

## **CYPRUS FOREIGN POLICY- REALITY COMES CALLING**

*Anna Procopiou*

*Foreign Policy Analyst, Research Associate, Cyprus Center for European and International Affairs, University of Nicosia*

It seems that Cyprus currently finds itself in the epicentre of what many analysts would dub 'the perfect storm': a newly-elected government, already discredited by the worst financial crisis to have hit the island since 1974, having to simultaneously deal both with the reopening of negotiations on the Cyprus issue and Turkish threats on the discovery and exploitation of natural gas deposits. No foreign policy balancing act could have proved more delicate.

Although once more the urgent (the financial crisis) has taken precedence over the important (the actual survival of the Cyprus state), one cannot fail but notice that the economic has, as always, become political. As Edmund Burke once noted the revenue of the state *is* the state and thus, as long as the Republic of Cyprus has no real revenue of its own accord, it has very little control left over its state of affairs. To add insult to injury, having the stakes upped by such a game changer as the discovery of natural gas deposits could prove disastrous for an inexperienced player surrounded by hustlers and hawks.

It is no coincidence, then, that the Cyprus issue has suddenly ceased to be the hot potato it once was, with the American government persuasively seeking to be actively involved in upcoming negotiations. How much arm-twisting the Americans are prepared to do to fulfil their agenda remains to be seen. Obvious energy scramble and geopolitical security considerations aside, timing does indeed seem right to push forward with a solution hitherto deemed unacceptable by the majority of Cypriots, as Cypriot society is currently in a state of shock; such a situation can be more easily exploited to push forward more controversial policies, while citizens are too busy emotionally and physically licking their wounds to create any sort

of effective opposition to what the elites who determine policy have in mind.

In any case, since the very founding of the Republic in 1960, Cyprus foreign policy has proven to be Janus-faced, trying to get the best of both worlds and usually getting much of neither. Most recently, in March 2013, the Cyprus government behaved in a manner which exhibited weakness, parochialism and ineffective crisis-management skills and an obvious yet irritating oscillation between East and West: Cyprus projected the image of the spoiled child, who once reprimanded for its irresponsible actions, tried in panic to play one parent (the EU) against the other (Russia), in what appeared to be a spasmodic, tumultuous tantrum rather than calculated high-level policy-making. The lessons of history were lost on the Cyprus government which seemed to have learned nothing from such erroneous oscillations in the past- oscillations which had made 'non-aligned' Cyprus an unreliable partner for East and West alike. All in all, the Eurogroup crisis provided an exemplary case study of how NOT to conduct business in international affairs.

The unforgiving nature of this particular foreign-policy debacle (in all fairness having happened in the absence of any real Foreign Ministry involvement) springs to mind all the more so as the Cyprus government is summoned to find a solution to the so-called 'Cyprus problem'. Despite strenuous attempts to dismiss its foreign policy dimension and focus instead on a so-called bi-communal approach, the international dimension will not go away quietly no matter how hard one tries to sweep it under the carpet. The 'Cyprus problem' is in essence a violation of international law by one state at the expense of another through means of military intervention, an act which has resulted into the illegal seizing of territory, the creation of thousands of refugees and the implanting of illegal settlers as usurpers of citizens' private properties. As far as international law and human rights are concerned, there are simply no de jure grey areas,

vouched for by numerous UN resolutions towards this effect throughout the years. Despite that using the pretext of the protection of a minority to intervene in the affairs of another state has been common practice in foreign-policy making, under international law it remains exactly that - a pretext.

In fact, foreign policy-making does revolve primarily around the promotion of national interest vis-a-vis the promotion of national interest by other states. National interest can either be defined as the survival of the state and/or the well-being and survival of its people, the former usually being considered a precondition for safeguarding the latter. Security considerations remain of primary importance, since there can be no prosperity in the absence of security. Resolving the Cyprus problem cannot fall short of any such pursuits. The Republic of Cyprus has no grievances against its Turkish-Cypriot citizens, its security has not and is not currently being compromised by them and nor have there been any international law violations on their part. Therefore, there should not have been any negotiating at bi-communal level in the first place nor is it acceptable that negotiators from 'both communities' will soon visit Ankara where the Turkish government will almost act as honest broker (Turkish President Ghul actually prefers using the term 'virtuous power'), being alleviated of its actual role as perpetrator of a range of international crimes for which it has shown no remorse.

The question remains why Turkey has been so easily let off the hook by none other than successive Cypriot governments, which have throughout time exhibited Jekyll-and-Hyde tendencies (to say the least) towards treatment of this affair. Not only have external relations with Turkey almost been disentangled from negotiation proceedings, the Foreign Ministry has been playing second fiddle in the most important foreign policy issue the Republic of Cyprus has ever faced. At the same time, Cyprus policy proclamations have ranged from outright demands for the

immediate withdrawal of Turkish troops and restoration of the original status quo via the use of international law to an inexplicable willingness to be get rid of Cyprus' only defence shield- that of international law, property and constitutional rights- by agreeing to the legalization of an illegitimate situation with its very own seal of approval. This has been based more often than not on emotional argumentation of finally reuniting the island (deemed as panacea to alleviate many wounds in a somehow resigned society) and much less on hard-driven zero-sum considerations, with a clear failure of placing the Cyprus issue within a broader geostrategic, geopolitical or even geo-economic spectrum at any given point in time.

An explanation for such behaviour can be two-fold. Apart from the obvious political inexperience of a state still in post-colonial modus operandi, there also springs to mind a psychological/sociological explanation for such behaviour, namely the so-called Stockholm Syndrome. In no uncertain terms, when such a syndrome takes hold, victims express empathy, sympathy and have positive feelings toward their captors, sometimes to the point of defending them, essentially mistaking a lack of further abuse for an act of kindness. Freudian theory suggests that such kind of bonding is the individual's response to trauma. By identifying with the aggressor and believing their narrative is one way in which the ego defends itself and the victim comes to feel that they are not losing face but instead preserving their dignity intact. It is a rather convenient way in convincing oneself that since you can only do little you might as well do nothing at all.

Nonetheless, as reality comes calling, Cyprus policy-makers do not have the luxury of such dangerous groupthink; Kissinger's words come to mind: "The statesman is permitted only one guess; his mistakes are irretrievable."