Can the Cyprus Problem be Resolved?

■ *by Christis Enotiades**

For a problem to be resolved, one has to examine its historical roots and try to identify the real causes.

The problem between the Greek and Turkish communities dates back to the mid-1950s when the Greek Cypriots took up arms against the colonial British rule. The Greek Cypriots demanded the right to self-determination and ultimately *Enosis* (union) with Greece. Faced with the animosity of the Greek Cypriots, the British brought into play the notorious 'divide and rule' policy. They used Turkish Cypriots to set up anti-riot police squads which were subsequently used to disperse riots by Greek Cypriots. This inevitably led to a hostile relationship between the two communities. The *Enosis* movement of the Greek Cypriots was counteracted by a nationalist movement, TMT, of the Turkish Cypriots which advocated for the partition of the island.

In 1960, Cyprus rid itself of the colonial rule and became an independent country. Its independence and constitutional order were guaranteed by three countries: Britain, Greece and Turkey. In 1963, following President Makarios' attempt to change the constitution by submitting the notorious 13-points to the guarantor countries, violence erupted between the two communities. The infamous Green Line was set-up by the British, dividing the capital Nicosia into two regions. This in fact was the first unofficial attempt by the British to partition the island. Following these events the Turkish Cypriots, who held the post of the Vice-President as well as ministerial posts in the government and seats in the House of Representatives, withdrew from the government and the legislature. The demographic, social and political rift between the two communities was a fact. From that point onwards, the Turkish Cypriots followed an isolationist policy, creating their own

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enclaves. Contact between Greek and Turkish Cypriots was thus limited.

The crucial question at this point is: How did the two communities, which had co-existed on the island for so long, grew apart and became enemies? There is no doubt of the key role played by the British.

However, the period in question, from 1955 to 1963 was marked by the emergence of nationalist extremists amongst both communities who committed violent crimes against members of the other community. These crimes scarred the two communities and created feelings of fear and insecurity. It was becoming apparent that the Greeks and Turks on the island could no longer live together as before. The nationalist extremists had achieved their goal which was to lead the two communities to a *de facto* partition.

The period of 1964-1967 was equally turbulent. Although intercommunal talks were taking place under the auspices of the UN, both the Greeks and Turks on the island were making military preparations to defend themselves against the other community. In 1967, the democratically-elected government of Greece was overthrown by a group of nationalist extremists and a military junta formed a government. From 1967-1974, President Makarios and his government were more pre-occupied with surviving their undermining by the Greek junta. The intercommunal talks between the two communities on the island were making relative progress. In 1974, the Greek Cypriot nationalist extremists led by the Greek junta overthrew President Makarios. Turkey, in its capacity as guarantor of the constitution of Cyprus invaded. Since then it illegally occupies 40% of the island's territory.

In 2004, following intensive talks the UN presented the two communities with a proposed solution, the so-called Anan Plan. It was not an agreed solution since it was the outcome of arbitration and strenuous timetables. Simultaneous referenda held in April 2004 resulted in a rejection of the proposed solution by the Greek community. The Turkish community voted in favour of the solution as it feared that it would be excluded from Cyprus' upcoming accession to the EU in May of the same year.

Today, thirty five years after the war of 1974, the leaders of the two communities, Dimitris Christofias and Mehmet Ali Talat, are making honest efforts through intensive negotiations to reach a lasting solution of the Cyprus problem. They are committed to reaching a mutually-agreed solution which will be decided upon by both communities in simultaneous referenda. Once more national extremists on both sides of the island are undermining these efforts.

If peace in Cyprus is going to have a fair chance the two communities must isolate these extreme elements. They should be bold to admit their mistakes, forgive each other for crimes committed in the past and look forward into the future.