

Cyprus – Time to Break the Deadlock

The brutal division of Cyprus comes at a high cost. The immediate human costs include communities separated by barbed wire and mines where trade and human relations have come to an end, where even phone calls and internet connections are problematic. A new generation of Cypriots has reached adulthood without contact among ethnic Greeks and ethnic Turks. Old animosities are reinforced and passed on to the next generation, today's youth, who carry real and imagined grievances, who are choked at the moment of intellectual formation by suspicion and hatred of others. Those in civil society and in politics who seek a way out of this dead end are ridiculed, isolated and denounced as traitors.

The economic costs are devastating. Though relatively prosperous, Southern Cyprus is harmed in its development. Northern Cyprus is in tragic economic decline, including losing a population of native Cypriots to be replaced by desperately poor immigrant Turks.

The international costs include more than 3 decades of United Nations Peacekeeping operations, (including Canadian participation for 29 years), tension in the already tense Eastern Mediterranean, a challenge to NATO relations, a looming crisis in EU enlargement, and, for students of the Huntington school, a potential point of conflict between religions and civilizations.

The United Nations, the Commonwealth, the U.S. and Europeans have all been unsuccessful in solving the Cyprus problem. There can be no doubt that it is the Cypriots themselves, and only the Cypriots, who can ultimately find a lasting, negotiated solution to the division of the island.

The present human costs, economic decline, and threat to international peace and security are unsustainable. Cyprus and Turkey are both aspirants to EU membership. The Economist has concluded (September 6, 2001) that "the growing prospect of the EU letting in the Greek-run Republic of Cyprus may actually provoke a conflict... perhaps even a war... A crisis looms." The need for a Cyprus solution has never been more urgent. The EU, especially, must urgently address this looming crisis.

Canadian Forces Peacekeepers and other Canadians have long been involved in seeking an end to the Cyprus conflict, promoting reconciliation, and offering assistance to Cypriots who seek a settlement of their divisions. Foreign Ministers, diplomats, academic experts, specialists in many fields, and the (former) Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security, have all been engaged.

Drawing on this Canadian experience, expertise and long-standing commitment to Cyprus, the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development (at the Department of Foreign Affairs) has undertaken three discussions from February 2000 to June 2001 to help encourage a Cypriot settlement of the Cyprus situation.