

# At Long Last, Cyprus Should Seize the Chance to Heal Itself

By David Hannay

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LONDON — Abba Eban, the former Israeli foreign minister, used to say that the Palestinians never missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity. The same sentiment could well be hovering over the Troutbeck Conference Center in upstate New York when UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan sits down Wednesday morning with the leaders of Cyprus's two main communities to resume what is just about the longest-running peace process in modern history.

It has been almost five years since the parties met for full-scale negotiations, and those were not years that encouraged the belief in any useful alternative to the UN-led process aimed at setting up a bizonal, bicomunal federation which is again under way.

What is different now that could make it possible to succeed after the unbroken record of past failures? For one thing, the objective now is a comprehensive settlement of all aspects of the Cyprus problem. In the

past there have been attempts to establish an outline framework, to negotiate substantial confidence-building measures or to proceed sectorally (a "security and demilitarization first" approach). None succeeded.

Of course, aiming for a comprehensive agreement — involving the drafting of a new federal constitution and agreeing to provisions on the geographical limits of the two zones, on the issues of displaced people and compensation, and on security arrangements — is to up the ante considerably and also has implications for the probable duration of the negotiations. But in a situation where it is clear that no one will agree on anything until everyone agrees on everything, it is surely the only realistic approach.

Then there is the EU dimension. This offers the longer-term prospect of prosperity and stability for a federal Cyprus

but, in the short term, has become another apple of discord, as the Turkish Cypriots have objected strongly to an application for membership made without their involvement.

It is common sense that accession to the EU preceded by a political settlement is the best, but certainly not the only, option for both communities in Cyprus. As such, the EU timetable for opening accession negotiations with Cyprus (among others) early next year offers a stimulus and an incentive to conclude a settlement.

Moreover, international support for the UN-led negotiations has never been higher, nor has there at any stage been less evidence of any fundamental conflict of interest between the external advocates of a settlement. The recent appointment of Richard Holbrooke as the U.S. president's special envoy is another im-

portant signal of that support.

This of course leaves out of consideration the abiding suspicion and distrust between Greece and Turkey, but they, too, could benefit from an equitable solution of the Cyprus problem, making this issue more than a simple zero-sum calculation.

So does this mean the success of these negotiations is assured? Far from it, alas. The legacy of the past, the bitterness engendered by the long confrontation along the Green Line, the distorted view of the other community nurtured in schools and in the media, the pressure of extremists on both sides, the low credibility of the peace process — all weigh heavily on the shoulders of Glavkos Klerides and Rauf Denktash at the table in Troutbeck.

Somehow the twin nightmares — that the Turkish Cypriots are seeking effective separation and eventual secession, and that the Greek Cypriots are aiming for domination, whatever soft words they use about political equal-

ity — have to be banished.

In any negotiation of this sort it is important that all concerned make a hardheaded analysis of the potential benefits of success and of the costs of failure.

An unresolved Cyprus problem will be a factor of instability in a region where that commodity is not in short supply and will impoverish the lives of all the island's inhabitants, even if it does not actually threaten them. It will also continue to poison the relationship between Turkey and the EU, and will confront the Union with difficult decisions on Cyprus's accession.

A settlement, in contrast, will have strongly beneficial effects in all these areas. So while success is a zero-plus game, failure is surely a zero-minus one.

Nothing is less convincing than diplomats conveying professional optimism, but after many contacts with those principally concerned I believe a settlement is obtainable if only the demons of history can be overcome.

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