

The Nicosia wall: political prospects for a solution

Giorgos Vassiliou, Former President of the Republic of Cyprus (1988-1993)

Abstract: *Former president of the Republic of (Greek) Cyprus, the author analyses the Nicosia Wall as an emblem of the division of the city and the state of Cyprus. He recounts the island's history from 1946 to 1960, from the struggle for union with Greece to independence from Britain and the presidency of Archbishop Makarios III, and then 1960-1974 – from the short-lived bi-communal state to the Turkish invasion and the appearance of the Nicosia Wall. The bi-communal state was based on a Greek Cypriot president and a Turkish Cypriot vice-president with the power of a veto. That was an eventful period: a coup d'état in Greece (1967), a coup d'état in Turkey (1971), a coup against Makarios to proclaim Enosis (union) with Greece, and diplomatic efforts to keep the state of Cyprus together. The failure of those efforts resulted in the Turkish invasion of the north of the island and the de facto creation of the Turkish Republic of North Cyprus. In 2003 a relaxation of controls on the Wall gave people a chance to move from one part of the island to the other, but for the last 16 years nothing else has changed. The author goes on to detail diplomatic and political initiatives, including those taken under his own presidency and the UN's Ghali Set of Ideas to achieve unification by means of a referendum. In 2004 Cyprus' accession to the European Union formally included the whole island but in practice only the Greek part, and entry in the Euro zone in 2008 also brought no unification. In 2015 the author expressed his hope that unification could be achieved, and has voiced the same sentiment in 2019. Although this hope seems increasingly forlorn, the author continues to nurture it, since "without hope there is no future" and "to be able to overcome the difficulties and survive we need to have hope. We need to be optimistic that the future will be better than the past".*

Keywords *Cyprus, Republic of Cyprus, Turkish Republic of North Cyprus, Makarios III, Turkey, Greece, ON, Great Britain, reunification of Cyprus, Nicosia Wall, Georgios Vassiliou.*

Sommario: *L'autore, già presidente della Repubblica di Cipro (Greca), illustra e problematizza il "muro di Nicosia", come emblematico della divisione della città e dello stato di Cipro. Egli illustra il periodo 1946-1960: dalla lotta per l'"Unione" di Cipro alla Grecia alla indipendenza dalla Gran Bretagna, con la presidenza dell'Arcivescovo Makarios (III). Poi considera il periodo 1960-1974: dallo stato "bi-communal" di breve durata all'invasione e alla creazione del "Nicosia Wall". Tale "bi-communal state" prevedeva un Presidente greco-cipriota e un vicepresidente turco-cipriota con diritti di veto. Tale periodo è denso di fatti (il colpo di stato in Grecia (1967), il colpo di stato in Turchia (1971), il colpo di stato contro Makarios per proclamare l'Enosis di Cipro alla Grecia) e di diplomazia per mantenere lo stato cipriota unito. Ciò non avviene, e quindi nel 1974 le truppe di Ankara occupano il nord dell'isola, e viene creata de facto la cosiddetta Repubblica Turca di Cipro del Nord (RTCN). Nel 2003 vi è un allentamento del controllo del muro con la possibilità data ai cittadini di passare da una parte all'altra di Cipro. Ma per i successivi sedici anni tutto si è fermato qui. L'autore percorre poi analiticamente gli sforzi diplomatici e politici, compresi quelli della presidenza dell'autore, Georgios Vassiliou, e della "Ghali Set of Ideas" dell'ONU per realizzare l'unificazione, anche attraverso referendum. E intanto si realizza l'entrata nell'UE dell'intera Cipro, formalmente, ma in realtà solo della Repubblica di Cipro (parte Greca) nel 2004 e poi nel 2008 nell'Euro Zona, senza unificazione delle due parti. L'autore, ancora nel 2015, si augura che questa unificazione abbia successo, ma invano; e poi nel 2019 spera che ciò avvenga in un prossimo futuro. Tuttavia tale speranza si fa sempre più flebile, anche se l'autore conta ancora su di essa, se non altro perché "senza speranza non c'è futuro", e "per essere capaci di vincere le difficoltà e sopravvivere dobbiamo avere speranza. Dobbiamo essere ottimisti che il futuro sia migliore del passato".*

Parole chiave: *Cipro, Repubblica di Cipro (Republic of Cyprus), Repubblica Turca di Cipro del Nord (Turkish Republic of North Cyprus), Makarios III, Turchia, Grecia, ONU, Gran Bretagna, riunificazione di Cipro, muro di Nicosia, Georgios Vassiliou.*

Introduction

Dividing walls, either between or within countries, have characterised the world's history since its very beginning. In the early ages, as a rule walls were built to defend a nation or a city from attacks by outside enemies. The two best-known examples are Hadrian's Wall in England and the Great Wall of

China, built to protect the Roman and the Chinese Empires respectively against attacks from various enemies. Later, and particularly during the middle ages, most walls were built around cities, usually for protection against intruders. There are hundreds of cities around the world today that still have remnants of such walls – fortunately nowadays important only as tourist sites.

In our era the Berlin Wall signified the partition of Europe during the Cold War period. In 1990, after the fall of the Berlin Wall there were high hopes that we were entering a new era of unity and cooperation between nations in which there would be no more place for conflicts or dividing “walls”.

The creation and development of the European Union certainly put an end to divisions within most parts of Europe, while globalisation contributed and still contributes greatly towards bringing nations worldwide closer together. Unfortunately, however, there are still real divisions and ethnic or religious conflicts in many parts of the world. The true causes of unrest are sometimes difficult to determine. Frequently, there is a mixture of political alliances, ethnic feuds and economic or religious differences. Usually they start as religious strife but then develop into general ethnic conflicts and go on and on, as in Northern Ireland, between Israelis and Palestinians (Jews, Christians and Muslims), Hindus and Muslims in South Asia and many other places.

Three typical examples of recent conflicts are:

- In Northern Ireland, “the troubles” refer to about three decades of violence, largely between
- the Roman Catholic nationalist community who sought union with Ireland and the primarily Protestant unionist community that wanted to remain part of the UK. It was largely rooted in discrimination by the Protestant majority against the Catholic minority. Between 1969 and 2001, 3,526 people were killed by Republican and Loyalist paramilitary groups and by British and Irish security forces. An uneasy peace was attained by the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 and fortunately has endured (McKittrick & McVea 2000, Bew & Gillespie 1993).
- The Rwanda genocide was mainly an ethnic conflict between the Hutu majority and the Tutsi minority. The religious split in the country (75% Christian, mostly Roman Catholic, and 25% indigenous) appears to not have been a significant factor. Around 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hu-

tus were murdered, mostly by being hacked to death (Prunier 1998,. White 2009: 471-481).

- The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina was among three faith groups, (Muslim, Roman Catholic and Serbian Orthodox). The Serbian Orthodox Christian attacks on Muslims were elevated to the level of genocide (Toal 2011: 136, Rohde 1997).

“Walls” are usually erected to stop military conflicts and partition countries provisionally until the conclusion of a final agreement (Quétel 2012). Other “Walls” are built to prohibit illegal or unauthorized crossings. The most striking examples are:

1. *India-Pakistan*: The so-called ‘Line of Control’ is a military demarcation stretching for 3300 km which divides Kashmir into two areas: one controlled by India and another by Pakistan,
2. *The “Walls” between North and South Korea, as well as China and North Korea*: At the 38th parallel, a barrier 4 km deep and 241 km long, characterized by hundreds of towers, walls and barbed wire has separated the two Koreas since 1953. China, long an ally of North Korea, decided in 2003 to build a wall along its borders with North Korea. The project accelerated in the aftermath of the nuclear tests conducted by the government of Pyongyang and the flight of many North Korean refugees asking for political asylum in China,
3. *Israel – Egypt*: On 3 January 2013, a new barrier along the border with Egypt was inaugurated in the presence of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu. It is 230 km long, 5 meters high, and is characterized by control towers, security cameras and technologically advanced alarms,
4. *Israel – West Bank*: The Palestine separation wall is a 730 km long barrier system built by Israel in the West Bank in the spring of 2002 under the name of “Security fence”, to prevent the intrusion of Palestinians. The Palestinians refer to it by using the term “racial separation wall”,
5. *Morocco – Mauritania*: The “Wall of Western Sahara” is the world’s largest wall after the Great Wall of China. It has a length of over 2,720 km and is, in fact, a military area with bunkers, ditches, ramparts of stone and sand and barbed wire surrounded by minefields, controlled by more than 200,000 Moroccan soldiers and volunteers,

6. *U.S. – Mexico*: Between the U.S. and Mexico there exists a continuous security barrier built by the United States to protect against drug trafficking and illegal immigrants. A significant section of this partitioning line is in the city of Chula Vista, California.

Naturally the history behind the erection of a ‘wall’ or a dividing line varies from country to country. We must never forget, however, that ‘Walls’ are never a solution. At the beginning they may be welcome because we hope that they provide a ‘breathing space’ but they tend to become ‘permanent’. It must also be pointed out that monitoring those dividing lines is very expensive, absorbing badly needed funds and causing considerable suffering to people on both sides.

We must also point out that there are many other countries around the world suffering from ethnic or religious divisions even though there are no formal ‘walls’ or dividing lines.

Greeks in Cyprus – Brief historical appraisal

I do not intend within this brief essay to try to write the history of Cyprus. It is necessary, however, to present a short outline in order to help our readers better understand the background of the Cyprus problem.

Since time immemorial, Cyprus has been an island inhabited mainly by Greeks. Over the ages there have been a number of invaders or occupants who came, stayed for a few centuries and subsequently left, but the overwhelming majority of the population remained Greek. The first Greek inhabitants came around 1200 BC from Achaia during the bronze age. For a period they were under Phoenician rule, but later in the 5th century Cyprus was divided into five Greek Kingdoms. The most important of which at that time was that of Salamis, near Famagusta, under King Evagoras. During that time the first major walls were built, remains of which are still visible today.

Cyprus became part of Alexander the Great’s Empire and in the Hellenistic period, after his death, came under the rule of the Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt. At the beginning of the Christian era, the island became famous as the first stop of the Apostles on their way from Jerusalem to Rome and the West. It was at that time that the Apostle Paul converted Cypriots to Christianity and Cyprus became the first country to be governed by Christians.

From 58 BC to 350 AD, it was an integral part of the Roman Empire and subsequently, until 1191, of the Byzantine Empire. The Greek language and culture remained prevalent all this time, mainly due to the fact that Cyprus found itself at the centre of the Greek world for fifteen consecutive centuries, that is from its inclusion in the Alexander the Great's Empire to its capture by the Crusaders in 1191. The inhabitants of the island continued to be Greek in the great majority although their rulers changed.

During the Crusader period, Cyprus again became a major stop-over, this time *towards* and *not from Jerusalem*. Its first King, Richard the Lionheart, after only a year sold the island to the Knights Templar and these, in turn, ceded it to Guy de Lusignan. Under the Lusignans and subsequently under the Venetians, Cyprus prospered and Famagusta became the major port in the Eastern Mediterranean on the way from the East to Italy, Spain, etc. During that period a great number of castles and walls were built. (See in appendix A remains of the Venetian Wall in Nicosia).





Figures 1-2. Photos of the Venetian Walls in Nicosia
(Source: Attribution by Ancient Nicosia (Own work) (CC-BY-SA-3.0 <<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/>>)).

In 1571, after fierce battles and terrible massacres in Nicosia and Famagusta, the Ottomans took over Cyprus from the Venetians. It was during the Ottoman rule that a Muslim community was established, starting with the Ottoman soldiers garrisoned there, followed gradually by settlers transported by the Sultans from Asia Minor to Cyprus, and finally with indigenous Christian communities declaring themselves Muslim in order to be relieved of the heavy taxes imposed on Christian subjects of the Empire.

The British period began in 1878 when Great Britain leased Cyprus from the Ottomans because the opening of the Suez Canal greatly increased the strategic value of the island, which became the major link between the eastern part of the Empire and Great Britain. The arrival of the British was welcomed by both Greek and Turkish Cypriots. Greek Cypriots saw it, from the very start, as a springboard to Enosis (union) with Greece. The Turkish Cypriots, who during the Ottoman period were the ruling elite and held most

of the jobs in the rudimentary government service, soon realised that the change meant losing their exclusive privileges. Facing the risk of becoming subservient to their former subjects in the event of enosis, they first clung to the Ottoman guardianship of the island and, subsequently, when Cyprus was formally annexed to the British Empire, they allied themselves to the British colonial rulers as the second best option.

Under British rule the island started enjoying relative freedom. Newspapers were established, the first trade unions were created, and municipal elections were held for the first time. It is very significant also that the British common law and justice system were introduced, and relations with the Greek state were getting closer and stronger day after day. The Greek education system, under the influence of the Orthodox Church, prevailed and young secondary school leavers as a rule went to study to the universities of Athens or Thessaloniki. The standard of living improved greatly and the population increased from 185,630 in 1881 to 450,114 in 1946.

During the Second World War more than 50,000 Cypriots (both Greek and Turkish Cypriots) volunteered to join the Cyprus regiment and fought bravely in North Africa and Italy against Nazi Germany. The slogan at that time was 'fight for freedom and for Greece'. The Greek Cypriots were convinced that the Greek/British cooperation during the war would subsequently lead to the realization of their dream for *Union with Greece*. This situation, however, changed abruptly after the end of the Second World War when Rhodes and the other islands of the Dodecanese were returned to Greece but Cyprus was left out.

1946-1960: From the struggle for 'Union' to the acceptance of Independence

The Cold War tremendously increased the strategic importance of Cyprus. The British government considered Cyprus to be of crucial importance and was not willing to lose it. Britain wanted to maintain its strength and power in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East and also feared that Greece could possibly come under communist control. This is why, even when they realized that the United States was ready to accept the union of Cyprus with Greece, Britain refused. After Israel's and Britain's defeat in the Suez

war in 1956, Cyprus became the only base for NATO forces in the Eastern Mediterranean. As a result, the question of accepting the Union of Cyprus with Greece was not even considered, although the popular desire for Union among Greek Cypriots was universal.

On the 1st of April 1955, EOKA started the Greek Cypriot armed struggle against the British in order to force Britain to accept union with Greece. In order to strengthen its position within the island, Britain started encouraging the nationalistic movement within the Turkish Cypriot population under Rauf Denktash and recruited a significant number of Turkish Cypriots in the police force. They enjoyed the full support of Turkey, which after the accession of the Dodecanese to Greece made it abundantly clear to the various Greek governments and the NATO allies that they would never agree to the Union of Cyprus with Greece; they knew that in such a case Turkey would be completely encircled by Greek islands and have no free access either to the Aegean or the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. They made their position abundantly clear to Greece as well.

From as early as 1956 British governments considered that the partition of the island might be a solution, taking into consideration that they had never wanted or been able to accept the accession of Cyprus as a whole to Greece. Furthermore, it must be considered that the various Greek governments were not able or willing to be involved in a serious conflict with Turkey or NATO. They knew very well that their victory in the civil war was entirely due to Anglo-American support and continued to be dependent on goodwill and financial aid from both the U.S. and Great Britain.

Mr. Ferenc A. Vali states in his book *“Bridge across the Bosphorus (1971: 227):* “Turkey was satisfied with the British since this was the best way to protect itself vis a vis the Greek Cypriot desire for union. If there was to be a change in the government of Cyprus then they insisted that Cyprus should have been returned to Turkey. It seems that two factors influenced the partition policy of Turkey. 1) The fear of Ankara that Whitehall would have come to an agreement with Athens and; 2) The British encouragement for Turkish involvement as a balance towards the strong Greek efforts for Union. Whether it was the result of being tired or a tactical movement in order to oblige the Greeks to accept a compromise solution, partition became the main and decisive policy of Turkey on Cyprus with the purpose of avoiding union”.

The idea of independence as a second best solution was suggested by India at first but subsequently found a great number of supporters both within the Labour Party in the opposition in the UK at that time, as well as in the United States. The governments of Britain, Greece and Turkey, after a series of secret negotiations, agreed on the basic terms of a settlement and in December 1959 they concluded the Zurich Agreements under which Britain ensured its strategic interests by keeping two sovereign bases in Akrotiri and Dekelia. The two “Motherlands” would retain an interest and involvement in Cyprus guaranteeing the Constitution and stationing Greek and Turkish military contingents. During the London conference which followed, Archbishop Makarios tried to resist to a number of points agreed in Zurich but at that stage Prime Minister Karamanlis warned Makarios that if he was not willing to accept and sign the agreements he would be responsible for the consequences, implying by that the partition of the island. Thus the Archbishop was obliged to accept the creation of an independent state of Cyprus, abandoning at the same time his efforts for union with Greece (King 1963).

1960-1974: From the short-lived bi-communal state to the invasion and the ‘Nicosia Wall’

The Republic of Cyprus was established on the 1st of January 1960 as a bi-communal state with a Greek Cypriot President and a Turkish Cypriot Vice-President with veto rights (Ibid., Kyle 1983).

When Makarios returned, Greek Cypriots welcomed him as a hero believing that getting rid of the British and having an independent state was a victorious outcome of their struggle. At that stage people neither understood nor appreciated the importance of strictly implementing the conditions laid down by the Zurich/London agreements. At that stage the overwhelming majority of the population, supported the bi-communal state, but from the very beginning Georgios Grivas and a significant number of EOKA fighters accused (Alassos 1961) Archbishop Makarios of betrayal because he had not ensured the full and unconditional union of Cyprus with Greece. The fact that this was never a possibility did not cross their minds. Unfortunately, President Makarios fell victim to these unfounded accusations and nationalistic propaganda and in his speeches

started stating that the Zurich/London agreements were not the end, but the 'last stop' before full implementation of the national goal of union with Greece. Greek Cypriots were under the illusion that respect for justice and democracy in the end would prevail. Also they did not take seriously the nationalist movement among the Turkish Cypriots, which with the encouragement of Ankara and Britain had already become a force to be reckoned with.

In 1960, the political leaders of both the Greek Cypriot (GC) and Turkish Cypriot (TC) communities, wholly without any previous governmental experience, were under pressure to cooperate successfully in achieving the smooth functioning of government. Within the frame of a Constitution described by a world constitutional authority as "probably the most rigid in the world" and "certainly the most complicated", residual resentments from the period of anti-colonial conflict (1955 to 1959), fanned by influence from Greece and Turkey, reinforced competing nationalist ideals.

After the first few years of independence the problems of cooperation with the Turkish Cypriots became obvious and in 1963 President Makarios submitted his famous 13-Point proposals (Makarios III 1963a, 1963b) aiming to make the Constitution more workable by reducing the veto powers of the TC constituent part. At that stage his proposals were rejected by the Turkish government and the Vice-President and other Turkish Cypriots, members of the government, resigned. Turkish Cypriots were concentrated in the Turkish part of Nicosia as well as a number of villages where they lived isolated but under the protection of the Turkish regiment.

At the January 1964 London Conference, called by the United Kingdom as a guarantor of Cyprus's constitutional order in an attempt to reach agreement, Rauf Denktash, the leader of the Turkish Cypriot delegation, made it clear that he believed that: "There must be complete physical separation of the two communities, who should undertake to live in Cyprus, I repeat, side by side... The time has come when we must set ourselves to see whether we can find any solution to partition, or whether we must now go fully ahead for partition." (Denktash 1964: 23-26).

Feridun Cemal Erkin, Foreign Minister of Turkey, was even more direct about Turkey's objectives: «As regards the strategic importance of Cyprus,

one should always keep in mind that the island is geographically a continuation of the Anatolian peninsula. Its strategic importance must be considered from two angles. Firstly, being sufficiently large and with a suitable location in the Eastern Mediterranean, the island constitutes a convenient base and holds the Eastern Mediterranean under its control. In view of progressing world strategy, Turkey is a country within the Western and even the Atlantic area. Actually Turkey's logistics are closely tied up with the sea communication routes which, coming from the Atlantic towards the Eastern Mediterranean, join up at the South Anatolian ports. All these supply routes are under the control of the island of Cyprus, only 40 miles away from the southern coasts of Turkey. On the other hand, Cyprus constitutes a foothold behind Turkey's and consequently the West's defence system which may be used in the direction of the Eastern Mediterranean and North African shores from the Middle East as well as the Balkans. All these considerations clearly demonstrate that Cyprus has a vital importance for Turkey, not merely because of the existence of a Turkish community on the Island, but also on account of its geo-strategic bearings" (Uslu 2013: 46; Cöktepe).

The so called 'Green Line', separating the two communities and monitored by a United Nations Force, was created in 1964 when efforts by the Greek and Cypriot governments to impose their rule by military force failed, following Turkish bombings. In 1967, Greek mainland and Greek Cypriot forces, again under the former EOKA leader General Grivas, tried once more to impose a military solution which ended with the withdrawal of the Greek division and General Grivas from Cyprus back to Greece, as a result of new bombings and the threat of invasion by Turkey. After these last military efforts failed, President Makarios realised that the only option open was to ensure the survival of the Republic. In his famous speech on 11 January 1968 (Bananiot 2010), he said that all his life he had fought for the desired solution, i.e. *union* with Greece, but he realised that this was impossible to achieve. He had no choice but to accept the *feasible* solution in cooperation with the TC community within the independent state of Cyprus. He turned the presidential elections, which he contested as a candidate, into a referendum for the feasible solution and won 96% of the GC votes. However, soon after the inter-communal talks started, Makarios tried to interpret the feasible solution as a state in which the Greek Cypriots would have full control and the Turkish Cypriot community would

simply have the status of a minority. Failure to reach an early settlement at a time when both the Turkish government and the Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktas, for reasons that are beyond the scope of this paper, badly needed a solution, had tragic consequences in the subsequent course of events.

Unfortunately, in 1967 a coup d'état took place in Greece and the Greek military Junta adopted an extremely nationalistic and populist policy arguing against the prospects of a federation and in favour of union. The military coup of March 1971 in Turkey brought a nationalist regime to power, which aggravated the situation. Relations between Makarios and the Greek junta were approaching breaking point until the new military dictator of Greece, Ioannides, carried out a military coup against Makarios, intending to proclaim the union of Cyprus with Greece. Fortunately, they failed to kill Makarios, despite burning down the Presidential Palace.

The Greek coup d'état was a great gift for Ankara. At last Turkey was given the excuse to invade immediately. At first they claimed that they simply wanted 'to protect the constitutional order' and the Turkish Cypriot population. They conquered Kyrenia and nearly 9% of the island and stopped provisionally under international pressure.

Theoretically, as a guarantor power under the Zurich/London agreements Turkey should have withdrawn once 'Enosis' was averted and Cyprus regained its independence. Their objectives, however, had nothing to do with their international obligations. From the moment they were able to launch the invasion, their intention was not only to stay but to strengthen their presence. This is why a second attack followed two weeks later which led to the occupation of the whole of the north of Cyprus and Karpass Peninsula comprising overall 37% of the island's territory and forcing more than 150,000 Greek Cypriots to abandon their homes and properties. Immediately after the failure of their coup d'état the junta collapsed and democracy was reinstated in Greece, but the price paid by Cyprus was huge.

The island was *de facto* partitioned with the 'Nicosia wall' and its extensions, the so-called 'Green line', stretching for 180 km (112 miles) from East to West across the island. Within Nicosia itself there are parts of the town where a real wall divides the two sides. For almost thirty years the division of the island was absolute. No Greek or Turkish Cypriot was allowed to move from the one to the other side, with the exception of a few diplomats. Then suddenly in

April 2003, under pressure from within, but also from European and international bodies, Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktaş was obliged to open the crossing points and remove the obstacles to the movement of people. As soon as the news spread huge waves of Greek and Turkish Cypriots moved from the one area to the other. Greek Cypriots visited their lost villages and houses; they sat down and talked with their Turkish Cypriot neighbours about their dreams and hopes for a better future, new friendships were created. At the same time thousands of Turkish Cypriots came to visit their abandoned houses and a number started working in the south. Even something unbelievable happened as young people started meeting, rekindling hope for the future. The opening of the crossing line proved how false and unjustified was the myth created by the partition policy of Denktaş that the co-existence of the two communities was impossible. He was claiming that as soon as Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots met they would start killing each other. The theory that what happened in Bosnia could be repeated in Cyprus collapsed overnight. It is significant that there were never any real conflicts or quarrels during that period between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. These contacts greatly contributed towards the development of a better understanding of the problems and realities facing the two communities and strengthened the movement for reconciliation. Unfortunately, the goodwill and support from international NGOs were not enough or could ever lead to a solution by themselves. Forty years since the invasion, the Nicosia ‘Wall’ still divides us.

There may be crossings, and people move northwards and southwards but the partition remains and the reality of the ‘Nicosia Wall’ is with us every day. On the 28th of April 2013, I was reading an article by Kostas Konstantinou in the “Politis newspaper”. I was really touched by the feelings expressed by Kostas in his article. The following extract is probably one of the best descriptions of the realities of a ‘Wall’ (Konstantinou 2013): “...All of my memories end at an impasse, an outpost, barrels, ruins. Beyond that, there extends the Line, mysterious, forbidden, unknown; a part of me, but a part to which I never had access. Like a locked room in my own house, to which someone has stolen the key and I cannot enter. The thought of it has been driving me mad since I was very young. I could not bear the unjust prohibitions. It is for this reason that I’ve begun walking it. For some months now, I’ve been entering the Line at different points, photographing parts of it, houses, old signs which

still bear witness to lucky people, with lives that were destroyed, yes, but who were not lost for ever like those of countless people who lived and worked in the erstwhile commercial centre, silent since 1963 or 1974. I walk along it, at times legally, at other times....I find it pointless to climb a tree. But to climb a tree in order to be able to see something that you cannot see from below, this is the meaning of life in a single sentence. That's the only way I can explain how only there on the Line do I go out on balconies that are ready to collapse and pass without a second thought beneath the semi-demolished ceilings of houses, rich and humble alike, trying to imagine the lives of the people who built them and lived there. Only there. I know it will sound strange, absurd even. It is a peculiar type of warmth, something akin to security, that this journey amongst the valuable ruins creates each and every time..."

Differences between the 'Nicosia wall' and other walls in the world.

The many differences between the realities in Cyprus as opposed to practically all other countries where partitions exist could be summed up in the following:

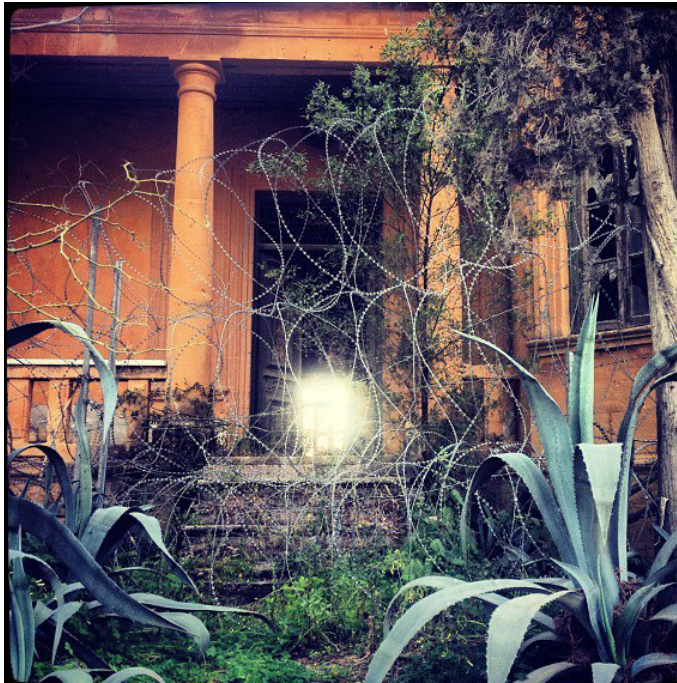
1. Cyprus is the only divided country within the European Union and, moreover, this is a division imposed by a country outside the E.U. but tolerated by the international community,
2. It is a division within the country but at the same time illustrates the differences between the 'Motherlands', Greece and Turkey,
3. The division is not 'natural' as it is the result of ethnic cleansing in a country where the two communities have been mixed throughout the island's history,
4. Usually, dividing-line 'walls' are constructed in order to stop illegal immigration. The only exception to that rule is Cyprus. In the occupied areas thousands of Turks from Anatolia were gradually settled without any international control whatsoever. The number of settlers has grown from 20,000 in the early 1980s to nearly 100,000 in the mid-90s. Nowadays Turks from Anatolia account for around 250,000 persons while Turkish Cypriots are barely 100,000 or so. In addition to the first generation settlers, we now have a second generation of settlers' children

born in Cyprus or children born from mixed marriages. In that sense, therefore, while Turkey was claiming that it came to protect the Turkish Cypriots they have now created a situation in which Turkish Cypriots are a minority within their own non-recognised state. In addition, illegal immigration to the free areas not only continues through the 'Green line' but it is unofficially facilitated. Illegal immigrants find it much easier to come to the north and from there cross to the south. The small United Nations force and the Greek Cypriot military are in no position to police this 180 km long line. Thus Turkey, whenever it wishes, can enable thousands of illegal immigrants to cross over and create huge problems for the authorities of the Republic,

5. Usually divisions within countries have mainly religious roots or a combination of religious and ethnic ones. In the case of Cyprus religion played a great role in strengthening the ethnic identity but religion was not the cause of the Cyprus problem. The differences were mainly ethnic. Over the ages in all mixed villages Orthodox Greek Cypriots used to live in peace together with their Muslim Turkish Cypriot neighbours. Mosques and churches were usually built close to each other and as a rule Imams and Priests in the villages were friends. Any conflicts were usually caused by differences between families and not between religions. Even today, after so many years of division, you cannot witness any signs of religious fanaticism.

Why the “Nicosia Wall” is still there after 40 years?

There is no doubt that it was not in Turkey's interest to solve the Cyprus problem quickly. They needed time and knew that the more the status quo was maintained the better for them. Negotiations were slow to start and kept dragging on. For Turkey it was convenient to take a hard stance exploiting their dominant position as well as the deep feelings of distrust and fear prevailing in both communities.







Figures 3-9. Photos of the Buffer Zone of the Wall of Nicosia
(Source: Costas Constantinou, Journalist – Politis Newspaper, Cyprus).

Turkish Cypriots' attitudes

Up to 1963 Turkish Cypriots were happy to accept a united Cyprus within which they would have special privileges as a minority. After 1963, and particularly in the years between 1964 and 1967 when the Turkish Cypriots lived in enclaves surrounded by Greek Cypriots, a feeling of insecurity and uncertainty arose, which was greatly exploited by Turkish Cypriot nationalists, particularly Rauf Denktash. They were looking to Turkey as their protector and saviour. Following the 1974 coup d'état, they welcomed the invasion and even the abandonment of their houses in the south and their movement to the Turkish-occupied North Cyprus areas. They thought that they would at last feel secure and started building a new life. Gradually they were beginning to settle down, get jobs and enjoy a better living standard. They accordingly supporting the so-called 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus' (TRNC), looked positively at the military presence of the 40,000-strong Turkish contingent and of course took advantage of Turkish financial help. A few decades later, particularly after the accession of the Republic of Cyprus to the E.U., Turkish Cypriots started wondering about the realities of this forcible division. The number of settlers was increasing continuously, Turkey was the real power taking all major decisions about governance and dictating the terms of a possible solution. Gradually Turkish Cypriots became a minority within 'TRNC'.

Greek Cypriots' attitudes

Greek Cypriots knew they were the victims. They had lost 1/3 of their territory, nearly 150,000 refugees had to be resettled and all were worried about their future. They believed justice had to prevail and they espoused the slogan written on the dividing 'wall' in Nicosia "Our borders are at Kyrenia".

Starting in 1821, Greece was liberated gradually from the Turks in a series of victorious wars but the disaster in Asia Minor in 1922, the massacre and forceful expulsion of Greeks from Smyrna and the Western coasts of Turkey scarred them greatly. Feelings of fear were intensified during the pogroms of the Greek population in Istanbul in 1955. Thus it was easy to cultivate the feeling that Greeks and Turks were eternal enemies and that Turkish official

policy could never be trusted. So while within Cyprus Greek Cypriots knew they were the majority and felt secure, at the same time they were aware that Turkey was the dominant power of the region.

Failure of the negotiations from 1974 onwards

Since 1974, there have been several U.N. initiatives to sponsor negotiations for the solution of the Cyprus problem. They all failed. Turkey and Turkish Cypriots were fully aware that the status quo always works in favour of the stronger party, as has been proved time and again in all international conflicts. Thus they took a hard stance against a really federal state requiring the acceptance of a practically independent Turkish Republic of North Cyprus (TRNC). On the Greek Cypriot side too nationalists always were against the idea of a federated state, they never wanted to share power with T/C, and exploited Greek Cypriot fears of Turkey and their reasonable demands for justice. The same people that criticized Archbishop Makarios for accepting the Zurich/London agreements instead of 'Enosis', criticized him for accepting federation in the wake of the invasion and the de facto partition of Cyprus.

Consequently, every time proposals were put forward by the United Nations, the nationalist maximalist camp tried to sabotage them using all types of legalistic arguments. In my book "From the President's office" (2010: 259) I write: "The panic of the Rejectionists, generated by the probability of obtaining a federal solution, was not due, in my opinion, to the fact that they were dreaming of something better. I believe that in essence they had accepted the theory of the former Greek ambassador in Cyprus, Michalis Dountas, that the maintenance of the status quo was in the interests of Cyprus and Greece and not of Turkey. As becomes apparent from the note Dountas sent to the Greek prime minister on 1 April 1983, this view was very simple and clear. He starts his note as follows: "The way the Cyprus issue has been handled after the invasion has harmed the Greek side. The Greek Cypriots and we have both been waylaid in seeking a solution. It was impossible, historically, politically and diplomatically to achieve anything that could constitute a real improvement of the status quo in favour of the Greek Cypriots."

This *status quo*, namely *de facto* partition, was called the ‘second best solution’.

The former Greek ambassador in Cyprus, Michalis Dountas, was the ‘father’ of the idea that the continuation of the ‘status quo’ was to Greece’s and Greek Cypriots’ benefit. ‘Any agreement, he said, would mean nothing more than the legalisation of the occupation and the transformation of the President of the Republic into a community leader’ (Bananiot 2008).

During my Presidency (1988-1993), we had the first good chance for a solution. The ‘Ghali Set of Ideas’ unanimously adopted by the Security Council, in November 1992, condemned Turkish intransigence and demanded the creation of a bi-communal bi-zonal federal state. The strong reaction of the nationalistic forces, however, frustrated the implementation of this plan.

Tassos Papadopoulos, President of the Republic from 2003 to 2008, pointed out at a rally of the youth branch of DHKO in Thessaloniki, in February 1992, that an agreement would make the Turks sovereign in the North and partners in the South: “I do believe that the strategic aims of Turkey have not only been advanced but I dare say that during the last two years the Turkish side has made great leaps forward towards achieving its basic strategic aims that I summarise in the epigrammatic sentence: ‘Turkey is to become the ruler in the occupied territories but at the same time - and this is more important for Turkey - an equal partner in the South.’”

Unfortunately, of course, it is precisely the opposite that is happening. It is thanks to the lack of an agreement that the Turks are the absolute and uncontrollable rulers in the North, while, with the passage of time, they have every opportunity to become partners in the South.

The last time we had an opportunity for an agreement was in 2004 when the Annan Plan (Annan 2004) was endorsed by the U.N. Security Council. Again, however, the nationalist forces prevailed. In my book (2010: 260), I revealed for the first time the following facts: “On Thursday 21 August 2003, President Papadopoulos invited me to the presidential palace and asked me to plead with Brussels so that the impending report of the Commission would not contain gaps and would be positive, so that the accession of Cyprus could be readily approved by the various parliaments and govern-

ments of the EU. I readily accepted this task, mainly because I believed firmly that Cyprus ought to become a member of the EU. It was, of course, assumed that Papadopoulos's commitment in The Hague to the Annan Plan, in spite of its weaknesses, was still valid, because he knew full well that if this were not the case there would be absolutely no hope of securing Cyprus's accession before a solution was agreed. He simply hoped, without saying so, that Mr. Denktash would always be there to reject any plan. I did not, however, hesitate to ask the president to what extent the Annan Plan that he was now supporting was so much better than the Ghali Ideas (Ghali 1992) which he had fanatically fought against. His reply surprised me and took my breath away at the same time: 'Who said anything like this? *The Ghali Ideas were much better than the Annan Plan that we have in front of us. And this is better than any future plan for a solution.*'

Finally, the then President of Cyprus Papadopoulos, after our accession to the E.U., felt strong enough to reject the Annan Plan through a referendum. The tragedy in this case was that Turkey had originally decided to vote "No" to the Annan Plan but when they realised that the Greek Cypriots were going to reject the Plan, they gave instructions to vote "Yes". As a result after the referendum they were given the chance to claim that the luck of a solution was not due to Turkish intransigence but to its rejection by Greek Cypriots.

I am afraid that Turkey is well aware that the more time passes the better for them. Just one small simple fact: When the invasion took place the ratio between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots was 80:20. Today, depending on the number of settlers it may be around 65:35. In 20 or 30 years' time, if Turkey wants, it can import a few hundred thousand more settlers and end up having more Turks living in Cyprus than Greeks. These are not theories but realities. The impasse was maintained for forty years. It is too long. We need to move on.

The way forward

The 'Nicosia wall' will be with us until the day the Cyprus problem is solved and Cyprus is reunited.

We know that all efforts for an agreement have failed so far both because of Turkish intransigence and the Greek Cypriot nationalists' illusions which

facilitated Turkey's plans. We need a win-win situation. The new prospects of gas exploitation and Cyprus becoming the energy hub for the export of gas, and possibly electricity from Israel, Lebanon, etc., to Europe as well as other parts of the world, provide us with such an opportunity. The E.U. would certainly support a solution because they cannot accept, and do not want, the break-up of any E.U. member state. The E.U. and the Euro-zone is the only future for Europe. Shengen is abolishing borders and thus they can never accept the creation of new borders and subdivisions of Europe to a great number of small states. They cannot possibly succumb to nationalistic, populist slogans and destroy everything that has been achieved since the end of the Second World War.

All Cypriots will reap the benefits of a reunited Cyprus and be able to exploit its national resources. It will be much easier to attract foreign investment within a united Cyprus, human rights for all will be secured and Greek Cypriots will, hopefully, regain some of their lost lands. Turkish Cypriots will implement the *acquis communautaire* which will help them solve the property issue. The embargo on Cyprus by Turkey will be abolished, etc.

Turkish Cypriots will enjoy the full and many advantages of E.U. membership. They are fully aware of the fact that Turkey's demand for an internationally accepted independent 'TRNC' has no chance whatsoever to be accepted. With the creation of a federal Cyprus as a full member of the E.U., relations between E.U. and Turkey will also be greatly improved.

To reach an agreement, however, we need to compromise, to learn to live in a Bi-communal Bi-zonal Federation within the E.U. 'Compromise does not mean cowardice' said John Kennedy. 'Indeed it is frequently the compromisers and conciliators who are faced with the severest tests of political courage as they oppose the extremist views of their constituents.' Compromise, in other words, requires a vision for the future' (Kennedy 2003/1956: 5).

The history of negotiations in every country, where a solution was found, shows *first* that this was always the result of a compromise, and *second* that there was willingness or rather determination to forget the past. Peace in South Africa was based on forgiveness of the crimes of the previous periods. The agreement between Germany and Israel was based on the acceptance of German apologies for the crimes of the Nazi period. Peace in Europe today is based on the fact that differences between neighbouring countries on territorial adjustments have

been forgotten since now every country is part of the E.U. and borders are of no importance. The well-known French author Jean-Daniel in his book 'A trip to the limits of the Nation', says in his prologue: "Without an element of forgiveness there is no way that you build a relationship with your neighbor". And he adds: "If the only thing living people want is to take revenge for those they have lost then they are no longer building a nation but a cemetery". Daniel concludes his introduction by saying that "nationalists are not only enemies of the future but the worst enemies of a nation, because their efforts and fights end up like efforts within the empires to dissolution within". And this is exactly the danger we are facing if we do not focus on the future.

I am hopeful that despite past failures, we will, at long last, look towards the future. The only problem is that future cannot wait forever.

Post-script on Walls for the period 2015-2019

Up to this point the current article on the Nicosia Wall has expressed a hopeful attitude, but practically four years have elapsed and Cyprus continues to be divided. The years that lapsed from 2015 to 2019 were years of great hopes and subsequently great disappointments. Cypriots were beginning to be hopeful that a solution could be reached after the negotiations had restarted between President Anastasiades and the newly elected leader of the T/C community Mustafa Akinci, under the auspices of the Secretary General of the United Nations. The talks lasted longer than one would have expected but certainly the news that were coming out were positive. The last round of talks was conducted in the Swiss town of Crans Montana in June and July 2017. At the beginning the negotiations were progressing very well, and agreement was reached on various points on which there was disagreement before. Between others, both the issue of territory and the implementation of the *acquis communautaire* were agreed. But then suddenly in the evening of July 17th the talks failed, despite the enthusiastic support they were enjoying from the international community and the United Nations. The Secretary General was greatly disappointed and in his Report to the Security Council he pointed out that 'unfortunately a historic opportunity to solve the Cyprus problem was lost' (Guterres 2017; Gasparini Nicolò 2004)

In his report, the Secretary General refused to say whether T/C, Turkey, Greece or G/C were to blame. He reconfirmed his view, however, that a solution is feasible and requested the two parties to consider seriously the situation.

As this post-script is written the Special Representative of the Secretary General, Mrs. Jane Hall Lute, is making an effort to reach an agreement with both sides on the Terms of Reference of the talks. I personally very much hope that the Report of Mrs Lute will be positive and encourage the Secretary General to relaunch the negotiations. In such case I am of the opinion that neither side will want to be blamed for a new and probably final failure of the talks.

I am fully aware that this article will be published in the “Futuribili» Jornal, which is a publication devoted to predicting the future. I am sorry but I cannot predict our future with any certainty. I can only express the hope that the talks, this time, will start and end successfully and that the Cypriot public fully recognises the dangers of a new failure. They all perceive the probability of the Security Council not renewing the mandate of UNFICYP after July 2019, if there is no prospect of a new round of negotiations. The repercussions for the future of the island will, in such case, be very bleak indeed. This is why I want to continue hoping that despite the difficulties an agreement will be reached.

As we all know very well “without hope there is no future”. To be able to overcome the difficulties and survive we need to have hope. We need to be optimistic that the future will be better than the past.

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