

Araştırma Makalesi/ Research Article

**Cyprus in 1954 British Parliamentary Debates:
Discursive Structures, Actors and the Colonial
Imaginary**

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Makale Gönderim Tarihi
09.05.2025

Makale Kabul Tarihi
16.07.2025

Atıf Bilgisi/Reference Information

Chicago: Yorgancıoğlu, C., "Cyprus in 1954 British Parliamentary Debates: Discursive Structures, Actors and the Colonial Imaginary", *Vakanüvis-Uluslararası Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 10/ Özel Sayı: Vakanüvis 10. Yıl Özel Sayısı (Special Issue for the Decennial of Vakanüvis), (2025): 1412-1439.

APA: Yorgancıoğlu, C. (2025). Cyprus in 1954 British Parliamentary Debates: Discursive Structures, Actors and the Colonial Imaginary. *Vakanüvis-Uluslararası Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 10 (Özel Sayı: Vakanüvis 10. Yıl Özel Sayısı (Special Issue for the Decennial of Vakanüvis)), 1412-1439.

Abstract

This study aims to analyse the discursive boundaries and political priorities of the colonial administration by examining the Cyprus debates in the British Parliament in 1954 in a historical context. The Cyprus question became one of the most complex issues in the 1950s in the wake of the disintegration of the British Empire and moved to the centre of London politics due to demands for enosis (annexation of the island to Greece), the search for constitutional reform and international diplomatic pressure. The study analyses these

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debates through the tensions between the Greek-Turkish communities, humanitarian discourses (after the 1953 earthquake) and the colonial administration's search for legitimacy. The enosis movement, which intensified in 1954, positioned the island as "a problem at risk of international intervention". The study draws on qualitative methods (discourse and content analysis) and is based on the minutes of 47 meetings of the House of Commons and 3 meetings of the House of Lords (Hansard, 1954). As a result, it is argued that the Cyprus question is not only a colonial problem, but also a discursive field that reflects Britain's relationship to its identity, its colonial past and its democratic values. The parliamentary debates are seen as an example of the crystallisation of political contradictions on a local and global level.

Keywords: Cyprus Conflict; Colonial Administration; Enosis; British Parliament Debates; Discourse Analysis.

1954 İngiliz Parlamento Tartışmalarında Kıbrıs: Söylemsel Yapılar, Aktörler Ve Kolonyal Tahayyül

Öz

Bu çalışma, 1954 yılında İngiliz Parlamentosu'nda yapılan Kıbrıs tartışmalarını tarihsel bir bağlamda inceleyerek sömürge yönetiminin söylemsel sınırlarını ve siyasi önceliklerini analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Kıbrıs sorunu, Britanya İmparatorluğu'nun dağılmasının ardından 1950'li yılların en karmaşık konularından biri haline gelmiş ve enosis (adanın Yunanistan'a ilhakı) talepleri, anayasal reform arayışları ve uluslararası diplomatik baskılar nedeniyle Londra siyasetinin merkezine taşınmıştır. Çalışma, bu tartışmaları Rum-Türk toplumları arasındaki gerilimler, insani söylemler (1953 depreminden sonra) ve sömürge yönetiminin meşruiyet arayışı üzerinden analiz etmektedir. 1954'te yoğunlaşan enosis hareketi, adayı "uluslararası müdahale riski taşıyan bir sorun" olarak konumlandırmıştır. Çalışma nitel yöntemlerden (söylem ve içerik analizi) yararlanmakta ve Avam Kamarası'nın 47 ve Lordlar Kamarası'nın 3 toplantısının tutanaklarına dayanmaktadır (Hansard, 1954). Sonuç olarak, Kıbrıs sorununun sadece kolonyal bir sorun değil, aynı zamanda Britanya'nın kimliği, kolonyal geçmişi ve demokratik değerleriyle olan ilişkisini yansıtan söylemsel bir alan olduğu savunulmaktadır. Parlamento tartışmaları, yerel ve küresel düzeyde siyasi çelişkilerin kristalleşmesinin bir örneği olarak görülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kıbrıs İhtilafı; Sömürge Yönetimi; Enosis; İngiliz Parlamentosu Tartışmaları; Söylem Analizi.

Introduction

In the last phase of decolonisation, as the British Empire was collapsing, the Cyprus dispute was a very difficult problem to solve, lasting for many years and having different causes.¹ By the mid-1950s, the political atmosphere on the island was no longer confined to localised tensions but became one of the central items on the agenda of the British Parliament with enosis, the search for constitutional reform and international diplomatic pressure.² This made Cyprus both a colonial administrative problem and an ideological mirror of domestic politics.³ The main aim of this study is to demonstrate the discursive limits and political priorities of the colonial understanding of governance by analysing the debates on Cyprus in the British Parliament in 1954 in their historical context. In particular, issues such as constitutional reforms, enosis demands, post-earthquake humanitarian aid discourses⁴ and Greek diplomatic influences are analysed.

The debates focus not only on the issue of political sovereignty, but also on the representation of the tensions between the Greek and Turkish communities on the island and the way in which the colonial power was legitimised.⁵ While the debates on humanitarian aid that

¹ Dodd, Clement, *The History and the Politics of Cyprus*. London, 2010; Gazioğlu, Ahmet C. *İngiliz Yönetiminde Kıbrıs III (1951-1959): Enosis Karşı Taksim ve Eşit Egemenlik*, Lefkoşa, 1998; Ioannides, Christos P., *Cyprus Under British Colonial Rule: Culture, Politics, and the Movement toward Union with Greece, 1878–1954*, Maryland, 2018.

² Anderson, David M., "Policing and Communal Conflict: The Cyprus Emergency, 1954–60", *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 21/3, (1993), pp.177–207; French, David, *Fighting EOKA: The British Counter-Insurgency Campaign on Cyprus, 1955-1959*, Oxford, 2015; Novo, Andrew R., *On All Fronts: EOKA and the Cyprus Insurgency, 1955-1959*, UK, 2010; Stephanos G. Xydis, *Cyprus: conflict and conciliation, 1954-1958*, Columbus, 1967.

³ Özmatyatli, İçim Özenli, and Efdal Özkul, Ali, "20th Century British Colonialism in Cyprus through Education", *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 50, (2013), pp.1-20; Robert F. Holland, *Britain and the Revolt in Cyprus, 1954-1959*, Oxford, 1998.

⁴ Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss, eds. *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics*, Ithaca, 2008.

⁵ Scarinzi, Fausto. "Force Structure and Counterinsurgency Outcome: The Case of the Cyprus Emergency (1955-1959)", *Defence Studies*, 21/2, (2021), pp.204-225; Kelling,

followed the great earthquake of 1953 positioned Cyprus as a ‘social crisis area’, with the intensification of the enosis movement in 1954, the island became a ‘problem with the risk of international intervention and conflict’.⁶ This analysis was conducted on the basis of qualitative research methods such as discourse analysis and content analysis;⁷ a comprehensive evaluation was based on the transcripts of 47 meetings in the House of Commons and three meetings in the House of Lords. The main source material of the study consists of Hansard documents, the official archive of the British Parliament.⁸ These documents provide a detailed account not only of the political debates of the period, but also of the rhetorical devices used to justify and legitimise these policies.

In conclusion, this study aims to show that the Cyprus issue is not only a colonial problem but also a discursive field in which Britain’s relationship to its identity, its colonial past and its democratic values is reproduced.⁹ In this respect, the Cyprus debates are seen as an example in which political ideas and contradictions are crystallised at both local and global levels.

Reflection of the Cyprus Problem on Britain’s Domestic Politics (1954)

The year 1954 marked a turning point, when the Cyprus question was no longer just a foreign policy or colonial issue, but became one of

George Horton, *Countdown to rebellion: British policy in Cyprus, 1939-1955*, Connecticut, 1990.

⁶ Salâhi. R. Sonyel, “İngiliz yönetiminde Kıbrıs Türklerinin varlık savaşı (1878-1960)”, *Belleten*, LIX/224 (1995), pp.133-188; Cemal Yorgancıoğlu, *The Nationalisms in Cyprus Within International Context (1954-1964): A Critical Approach*, Nicosia, 2020; Emrah Balıkcıoğlu, “Birleşmiş Milletler (BM) Genel Kurulu’nun 14 Aralık 1954 Tarihli 750’nci Oturumu Işığında Türkiye’nin Kıbrıs Politikasının Değerlendirilmesi”, *Vakanüvis - Uluslararası Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 9/2 (Eylül 2024), pp.984-1027; Şükrü S. Gürel, *Kıbrıs tarihi, 1878-1960: kolonyalizm, ulusçuluk, ve uluslararası politika*, İstanbul, 1985.

⁷ Robert K. Yin, *Case study research: Design and methods*, 5th. ed., CA: Sage Publications, 2009.

⁸ See Hansard, 1954. *Sittings in 1954* (Parliamentary Debates). <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/sittings/1954/index.html>

⁹ Ker-Lindsay, James, *The Cyprus problem: What Everyone Needs to Know*, Oxford, 2011.

the priorities on the domestic political agenda of the London. During this period, the emergence of the enosis demands, the intensifying debates over constitutional arrangements and the increasing social tensions on the island led to a clear divergence of opinion between the different ideological camps in British domestic politics.

The agenda of both Houses of Parliament was much fuller than in previous years. Over the course of 1954, 47 debates took place in the House of Commons and three debates in the House of Lords on the subject of 'Cyprus' alone. The fact that these debates reached a total of 50 sittings shows - when analysing the topics - that the issue was not only related to the geopolitics of the island, but had a multi-layered agenda, with topics such as 'welfare policy, public order, media control and religious representations' not being directly linked.¹⁰

Against this background, this study analyses the distribution of debates that took place in the two Houses in 1954 and the negotiations surrounding these debates under two sub-themes.

In terms of content, the debates in both Houses of Parliament were not limited to highly political issues such as independence, decolonisation and territorial status. The debates were entitled 'Cyprus (new constitution), the enosis movement, Greek representation, aid to earthquake victims, Athens Radio, Cypriot immigrants and the Greek Orthodox Church (pamphlet)' and covered a wide range of issues that were both closely related and distinct. This diversity of topics is indicative of the increasing importance of the island in the London public sphere and its emergence as a multidimensional issue that went beyond geostrategic - humanitarian, diplomatic and cultural - aspects and represented the beginning of a deeper and more nuanced debate.¹¹

During 1954, debates were frequently labelled in terms of "commonwealth, constitutional arrangements, public opinion and security, development, welfare, the future, anti-enforcement and press

¹⁰ See Hansard, *Sittings in 1954*

¹¹ See Hansard, *Sittings in 1954*

laws, self-government, schoolteachers, the wine industry, lorry drivers or colonial administration” rather than “foreign policy”. This indicates that the Cyprus conflict is not just a foreign policy issue, but a debate of a holistic nature that deals with multi-layered sociological issues directly related to values and the understanding of colonial rule.¹²

Another detail when analysing the parliamentary speeches was the differences in the way the MPs addressed the issues. This shows that they considered the issue not only in the context of the government’s foreign policy, but also in line with their own political views. For example, Labour MPs questioned the legitimacy of colonial rule, the Conservatives focused on public policy and the future of the Empire as well as strategic interests (Eastern Mediterranean), while the limited Liberal MPs (with the exception of the National Liberals who were in coalition with the Conservatives) were more concerned with development and freedoms more broadly.¹³

The debates of 1954, which are the focus of this study, show clear differences between the two chambers, both in terms of the language of discourse and ideological intensity. The House of Commons provides a platform where policy concerns are paramount, where political parties must defend their ideological positions, where a climate of rigour and ruthlessness prevails, where statements can be made directly to individuals, and where MPs must maintain the political balance in their constituencies, with the region they represent and their family backgrounds shaping their policies. In this sense, the House of Lords is a platform where quieter and much more long-term thoughts/opinions can be expressed. As a result, speeches were sometimes highly charged, partisan and critical. Issues such as enosis, self-determination, constitutional reform and the moral limits of colonialism were particularly present in the Labour Party’s contributions. Thus the speeches of MPs such as Fenner Brockway,

¹² See Hansard, *Sittings in 1954*

¹³ See Hansard, *Sittings in 1954*

James Griffiths and Edward L. Mallalieu generated considerable pressure to listen to the demands of the people.¹⁴

In contrast, the debates in the House of Lords were dominated by former colonial governors, diplomats and Lords with military backgrounds. The language used in these debates tended to be technocratic and diplomatic, often framing the issue in the context of Middle East security, NATO relations and geopolitical balance. Issues such as security concerns, the influence of Athens and the future of strategic bases take centre stage.¹⁵

This dichotomy reveals not only the nature of institutional structures, but also discursive differences in how the Cyprus question is defined by which actors. The House of Commons approached the issue from a more “social and ideological” perspective, while the House of Lords looked at it from a more “strategic and institutional” perspective.¹⁶

The Place of Cyprus in the Parliamentary Debates of 1954: A Numerical Overview

The year 1954 stands out as a period in which Cyprus became an increasingly visible and controversial issue in the British Parliament. In that year, Cyprus was mentioned directly and indirectly in a total of 50 session titles, 47 in the House of Commons and 3 in the House of Lords. This statistical visibility does not include indirect mentions. This statistical visibility does not include indirect mentions. It shows that Cyprus is increasingly becoming part of a broader political debate, not only as a colony, but also in the areas of international relations, security, human rights and social policy.¹⁷

¹⁴ See Hansard, *Sittings in 1954*

¹⁵ Cemal Yorgancıoğlu and Şevki Kıralp, “Turco-British relations, Cold War and reshaping the Middle East: Egypt, Greece and Cyprus (1954–1958)”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 55/6 (2019), pp.914-931.

¹⁶ See Hansard, *Sittings in 1954*

¹⁷ See Hansard, *Sittings in 1954*

While some of these debates were directly about Cyprus, others made contextual references to developments on the island and only addressed the island issue to a limited extent in the context of general foreign policy, defence or financial arrangements. The way in which Cyprus appeared on the parliamentary agenda in 1954 as a main topic or secondary topic therefore gives an important indication of the periodic intensity of the issue. To make an explicit statistical note here, 1954 marks the beginning of parliamentary traffic on the topic of 'Cyprus' between 1954 and 1959, and although the content of the texts is crucial, it accounts for only 6.5 per cent of the volume of texts (compared to the total word count) or 5.4 per cent of the total topics of discussion. These raw statistics are significant in that they provide a picture of the heartbeat of the Cyprus issue in Parliament, and therefore in London, between 1954 and 1959.¹⁸

An analysis of the temporal distribution of discussions throughout the year shows a clear increase in discussions on Cyprus in February, July, October and December. The increase in these periods generally coincides with the following developments:

- **February 1954:** an overview of Cyprus (education, local government, economic and social development, constitutional issues) and discussions related to the Enosis demands¹⁹

- **July 1954:** Demands for a new constitution, administrative reforms and the future of the island were discussed.²⁰

- **October 1954:** Greece presents its Enosis demands on international platforms.²¹

¹⁸ See Hansard, *1950-1959, Sittings in 1950s* (Parliamentary Debates). <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/sittings/1950s>

¹⁹ HL Deb 23 February 1954 vol 185 cc1068-98; Cemal Yorgancıoğlu, "Kıbrıs'ın sosyal ve siyasal manzarası: 1954 yılı Lordlar Kamarası'nda bir tartışma ve gelecek vizyonları" eds. Gökçe Y. Peler, Zeki Akçam ve Ergenekon Savrun, *Kuzey Kıbrıs'ın İstirdadının 50. Yılı Anısına Kıbrıs Çalışmaları*, İstanbul: Hiperyayın, 2024, pp.501-516.

²⁰ HC Deb 28 July 1954 vol 531 cc517-71

²¹ HC Deb 28 October 1954 vol 531 cc2142-54

- **December 1954:** Radio Athens broadcasts create tensions in domestic politics and propaganda debates.²²

These periodic intensities not only reflect developments on the island, but are also an indicator of the mood of the British public and the political disputes between the parties.

Thematic Breakdown: The Production of Meaning Through Cyprus

Having analysed the content of these 50 session titles, it is possible to break down parliamentary interest in Cyprus not only quantitatively but also thematically. The sessions focussed on the following five main themes:

- **Enosis and debates on the political future:** These debates, which revolved around the political status of the island, the right to self-determination and the demand for unification with Greece (enosis), were particularly intense among representatives of the Labour Party and a limited number of Liberal Party members. The conservative members of the government, on the other hand, regarded these demands as hostile and responded with the dimensions of “sovereignty” and “strategy”.

- **Military strategy and defence policy:** Cyprus’ place in NATO’s defence architecture, the protection of British interests in the Middle East and the future of military bases came to the fore, particularly in the House of Lords. The island was included in the “defence of Cyprus” and “defence plans of N.A.T.O.”

- **Earthquake relief and social policy:** Humanitarian aid measures following the great earthquake of 1953 were put on the agenda at various meetings in 1954. The discussions formed an important discursive space, not only in terms of technical assistance, but also in terms of colonial governance and public relations strategies. Both Liberals and Labour members raised the issue seriously.

²² HC Deb 08 December 1954 vol 535 cc933-49

- **The status of Turkish Cypriots and minority rights:** In 1954, the status of the Turkish Cypriot community was not as clear as that of the Greek Cypriots. Even those in favour of Enosis and the aspirations of 80% of the island's population (e.g. John Parker) could not hide their concern about what the Greeks had recently done on the island of Crete. In speech of Oliver Lyttelton about the Turkish Cypriots or the Turkish-speaking population of Cyprus, "the position which Turkey occupies in the defence plans of N.A.T.O.? Are they aware that 18 per cent, of the population of Cyprus is Turkish-speaking? Is no account to be taken of these facts?"²³

- Reflections on British public opinion and the media: The Radio Athens broadcasts, the protests reflected in British public opinion and the politically influential nature of Cyprus news in the newspapers were assessed by some MEPs, particularly in the context of "hostile broadcasts", "propaganda" and "subversion". This triggered a debate that redefined the role of public opinion in colonial affairs.

While these thematic headings illustrate the multidimensional position of Cyprus in British domestic politics, they also provide a framework for analysing the ideological infrastructure of parliamentary discourse. This is because each issue gains significance not only through its subject matter, but also through the question of which actor, in which language and with which value framework it is articulated.

In the following section, the language, metaphors, rhetorical strategies and discursive positioning between the actors used in these debates are analysed in detail. Thus, Cyprus is not only analysed as part of colonial rule, but also as a discursive space in which the imperial imaginary is reproduced.

Discursive Lines in the Parliamentary Debates on Cyprus in 1954

Throughout 1954, the debates in the British Parliament on Cyprus were more than a matter of administration and defence; they were a battleground of ideology and discourse. The content of these

²³ HC Deb 28 July 1954 vol 531 cc517-71

negotiations was not necessarily overlapping concepts. On the one hand, there were calls for the continuation of colonialism; on the other, there were voices calling for independence and a new constitution. The parliamentary documents show that the decisions regarding Cyprus were not only underpinned by logical arguments, but also by speeches intended to convince the population. These documents clearly show the language used in the debates of the time.

The Status of Cyprus: “A Colony or a Strategic Asset?”

Another important theme in the parliamentary speeches on Cyprus was security concerns. The island was seen not only as a colony, but also as a geopolitically important military base for the post-colonisation period, as the fall of Egypt was imminent. Government ministers described the island as a vital part of the defence network in the Eastern Mediterranean and frequently emphasised its strategic importance. Foreign Secretary Henry Hopkinson, for example, declared in a speech on 28 July 1954: “it is quite clear that there can be no question of any change of sovereignty in Cyprus, no question of any change in sovereignty”. The Minister, who was put under pressure during the negotiations, went further and clarified his words and gave a historic reply:

“it has always been understood and agreed that there are certain territories in the Commonwealth which, owing to their particular circumstances, can never expect to be fully independent. I think the right hon. Gentleman will agree that there are some territories which cannot expect to be that. I am not going as far as that this afternoon, but I have said that the question of the abrogation of British sovereignty cannot arise—that British sovereignty will remain”.²⁴

In such statements, the island was assessed in the context of Britain’s military and regional interests rather than from the perspective of the people’s right to self-determination. Opponents emphasised the free will of the Cypriots by invoking the principle of self-determination. For example: Fenner Brockway, 28 April 1954: “May I ask if the people

²⁴ HC Deb 28 July 1954, vol 531, cc504-514

of Cyprus could have self-determination to decide their association?"²⁵ or in the parliamentary session of 20 December 1954 when he said, "Does it not represent the demand of the great majority of the people of Cyprus for the self-determination which this country has guaranteed in the Atlantic Charter and in many other declarations?"²⁶ This discourse argues that the fate of the island should be determined by the democratic will of the people and not by military interests or diplomacy. The tension between these two approaches formed the basis for the debate on the status [future] of Cyprus.

The Enosis Demand: "A Justified Aspiration or a Dangerous Deviation?"

The demand for Enosis (union with Greece) was one of the most polarising issues in the parliamentary debates of 1954, with some MPs seeing it as a legitimate and historic goal. John Parker, for example, stated on 23 July 1954: "The Greeks settled in Cyprus before they did in much of the present Greek mainland"²⁷ or questioned by Edward Mallalieu on 28 July 1954: "How can it possibly be said that we have our own interests in mind in refusing the legitimate aspirations of the Cypriot people?"²⁸

In his reply, Lord Winster stated that "[enosis] is a movement which provides a common platform for the church and the communists (strange bedfellows), which I think must probably be exceptional over the whole of the world".²⁹ Government MPs declared that "enosis will have the gravest effect upon Turkish opinion [...] but it has not been made by anybody so far", or as Crossman put it, "the best pointer to the genuineness of Enosis is that the Communists have exploited it; they are no fools, and they are on a winner there".³⁰

²⁵ HC Deb 28 April 1954 vol 526 cc1593-41

²⁶ HC Deb 20 December 1954, vol 535, cc2436-41

²⁷ HC Deb 15 July 1954, vol 530, cc1841-52

²⁸ HC Deb 15 July 1954, vol 531, cc517-71

²⁹ HL Deb 23 February 1954, vol 185 cc1068-98

³⁰ HC Deb 28 July 1954, vol 531 cc517-71

In another speech at the same meeting, Niall Macpherson said, “[w]e should be very careful of this sentimental urge. One of the great troubles has been that the opposite point of view has not been sufficiently expressed in Cyprus”.³¹ She was referring in particular to communism, which was developing ever more rapidly on the island. This discourse is not only about a political decision, but also about a risk assessment in the context of minority rights, security balances and international relations.

Rhetorical Codes: “Peace, Loyalty and Agitation”

As far as the use of language was concerned, the government and opposition positioned themselves in defence and attack positions depending on the course of the debates and constructed their discourses simultaneously. Expressions such as ‘progress’, ‘stability’ and ‘achievements’ were used to legitimise the successes of the British administration and the maintenance of the status quo. Thus, in his speech on Cyprus on 23 February 1954, Lord Winster used the phrase “wise guidance and steady progress” for the period of his successor Sir Andrew Wright’s governorship, emphasising that the island was “progress and headway”.³² The Earl of Munster, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, also stated in the session of 28 July 1954 that the British Colonial Administration “[had] maintained and [is] still maintains stable conditions in this vital strategic area” and that “Her Majesty’s Government are resolved to continue their vigorous policy of economic development in Cyprus”.³³

In contrast, terms such as ‘agitation’, ‘propaganda’ and ‘boycott’ were used to portray the Enosis movement and its supporters as illegitimate or under foreign influence. Such terms imply that the popular movements were the movement of forces that would not normally come together, or that they were fuelled by external influences such as certain groups (notably the church and the

³¹ HC Deb 28 July 1954, vol 531 cc517-71

³² HL Deb 23 February 1954 vol 185 cc1068-98

³³ HC Deb 28 July 1954 vol 189 cc202-42

communists) rather than internal demands. Lord Winster testified against the 1948 constitutional proposal that “apart from destroying the consultative assembly and the hope of a constitution, the Church and the Communists simply dug their heels in and said, ‘Enosis or nothing’”.³⁴ The Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lennox-Boyd, explicitly described the Enosis movement as “agitation” and referred to “subversive publications” and “hostile propaganda” coming from Greece.³⁵

Colonial Secretary Alan Lennox-Boyd declared that the “[enosis] agitation by certain Church leaders and Communists” must not be allowed to overshadow the achievements of British rule, and said that in recent events “the greater proportion of those arrested in Nicosia were Communists shows where much of the responsibility lies”.³⁶

The concept of “loyalty” is also used to emphasise the attachment of the Turkish minority on the island to British rule and their rejection of Enosis. Major Legge-Bourke, for example, stated that the Turkish Cypriots had shown that “the attitude of the Turkish-speaking minority has been one of outstanding dignity, restraint, and loyalty to this country?”.³⁷

These rhetorical codes portray the situation on the island in the context of “peace”, “stability,” and “progress” brought about by British rule, while dissenting voices and the Enosis movement are portrayed as the result of “agitation”, “propaganda”, “boycott,” or “provocation” by certain groups such as the “church and communists” by external help with the aim of overshadowing the “real achievements” of British rule and emphasising the “phoney” (for nature of the plebiscite) or “rogue” nature of the movement.

Given the rhetorical differences between the parties, it is important to consider who is defending what. Throughout 1954, the Cyprus

³⁴ HL Deb 23 February 1954 vol 185 cc1068-98

³⁵ HC Deb 28 April 1954 vol 526 cc1593-4; HC Deb 8 December 1954 vol 535 cc933-4

³⁶ HC Deb 20 December 1954 vol 535 cc2436-41

³⁷ HC Deb 15 December 1954 vol 535 cc1752-3

debates in the British Parliament served as a platform for the expression of differing political views on the status and future of the island. Conservative, Labour and Liberal MPs held differing views on Cyprus. The Conservative government and its supporters emphasised the importance of maintaining “stability in an important strategic area” on the island, continuing “economic development” and preserving “sovereignty”, presenting constitutional progress as a “first step” but making it clear that they did not envisage a “change of sovereignty”. They associated the Enosis movement with “agitation” and labelled “church leaders and communists” — a “unique combination not found in any other colony” — as the movement’s agents.

On the other hand, Labour MPs in parliament were openly philhellenic, questioning the government on matters of principle and attacking it relentlessly. These Labour MPs argued that they could even accept the plebiscite conducted by the Church, even though it was a religious authority that would set a bad example for other colonial peoples awaiting their liberation, at the cost of ignoring the island’s particular situation. Despite the limited number of representatives in parliament, the Liberals were primarily concerned with the most basic issues, such as “freedom of speech and the press” and the principle of “self-determination”. The year 1954 thus showed that debates about the future were still in their infancy when the Cyprus question became a direct subject of political discussion.

In 1954, the Cyprus debates with their multi-layered identity were caught between imperial attitudes on the one hand and post-colonialism on the other. While the conservatives clung to concepts such as “security” and “civilisation”, the Labour Party and the liberals adopted more universal discourses and attempted to create a space of legitimacy for themselves. These opposing salvos can be understood as a struggle for discursive hegemony, that was exacerbated by the Cold War.

Political Parties and Cyprus in the Parliamentary Debates of 1954: Discourses, Actors and Ideological Camps

Throughout 1954, the Cyprus debates in the British Parliament functioned not only as a colonial issue but also as an ideological arena reflecting British political thinking. The representatives of the Labour Party, the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party in Parliament developed different, even contradictory policies on the status and future of Cyprus and engaged in very serious debates. On one side of the parliamentary debate was the right to self-determination and self-government, on the other the preservation of the British Empire and the existing colonial structure. Although the maintenance of order (British sovereignty over the island) in general could not be criticised much or UN Art. 2(7) could not be extended, it was criticised in the context of basic human rights and the right to self-determination. The only problem with this was that the right to self-determination and the concept of Enosis (the desire for unification with another country and not independence) were coupled together, while on the other hand Enosis and the communists on the island were glued together. The security architecture of the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean and the future of the island in the Commonwealth were paramount in the minds of the ruling Conservatives. This section analyses in detail the rhetoric of the parties' representatives in Parliament and the ideological structure behind it.

The Conservative Party: Defence of the Status Quo and Strategic Calculations

Throughout 1954, Conservative government ministers and MPs were on the defensive, as if preparing for the early stages of the gathering wind, positioning Cyprus as a "vital strategic area" at the centre of Britain's defence architecture and stressing the importance of preserving "sovereignty". This approach was evident in the speeches of colonial ministers Alan Lennox-Boyd and Henry Hopkinson, as well as C.E. Mott-Radclyffe, W.T. Aitken and Major H. Legge-Bourke. Alan Lennox-Boyd, for example, stated: "In the present troubled world situation we cannot foresee a time when relinquishing our sovereignty

over Cyprus would be compatible with our responsibilities for security in the Middle East”.³⁸ According to Aitken, “the first reason I have given why we should remain in Cyprus is security”,³⁹ emphasising the indispensability of security.

The Conservatives also argued that constitutional progress was only possible under “stable conditions”. The maintenance of ‘law and order’ was seen as the basis for any progress. The agitations of the enosis movement were seen as a rejection of the constitutional proposals and an obstacle to the island’s progress. ‘peace and stability’ was defined as the political situation that had to be maintained and defended at all costs.

Government ministers and their supporting MPs often tried to paraphrase the issue by repeating the problems of ‘communists’, ‘church leaders’ and ‘propaganda’. Sir Anthony Eden and Alan Lennox-Boyd went further, openly using phrases such as ‘enemy propaganda’ and ‘subversive publications’ and invoking the duo of church leaders and communists in their defence. This rhetoric was intended to glorify the (actual) success of the government and portray the Enosis movement as an illegitimate movement that was preventing this success. Ultimately, the government, which viewed the island more from a security perspective, sought to place the demands of the people on the island in a geopolitical framework and viewed the island more as a strategic advantage.

Labour Party: Self-Determination and Moral Responsibility

In 1954, Labour MPs developed a more critical and universalist discourse on Cyprus. Figures such as Edward Mallalieu, James Griffiths, Fenner Brockway, John Parker, and Aneurin Bevan exerted pressure on the government by advocating both human rights and an anti-colonial ethic. At the meeting on 28 June 1954, James Griffiths replied to the Conservatives, who had played down the Enosis demands: “So far as

³⁸ HC Deb 28 October 1954 vol 531 cc2142-54

³⁹ HC Deb 28 July 1954 vol 531 cc517-71

Cyprus is concerned, it is not proposed that this constitutional development shall take its normal course which it has in other places, in conformity with the policy of this House?"⁴⁰ This statement clearly emphasises the universality of the right to self-determination. Griffiths portrays the colonial exception approach applied to Cyprus as inherently contradictory and morally weak.

Another strong criticism came from Richard Crossman. Crossman criticised British defence reasoning in the Middle East, arguing that it continued to make the same mistakes in Cyprus:

"For generations we neglected Cyprus. We kept it in cold storage, in the belief that there would be a use for it some day. Now it is going to be useful—because we have scuttled out of Egypt. But we are going to make exactly the same mistake in Cyprus as we have made in Egypt and elsewhere. We know already what the will of the population is. It is overwhelmingly in favour of incorporation with Greece. [...] but democracy means the right to have a low standard of living if that is what the people want and if that is the way they want to live their own lives. [...] Human beings sometimes prefer to be free with fewer of the material advantages".⁴¹

Tom Driberg, for example, criticised the government's discourse on self-government in the same session, saying:

"That is the truth of the matter and that is why I said that all this talk about progress and self-government was hypocritical, when, in the next breath, the Minister was saying to them, as it were, 'Of course, we are not going to let you have proper self-government ever, because you are strategically too important to our interests'".⁴²

This statement called into question the British position in Cyprus not only for geopolitical reasons, but also because of moral contradictions. Driberg criticises that the official rhetoric towards the Cypriot people contradicts the promises of democracy and progress, while the true intention is to protect colonial interests. Such outbursts show that the

⁴⁰ HC Deb 28 July 1954 vol 531 cc504-14

⁴¹ HC Deb 28 July 1954 vol 531 cc517-71

⁴² HC Deb 28 July 1954 vol 531 cc517-71

discursive divergence between the parties is not only political, but also ethical.

Liberal Party: Limited Support, Dual Discourses

In 1954, the Liberal Party MPs took a cautious and reserved position on the Cyprus question, moving between the hard-line stance of the Conservatives, who wanted to preserve the status quo, and the more open advocacy of self-determination by the Labour Party. In this context, Liberal MPs, while not directly supporting the call for Enosis, made statements emphasising the improvement of conditions on the island in areas such as freedom of expression, economic development and human rights. The leader of the Liberal Party, Clement Davies, questioned in his speech whether the government was taking the Cypriot people's right to self-government seriously. Davies said: "It is only right that we should know exactly what he means by that. Does he really mean, whether it is a long step or a finicky step, that this will lead to full self-government by the people of Cyprus?"⁴³ In another speech, he questioned how "the Government do not contemplate any change whatever of sovereignty" could be reconciled "with the solemn pledge made in the Atlantic Charter by the Prime Minister on behalf on this country, in a time of peril, that people would be allowed to determine their own form of government?"⁴⁴

In several speeches on 24 February and 20 October 1954, Donald Wade spoke about the fate of economic development plans in Cyprus and the legal restrictions on human rights. In particular, he questioned the amount of financial aid provided after the 1953 earthquake and its impact on the island's development prospects and argued in favour of the abolition or relaxation of laws restricting personal liberty, freedom of speech and freedom of the press. "Take steps to repeal or relax the existing laws in Cyprus restricting freedom of speech, freedom of the

⁴³ HC Deb 28 July 1954 vol 531 cc504-14

⁴⁴ HC Deb 28 October 1954 vol 531 cc2142-54

Press and liberty of the subject”⁴⁵ and emphasise that legislation must not contradict democratic values.

Given these data, the Liberal Party’s position on Cyprus in 1954 was neither an explicit support of Enosis nor an absolute defence of the status quo. On the contrary, the party adopted a more cautious and conciliatory stance on structural issues such as human rights, governance and economic development, positioning itself as a kind of “third way” between the polarisations in the parliamentary debates.

If one deciphers the codes of the discourse in this context, it becomes clearer which words were used with which intentions. Some terms that were frequently used in the parliamentary debates on Cyprus reveal the ideological foundations of the discourse:

- “Strategic”, “law and order”, “sovereignty” → Conservative discourses of colonial control.

- “Self-determination”, “self-government”, “majority of the people” → Labour’s rights-based universalist discourse.

- “Agitation”, “propaganda”, “church and the communists” → Enosis delegitimisation discourse.

- “Freedom of speech”, “liberty of the subject”, “Charter of Human Rights” → Liberal Party’s freedom-based universalist discourse.

Beyond their technical meaning in parliament, these words and expressions should be seen as rhetorical tools used to express and support political positions.

The Continuity of Imperial Discourse: The 1954 Parliamentary Debates on the Positioning of Cyprus

Since 1954, the Cyprus question, which came on the agenda of the British parliament, has been a multi-layered, multi-faceted, multi-dimensional, and multi-complex situation, reproducing on the one hand the imperial imaginary and on the other the loss of world domination,

⁴⁵ HC Deb 20 October 1954 vol 531 c1185-87

which is never a temporary or current administrative crisis. The main axis of the debate revolved around the readiness of the decolonised peoples for self-government and their future in the Commonwealth. In this respect, Cyprus is indeed an outlier. Traditional colonial narratives do not work well. The population (82 per cent of the island) rejects self-government and wants to be annexed to another allied country (Greece), but the island is leased by another ally (Turkey) (there are very serious promises - like the promise of support against a Russian invasion) and has become a linchpin in the changing security architecture of the Middle East - the last bastion in the Eastern Mediterranean, so to speak. The prominent themes in this framework are the accusation of foreign interference, the reproduction of civilisational discourse, the expectation of loyalty, and the discursive suppression of social realities.

External Influences and Illegitimisation of Domestic Demands

The main axis of the discussions in 1954 was the refusal of the Greek Cypriots to co-operate politically. Their co-operation with the communists, especially with the church leaders, with regard to their dreams of enosis was frequently mentioned, especially by those in power such as Gilbert Longden, Anthony Eden and Alan Lennox-Boyd. The unity of political discourse with Greece (a foreign country, albeit an ally) and the broadcasts of Radio Athens were openly denounced as subversive. Gilbert Longden, in particular, described the broadcasts of Radio Athens as “subversive and hostile”, while William Aitken stressed that “unless they enjoy the advantage of self-government and the conduct of their own affairs”,⁴⁶ local aspirations were not so much in their own name as illegitimate. Such accusations are a common strategy in classic colonial narratives. The will of the local population is discredited by claiming that the resistance was not spontaneous but controlled. In this way, the demands of the Greek Cypriots are not only suppressed, but their position as legitimate political actors are also denied.

⁴⁶ HC Deb 28 July 1954 vol 531 cc517-71

Updated Forms of Civilisational Discourse

Another discourse that was frequently mentioned in the debates was Britain's administrative and cultural mission in Cyprus, which was defined as an "obligation" or "responsibility". In particular, Lord Winster's speech of 23 February 1954 emphasised that "the other characteristic, of course, is their fear of taking responsibility, especially political responsibility" for the Cypriots, which was the result of centuries of subjugation. Such statements show how the 'civilising mission' inherited from the Victorian era was still kept alive in the 1950s. On the one hand, British values are universalised; on the other, local political and cultural demands on the island are placed above these values. Imperial supremacy is thus legitimised not only strategically, but also through a moral claim to justice.⁴⁷ An example of this is Major Legge-Bourke's statement: "We have a great advantage over those people. We are far more civilised and cultured in many ways"⁴⁸ is the clearest proof of this. From another perspective, even Aneurin Bevan, though he was in opposition, criticised them by saying, "[w]e are still as imperialist as we ever were but we are not as strong as we were"⁴⁹ and did not deny that they were an imperialist power with their government and opposition and that they were the carriers of this mission.

The Colonial Meaning of Aid: Expectation of Gratitude and the Creation of Political Cohesion

In the 1954 parliamentary debates, humanitarian aid to Cyprus after the great Cypriot earthquake at the end of 1953 was presented as much more than technical assistance. The aid was presented as an expression of the generosity and civilising mission of the colonial administration, which expected loyalty from the Cypriots. The Earl of Munster's statement of 23 February 1954 clearly illustrates this discourse: "Since the earliest days of the benevolent British occupation. We may well be proud of our achievements".⁵⁰ Such statements imply that aid is not an

⁴⁷ Yorgancıoğlu, *ibid.* 2024

⁴⁸ HC Deb 28 July 1954 vol 531 cc517-71

⁴⁹ HC Deb 28 July 1954 vol 531 cc517-71

⁵⁰ HL Deb 23 February 1954 vol. 185 cc.1068-98

undeserved right, but a favour and thus an expected *quid pro quo*, i.e. political cooperation. The increase in local demands and calls for self-government in the post-aid period was described by some parliamentarians as “disappointing” and coded as a form of ingratitude towards the bona fide endeavours of the British administration. Such assessments suggest that aid becomes an instrument of questioning rather than legitimisation if Cypriots do not show loyalty.

Furthermore, in another session Lennox-Boyd indirectly expressed the expected behaviour of the people as follows: “All responsible Cypriots should now co-operate in making a success of this important move towards self-government” and “the best contribution of the people of Cyprus would be for them to discuss the constitution with the Governor...”.⁵¹ Such statements show that aid is not seen as an ungrateful humanitarian gesture, but as part of the political cohesion that the population expects. Aid was defined as a unilateral effort, not a dialogue; cooperation was defined as expected loyalty in return. Thus, the legitimate political demands of the Cypriots were reconceptualised in the colonial mind-set as a kind of “refusal of mercy” or “resistance to civilisation”.

Silences, Suppressions and Blind Spots of Colonial Discourse

One of the most striking aspects of the 1954 debates is that the Turkish Cypriot community was barely mentioned. The debates focussed on the political aspirations of the Greek Cypriot community - particularly enosis - the influence of Greece and the strategic position of Britain, while ignoring the multi-ethnic character of the island. Labour MP John Parker’s statement that “the Turkish minority have every right to be very seriously concerned as to what their position would be if the island was transferred to Greece [...] in the case of Crete”⁵² is but a reminder of this fact. Conservative MP Oliver Lyttelton’s statement

“Are they aware that 18 per cent, of the population of Cyprus is Turkish-speaking? Is no account to be taken of these facts? [...] It is worth

⁵¹ HC Deb 28 October 1954 vol 531 cc2142-54

⁵² HC Deb 23 July 1954 vol 530 cc1841-52

making the point that 18 per cent. of the population of Cyprus are Turkish-speaking, but it has not been made by anybody so far”⁵³

and the statement by Conservative MP Captain Robert Ryder: “In contrast with the irresponsible conduct of the Greeks, the attitude of the Turkish-speaking minority has been one of outstanding dignity, restraint and loyalty to this country? Will my right hon. Friend bear their interests particularly in mind?”,⁵⁴ revealing the damaging reality. The demands, security or identity of the Turkish Cypriots were left out of the debate. This silence shows that the colonial imaginary was shaped not only by what was said, but also by what was not said. In this way, the social realities that were suppressed in the discourse harboured the seeds of the tensions that would later develop.

Inter-party Differences and Discursive Continuity

The parliamentary debates of 1954 revealed not only differences in political positions, but also the discursive continuity of the imperial imaginary. The Conservative Party defended the colonial structure on the grounds of strategic necessity and the maintenance of order, while the Labour Party opposed it on the grounds of moral responsibility and the right of peoples to self-determination. However, this opposition did not mean a radical rejection of the colonial discourse, but on the contrary led to its reproduction with formal differences. The Liberal Party, on the other hand, with its limited number of MPs, tried to adopt a vague and conciliatory position that could not go beyond the liberal discourse, but this position was often ineffective. Despite these party differences, the Cyprus question proved to be not only an administrative problem but also a discursive field in which the imperial imaginary was reproduced. In this discursive struggle, Cyprus became not only a piece of land but also an ideological stage on which identities were redefined, some peoples were made visible and others were silenced.

⁵³ HC Deb 28 July 1954 vol 531 cc517-71

⁵⁴ HC Deb 15 December 1954 vol 535 cc1752-3

Conclusion: Cyprus in the Parliamentary Debates of 1954 - Discursive Location and Political Consequences

1954 is regarded as the year in which the Cyprus issue, which parliamentarians felt was unlike any other colonial nation (the Empire had to defend itself against an external power, its Greek friends, on the one hand, and against an indigenous population that was not demanding full independence, on the other), moved to the focus of domestic politics in London. In February 1954, Lord Winster, the former Governor of Cyprus, raised the issue in a lengthy statement and in total the issue was discussed directly and exclusively under the title of Cyprus 50 times, albeit under different headings. At this point, it should be noted that this high level of visibility is just the beginning. The topic is far more than a simple foreign policy issue and it is also directly linked to Britain's colonial identity, its understanding of democratic legitimacy, its security architecture adapted to the Cold War climate and its international position.⁵⁵ The rejection of enosis and the security-oriented approach in the discussions of 1954, as well as the extensive ignoring of the Turkish Cypriot community, formed the discursive and ideological basis of the Cyprus question, which was to take shape in the years to come. This framework paved the way for the increasing tensions and ethnic polarisation from 1955 onwards. When analysing the debates in Parliament in detail, three main levels come to the fore:

Structure of the Discursive Field: The Struggle with Hegemony

The dominant discourse in the debates is colonial hegemony, which is reproduced through the “maintaining stability” and “strategic necessity”. As the bearer of this discourse, the Conservative Party has portrayed Cyprus as a geopolitical necessity and its people as an immature mass. This is not only a political defence, but also an attempt at mental attribution: to fix the island's status and delegitimise demands for change.

⁵⁵ Yorgancıoğlu, *ibid*, 2020.

However, this hegemonic framework was broken by the universalist discourse emanating from the Labour Party. Issues such as self-determination, human rights and anti-colonial ethics were presented not only as political proposals but also as moral challenges. The Liberals, on the other hand, did not take a position in this field of tension, but remained on an ineffective borderline with their cautious and hesitant discourse.

Rhetorical Means and Silences: The Language of Colonialism

The language itself reveals the internalisation of the colonial imaginary, regardless of political positions. Phrases such as “subversion”, “agitation”, “rejection of self-government”, “generosity of [...] which we have granted” are classic imperial rhetoric that constructs the dominated people as passive, emotional and needy beings that must be dominated.

The invisibility of the Turkish community, however, proves to be a critical area of silence in the discursive analysis. While the demands of the Greek Cypriot community were frequently raised in the 1954 debates, the expectations and existence of the Turkish community were almost completely ignored. This is an important indicator that reflects both the political blindness of the time and the seeds of ethnic polarisation in the following years. Although only a few MPs mentioned the situation of the Turkish community, these statements had no influence on the general course of the debate. The silence on the demands and concerns of the Turks should therefore be seen as an expression of the colonialist mentality of the time.

Political Consequences and Historical Legacy

In 1954, these discussions did not directly change the existing colonial order of the time. Neither did the conservative government resign nor was the Enosis demand officially recognised. Nevertheless, these debates contributed both to the escalation of tensions on the island and to the armed resistance that would begin in 1955. The sharp polarisation that emerged in the British Parliament transformed the Cyprus problem from a mere “administrative issue” into a moral and

ideological conflict. During these debates, the Cyprus question was on the one hand a questioning of the last days of imperial legacy and colonial imagination and on the other a sign of intellectual decadence.

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