community, and the political reactions within the latter. Umut Bozkurt adds to this analysis by considering the economic features of the restructured ‘TRNC’ economy – which he dubs ‘incomplete neoliberalism’ (taking in to

consideration Turkey's push to roll back the state on which the economy heavily depends, in compliance with policies of fiscal responsibility via budgetary austerity). Bozkurt's analysis highlights 'significant similarities between the economic policies imposed by the Troika in the RoC and Turkey in the 'TRNC'.

The first paper of Part III, by Jonathan Warner, compares how Cyprus and Belize (in Central America) experienced British colonization, and how the local ethnic groups in each case developed their self-understanding. In the case of Belize, a common identity and national narrative facilitated peaceful co-existence, whereas in Cyprus the antagonistic ethnic identities and respective narratives 'led to violence and separation'. The second paper, by Zenonas Tziarras, compares Cyprus and Sri Lanka, and does similarly highlight the role of ethnicity in the respective conflicts. Where it departs is in pointing out that in both cases ethnicity changes over time and therefore its impact on the conflict changes; furthermore, it underlines the existence of other 'root causes' to the conflicts, such as political and economic ones, the role of elites and how they exploit identity issues, and so on.

The final section of the book, Part IV, considers 'new approaches' towards resolving the Cyprus Problem. Matteo Nicolini uses the 'Legal Geography' perspective to highlight the existence of two institutional mechanisms for keeping together deeply divided societies: territorial demarcation of the sub-units, and power sharing in governing the whole. Of course the problem in Cyprus was that territorial separation, rather than being a gradual, peaceful historical outcome, came about through violence and ethnic cleansing (1963 and 1974), and that is why legitimization of the status quo is difficult to establish, and similarly for power-sharing. The final chapter, by Bulent Kanal and Ilke Dagli, points out that official negotiations so far have not brought much result because they have largely ignored the role of civil society and its institutions – which are vital in 'building bridges' and tackling the 'ontological insecurity' of social actors (who cannot be expected to 'reconfigure the enemy as the new 'compatriot', and to accept the 'threatening other' as part of the 'self').

Overall, a balanced volume with notable contributions which do acknowledge the difficulties of this intractable problem, while allowing some room for optimism and a ray of hope for its eventual resolution.

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