

## **THE CYPRUS PROBLEM: WHAT NEXT?**

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The post 1974 "Cyprus problem" is half-way through its 39<sup>th</sup> year and although it has been looming in the background over the last few months it has been overshadowed by the economic crisis and the events of March 2013.

As, however, the various economic issues begin to be handled one way or another it is expected that the Cyprus problem will re-surface in the autumn. It is not easy to predict how the resumed negotiations will fare due to a number of new factors that will come into play. The first factor is that there is now a new President of the Republic of Cyprus in the person of Nicos Anastasiades and it is not known as yet what approach he will follow. His pro-Anan plan stand in 2004 is known but he has repeatedly stated during his election campaign that he will respect the "NO" vote cast by 76.4% of the Greek Cypriot population. Ex President Demetris Christofias' soft and friendly approach towards Talat and Erdogan has not paid off despite his strong desire for a solution and his very flexible approach in the negotiations. President Anastasiades will be under pressure by the right wing of his party as well as his partner in the government (Diko) to withdraw Christofias' "gifts" to the Turkish Cypriots. However, how easy is this going to be? Alexander Dawner has already prepared his document which he most probably plans to use as the basis for the renewed proximity talks. President Anastasiades has decided to appoint a negotiator to represent the Greek Cypriot side and it is not yet known how this may facilitate or complicate the process.

New elements in the political arena that might affect negotiations on the Cyprus problem are the developments regarding the gas deposits in the Cyprus Exclusive Economic Zone. There are now new important interests that involve Israel, the European Union, the USA and Russia. Even the Chinese are showing interest. One has to see how these new extremely important economic interests will affect negotiations and provide the catalyst for a political breakthrough.

Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan is facing serious internal problems and one cannot predict how he will handle foreign policy, security and energy issues in the months ahead. It is generally accepted that Turkey is the key player in any solution to the Cyprus problem. Greece, which is facing serious economic problems, political instability and social upheaval, is certainly not in a position to play a leading role in initiating a policy that would lead to a solution.

Thirty-nine years is a long time and a lot has changed on the ground as regards the two communities in Cyprus. The increasing number of settlers has altered the demographic character of the occupied North and simultaneously the political balances; the settlers are now the ones who decide. In the Republic of Cyprus more and more of the older generation of refugees are dying and perhaps this might facilitate a solution that would provide for compensation on property. The number of those ready to settle property issues through the Turkish committee is also increasing.

As time passes there are more people on both sides of the divide who speak about a solution based on the "present realities": that is a division of the island and peaceful co-existence after some territorial adjustments. The gradual "tawainisation" of the "TRNC" is also causing concern. So the different scenaria of separate statehood; loose confederation or continuation of the current status quo cast a gloomy shadow over the island which is also suffering under the austerity measures imposed by the Troika

A solution of the problem will make Cyprus a strong base of stability and security for European and American interests in the area. This is of particular importance in the light of the turmoil in the nearby Arab world and the worsening of the situation in Syria

The challenge for President Anastasiades is really great; will he manage to recover his political stature so badly damaged by the March events through a breakthrough in the long -drawn out deadlock in the search for a solution?

1. Continuation of the current situation and gradual " " of the north
2. Re-unification on the basis of a confederation of two states and the return of some territory to the Greek Cypriots
3. Two separate states with partial recognition after some territorial adjustments.
4. One unitary state based on the federal model?

Cyprus Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)