

Historical Dictionary of Cyprus (2nd Edition)

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Twelve years after the publication of the first edition of the *Historical Dictionary of Cyprus*, written by Farid Mirbagheri, I predict that Cyprus watchers will be happy to embrace the seriously expanded, mildly revised and further refined new version. For this second edition, signed by its original author, accompanied by his University of Nicosia colleague, Dr Emiliou Solomou, is a most valuable source, not only of anticipated entries on essential or major historical issues, items and actors, but also of unexpected minutiae and psychocultural insights on Cyprus and its people.

Faithful to the structure established *ab initio* by the Historical Dictionaries Series of Scarecrow Press and today under the auspices of the parent organisation (Rowman and Littlefield), the book's title borders, one might playfully say, on a self-effacing... misnomer. For in its 322 pages, the work goes beyond a -deeply satisfactory- coverage of material that is *stricto sensu* 'historical'. That is, it is not confined to merely presenting and commenting upon important events, dates, conditions, protagonists and main actors involved in Cyprus' long and tempestuous life and times. In fact, this Dictionary constitutes a delightful mental gallery that also offers a treasure of information on matters related to Cypriot archaeology, architecture, culture, economy, energy, geography, literature, religion, and even provides brief portraits of major cities. In that sense, it forms a harmonious pair with Dimitris Keridis' excellent *Historical Dictionary of Modern Greece*, published in the Scarecrow Press Series in 2009.

After a most informative historical *tour d' horizon* in the Preface, the 15-page Introduction, and a rich and rewarding 21-page Chronology, the book, besides the main 'historical' corpus, adds a series of ten useful Appendices, recalling, inter alia, the Special Representatives of the UN Secretary General to Cyprus, enumerating the British Personnel from 1878 to 1960, and covering the UNFICYP Force Commanders from March 1964 to March 2021. (Incidentally, while the first edition's Chronology ended on 19 April 2009, the second edition's reaches 15 September 2020.)

The Dictionary of Mirbagheri and Solomou is written clearly and even elegantly. Fully sensitive to the supreme need for objectivity and precision in addressing a most

convoluted and often mind-boggling subject-matter, the authors have succeeded overwhelmingly in avoiding facile evaluations of events and personalities.

And yet, perhaps inevitably, such an ambitious opus could not avoid a few, indeed very few, minor weaknesses, in terms of evaluative judgments, inaccuracies or omissions. If I choose to submit my take on some apparent oversights and a couple of arguable omissions, this is only in a spirit of utter respect for this wonderful contribution to *Κυπριολογία*.

An instance of an inaccuracy would, in my opinion, be the statement (p. 185) that former Greek PM Costas Simitis ‘tended to distance himself from the Cyprus problem; he did not become personally involved and allowed others to deal with the issue.’ In fact, although it may be true that Simitis was ‘cautious on issues concerning Turkey’, given his 1996 early experience vis-à-vis Imia (ibid.), it cannot be overlooked that, only days before the historic April 2004 Referendum on the Annan Plan, Costas Simitis became most ‘personally involved’ in one of the most dramatic moments of Cypriot History. Through his notorious article in Athens’ *Eleftherotypia*, the former Greek PM boldly ‘advised’ the Greek Cypriots to vote ‘Yes’ in the referendum, in contradiction both to the well-known anti-plan stance of President Tassos Papadopoulos and to the solid opposition by the overwhelming majority of the Greek Cypriots, as repeatedly demonstrated in numerous opinion polls.

In my view, many readers might express discomfort as regards the statement about Henry Kissinger’s role in the 1974 Turkish invasion. Apparently opting to err on the side of caution, the two authors wrote that ‘Henry Kissinger, then secretary of state, is believed by many to have played a major part in the events of 1974’. (p. 110) Manifestly, the wording of ‘is *believed* by many’ aims clearly to pronounce on Kissinger’s role in contradistinction to *knowledge*. There is, however, devastating evidence revealing Kissinger’s anti-Cyprus (and pro-Turkey) ‘realist’ conceptual and geopolitical machinations. Such evidence is contained in such distinguished relevant works as Laurence Stern’s *The Wrong Horse: The Politics of Intervention and the Failure of American Diplomacy* (Times Books, 1977); Christopher Hitchens’ *Cyprus* (Quartet, 1984); Michalis Ignatiou and Costas Venizelos’ *Τα Μυστικά Αρχεία του Κίσσινγκερ (Kissinger’s Secret Archives)*; and William Mallinson and Vassilis Fouskas’ brilliant essay, ‘Kissinger and the Business of Government: The Invasion of Cyprus, 15 July–20 August 1974’, published in the *Cyprus Review* (2017, pp. 111–134). Given the enormous importance of revealing Kissinger’s deeply illegal and unethical decisions and actions, that manifestly endorsed and variously facilitated Turkey’s double invasion, there is no need for the application of such (positivist) ‘caution’.

After all, Mirbagheri and Solomou's *Historical Dictionary* exhibits throughout clear signs of optimism and even 'idealism', that are most refreshing in our confused and melancholy times. A characteristic example of palpable 'idealism' is presented in the last two sentences of the Introduction's 'Prospects for the Future': 'Cyprus may thus continue, as in the past, to be a hostage to international politics. But as before, it will most probably survive them'. (p.15)

Similarly, extending the 'idealist' approach –that gives pride of place to the norms of international law and international ethics- the two authors did not hesitate in the slightest to employ throughout the term '*invasion*' describing Turkey's *illegal 1974 military intervention*. In this manner they fully respected the technical definition of the term, even though they knew that endorsing 'invasion' was bound to infuriate many Turkish Cypriots, most Turks, and many Turkophiles who refuse, for obvious reasons, to adopt the proper terms.

Finally in this connection, it is appropriate to point out that, whereas Mirbagheri and Solomou have tended to avoid evaluations of various personalities' personal character traits, in one instance they could not resist the expression of genuine respect for the virtues of a Cypriot politician. He is Ozker Ozgur (1940-2005), chairman of the Republican Turkish Party, who was, 'throughout his political career, at odds with the Turkish Cypriot leader, Rauf Denktas'. For many, this observation may suffice already to elevate Ozker Ozgur's prestige, given the serious reservations most observers have accumulated regarding the authoritarian and controversial TC leader. But Ozgur's positive portrait is fortified further by two statements: first, that 'he strived to support the interests of the Turkish Cypriots for equality, freedom and peace'. And second: 'Ozgur was a man of principle and never appeared willing to compromise his beliefs for personal gain'. (p.151)

As already intimated, the very nature of a Historical Dictionary of over 320 pages makes rather unavoidable that some readers may identify potential weaknesses, such as arguable omissions. In this spirit, I am inclined to suggest that, in view of the special status of Cyprus' protracted and rich relations with Moscow as a capital of the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union and now the Russian Federation, an entry sketching these relations deserves to be included in a third edition of the two authors' Historical Dictionary of Cyprus. The suggestion is supported by the fact that the present edition contains abundant, and fully justified, material about Cyprus' relations with the United Kingdom, the United States of America, the Hellenic Republic, and, of course, Turkey.

Another serious reason in support of my proposal comes from an intriguing fact: namely, that Greek Cypriots (together with the Greeks of Greece) appear to be only partially aware of the special relations that developed over the centuries between Cyprus and Moscow and between the Russians and the Hellenism of Cyprus. Moreover, besides ‘methodological’ disagreements concerning the analysis of these bilateral relations, there are also political, ideological, and even psychological reasons that can explain why the Greek Cypriots entertain, with a passion, totally contradictory readings of the bilateral History of the two sides. For there is no doubt that, while many are enthusiastic about the rich and multidimensional benefits accumulated by Russians and Cypriots over the centuries –especially after the Second World War, and primarily after the birth of the Russian Federation in 1991- there are others who oppose this stance bitterly and fanatically.

The inclusion of an entry on Cyprus-Russia relations in the dictionary’s future edition will have to enumerate the multiple bonds and benefits enjoyed by the two countries and their peoples –political, diplomatic, military, economic, cultural, religious, and of course related to energy and tourism. But, most unfortunately, it will have to handle the tragic developments in Ukraine since 24 February 2022, which obliged Nicosia to take a clear stance of legal and moral condemnation of ‘Putin’s War’. Admittedly, this earth-shaking war and its endless implications will render the job of writing such a new entry deeply challenging. But this is no reason for avoiding the task. And the authors are more than capable of navigating treacherous waters.

In view of the enormous importance of the crime of settling illegally in the occupied northern territory of the Republic of Cyprus, I submit that an entry potentially called ‘Illegal Turkish Settlers’ may have to be added in the future. Similarly, those less tutored regarding Ankara’s apparent project to send refugees to the free territory of the Republic in order to destabilise Cyprus and potentially Europe itself, will certainly benefit from an entry that would spell out the Republic’s corresponding insecurities and Ankara’s devious intentions and actions.

Finally, allow me to submit a couple of notes regarding what many Greek Cypriots may perceive as ‘evaluative inaccuracies’. The first emerges concerning UN secretary general, Antonio Guterres, because the two authors exhibit, in my view, exceeding generosity towards him, when they write that he ‘has been working consistently for a Cyprus settlement’ .(p.92) Given that the present edition covers Cypriot developments up to September 2020, I believe it would have been more appropriate to mention that serious complaints are being voiced by serious analysts and commentators

objecting to Guterres' protracted diplomatic passivity, that frequently amounts to blatant favoritism towards Turkey.

The second reservation is known to be shared by even more Cypriot analysts and members of civil society. It is related to Norwegian politician, Espen Barth Eide, who was appointed by UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon as special adviser on Cyprus in August 2014. The present edition, quite surprisingly, contains a deeply flattering portrait of this deeply controversial UN official. In fact, however, Eide managed, in a very short while, to infuriate repeatedly the Greek Cypriots for his outstanding weaknesses, including his penchant to misrepresent reality in international fora. This behaviour culminated in the widespread conviction that Eide 'was clearly serving Turkey's interests'. Hence, at the end, Espen Barth Eide was openly treated as a *persona non grata*.

These few, mildly critical comments, do not even remotely amount to reservations about the quality of this praiseworthy addition to the Bibliography on Cyprus. Indeed, Mirbagheri and Solomou's Historical Dictionary is a truly valuable contribution to the inexhaustible study of the countless dimensions of Cyprus' life and times, written clearly and conscientiously, with numerous insights, and an evident love and respect for the country and its people.

Costas Melakopides