

BUSINESS AS USUAL NO MORE

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Cyprus assumed the EU Presidency with minimum expectations. Still the goal is to succeed in delivering its mission. President Christofias would not stop repeating a fashionable maxim: Cyprus will run the Presidency as an honest broker. It will pursue the interest of the EU as a whole.

Definitely, there is no recipe for achieving even the minimum. Down the road there are some pressing issues to deal with, the Union's budget being just one among the pending tough issues. Bargaining at the EU level is quite tricky and under the Lisbon arrangements decision-making resembles the Tower of Babel. Complexity is akin to EU politics. The country that holds the Presidency needs to demonstrate the caliber of an actor with endless stamina.

If there was a piece of advice one would give to Cyprus that would be to avoid mistakes. This may sound like a truism, but a moment's reflection would prove the opposite. The only way one may make no mistakes is by doing nothing. In the case at hand, however, inertia is not an option for Cyprus. Soon after Cypriot officials were involved in the Presidency affairs they realized two basic things: (a) preparing for the Presidency and assuming the Presidency make two different pairs of shoes, and (b) the assistance by EU institutions and bureaucracies is very useful, but it does not suffice for accomplishing the mission. Cyprus officials will need to use their faculty to the maximum if they are to be as productive as they are expected to be. To be sure, at the EU level being productive is not enough if this is not coupled with efficiency.

The EU is business as usual no more. Beyond the quotidian affairs, the Union struggles to overcome a systemic economic crisis with tremendous ramifications for national societies. The project of European integration lost its beauty. It has been some time now since the people of Europe lost trust to the EU and its potential to provide a vision for a better future. Even though there is no alternative to the EU, if its decay is not overturned it may go full speed to disintegration.

Cyprus assumed the Presidency of the Union during a difficult period. This prevents the government in Nicosia from appealing to the EU as a means for overcoming the mounting internal pressure. Any thoughts or plans to use the Presidency as a means to assuage the tarnished reputation of Mr. Christofias must be reconsidered or better abandoned.

Up until this Presidency reaches its end there is some way to go. Cyprus should embrace the attitude of a vigilant sailor. The possibility that something unexpected will pop up should be seriously considered. Good EU Presidencies are those which are ready to handle the unexpected. The chances to accomplish an EU Presidency mission with success are always 50-50. The effort should be to make the Cyprus Presidency a successful one. It will take at least 18 years up until the next time Cyprus will lead the EU. No one wants to leave behind a bad legacy, for there will be no chance to make over in the near future.