

***‘Reflections On The Search For A Solution: Lessons Learned
And A Glance Ahead’***

Remarks by Lord Hannay of Chiswick GCMG, CH

at the GSF Seminar:

‘From Crisis To Paralysis In Cyprus: Who Can Break The Deadlock?’

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Speaking as we do today in the bicentennial year of Charles Dickens’ birth it is surely appropriate for me to play the role of the ghost of Christmas past. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the Annan Plan and the two contradictory referendum results that followed, it is hard to characterise the eight years since then as anything other than a period of missed opportunities and of journeys up blind alleys. But I will look forward as well as back because, unpromising though the prospects for a settlement of the Cyprus problem may seem to be right now, I remain convinced that an equitable settlement is achievable and that such a settlement is in the interest of all concerned.

First a tribute to the work done over many years by successive United Nations Special Representatives and Secretary-Generals, not least by Alexander Downer, who is here today. Without those efforts even the faintest hope of a settlement would have been absent. Those of us closely involved in the major UN-led negotiating drive between 1996 and 2004 became convinced, with the benefit of hindsight, that we outsiders had been too prominent and too dominant. But now I suspect that the pendulum has swung too far the other way. The experience of the last fifty years has surely demonstrated often enough that Cypriots on their own find it impossible to reach agreement. A successful negotiating effort needs strong backing from outside as well as clear

ownership and authorship from within. That balance perhaps needs a bit of adjustment in the period ahead.

Another lesson from history is that in Cyprus, as on the dance floor, you need two to tango, indeed you need more than two since Turkey and Greece also need to be constructively active. But the basic two are essential; and far too often over the years, when one side in Cyprus has been led by someone committed to making the sort of compromises which would be required to reach and sustain a settlement, the other has not. I will name no names. But if, when the Greek Cypriots go to the polls to elect a new president next year, they choose someone who fits the first of those categories, then a new opportunity could exist, so long, that is, that there is a similarly-minded Turkish Cypriot counterpart. I would also suggest that the lack of any direct means of communication between the leader of the Greek Cypriot community and the government of Turkey has been a fundamental flaw to the negotiating structure which needs one day to be remedied.

The attitude of the government of Turkey towards a Cyprus settlement has always been crucial to the chances of success. Turkey's current enhanced economic and diplomatic influence make it an even more essential piece in the jigsaw. And anyone who doubts that that attitude is critically influenced by Turkey's own relationship with the European Union is seriously suffering from denial. That is why I believe the government of Cyprus has been misguided to have contributed so enthusiastically to placing obstacles in the way of Turkey's EU accession negotiations, thus acting as a (possibly inadvertent) stalking horse for others in the EU who want to frustrate Turkey's aspirations. It would surely make sense to review that policy as the carousel of European elections bring subtle shifts in previous positions.

As usual in the case of Cyprus there are no guaranteed good options, no silver bullets waiting to be used which would ensure a settlement, no alternative approaches which no one has thought of so far. The main components of any possible negotiated settlement are lying around in the graveyard of previous attempts waiting to be pieced together a little differently and waiting above all for the political will to be summoned up across the board to bring about a settlement based on painful compromises which by definition can give neither side everything it wants. Probably the biggest obstacle to summoning up that political will is the lack of credibility in the negotiating process, the air of weary cynicism which is aroused whenever discussion turns to a Cyprus settlement. To dissipate that air politicians on both sides would need to stop demanding their maximum requests as if they were even remotely achievable and would need to start explaining why a re-united Cyprus would be of benefit to both peoples on the island. A tall order, you might think; but why should anyone be expected to support compromises to achieve something they have not been convinced is worth having in the first place?

There could be a potential new game-changer in the offing worth bearing in mind. Over those many long years of attempts to find a negotiated solution to the Cyprus problem, the economic benefits that might flow from agreement on a bi-zonal, bi-communal Cyprus federation, at peace with all its neighbours and integrated with their economies, have tended to be discounted. Indeed at the time of the referendums in 2004, Greek Cypriot opponents of the Annan Plan made much out of the alleged costs of re-uniting a wealthier Greek Cypriot federated state with a poorer Turkish Cypriot one. They took no account at all of the fact that Cyprus' nearest neighbour, Turkey, with whom it has negligible trade in either goods or services, was emerging as one of the largest and certainly the most vibrant and rapidly growing economy in Europe. Truly the history of attempts to solve the Cyprus problem represents a triumph of politics

over economics. Now, with Cyprus teetering on the brink of needing a European bail-out, with all the austerity measures likely to accompany such a development, the time may be coming to re-appraise those economic issues and give them greater weight in the overall balance of the pros and cons of a compromise settlement.

One final thought. From time to time it is suggested that the international community should just give up on seeking a Cyprus settlement, that we should all, Cypriots included, settle for some version of the status quo. Not only do I see no sign that such an outcome is remotely on offer. But more worryingly, there are continual reminders that a Cyprus Problem neglected is all too likely to bite you on the ankle, possibly quite painfully. The disputes which have been building up over the development of the mineral resources in Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone are a case in point. At a time when the stability of the Eastern Mediterranean is under threat from a number of other directions it would seem pretty irresponsible to add one more continuing source of friction to the brew. Better surely to keep up the search for a solution, the title I gave to a book I wrote about the Cyprus Problem some years ago.