

A Dark Room: 1967-1974

[Ένα Σκοτεινό Δωμάτιο: 1967-1974]

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Alexis Papachelas' study on the events that led to the Turkish invasion in Cyprus and the occupation of 37% of the Cypriot territory is much more than a reportorial work. As has already been pointed out before, his work has the virtues of a solid research that resembles that of an academic historian. Through a massive number of primary and secondary sources, the author sheds light onto one of the more important periods of Greek history. The author quotes extensive extracts from the sources and provides direct access to most of them through the use of PQR codes incorporated in the book, yet he avoids guiding the reader himself by use of his own comments. His comments are clarifying when necessary or link the content of the source to its wider context, but in fact the author lets the sources speak on their own and allows the reader to come to their own conclusions.

Papachelas commences his research from 1964, this chronological choice being not at all accidental. In 1963/1964, it became obvious that the life of the Cypriot State in the form designed by the Zurich agreements was not sustainable. From there on, the three main agents of the so-called Cypriot issue or problem, namely Cyprus, Greece and Turkey, have been trying to untangle the bonds that the Zurich agreements imposed upon them. However, they do not share a common perception about what kind of a settlement could be an acceptable solution for all three 'players' involved. In fact, their perception about a future settlement have been contradictory to one another.

According to Archbishop Makarios, President of the Republic of Cyprus, who was backed by the majority of the Greek Cypriots, the only feasible solution was that of independence through the enforcement of the principle of self-determination, meaning the exclusion of the unification of the island with Greece, which had been the main goal of EOKA's struggle between 1955 and 1959. The solution of independence was also supported by AKEL, the biggest organised political party at that time. Makarios' policy was challenged by his opponents among the Greek Cypriots, but

during the critical decade 1964-1974 they failed at changing that policy. The policy of independence supported by Makarios kept -from the package of the Zurich agreements- the exclusion of unification or partition of the island which had been the main goals of Greece and Turkey during the time of EOKA's revolt, but rejected all other settlements included in the agreements, regarding the bicomunal structure of the independent state's governance. However, the success of such a policy depended on factors which were beyond Makarios' control. The Turkish consent to a solution (independence) that did not guarantee the national security of Turkey while at the same time diminished the guarantees to the Turkish Cypriot community (guarantees which were considered a security safety valve for Turkey), could never be given. Furthermore, the support of such a solution by the USSR did not imply any will on behalf of the Soviets to change the status quo in the region. It is one thing to attempt to cause problems for the western alliance and it is a quite different thing to try and challenge the whole balance of the post war equilibrium, as Makarios himself realised several times during this period (see Papachelas, p.130). Nevertheless, Makarios seemed to believe that an intervention by one of the two superpowers could rein in Turkey and would allow him to achieve the goal of independence, at least in the way that he perceived the said goal.

On the other hand, the main objective of Greece during this period seemed to be that of unification between Cyprus and Greece, with some tradeoff for Turkey. The Acheson Plan was part of such a strategy. The main disadvantage of this strategy was that its success presupposed its acceptance by Cyprus. Yet all the available data from that period do not indicate that such a solution was acceptable by the majority of the Greek Cypriots, or President Makarios. Furthermore, the available data do not clarify beyond any doubt what the reaction of Turkey to such a plan would be. Turkey had made clear that it would not accept any plan which would not concede sovereignty over part of the Cypriot territory, a request that could not be accepted by any Greek government. Acheson's epistle, which was published in 2002, says that he would have to exercise pressure on Turkey in order to accept the plan. Yet Turkey rejected the final draft of the Plan that was submitted by Acheson, which provided for the hiring -instead of concession of sovereignty- of some part of the Cypriot territory, after its prior rejection by the Greek side. We can conclude then that Turkey's consent to the Acheson Plan had not been granted from the beginning and that the rejection of the final draft was due to its clause of hiring instead of concession of sovereignty on part of Cypriot territory. It is worthy to note that, three years later, in a meeting between

the leaders of the Greek junta and the Turkish Prime Minister, which took place at the Greek-Turkish border, the Turkish delegation rejected the Greek proposal for the concession of sovereignty over a small part of the Cypriot territory as a tradeoff for the unification of the rest of the island with Greece (id. p.125). However, the Turkish rejection of the Greek proposal, which was not far from a proposal made by Turkey three years prior in the context of the negotiations on Acheson Plan, should have been an indication about Turkey's intentions regarding the content of a settlement that it could find acceptable from that time on.

Turkey's perception about what could be an acceptable settlement was not vague. Any settlement should have included two elements: a) The de jure or de facto sovereign control over a part of the Cypriot territory, in which Turkish Cypriots would be settled, and b) the security dimension, namely the avoidance of it being taken over by Greece. The proposals, which were based on offering a tradeoff to Turkey on the condition that it would accept the unification of the island with Greece, might have satisfied the former presupposition, but not the latter. On the contrary, the 'settlement' which is the outcome of the Turkish invasion of 1974, fulfils both presuppositions. Turkey gained the de facto control over 37% of the Cypriot territory, in which Turkish Cypriots were settled and, instead of having an extended borderline with Greece, has a borderline with Cyprus, whose ability to exercise the full range of its competences on the military and foreign policy field is highly restrained by the very fact of the Turkish occupation and the stationing of a considerable number of Turkish troops in the occupied areas.

The crucial question then is, how did Turkey achieve such a goal. It is well documented in Papachelas' book that USA was not against a kind of double unification as a settlement of the problem, since 1967 or even earlier (id. pp. 125, 141). It is also well documented that since 1972 Henry Kissinger had not been eager to intervene in case of any attempt to overthrow the Cypriot President through use of Greek military forces that were stationed in the island (id. p.140). It is also well documented in the book that, when Ioannides informed USA officials about his intention to overthrow Makarios, there was no clear negative reaction to his plans (id. pp. 304-305). It is also clear that, just after the coup against Makarios, USA officials were aware of the Turkish plans to proceed with the partition of the island through a military intervention (id. pp. 315, 329). The most shocking evidence that the book provides is a 38-minute extract from a transcript of a meeting among Greek officials just after the Turkish invasion, in which Ioannides seems to be assured that Turkish troops are going to

occupy Kyrenia and then stop (id. pp. 377, 380). It is interesting that the source of his assurance is someone called 'Chief' (id. p.377), probably the Chief of the Greek Army.

The documentation that the book provides sheds light to some of the crucial facts that led to the Turkish invasion and the occupation of northern Cyprus and offers a clear image about the positions of all those involved. However, the book is important for one more reason. It makes clear that what happened might have fulfilled the maximum of the Turkish intentions and the USA's policy about a 'viable' settlement with regard to the so-called Cyprus problem, but was also the result of fatal mistakes and omissions by the Greek junta. This, thus, is a book that contributes to national self-consciousness and encourages an honest collective self-reflection on one of the darkest periods of the Greek history.

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