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What constitutes a “solution” to a political problem? How far is the solution complicated by rival perceptions on what exactly *is* the problem? How does the insolubility of a protracted conflict acquire social capital and morph into a form of settlement? And what does it mean to have settlements that escape government control and undermine the monopoly of state or communal authority to settle conflict?

These are questions that confront who ever engage in the Cyprus imbroglio. The persistence of disaccord for several decades has frustrated and puzzled the international community. Unfulfilled series of negotiations, framework agreements, and UN-mediated plans have tested the limits of diplomatic method and innovation. Explanations for not “solving Cyprus” abound. The political will and ethnonationalist strategy of the parties has been blamed, periodically of one party or the other or both. The perceived inadequacy or muscular tactics of international mediation and facilitation has also been flagged, periodically of the UN or the EU for example. The dubious intentions and self-serving interventions of the interested internationals have been highlighted, such as the so-called guarantor powers, Britain, Greece, and Turkey, but also the United States, Russia, or any foreign power that is perceived as benefiting directly or indirectly from a settlement or non-settlement.

Does insolubility mean that diplomacy has failed in its mission? Indeed, if the purpose of diplomacy is viewed exclusively from the angle of reaching a final and comprehensive settlement, then diplomacy has not delivered in this case. If, however, diplomacy is viewed from the perspective of what arrangements are being negotiated and set in place in the absence of a final and comprehensive settlement, then there is more to be said about the end(s) of diplomacy, its small-scale successes, and multidirectional character. Multidirectional diplomacy never functions on the basis of a single teleology. When policy goals remain unfulfilled its objective shifts. Foreign policy may be obsessed with the attainment of a specific goal, but diplomacy has to test the feasibility of its achievement and ultimately question its prioritization

via-à-vis other goals, be it those of our side or those we hold in common with others. Foreign policy implementation requires a diplomacy of advocacy, but when the limits of advocacy are reached and the power of persuasion exhausted, diplomacy has to explore alternatives—and indeed recommend new goals—for “our” side as well as the “other” side.

Multidirectional diplomacy is especially concerned with what is to be done when an impasse has been reached. How is a deadlock represented and to what extent does its declaration exacerbate the conflict or lead to new ones? If a conflict cannot be solved, how far can and should it be contained through “temporary” agreements? Can a violent conflict transform into a nonviolent one and how far can this be sustained? Under what conditions is communication and cooperation across the divide possible in protracted conflict situations? Can specific grievances of the opposing sides be addressed in the short and medium terms, when full remedy does not appear forthcoming? Can the incompatibility of positions over core issues be set aside while common interests are explored and softer issues resolved? The diplomacy of the Cyprus conflict will be assessed rather differently if we are attuned to this other direction and dimension of diplomacy, which underscores the daily encounters and engagements of protracted conflicts (the official and unofficial communicating, hot-lining, coordinating of public statements over sensitive issues, establishing joint technical committees, facilitating the “normal living” of people on the other side of the Buffer Zone, cooperating to cope with emergencies, etc.) that deliver a range of “minor,” “temporary,” and “soft” agreements that—while failing to resolve the conflict—provide more or less acceptable modalities of living together *in* conflict.

Let there be no doubt. Reaching a *modus vivendi* does not always bring a satisfactory result. It should not be idealized or romanticized. Although it can freeze disaccord over an issue, it can support a *fait accompli* and prolong an unfair status quo from the perspective of one or more sides to a conflict. Still it figures as a “necessary” or “possible” way of being when a “preferable” solution remains elusive. It is an ordering that utilizes “the normative power of the given,” as put by Carl Schmitt in relation to international law. It confronts and negotiates the hard political reality that in time develops and promotes its own ethics.

With respect to diplomacy, negotiating “the given” is manifested in two ways. First, while seeking an “ideal” or “pragmatic” solution, diplomacy works in the direction of making the existing situation less hazardous and tense and more acceptable while the conflict persists. This necessitates the reaching of interim agreements. These agreements may or may not have spill over effects on a comprehensive settlement. Still parties find these agreements on balance advantageous, as life must go on irrespective of differences, finding ways of working with and around persistent problems. Second, the longer a

conflict remains unsolved, the diplomacy of the *modus vivendi* progressively transforms an *is* into a *should*, by intention or default. If a containable non-violent conflict is secured and if one or more sides find it possible to prosper in the meantime, the easier is for stakeholders to find moral arguments for the continuation of the status quo and perpetuation of the interim agreements reached rather than risk a “problematic” comprehensive settlement. The easier it also is for individuals to exploit opportunities to reach private cross-ethnic settlements while a public inter-ethnic settlement remains elusive.

To have a “diplomatic understanding,” Paul Sharp suggests, is to recognize the plurality of existence, that is, the different ways of being in the world. To have a “diplomatic thinking” is to seriously engage the complexity of relationships that follow from such plurality. To that extent, multidirectional diplomacy engages the range and nuances of disaccord as well as the idiosyncrasies of every conflict situation. Conflict situations, especially complex and protracted ones, direct diplomatic action along multiple routes, where practitioners are called upon to innovate and provide policy rationales, oftentimes within the established conflict parameters and sometimes beyond them. The search for solutions always exceeds the public diplomacy rhetoric concerning the one and only solution. Diplomacy undertakes the mediation of the *real* as well as the *ideal*, combining references to the politics on the ground, the feasible or non-feasible positions of opposing sides, and the common aspirations of conflicted communities and regional and global actors.

In the Cyprus case, as with any other conflict, planned solutions are inextricably linked to different understandings of what constitutes “the problem” to be solved. Partition is a solution for some as it is a problem for others. Reunification is a problem for some as it is a solution for others. Establishing “a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation” appears to be an agreeable solution to most—at least in public discourse—and this is currently the framework under which formal negotiations take place in Cyprus. But there is no agreement about what that means. Would it be based on a strong or loose federation, with hard or soft bi-zonality, with or without cross-voting, with or without rotating presidency, with or without foreign judges, with or without international guarantees, with or without derogations from the EU *acquis*, and so forth?

Is this inevitable when negotiating complex and intractable problems? Perhaps, yet the point not to miss is how official commitment to a particular type of “agreed solution” is not necessarily the beginning of the end of the problem but can introduce a range of apparently *minor* problems any of which can be elevated by a stakeholder into a *major* problem, in good or in bad faith, at any stage of the negotiation. It could also be raised as an issue within one’s community. Proposed solutions thus beget their own problems; problems that are not necessarily unsolvable but have no guarantee they are solvable either. Crucially, particular solutions may become *the* problem, such as the threat of an unwanted solution that is perceived to be worse than the problem at hand. In the case of Cyprus, this has included, at different periods, bi-zonality,

federalization, Europeanization, the Boutros-Ghali pointers, the Annan Plan, and so on.

The prioritization by one side of different aspects of the problem as well as the incompatibility of different proposed solutions to it, complicate diplomatic efforts tasked to solve “the problem.” Exchanges and deliberations meant to create diplomatic understanding over contentious issues create new antagonisms not only between ethnic communities but also within them. In such cases there is a flurry of diplomatic activity but not much of a rational and critical debate. Will- and opinion-formation in the public sphere is divested of dialogical insight and thrives on mutual monologues and rhetorical moves for domestic and international consumption. The loss of the deliberative capacity, which Habermas saw as a “refeudalization of the public sphere,” Corneliu Bjola identifies as an anti-diplomatic attitude that trivializes negotiation and dialogue. Sides engage in high-level diplomacy through trite and staged performances, often with very low expectations themselves as to any positive result, other than proving to the “outside world” that they desire and are committed to a solution.

Stakeholders frame “the problem” and its possible solution through the dominant way they talk about it. Cyprus conflict discourse is not a mere passive tool of communicating the problem but effectively implicated in it. The clash of meanings within and across the ethnic divide is very real to anyone living in the island or studying the conflict, and abundantly registered (more recently in Bryant’s and Ker-Lindsay’s books). Terms and phrases are valorized *differently* across the divide but also within communities as well as across time. Instruments and methods that are considered essential to settle specific issues at specific negotiating periods can in time become problematic for the same people that once considered them necessary.

For example, some problematic methods involve the positive or negative value of UN mediation or facilitation; negotiation, arbitration, or adjudication over core or not so core issues; foreign interest or lack of interest about the conflict; open-ended negotiation or negotiation with deadlines; locally owned negotiation or international, multilateral conferencing; elite settlement or referenda; and so on. These shifts in discursive allegiance among the elites and other stakeholders are not always visible or memorable to the public. Thus, the public increasingly conflates its preferred solution with the effective resolution of those side issues that they have been told are “necessary” to settle in order for a just and durable solution of the Cyprus conflict to be possible.

What uncompromising Cypriot sides appear to fear the most is the “final solution” that will bring an end to any future negotiation of “our” problem and the potential betterment of the settlement that befits such a problem; in other words, the kind of settlement that will ensure “our” long-term interests and the viability of “our” community. Furthermore, efforts to “rush” settlement can become contentious. Both Cypriot sides are extremely suspicious of the

processes through which the final solution is to be negotiated, meaning that they spend considerable amounts of energy and innovation on the pre-negotiation stage, that is, on negotiating *how* and *what* to negotiate. For the negotiating elites, the search for a solution oscillates between negotiation-phobia and negotiation-mania. For watching citizens and external actors, diplomatic work is increasingly viewed with cynicism as negotiation-fatigue sets in.

Across the ethnic divide in Cyprus, claims about what it would entail to comprehensively settle the conflict are commonly based around two discourses: pragmatism and durability. On the one hand, both sides present their preferred solution—at least in official negotiation—along the lines that this must be a pragmatic settlement. The pragmatic is interpreted to mean not pursuing the maximalist ethnic positions of the 1950s, '60s, and '70s, such as *enosis* (union with Greece) or *taksim* (partition of the island). It also means taking into account “the realities” on the ground, including the long history of separation, in some instances post-1963 and more firmly post-1974. However, both sides focus their pragmatism on different “realities.” The Turkish-Cypriot side underscores the reality of the division into two ethnically demarcated zones in which people resettled after the 1974 war and currently live “normal lives.” The Greek-Cypriot side underscores the reality of Cyprus’ EU accession, which should guarantee as a matter of principle, freedom of movement and settlement and property rights for all EU citizens, including Cypriots.

Claims about the need to display pragmatism confront head on the question of justice. Both communities respond to the other side’s pragmatist understanding by protesting discounts on justice that are demanded from one’s own side for conflict resolution. The Greek-Cypriot side underscores the rights of many refugees that would need to be sacrificed for the Turkish-Cypriot “reality” to be accommodated. The Turkish-Cypriot side focuses on the injustice that the Turkish-Cypriots suffered from 1963 to 1974 and which cannot be remedied by implementing a full restitution of property, which the Greek-Cypriot “reality” expects. The 2002–2004 Annan Plan sought to strike a balance between these two realities (return and restitution of property for many but not all displaced persons) and it was endorsed by the Turkish-Cypriot community in the 2004 referendum but overwhelmingly rejected by the Greek-Cypriot community.

On the other hand, both sides underscore the importance of negotiating a durable settlement. That is to say, any comprehensive settlement should not collapse shortly after its signing, as it happened with the 1960 independence agreements. For the Greek-Cypriot side, this means that the solution should be “just” and “functional,” that is, in radically different terms to the 1960 “imposed constitution,” which created an antagonistic diarchy across ethnic lines and favored the Turkish-Cypriot minority community. For the

Turkish-Cypriot side, durability means providing the necessary safeguards that will ensure the majority community does not take exclusive control of the legitimate government again, as happened post-1963. Greek Cypriots often say they want a solution (*lysis*) not dissolution (*dialysis*), a point that equally worries Turkish Cypriots and means that at any time either side may choose to flag a proposed solution as a proposed new problem leading to chaos and disarray.

An issue that complicates claims about settlement durability concerns the question of Cypriot sovereignty, specifically how Cypriot sovereignty is constricted by the presence of the three “guarantor powers” (United Kingdom, Greece, and Turkey) with rights to intervene as well as veto over changes in core articles of the Cypriot constitution. For the Turkish-Cypriot side, durability should be ensured by the continuing guarantees of Turkey; whereas for the Greek-Cypriot side accession into the EU suffices to guarantee good governance and respect for human rights. For the latter side, the guarantor system is a neocolonial arrangement, which as long as it exists will continue to legitimate foreign meddling in the internal affairs of Cyprus, thus raising serious questions about the durability of any settlement reached. Complicating matters, there are serious disagreements over the character of Cypriot sovereignty and whether it is single, divided, or shared between the two main ethnic communities. A single sovereignty is seen as a problem by the Turkish-Cypriot side to the extent that it means domination of the majority over the minority; whereas a divided sovereignty is seen as a problem for the Greek-Cypriot side because even when brought together in unity the notion could still promote split attitudes in the future. Shared sovereignty between the two communities seems to be the linguistic compromise, but again what this means varies between and within the two communities and consequently how it is drafted into a final settlement remains an issue.

The Cyprus Problem has been proclaimed the “graveyard” of many aspiring diplomats—a popular and somber metaphor that nonetheless captures only a partial truth of the diplomatic effort to solve the conflict. For a lively and truly multinational industry has developed out of the Cyprus Problem that sustains the professional interest of local politicians, friends of Cyprus abroad, academics, researchers, and officials of governmental, intergovernmental, and nongovernmental organizations—all making the conflict their full- or part-time occupation. No doubt there have been plenty of frustrations, but also plenty of benefits for these Cyprus Problem professionals working on and often living off the conflict. Whether as official representatives or self-declared experts of track-one, track-two, or multi-track diplomacy, they have profited invariably in terms of paid work and career and/or social role and visibility.

What do all these diplomatic agents make possible on the ground? Where are we now and what are we left with in terms of settlement? First, we

need to recognize that this plurality of diplomatic actors currently in Cyprus pursue different goals, goals that are sometimes opposing and sometimes complementary. Especially since the opening of the checkpoints in April 2003, a range of practitioners (from politicians to religious leaders to bi-communal association members to activists and the general public) have been able to cross and meet, raise issues directly with the “other side,” and mediate differences with much or less or no success. This diplomacy of the everyday is important, yet missed by those concerned exclusively with the high-level diplomacy of the communal leaders and their accredited agents.

The daily encounters and engagements with the “other” enhance and intensify the multi-directionality of diplomacy described above. All kinds of settlements that were not possible before are now an option. Multilevel governance, regional and international, provides a range of new sociolegal parameters within which settlements can be reached across the ethnic divide. UN resolutions, EU and Council of Europe conventions, regulations, adjudications, and monitoring regimes support and empower individuals and groups of people taking action, negotiating arrangements, and reaching settlements with regard to, say, immovable property, religious rights, freedom of movement, minority protection, heritage reconstruction, and so on. We are therefore in an era of what might be termed “the privatization of settlement”—meaning *à la carte*, cross-ethnic settlements by Cypriots from all communities transgressing the divide, without authorization or consent by their respective authorities as well as without these authorities having the ability to stop or control them.

To give some indicative examples: While the division persists, tens of thousands of Turkish Cypriots living in the north or abroad have applied and received Republic of Cyprus identities and passports; an increasing number of Greek Cypriots apply, negotiate, and settle (or may opt not to settle) with the Property Commission established in the north for the restitution, exchange, or compensation of their immovable properties; an increasing number of Turkish Cypriots directly negotiate with the Greek-Cypriot authorities in the south the possibility and conditions under which their property may be restituted or compensated; and Turkish and Greek Cypriots buy and sell property to each other across the divide or come to other property arrangements through the exchange of contracts that are not deposited to the land registry.

Furthermore, displaced (Greek Cypriots) and current inhabitants (Turkish Cypriots) of the village of Kontea agree to restore the cultural heritage of their village, jointly applying to and receiving funds by the United Nations Development Program. Cypriot Maronites and Roma utilize their interstitial identity, and make representations to the respective authorities across the divide to acquire rights of settlement, communal services, and social welfare where they may periodically decide to be. Turkish-Cypriot students cross daily to the south for their secondary and university education; Greek-Cypriot youth cross regularly to the north to join cultural events. Religious leaders

visit their holy shrines across the divide and try to arrange restorations, better protection, and resumption of religious services on a permanent or ad hoc basis. Business people and corporations negotiate and establish joint ventures across the divide. Consumers shop and carry a range of EU permitted goods across the Buffer Zone. Activists and researchers from all the Cypriot communities meet and work at the Home for Cooperation on the Buffer Zone; others “occupy the Buffer Zone,” live in tents for months, and declare that as far as they are concerned the Cyprus Problem has been solved. And so on and so forth.

Can Cyprus be solved? Although the Cyprus Problem has remained intractable for decades, in certain respects and for certain people their personal “Cyprus Problem” has already been largely negotiated and solved, through permanent or temporary arrangements with regimes of power and individuals across the divide. To be sure, these everyday diplomacies and private settlements take place within the problematic “states of exception” established on the ground, and which severely restrict rights, options, and bargaining leverage for individuals. Furthermore, a lot of people still suffer the material and psychological effects of the forceful and tragic division of island, thus of the failure to reach a final and comprehensive settlement. Cypriots have not reunified their island, although they have managed through sustained diplomacy to devise interesting ways of living together in conflict, containing some but certainly not all of its negative effects. This may not be the kind of solution Cypriots deserve. But it might be—and time will tell—the only solution they are capable of.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

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