

SLOGANS AND NATIONAL INTEREST

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As the Greek and Turkish Cypriots are set to embark on direct negotiations it would be advisable to think carefully about one of the most important lessons of the crisis in the Caucasus: if you are a small state be very realistic about your real national interest. This requires three things: brutal honesty; constant reevaluation of the options; and avoiding the sclerosis of slogans. Because, if you are small, mistakes are a luxury you cannot afford.

For years the Greek Cypriots have insisted that their national interest lay in reunifying the island. Of course this implied that the Cypriot Republic had been a happy union of Greeks and Turks, and that ultimately the Turkish Cypriots would see the light and return 'home.' In parallel, hard nosed, lawyerly negotiators took the Cyprus issue to a different direction, essentially working on redrawing conflicting national ambitions into a contractual arrangement. Like good book keepers they retained every scrap of paper, every note, every nod of agreement, piling it all into a body of work that eventually came to resemble the Annan Plan, which Greek Cypriots rejected.

The rejection of the plan in a referendum has been discussed and analyzed, and will probably continue to be. Ultimately, the overwhelming Greek Cypriot 'no' was the result of two basic causes: for the vast majority it stood contrary to the messages in the slogans they have been accustomed to hearing,

certainly since 1974; and for the more discerning, the plan was contrary to Greek Cypriot national interest. It is time now for Greek Cypriots to put aside the slogans and have an honest and open discussion about what their national interest really is.

On the basis of what we know – because traditionally the diplomacy of the Cyprus issue has not been transparent – the framework of the negotiations continues to revolve around the same core issue: the contractual arrangement of one state for two peoples. It is easy to understand the progression of Turkish Cypriot national interest – albeit some would argue that this does not exist independently of Ankara – and of course Turkey's interest: to preserve to the highest degree possible the autonomy (preferably independence) of the Turkish Cypriots on the island, as an extension of Ankara's interests on the island. It is also clearly understood that for the Turkish position, the post-accession status quo and the much lauded Turkish Cypriot support of the Annan Plan do not contradict their national interest. The Turkish side has adjusted its national interest to changes, and in at least two ways instigated the changes themselves: the invasion and its results, and the demographic change with massive settler infusion. As such, when reunification was offered as part of a European Union package, at no real cost (the Turkish side has neither been asked to reverse the occupation of the north, nor been punished for persistently delegitimizing the Cypriot state), Turkish national interest adjusted accordingly. This means that they retained the fundamental principle of maximum Turkish Cypriot independence, at the same low cost, while hoping for even better terms (recognition, legitimating settlers, accession, etc.).

But what about the Greek-Cypriot national interest? Does it really lie in reunification under a structure that has been negotiated since 1974, and possibly even earlier? There are many in Cyprus and elsewhere who are skeptical about the rationale behind this approach. After all, anyone who views the Greek Cypriots as having the upper hand in Cyprus because of their status as an overwhelming majority is missing the point. The Greek Cypriots are a minority in a broader Turkish majority, one that is not only present in Cyprus through the long-arm of the Turkish armed forces, but is also politically and philosophically inclined to regard the Greek Cypriots as a minority on a Turkish island.

Greek-Cypriot national interest lies in safeguarding maximum independence from the Turkish majority. As such, the post-1974 situation has, paradoxically, liberated the Greek Cypriots from their Turkish Cypriot compatriots, increasingly from Ankara's hold, and fundamentally from Greece. It is this independence that should be preserved and bolstered, and should guide Greek-Cypriot negotiators. It must not be based on blind nationalism but on the recognition that post-1974 there are new realities in the government controlled south, and these have shaped Greek-Cypriot society, politics and self-perception, and these should be understood well if the Greek-Cypriot national interest is to be expressed best. Because it is time that we distinguish Greek-Cypriot national interest from that of the Republic of Cyprus circa 1960, and come up with some new slogans.