

Solving the Cyprus Problem: An Evolutionary Approach.

*By Christos Yiangou**

For more than 35 years Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots have been trying hard, under the auspices of the United Nations, to solve the Cyprus problem and reunite Cyprus (a beautiful island strategically located in the rich endowed Eastern Mediterranean Sea) under a bi-zonal, bi-communal Federation. Regardless, however, of the various efforts by successive General Secretaries of the UN, and the international community in general, to assist the above-mentioned Cypriot communities reach an everlasting agreement of solving the said problem, no substantial result has so far been produced. The most important effort by the UN to solve the problem culminated in 2004 with the Anan Plan (named after the former UN General Secretary Kofi Anan). This Plan, presented to both communities in separate referenda, was only accepted by the Turkish Cypriot community and was rejected by the Greek Cypriot one as non-viable. Following the Anan Plan debacle Cyprus Republic in its totality became, on the 1st of May 2004, full member of the European Union with a temporary suspension of the implementation of the European Law (Aquis Communautaire) in the northern part of the island now controlled by the non-recognized "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus." Following four years of stagnation the current UN General Secretary Ban Kim Moon decided again in 2008 to renew the UN efforts to solve the Cyprus problem by inviting both sides to a new round of negotiations. This round of negotiations still goes on, albeit with some interruptions, for almost five years, yielding again no result. This is due to the huge gap in the positions of both sides on the core negotiating issues. Namely, the maximum concessions the one side is ready to make on the negotiating table on the current chapters of negotiation do not meet the minimum requirements the other side is ready to accept, and vice-versa. Because of the above-mentioned (non) developments no light is seen soon at the end of the tunnel in the Cyprus problem by any impartial observer.

Why, however, all these rounds of negotiations to solve the Cyprus problem have failed? Presumably because, via this protracted negotiating process, Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots have always put the cart before the horse. Namely, instead of insisting in creating the necessary conditions for the implementation of a viable solution (i.e. trust, confidence, proven record of political, economic and cultural collaboration between the two Cypriot communities) before any substantial negotiation for a comprehensive solution could start the two Cypriot communities have always attempted to solve the problem without these conditions being in place. Thus, the failure!

That is why, in his report to the UN Security Council of his mission of good offices in Cyprus, dated 19th November 1992 (S/24830), the then UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali describing the position of the two communities in relation to the then UN “set of ideas” to solve the Cyprus problem rightly observed that there was a “deep crisis of confidence between the two sides” making it “difficult to envisage any successful outcome to the talks for as long as this situation prevails” (para.63) by simultaneously suggesting the implementation of a series of Confidence Building Measures (CBMs). These CBMs, however, were never implemented because of a failure by both communities to reach an agreement on a relevant *modus operandi*.

Based on the above it seems obvious that a new approach in solving the Cyprus problem is needed, an approach that could build upon Ghali’s thinking in 1992. That is, instead of trying to reach a comprehensive solution to the problem at once, the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots could reach such a solution via an evolutionary (or a step-by-step) approach. Such a gradual approach could offer both Cypriot communities the opportunity to incrementally satisfy their negotiating interests by simultaneously creating trust and confidence, something quintessential for a future comprehensive settlement of the said problem based on a new revised plan by the UN.

The Cyprus Problem

The Cyprus problem is the result of a protracted conflict between the Cyprus Republic and Turkey over the Turkish occupied northern part of Cyprus. Albeit, however, the ethnic nature of this problem, involving the Turkish and the Greek communities, the international complications of this problem extend beyond the boundaries of the island of Cyprus itself and primarily involve the guarantor powers of the Republic of Cyprus (Greece, Turkey and the United Kingdom) the United States, the United Nations, and the European Union.

More specifically, the island of Cyprus has been essentially divided on its territory between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities (making up its society at the ratio of 80:18) since the inter-communal hostilities broke out in December 1963, three-and-a-half years after Cyprus gained its independence from Britain under a bi-communal, power-sharing constitution. On 20 July 1974, following a military *coup d’etat* (instigated by the Greek junta and executed by nationalists from the then Cypriot National Guard) against the then President of the Cyprus Republic Archbishop Makarios, Turkey invaded the island, occupied the northern part of the internationally recognized Cyprus Republic, caused the exodus of Greek Cypriots inhabiting the land to the southern part of the country and transferred the Turkish Cypriot community from the southern part to the northern part. In 1983, nine years after the Turkish invasion (formally disapproved by the UN Security Council), the Turkish Cypriot community, upon the northern part of the island, unilaterally declared independence forming the “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” (“TRNC”), a sovereign entity that still lacks international recognition with the exception of Turkey with which “TRNC” enjoys full diplomatic relations. Also since 1974, the United Nations have created and maintained a buffer zone (the “Green line”) to avoid any further inter-

communal tensions and hostilities. This zone still separates the Greek Cypriot-controlled south from the Turkish Cypriot-controlled north.

Since 1977 the two communities and the guarantor countries have committed themselves in finding a peaceful solution over the Cyprus problem in the form of a bi-communal, bi-zonal (or bi-regional) federation, through a negotiating process under the auspices of the UN. Many rounds of negotiations have been undertaken by successive leaders of the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities without any fruitful result, despite encouragement and advice by the United Nations, other international bodies and major international powers. Today Cyprus still remains divided between a Turkish north and a Greek south, each with their own ethnic community, government and state administrations, namely the non recognized "TRNC" and the recognized Cyprus Republic respectively.

...a protracted problem.

Why has the Cyprus problem not been solved yet? One could suggest primarily because of bi-communal fear, mistrust and lack of confidence, deriving from a conflicting historical past and exacerbated by the historical involvement in this problem of the two "motherlands" namely, Turkey and Greece.

Indeed, as Zenon Stavrinides, a professor of philosophy, has eloquently argued

"...the two Cypriot communities in their vast majorities, give very different explanations of the character of the Cyprus problem, how it came about, and what would be a just and viable settlement of it; and further, the two communities dismiss with disdain each others accounts as untrue, insincere and self-serving...each of the communities harbors a huge trauma for which it blames the injustices committed by the other side, and it wants to secure at the negotiating table concessions from the other side to remove, as far as possible, the injustices...The Greek Cypriots in their large majority believe that the central core of the problem – the "essence of the problem" as they often say – is the terrible wrong done to them by the...Turkish invasion of 20 July 1974 which resulted in probably more than 3,000 dead and 1,400 missing persons, as well as other victims of inhuman mistreatment and widespread rape. The continuing occupation of the northern part of the island by the Turkish army, in blatant breach of international law and morality, is for Greek Cypriots a continuing trauma and humiliation, with numerous adverse practical consequences for the rights and interests of the Greek Cypriot community, such as the displacement of some 180,000 Greek Cypriots from their homes and properties in the north, the *de facto* partitioning of the island, the illegal immigration of tens of thousands of people from Turkey intended to change the demographic composition of the island, and so on... 'On the other side of the territorial and social divide, the Turkish Cypriot community in their large majority, take the view – which is also the standard view of Turkey's officialdom and the media – that the Cyprus problem did not begin in 1974, but it existed at least as far back as the inter-communal fighting of which broke out in December 1963, when Greek Cypriots, failing to intimidate them into accepting changes to the bi-communal constitutional order as a prelude to bring about enosis, attacked them with groups of armed irregulars. Turkish Cypriots, in their thousands, were forced to leave their homes in isolated or mixed villages and move in fear of their safety to enclaves defended by a few hundreds of Turkish troops and their own poorly armed irregulars, mainly in an area extending from north Nicosia (the island's capital) to the Pentadaktylos mountains, covering just 3 per cent of the island's area. The Turkish Cypriot community's experience of living as "second-class citizens" in enclaves left a deep trauma and had a formative influence on the collective mind of all those who went through

it...Turkish Cypriots have had to exist without a recognized state, without an international accepted government which was capable of speaking for them in the family of nations as an equal member...References to the period 1963-74 are used by Turkish Cypriots to talk about their trauma and indicate their entitlement to a future free from...humiliation and domination by Greek Cypriots...and this [as they argue] requires the maintenance of Turkish guarantees for their security. In any federation (or preferably confederation) they are willing to take part in, they would have to have political equality with the Greek Cypriot community, which is taken to mean effective share in all institutions of the federation.” (source: **Stavrinides Zenon, “Dementia Cypria: On the Social Psychological Environment of the Intercommunal Negotiations,” *The Cyprus Review*, Vol.21, No.1, Spring 2009).**

The Evolutionary Approach

Based on the above historical description it is more that obvious that a new approach in solving the Cyprus problem is needed, an evolutionary approach that will attempt to cure the cause of the problem: namely, fear and lack of confidence between the two Cypriot communities to create a common state. More specifically, after substantial preparation and consultation with all interested parties, the UN Secretary General ought to convoke an International Conference with the participation of: the three Guarantor powers of the Cyprus Republic (namely Greece, Turkey and the UK), Cyprus Republic, the EU, the five permanent members of the UN, and the two Cypriot communities. The said Conference should aim at leading the two communities to a Provisional (or an Interim) Agreement for an evolutionary solution of the Cyprus problem. Such an Agreement should incorporate a 5 to 10 year (or until the final status of Turkey’s relation with the EU is decided) road-map. Within this road-map both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots (commonly excluding the partition of the island and reaffirming their end goal to reunite their country in the future under a bi-zonal, bi-communal, federation) could concurrently implement a series of substantial Confidence Building Measures (CBMs). Such measures on the one hand would engage them into a creative, constructive and trustful political, economic, military and cultural collaboration on the other hand would satisfy each side’s core negotiating interests. An indicative list of five substantial CBMs could be as follows:

First, return by Turkey of the fenced-off section of the Turkish occupied city of Famagusta to the administration of the United Nations and subsequently to its legal Greek Cypriot inhabitants in return for a Cyprus Republic legitimate approval of the opening of the port of the said city and the Tymbou Turkish Cypriot airport (essentially via a commonly accepted implementation of the EU direct trade regulation). More specifically, a big section of the city of Famagusta in the northern part of Cyprus was captured by the Turkish invading forces in August 1974. That section of Famagusta (named Varosha) was then sealed off and still remains uninhabited, a ghost place, under the direct control of the Turkish military. Consequently, the Cyprus Republic has since 1974 declared the ports and airports in the occupied areas as closed since it can not exercise its full control over them. In this respect, direct flights to northern Cyprus and the trade traffic through Tymbou Airport and Famagusta port respectively are considered illegal by the

Cyprus Republic and the European Union. A regulation, however, permitting direct trade between the Turkish Cypriots and the European Union—thus in essence permitting the opening of the Famagusta port and Tymbou Airport—is now in the hands of the European Parliament and the European Council. The said regulation has been vetoed by the government of Cyprus Republic since 2004 on the grounds that a possible implementation of this regulation—based on its current wording—would amount to recognition of the unilaterally-declared “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” (TRNC). The return of Varosha to the United Nations and subsequently to the city’s legal inhabitants, combined with the approval by the Cyprus Republic (via a commonly agreed legal wording of the above mentioned EU direct trade regulation) of the opening of Tymbou airport and the port of Famagusta for use by both Cypriot communities, ideally both co-managed by Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots under the auspices of the EU, could be a decisive and very beneficial CBM for the two sides to agree on.

The opening and rebuilding of Varosha becomes even more necessary now because of the latest financial and economic crisis that has been developing in Cyprus and will dramatically affect not only the Greek Cypriots but the Turkish Cypriots as well. This crisis has led the previous and current governments of Cyprus Republic to recourse for financial assistance to the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), an international organization located in Luxembourg, which provides financial assistance to members of the euro zone in financial difficulty. After many months of negotiations between Cyprus and troika (namely the International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank and the European Commission) a €10 billion bailout was announced on the 25th of March, 2013 by troika in return for a Cyprus Republic agreement, on harsh austerity and government restructuring measures. Because of this crisis the Republic’s economy is expected to pass through years of big recessions causing high levels of unemployment and increasing poverty amongst the Greek Cypriots. The Turkish Cypriots, however, will also be negatively affected by this situation. For many decades the Turkish Cypriot community has benefited a lot by the Cyprus Republic’s booming economy. Namely, in the last decade or so many Turkish Cypriots have been working in the south of the island and many Greek Cypriots have been shopping in the North. Also the Turkish Cypriots have historically enjoyed many social benefits by the Cyprus Republic like free medical care, electricity and other. Undoubtedly, the opening of Varosha could be the prime mover in a restart of Cypriot economy and the creation of economic growth to the benefit of both communities. As a report, prepared by former President of Cyprus Republic Dr. George Vassiliou and his team of consultants, indicates “a Resettlement of displaced persons in Varosha...will cost several billions. However, significant contributions by international donors [and investors from Greece and Turkey] can be expected and this whole process will lead to speeding up the growth of the economy, creating a huge demand for construction and other services” (source: **Dr. George Vassiliou et al “The Economics of the Solution Based on the Anan Plan” Working Paper**)

Secondly, creation by the UN (and approved by the Cyprus Republic) of a bi-communal Steering Committee that should discuss the future of hydrocarbon reserves (i.e. natural gas) recently discovered in Cyprus Republic’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) with the aim of proportionally and fairly allocating to the benefit of both Cypriot communities the wealth that will derive from

the commercialization of the said natural endowment in the following years and decades. As a recent Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) investor report has suggested Cyprus “is sitting on huge reserves of natural gas and potentially oil reserves too.” As the said report claims “Initial gas reserves discovered [in Cyprus Republic’s EEZ] are likely worth 300 per cent of [the country’s] GDP. This could rise to 2,950 per cent GDP...the Island sits on potentially huge energy wealth in excess of 600 billion euros...Cyprus will become geopolitically important for gas pipeline routes.” Judging by various estimations both by Cypriot officials and international companies, the country could have an injection of more than 1 billion Euros annually after 2020, lasting for several decades, an amount around 6% of its current GDP, a substantial number in analogy to other gas producing states. **(source: *Natural Gas Europe’s website “Cyprus Natural Gas Sector Sails on Fast” 4/2/2013*)**

Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, however, vehemently disagree on how they should allocate the wealth that will derive from the exploitation of Cyprus’ hydrocarbon reserves. Cyprus Republic argues rightly that it has every legal and sovereign right, under international law, to drill for oil and gas and any future prosperity deriving from such venture will be fairly distributed to both Cypriot communities. In this regard in 2008 Cyprus Republic signed its first hydrocarbon exploration contract with US Noble Energy (a company also currently activated in Israel’s EEZ)-for offshore block 12 (adjacent to Israel’s EEZ). Initial exploratory drilling conducted by Noble in late 2011 revealed an estimate of gross mean resources of 7 Trillion cubic feet of natural gas in block 12. Moreover, in early 2013 Cyprus Republic signed contracts with the Italian-Korean ENI/KOGAS consortium for hydrocarbons exploration in blocks 2, 3 and 9 in the EEZ of Cyprus, while on February 6 it signed hydrocarbon exploration contracts with French TOTAL for blocks 10 and 11. Based on the above mentioned developments Cyprus Republic has also recently announced its intention to build a Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) terminal on the island’s southern shore where natural gas could be loaded on ships and exported. In this respect the Republic has so far ruled out any possibility of exporting its natural gas from a pipeline connecting Cyprus EEZ with Nabucco pipeline in Turkey (a proposed natural gas pipeline from Turkey to Austria aiming at diversifying the natural gas suppliers and delivery routes for Europe, thus reducing European dependence on Russian energy).

Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots, however, have protested strongly against the Cyprus Republic’s energy search, branding it “illegal” and beginning their own exploratory drilling off the non-recognized “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.” Both Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots regard this exploration as involving the exercise of sovereign rights at the international level which, they maintain, the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots jointly possess. In addition, Turkey would ideally be interested in connecting Cyprus natural gas with the Nabucco pipeline in Turkey thus making the Nabucco project more viable. According to a Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) recent report “Turkey is likely to respond to exploration activities in the areas that the Turkish Cypriots intend to explore and which overlap with most of the blocks in Cyprus Republic’s EEZ. Turkey could do so even more aggressively, in response to any exploration in

Sea Blocks 1,4,5,6 and 7 (which have not yet been licensed by the Cyprus Republic,) which Turkey claims partly fall within its own continental shelf.” Related to this, Turkey has recently started shutting out of Turkey energy investment international companies like the Italian ENI involved in the Cyprus hydrocarbon exploration process (**source: Gurel Ayla, Fiona Mullen, Harry Tzimitras “*The Cyprus Hydrocarbons Issue: Context, Positions and Future Scenarios,*” PRIO Cyprus Center, PCC Report 1/2013).**

Cyprus’ hydrocarbon reserves bonanza becomes even more perplexed since it also directly involves the interests of Noble Energy and Israel. Noble Energy (expected to be the first company to commercialize Cypriot natural gas) seems to be very much willing to proceed with plans to build an onshore LNG terminal in partnership with Cyprus Republic in order for Noble to process the output of all offshore gas fields in Cyprus Republic’s EEZ and from the Tamar natural gas field offshore Israel where Noble is activated as well. In this regard Noble believes that LNG is the “most viable option” to export the fuel, not a pipeline, as the product would reach the LNG plant on Cyprus shore from where it could be loaded on ships and exported. In this respect Noble has asked the Cyprus Republic’s government to expedite the process by allowing an additional partner to join the venture and proceed with a commercialization framework for a multi-million terminal. (**source: *The Cyprus Financial Mirror* 10-16/4/2013, page 3**). In addition, Israel, has not yet decided whether it would like to export its EEZ natural gas from an LNG facility in Cyprus or from Nabucco’s pipeline in Turkey or from an LNG facility in Israel. In this respect Israel has officially stated its interest to seriously consider the possibility of exporting its natural gas from an LNG terminal in Cyprus. Nevertheless this scenario would be most vulnerable if Israel and Turkey bridge their differences (deriving from the bungled Israeli raid on the Mavi Marmara, a Turkish ship that was in 2010 trying to breach Israel’s naval blockade of Gaza strip) and Israel responds positively to Turkey’s recent calls about building a gas pipeline between the two countries that will be connected to the Nabucco pipeline. Just recently Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu apologized over a telephone call to his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan for this deadly incident. This apology is considered as a leap toward improved ties between two US allies and a diplomatic victory for Barack Obama who facilitated this conversation during his latest visit in Israel. A possible improvement of the relations between Israel and Turkey, however, would obviously induce Israel to seriously consider the possibility of exporting all, or almost all, of its natural gas to Europe from Nabucco pipeline thus putting in question a possible cooperation between Israel and Cyprus Republic in commonly building and exploiting a LNG terminal plant on Cyprus Republic’s southern shore. There is also a high possibility that Israel will eventually opt for a “safer and more protected” solution, namely to export its natural gas to Asia-instead of Europe-from an LNG terminal built in Israel. In such a scenario Israel may rule out completely the possibility of exporting its gas from an LNG facility in Cyprus or from Nabucco pipeline.

Moreover, the international community seems to support the right of Cyprus Republic to explore for oil and gas, but expects hydrocarbon revenues to be shared between the two Cypriot

communities in the context of a settlement. In this regard the UN, the EU, the USA and others have asked both the Greek and Turkish sides to refrain from future political and military actions that could endanger tranquility in Cyprus Republic's EEZ.

All of the above mentioned domestic and international variables affecting Cyprus' hydrocarbon reserves constitute for both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots a Gordian knot that could perhaps only be cut by the formation of a "Cyprus Hydrocarbon Reserves Steering Committee" set up by the UN *with the approval of the Cyprus Republic* and comprised by Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots experts in the field. The purpose of this Committee would be to synthesize all relevant conflicting interests with the aim of finding, in a constructive and collaborative manner, the best possible ways of exploiting Cypriot hydrocarbon wealth to the benefit of not only the two Cypriot communities but also of all other regional state and private actors in concern (i.e. Israel, Greece, Turkey, Noble Energy etc.) This committee could, among other things: a) make a cost-benefit analysis of the two main available options in exporting natural gas from Cyprus. Namely, the creation of a LNG terminal plant on Cyprus southern shore and/or the creation of a pipeline from Cyprus Republic's EEZ to Nabucco pipeline and subsequently, reach a universally accepted conclusion as to the best option to be selected, without excluding the possibility of choosing both options if necessary b) create a bi-communal "Oil and Natural Gas Fund" and a relevant account that will save, invest and proportionally allocate to both Cypriot communities, on time and before any comprehensive solution of the Cyprus problem takes place, any profits accrued as a result of the exploitation of Cyprus natural endowments. The engagement of both interested parties into such Committee would undoubtedly substantially reduce fears by the international community that the discovery of natural gas in Eastern Mediterranean Sea could constitute a continuous source of regional political anomaly and military conflict.

Thirdly, implementation by Turkey of "Ankara Protocol" in return for a de freezing by Cyprus Republic of the 6 negotiating chapters of Turkish accession negotiations that Cyprus Republic has been blocking since 2009. Turkey, started, accession negotiations with the EU on 3 of October 2005. Turkey's accession talks, however, have since been affected by a number of domestic (slowdown in Turkish reforms) and external problems (the Cyprus issue). Due to these setbacks, negotiations came to a halt in December 2006. On that year the EU member states decided not to open eight chapters in Turkey's accession negotiations and to suspend the conclusion of the remaining chapters in process on the grounds that Turkey had failed to fulfill its responsibilities stemming from the "Additional Protocol" (or "Ankara Protocol") to the Association Agreement, which stipulates that Turkey must open its ports and airports to Greek Cypriot ships and planes. In December 2009, the Cyprus Republic blocked another 6 chapters of Turkish accession negotiations arguing that Turkey needs to first normalize relations with Cyprus by implementing the "Ankara Protocol." Turkey has been rejecting such an action on the premise that it would indirectly connote the recognition of the Cyprus Republic. Undoubtedly, a Turkish side implementation of the Ankara Protocol in return for a Cyprus Republic decision to de freeze the 6 chapters of Turkish Accession negotiations that the Cyprus Republic has been blocking since 2009 will have a very positive impact upon the efforts by all interested parties to solve the Cyprus problem. Such an initiative will inevitably lead to a normalization of the

bilateral relations between Turkey and the Cyprus Republic something which will reflect positively on the negotiating atmosphere between the two Cypriot communities.

Fourthly, gradual withdrawal of the Turkish troops from northern Cyprus and approval by Turkey of a demining of the island in return for a gradual reduction of the Cyprus Republic's National Guard. It is not possible to give an exactly accurate number of military personnel serving in northern Cyprus, due to conflicting public sources of information but it seems there are an estimated 30,000 regular troops of the Turkish Army serving in northern Cyprus at any given time. To this one should add the Turkish Cypriot Security Force, a military and security force of the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" estimated about 9,000 strong force primarily made up of conscripted Turkish Cypriot males between the ages of 20 and 40. It is a combined arms force, with land, air and naval elements. The Greek military contingent on the island (about 1000 men) is supplemented by the Cyprus Republic National Guard of 12,000 active and 75,000 reserves. Air reinforcement of the Turkish troops can be effected, if necessary, within hours. All these Greek, Turkish and Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot forces are equipped with all modern weaponry making Cyprus one of the most militarized areas in the world, in terms of ratio of troops to civilian population causing enormous insecurity within the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. **(source: Wikipedia)** In fact no military presence on the island is currently essentially justified given the fact that Cyprus Republic is now member of the EU, Turkey is currently negotiating to become member of the EU and both Greece and Turkey are NATO allies. It is therefore essential that a planned and combined reduction of troops in the northern and southern part of Cyprus is effected under the above-mentioned Provisional Agreement with the supervision of the UN. In addition, the United Nations estimates that Cyprus still has some 15,000 land mines covering an area of two million square meters in the buffer zone and the surrounding lands. UN Peacekeepers have so far successfully cleared 73 minefields, which included some 27,000 mines. The peacekeeping operation has been denied access by the Turkish army to mined areas within the buffer zone (separating the Northern occupied part of the island with the Southern part). Additionally, since January 2011, the United Nations has suspended its de-mining operations because the two sides have failed to reach an agreement on demining outside the buffer zone **(source: Wikipedia)**. The Turkish army ought to allow the UN access to mined areas within the buffer zone and both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots ought to reach an agreement on demining outside the buffer zone. A gradual reduction of Turkish and Greek troops in Cyprus combined with a gradual demining of the island will definitely reduce insecurity within the two Cypriot communities.

Finally, the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots ought to continue and intensify current cultural and educational exchanges, under the UN supervision, in order for them to help their respective societies understand each other. The goal of these exchanges is to encourage cooperation between Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot professionals, students, and community leaders through bi-communal activities, to encourage the participants to work together in order to break down barriers and find practical solutions to island-wide concerns, create opportunities for island-wide collaborations between Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities, foster sustainable inland-wide network of leaders, students and professionals active in bi-communal efforts and develop a cadre of trained individuals from both communities who can make positive contributions to Cyprus's development. **(source: UNDP Cyprus Portal)**. Such exchanges could

gradually cultivate the bi-communal psychological and social ground necessary for the future bi-communal approval and implementation of a comprehensive solution of the Cyprus problem.

...an all-win approach.

Undoubtedly such an evolutionary solution could gradually lead Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots as well as all the international players involved in this protracted dispute into an all-win situation. A signing of the Provisional Agreement is expected to be very beneficial for both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. The Greek Cypriots would: get back, for first time since 1974, an important piece of now occupied land (Varosha) and reap the economic and financial benefits (i.e. influx of foreign direct investment, jobs creation etc.) that will inevitably derive from the reconstruction of this land, experience conditions of tranquility in Cyprus Republic's EEZ thus making the exploitation of Cyprus Republic's relevant hydrocarbon reserves easier and safer, receive a semi-recognition of Cyprus Republic by Turkey, save a lot of money from the gradual demilitarization of the Cyprus Republic National Guard and develop confidence with their Turkish Cypriot compatriots something quintessential for a future comprehensive solution of the Cyprus problem. Likewise, in return for their signing of the said Agreement the Turkish Cypriots would: win a lift of their so called "economic and political embargo" by the opening of Famagusta port and Tymbou airport (under the auspices and legality of the EU), also reap the economic and financial benefits of the reconstruction of Famagusta, proportionally enjoy the benefits of the exploitation of Cyprus Republic hydrocarbon reserves, indirectly receive a reaffirmation by the Cyprus Republic that they are politically equal with the Greek Cypriots, save a lot of money from the gradual demilitarization of Cyprus and develop confidence with their Greek Cypriot compatriots. Moreover both communities will, jointly and separately, benefit substantially by doing business with the now vibrant economy of Turkey.

In addition, both Turkey and Greece would benefit a lot from the signing of such an interim agreement. On the one hand Turkey would, inter alia: enjoy a boost in its effort to become member of the EU, save a lot of money from the gradual withdrawal of its troops from Cyprus and substantially improve its relations with Greece thus creating the necessary conditions for solving the Aegean political and economic differences with Greece (these differences involve a set of interrelated issues between Greece and Turkey over sovereignty and related rights in the area of the Aegean Sea). On the other hand Greece would, among other things: further improve its bilateral political and economic relations with Turkey including finding a solution in the Aegean difference mentioned above that will allow Greece to exploit its EEZ full potential.

The United Kingdom should also be quite eager to see such a major initiative in solving the Cyprus problem. Being the third guarantor power of Cyprus, and maintaining sovereign bases on the island since the country's independence in 1960, Britain has also a vested interest to see a rapprochement between the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots leading to a gradual solution of the Cyprus problem. It goes without saying that Britain would never want a war

between Cypriot parties, something which could in turn necessitate Britain's reluctant involvement as a guarantor power.

The European Union should also be very positive with the signing of a Provisional Agreement between the two Cypriot communities since this would essentially be the beginning of the end of a problem that has become an EU problem since Cyprus Republic's accession to the EU in 2004. The fact that Cyprus Republic became member of the EU before a solution of the Cyprus problem has left Turkey hostage to Cyprus Republic veto on any future accession of Turkey to this Union. This has occasionally resulted in a lot of friction between a member state namely Cyprus Republic and a candidate state for membership namely Turkey and such friction has caused problems in the dialogue between the EU and NATO. More specifically the EU-NATO strategic cooperation remains blocked because of mutual vetoes by Cyprus Republic in the EU and Turkey in NATO. The agenda of the regularly scheduled joint meetings of the North Atlantic Council (NAC) and the Political and Security Committee of the EU (PSC) are generally void of any new items and can only legitimately discuss the Berlin Plus operation in Bosnia. Questions of imminent concern, such as the fight against terrorism and energy security, cannot be tackled. A Provisional Agreement between the Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots would not only allow Turkey to invigorate its bid for membership in the EU but would also allow both Cyprus Republic and Turkey to respectively lift the above-mentioned mutual vetoes thus enabling the dialogue between NATO and the EU to progress.

The United States should also welcome an evolutionary solution to the Cyprus problem. Such an initiative could bring Greece and Turkey closer thus reducing friction in the southeast flank of NATO. In addition, an evolutionary solution could enable the USA to assist all interested parties design a new strategy in exploiting hydrocarbon reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea to the benefit of all public and private players involved in this venture. Moreover, a strategic collaboration between Greece, Turkey, Israel and Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots could dramatically reinforce USA efforts to contain state and other sources of terrorism in the Middle East.

Finally, the United Nations would pleasantly welcome the fact that after so many efforts Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots could eventually reach a modus operandi to gradually eradicate their longstanding differences. The UN has for many decades invested a lot of time, money and energy in solving the Cyprus problem and any breakthrough in negotiations should naturally be accepted by the UN with joy and happiness. Especially, since such a development could potentially alleviate future frictions in the UN Security Council on the Cyprus question among the five Permanent Members (USA, UK, France, China, Russia) that comprise the said UN body.

Moving Forward!

Cyprus is a beautiful island and a very attractive tourist destination. Every year millions of tourists from all over the world visit Cyprus in order for them to enjoy the country's fantastic sunshine and beaches, to admire the island's unique archeological sites, to try Cypriot tasty cuisine and to appreciate Cypriot hospitality. Yet this wonderful country picture hides a rough historical past between the two main Cypriot communities. Unfortunately years of fear, mistrust, hatred, separation, violence, stereotyping, misusing of national symbols and selective use of historical memory have deterred the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots from coming together.

The two Cypriot communities, however, need to free themselves from this past, solve the Cyprus problem and move to the future with determination, imagination and confidence in order for them to commonly build a new prosperous Cyprus. Yet, in order for Cypriots to achieve all of the above they need to view the Cyprus problem from an out-of-the box, non-conventional, perspective. They need to use a different thinking pattern and find new solutions that will put away the "baggage" of the problem area. As Albert Einstein once nicely put it "We cannot solve a problem with the baggage of thinking that created it."

After so many abortive efforts by all interested parties to find a comprehensive solution to the said problem it seems that time is now ripe to approach the solution of this problem from such a different thinking pattern, namely from an evolutionary point of view. Through an evolutionary approach everyday collaboration between the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots on high and low policy issues, based on a non-zero sum game, could be very productive. Such collaboration could enable the two communities not only to incrementally satisfy their basic negotiating interests but also to create a baggage of trust that would help them renegotiate in the future, with a fresher angle, a comprehensive settlement of the problem within the framework of a future plan by the UN based again on a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation. Perhaps only through such an approach will the Cypriots be able to ever reunite their island thus creating the conditions for an everlasting peace and prosperity in this small but significant country situated in the turbulent Eastern Mediterranean region.

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