

As divided Cyprus gets ready to welcome America's top peacebroker, Turkey sends out a message. Forget the gifts: beware Greeks, period

Norman Stone

Screamingly, throbbingly, the great turbines hurtle the craft through the thin air of the Aegean morning, the cerulean, the agate, the vermilion of the dawn just fading away behind the ghostly silhouettes, now of Chios, now of Mytilene, now of Samothrace, with emerald Smyrna's flanking hills just ahead. The cicadas, far below, will chatter, all staccato, to greet the rising day; on winding clay-white mountain paths, the little old women, the boys, drive their goats, their sheep, to spring pastures, through the scent of tamarisk, of citrus, of jasmines. The mind drifts, ineluctably, to the scenes that, once, these mountains saw - the hoplite phalanx, the spartiates, the Byzantine strategoi, the stalwarts of the Scutarioti, who fought, here in western Anatolia, for civilisation, in numberless encounters. At that point, the mind has had quite enough of Lawrence Durrell and thinks, poor mutts -

The year mints in question are the Greek invaders of Anatolia in 1922. With British encouragement, they had barged into a Turkey that seemed to be falling apart - our present ambassador in Athens, Sir Michael Llewellyn-Smith, wrote a wonderful book about this (*Ionian Vision*, 1973). It was a campaign waged with ghastly atrocities, which shamed one of the Greek commanders, Prince Andrew (father of the Duke of Edinburgh) into a confession that he did not think that anyone, let alone Greeks, could behave in the way his men had done.

It ended in dreadful tears - the collapse of the quarter-million Greek army, the destruction of Izmir, one of the great classical ports, and the evacuation, from Anatolia, of two million non-Muslims. The episode planted itself on the Greek psyche, and some of the shriller politicians seem to make a career out of Turk-bashing. Now, they are at it again.

Cyprus, divided between Greeks and Turks, with soldiers on both sides, is to be reunited with Greece, in a roundabout way: it is to join 'Europe', of which Greece is already part. Many Turks fear the worst; they also mistrust the British, and our would-be mediator, Sir David Hannay, is *non grata* in Cyprus, and gets nowhere in Ankara.

Outside the Turkish Embassy in London's Belgrave Square there is a bedraggled little group of students, day in, day out, with banderoles proclaiming this or that objection over Turkish Cyprus. Their model is no doubt the day-in, day-out anti-apartheid demonstration that used to go on outside South Africa House. But

what possible points of comparison can there be in these two situations?

It was after all the Greeks who upset the Cyprus applecart in 1974, and who threatened to massacre the Turkish minority, it is they, today, who name streets after terrorists if ever there is a case of the persecutor turned martyr, this is it - the silliest international conflict in the headlines today.

None of this makes much sense to Turks. Yet the Greek Cypriots are spending hundreds of millions of dollars on some Russian missiles, and creating a large military airport at Paphos. Meanwhile, to add some kind of carrot to the stick, Greek Cyprus applies to join the European Union, but without the consent of the authorities in the Turkish part of the island, let alone Turkey. This is straightforwardly against international treaties.

In 1959 and 1960, to make the independence of Cyprus acceptable, agreements were made between Turkey, Greece and Great Britain, and these agreements explicitly state that it should not participate 'in whole or in part, in any political or economic union with any state whatsoever'. Greek spokesmen argue that 'state' does not apply to the European Union, a dodgy interpretation if ever there was one.

All of this goes together with much mean-mindedness and worse on the Greek side - vetoing the relatively small sums that Europe owes to the Turks to make the customs agreement work; now slapping an extra tax on Greeks who visit Turkey (which gives visa-free entry to them), now arresting and imprisoning parents with a small child who have inadvertently crossed the Cypriot Green Line dividing the Turkish North from the Greek South while picnicking.

More seriously, by reports that have not been adequately denied, they have been helping Kurdish terrorists inside Turkey. Because Greece has a position within the European Union, and because the EU can hardly stand up to such unscrupulous lobbies, she can make even very exasperated Europeans do something of what she wants (Greeks shaped the unfriendly wording of the recent Luxemburg declaration about Turkey's membership of the Union, and the less unfriendly Germans could only manage the small print).

Quite a show for the 'martyrs' of Belgrave Square, and they make it worse when their Foreign Minister, Theodore Pangalos, claims on television that Turks are 'thieves, rapists and murderers'. His grandfather, incidentally, was chief of staff of the Greek army in Anatolia, back in 1922. He should remember this.

The problem for Turks is threefold. There is quite a strong strategic difficulty, in that aircraft from Paphos

might reach bases even in eastern Turkey. Then again, the Turkish population of northern Cyprus has every reason to fear a return of the Greeks. Several million Turks descend from people who were ethnically cleansed from the Balkans in recent times, and memories on Cyprus are quite fresh when it comes to the atrocities that were committed by Greeks, Cypriot or mainland, after independence.

Constitutional safeguards were flouted; Glafkos Clerides, the present Greek-Cypriot president, was himself a terrorist Eoka man, with the code-name 'Hijeridou'. The wrongs done to Turkish Cypriots have been well documented whether by Christopher Hitchens or more recently by Harry Scott Gibbons in the *Genocide Files* (Charles Bravos, London 1997), which has original documents from the Greek side that fully bear out the book's title.

The third problem from the Turks' viewpoint is that the problem is only partly about Turkish Cyprus at all. Yes, the place has problems. It is poor, and many Turkish Cypriots emigrate. This is mainly because of the international blockade which stops the

export of citrus fruit and hinders the movement of tourists.

Relations between native-born Turkish Cypriots and the rougher characters who have been moved in since 1974 are often not very good, and they even have some trouble understanding each other, since the Cypriots speak an old Ottoman Turkish that has long disappeared on the mainland. If Turkish Cyprus were simply recognised as a separate state, these problems would go away.

There is one problem that will not 'go away, however: Greece. The Greeks complain of Turkish aggression, but it is they who, three times in the past century, attacked Turkey - 1897, 1912, 1919 - and it was they who took the lead both in 1963 and in 1974, over Cyprus. Now, using various tricks, and relaying on what they see as strong alliances in Europe, they seem to be at it again.

Why do they do it? They should remember 1922. At that time, the Greek population of the Ottoman Empire was rich and growing. The Greeks of Istanbul, over quarter of a million strong, dominated economic life there. All of that was thrown away in a crazy effort to recreate an Aegean empire.

Photograph by A. Venizagou/Magnum

Greek antics over Cyprus led to mass migration of the Istanbul Greeks, and it has taken a long time for either them or the city of Istanbul to recover. However, and this is the point for all Greeks to bear in mind, Turkey gets there in the end, as she did in 1922. Here is now the fastest growing economy in the European region, and is now larger than Sweden's. She has her faults, but it would be more sensible for Greeks to forget about Cyprus, and improve their relations with their most important neighbour. Oddly enough, for all the posturings of official Greece (I do not know one single Greek, from professors of European Law to directors of archaeological institutes and the manager of my local Greek restaurant who disagrees with this).

Meanwhile, their country has to go lumbering along with a huge weight of armaments which wrecks its budget and makes it dependent on grudging handouts from Europe. That Greece might yet be brought back to the point, 'That Greece might yet grow up,' sigh I.

Norman Stone is Professor of International Relations at Bilkent University, Ankara

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