
MOMENT OF TRUTH FOR CYPRUS

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13.01.2017

Hurriyet Daily News January 13 2017

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Today marks the fifth death anniversary of Rauf Denktaş, the founding president of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Today may also be a new start for Turkish and Greek Cypriots. Thursday was a very important day for all Cypriots, irrespective of ethnical divides, and all those who are still bothered with the prospect of peace in the eastern Mediterranean island. For the first time ever since the 1960 creation of the Republic of Cyprus, the two communities and the three guarantor powers; Turkey, Greece and Britain, came together.

What was the result of the meeting? Did not you hear? The multinational, international or five-party conference is still underway, but because Hürriyet Daily News is printed early, this article had to be penned down earlier than the result. Yet was it not clear enough from such statements like Geneva will not be the last stop or the no one should expect date of a referendum on a Cyprus deal to come out of this meeting said by U.N. Envoy Espen Barth Eide? The expectation that the Geneva round of talks might bring about a settlement was brushed aside long-ago. Why was there a meeting then? Was it not obvious that there was no sufficient progress for a landmark deal?

Obviously, these and many other questions might be asked and very pessimistic or optimistic remarks might be made. The clear fact is that for the first time ever representatives of the three guarantor states and the two communities of the island came together. Did they come to finish off the Cyprus problem with a single magical touch or will this be the start of yet another inconclusive process, which is very much similar to the previous almost-half-a-century-old intercommunal talks.

There is no need for pessimism. Personally, I would not expect success from Geneva or the possible subsequent round of talks, irrespective whether they are bi-communal or multinational, only unless Greek Cypriots agreed to share the territory and sovereignty of Cyprus with their Turkish counterparts on the basis of political equality.

There were signs yesterday just before the multilateral conference convened that indeed Greek Cypriots, at least verbally, agreed to deliver the effective participation in governance as well as the rotation of presidency demands of the Turkish Cypriot side. But the two sides presented their respective territorial perspectives accompanied by a set of maps, without fulfilling the terms agreed in the previous Mont Pelerin rounds of talks. Those terms included the completion of bilateral talks on property, governance, EU matters, federal legal affairs, and making a settlement to be reached as the primary law of the EU and such issues. It was considered an unacceptable development by the Turkish Cypriot government which strongly protested the presentation of a

map on territorial adjustments without actually providing their input in a memorandum issued in Geneva.

The government was against Mustafa Akıncı who agreed to take down the Turkish Cypriot territory from the present 36 percent to a 29.2 percent level, while Greek Cypriots considered that one percentage point above their offer of 28.2 percent. According to unverified reports in a written reservation, the Greek Cypriot side notified the U.N., which has locked the maps in a safe place until the international conference reaches a stage of discussions, that it would not accept the Turkish Cypriot sides control of Morphou (Güzelyurt) area – the richest aquifer of the island – and the tip of the Karpasia Peninsula, which houses the Apostolos Andreas Monastery, and is considered important for the control of eastern Mediterranean and its hydrocarbon resources.

A key remaining sticking point is the guarantees issue. While Greece has been stressing that its participation in the Cyprus International Conference was totally aimed at discussing liquidation of the 1960 guarantee scheme for which there was no place in an EU-member country. Greece, as the motherland of the numerically-larger Greek Cypriot population of the island enjoys access to all Greek Cypriot military facilities and ports. Besides, through bilateral security arrangements, they have considerable military presence at all levels separately as well as the control of the Greek Cypriot National Guard. Greece giving up the guarantor status would not make any difference. Besides, like Greece and the outgoing Britain, Cyprus is an EU-member country.

Britain has two sovereign bases, a portion of whose territory it declared would relinquish to Cypriots as a bonus of the resolution. Those bases will continue to be on the island and function as a guarantor when required. Britain giving up its guarantor power status will not make much change.

For Turkey, however, not only for the security and wellbeing of Turkish Cypriots, Cyprus is strategically important. When in some other forms Greece and Britain will be staying in Cyprus, Turkey would withdraw from the island. The International Conference will have to find an answer to that question apart from going over the unresolved issues and if it can encourage the two sides for a grand give-and-take which might bring about a resolution.

If that can be achieved, then, at least three months will be needed to write a new constitution, prepare conditions and start a referendum campaign that may carry the two populations to separate simultaneous referenda late this summer.

Lets wait and see the outcome of a multinational summit, what will come out of it, and whether there would be further summits as anticipated, or perhaps a collapse...

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