

# OPPORTUNITIES & SETBACKS IN THE GENEVA CYPRUS NEGOTIATIONS

*Negotiations on a settlement of the Cyprus problem, which has a history of about 50 years, are still in progress. In 2014, a new period of negotiations started under the leadership of Akıncı and Anastasiadis. In 2017, discussions were held in Geneva with the aim of achieving peace and an ultimate resolution to the Cyprus problem. However, the Geneva talks failed due to the parties' disagreements on a number of matters. In this article, the authors provide a brief history of Cyprus negotiations, followed by an assessment of the 2016-2017 Geneva talks as part of the new negotiation period. In this context, the key points of the Geneva talks, which were agreed upon by the parties, are discussed.*

Ayhan Dolunay and Dilan Çiftçi\*



\*Ayhan Dolunay is a Legal Advisor and Lecturer in the Faculty of Communication, and in the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences at Near East University, North Cyprus. Dilan Çiftçi is a Lecturer in the Faculty of Communication, and the Former Dean of Students.

**T**o begin with, the Cyprus conflict must be explained as a protracted social conflict (PSC), characterized by the prolonged and often violent conflict for security, recognition, acceptance, fair access to political institutions, and economic participation.<sup>1</sup> A protracted social conflict is not a phenomenon unique to Cyprus, but a remarkable problem for a variety of multiethnic states all around the world.<sup>2</sup> Being an Eastern Mediterranean island, Cyprus has not only strategic importance for its guarantor countries, but also many others due to its geopolitical location. A former British colony, Cyprus became an independent state in 1960 as the Republic of Cyprus (RoC), and is composed of Turkish Cypriots, Greek Cypriots, Maronites, Armenians, and Latinos.<sup>3</sup>

It is crucial to note that the Cyprus conflict is the second longest-lasting conflict of competing nationalism in the region of the Middle East, after the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In addition to the fact that Cyprus is a long-running conflict, which has a history of about 50 years. As part of the European Union, Cyprus is important for its guarantor countries – France, the UK, and Turkey – although there have been many attempts to resolve the conflict.<sup>4</sup>

There have been numerous attempts by international actors – such as the UN, the UK, Turkey, and Greece – to solve the conflict and establish peace and security on the island.

However, all such attempts have consistently failed.<sup>5</sup> The 2004 Annan Plan, for example, aimed to overcome communal fears that had arisen from the breakdown of the 1960 Constitution of Cyprus. In particular, the plan was designated to create a United Cyprus Republic (UCR) as the new state of Cyprus. Significantly, there were several drafts for the final form of the 2004 Annan Plan, with the first draft submitted in July 2000. This plan was the result of long negotiations which outlined a comprehensive solution to the Cyprus Conflict. Besides, the team was aware of the idea that a single negotiating text would also be the basis for further negotiation. On 22 November 2002, the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan submitted to the two

<sup>1</sup> Edward E. Azar, Paul Jureidini, and Ronald McLaurin, “Protracted Social Conflict; Theory and Practice in the Middle East,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (1978), pp. 41-60.

<sup>2</sup> Harry Anastasiou, “Communication across Conflict Lines: The Case of Ethnically Divided Cyprus,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (2002), pp. 581-596; Dilan Çiftçi, “Peace Journalism and News Coverage on the Annan Plan Referendum: The Role of Framing the Conflict Issues and Negotiation Process,” *GSTF Journal on Media & Communications*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (2014).

<sup>3</sup> Makarios Drousiotis, *The First Partition: Cyprus 1963-64* (Nicosia: Alfadi, 2008), pp. 21-94

<sup>4</sup> Harry Anastasiou, “Communication across Conflict Lines: The Case of Ethnically Divided Cyprus,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (2002), pp. 581-596.

<sup>5</sup> Harry Anastasiou, (2002), pp. 581-596; Biran Mertan, “Children’s perception of national identity and in-group/ out-group attitudes: Turkish- Cypriot school children,” *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (2011), pp. 74-86.

sides a comprehensive plan for the solution of the Cyprus issue. The plan was approved by the leaders, and a referendum was held on both sides. 76 percent of the Greek Cypriots voted “no” and 65.9 percent of the Turkish Cypriots voted “yes”. So, the plan failed.

### ***Geneva Talks and the Cyprus Dispute***

With respect to the Geneva talks, if a united federal Cyprus is accepted, it means there will be a recognition of the political structure of the island by the EU. At present, only the south is recognized by the EU, with UN troops overseeing a buffer zone across the island. An agreement in Geneva would also have to be sanctioned by the UN.

At the Geneva talks, both Mustafa Akıncı and Nicos Anastasiades, the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot leaders respectively, were ready to represent their communities, along with the UN Secretary General’s Special Adviser on Cyprus, Espen Barth Eide. Officially, and as was explained through the media, the talks covered property, governance with a rotating presidency, the economy, territory, and security guarantees as similar with the earlier Cyprus dispute context. In other words, the topics covered in Geneva were similar to those covered in previous talks.

*“The Cyprus conflict is the second longest-lasting conflict of competing nationalism in the region of the Middle East, after the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”*

### ***Requests of the Parties: Important Concerns***

#### ***Territory***

The issue of land sharing – one of the most important topics in the negotiation process – is one of the six main issues addressed during the Geneva talks, and is a long-lasting discussion of which parties cannot agree upon. Similar to previous discussions, both Akıncı and Anastasiades presented their maps on the issue of land sharing, which is a crucial issue for external bodies as well. Essentially, the maps of the two sides were kept under a “steel bar” by the UN.

Turkish and Greek media statements have presented the official picture of land sharing, however the maps shown in the press do not reflect reality. Additionally, the maps will only be seen by the two community leaders, the UN Secretary General,

and two map specialists. It is clear that the maps are extremely important as there is a great reflection at the beginning of the talks. Moreover, the percentages of land sharing and gender mainstreaming, as determined by the maps, have also created a very serious debate.

*“There have been numerous attempts by international actors to solve the conflict and establish peace and security on the island.”*

The Turkish Cypriot side proposed to reduce the percentage of territory (surface area) which stands at 36 percent now, to 29.2 percent in the previous negotiation process, and this fact is included in UN reports. During the Geneva talks, the Greek Cypriot side, proposed to reduce the Turkish Cypriot Constituent State’s (which will take the place of the Turkish Republic

of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) in the next period) land area to 28.1 percent. This issue is frequently criticized by the authorities of the TRNC government – a polity which is still only recognized by Turkey today. This lingering issue has heightened the long-standing dispute between the parties, which has stalled the negotiations process.

### *Security and Guarantees*

Throughout the long history of the Cyprus problem and during the Geneva talks especially, one of the major disputes was the issue of security and guarantees. The Turkish Cypriot side wants Turkey to be a guarantor in the new partnership. For Turkish Cypriots, however, it is clear that there cannot be a solution in Cyprus without maintaining the system of security guarantors.

On the other hand, the Greek Cypriot side disagrees with this proposition. With the various approaches that have been proposed, the Greek Cypriot side frequently stresses that guarantors are not needed. In addition, they say that a united federal Cyprus should not necessarily be based on the security and guarantors power system.

President Akıncı, in response to a question posed by a member of the press, stressed that the security and guarantors issue was the main subject of the talks. Akıncı, continued to say that “security and guarantors are the second paragraph of the 2014 text. It is not invented recently and these six chapters shall be taken up interdependently. What is important to find a common basis that will be acceptable to all the parties. I see the security of Turkish Cypriots in Turkey’s guarantees.”

Akıncı, stressing that he sees the security of the Turkish Cypriots a responsibility of Turkey, elaborated:

The continuation of the guarantees is a well-known fact. What matters most is to find the point whereas the security of one community will not be seen as a threat by the other side. This is one of the objectives of this conference. Therefore, we should be a little patient and give them the chance to work towards this objective.<sup>6</sup>

### *Political Equality*

The Turkish Cypriot side is very determined with regards to political equality of both sides in a future united federal Cyprus. In this context, throughout the many years of negotiations but in particular at the Geneva talks, the Turkish Cypriot side demanded political equality. Regarding this request, the TRNC Presidential spokesman Barış Burcu stated that the indispensable elements of the political equality of Turkish Cypriot people are non-debatable including effective participation of the decision-making and a system of rotating presidency, and that the Greek Cypriot community should be prepared to face the realities regarding these matters.

*“The Greek Cypriot side frequently stresses that guarantors are not needed.”*

Burcu also noted that they are saddened with the continued behavior of the Greek Cypriot administration, which does not pave the way for preparing Greek Cypriot community for a federal solution, where Turkish Cypriots will have political equality and effective participation in the decision-making, but the other way round. “It is clear that such attitudes do not contribute towards the efforts of a federal solution based on the equality of the two constituent states,” he said.

Burcu, reminding the Greek Cypriots that Akıncı will not sign and put to a referendum a document that does not include said elements said, “we would like to emphasize once again that we will never sign a document that will not include the political equality, freedom, and security of the Turkish Cypriot people.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup>“Security and Guarantees are the second paragraph of the 2014 text. It is not invented recently,” 13 January 2017, <https://kktcb.org/en/security-and-guarantees-are-the-second-paragraph-of-the-2014-5810>

<sup>7</sup> Presidential Spokesperson Barış Burcu, “Political equality is one of the basic principles of a solution,” *Presidency of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus Website*, 6 February 2017, <https://kktcb.org/en/presidential-spokesperson-baris-burcu-political-equality-is-one-of-the-5827>

### *Recent Developments*

After the end of the Geneva peace talks and the return of the parties to the island, negotiations continued. In particular, one month after the Geneva talks, the decision of reviving *enosis* celebrations in schools – a 1950 referendum of the Greek Cypriot preference to annex the island to Greece – led to increased tensions once again between the two leaders. A political crisis emerged at the first meeting following this referendum; Anastasiadis abruptly abandoned the talks while discussing the decision to celebrate *enosis*, under the auspices of Special Advisor Eide.

*“The issue of enosis is of such a critical nature that the Turkish Cypriots cannot compromise.”*

Following the meeting, Akıncı explained that Greek Cypriot leader Anastasiadis said that the *enosis* celebration day story had caused significant damage to the settlement negotiations, and that Anastasiadis had left the meeting in the process of development. Akıncı stated that no compromise will be made on this issue. TRNC Prime

Minister Hüseyin Özgürkün also interpreted the attitude of Anastasiadis as “disrespectful.” The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, also condemned the events, stating that the attitude of Anastasiadis is unacceptable. Contrastingly, Anastasiadis expressed his disappointment after the meeting, saying it was the Turkish Cypriot leader who left the meeting without any explanation.

The issue of *enosis* is of such a critical nature that the Turkish Cypriots cannot compromise. Since the Greek Cypriot action before the 1960 RoC was established and the Greek Cypriots’ annulment of the anniversary of their attempt to “annihilate” the Turkish Cypriots could lead to a negative and final conclusion of resolution and peace negotiations. Moreover, if the Turkish Cypriots cannot be sure of their security, negotiations will have no meaning, which directly leads to a “frozen” process.

To conclude, the main aim is achieving a peaceful solution. However, negotiations will fail if the parties are distrustful of important issues, especially of those discussed in the Geneva talks – including security and guarantors. If the negotiations fail once again, motivation of peace and solution may disappear completely. For this reason, both leaders and sides should be very careful throughout the negotiation process.