



GSF SEMINAR

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

**Committee Room 4A
House of Lords**

Wednesday 13th June 2012

On 13th June 2012, Global Strategy Forum (GSF) held a seminar entitled ‘*From Crisis to Paralysis in Cyprus: Who Can Break The Deadlock?*’ The seminar took place in the House of Lords under the chairmanship of Lord Lothian, Chairman, Global Strategy Forum.

The speakers were: **The Honourable Alexander Downer**, UN Secretary-General’s Special Advisor on Cyprus; **Lord Hannay of Chiswick GCMG, CH**, Chairman, House of Lords EU Sub-Committee F (Home Affairs), and British Special Representative for Cyprus (1996-2003); **Baroness Hussein-Ece OBE**, House of Lords; **Sir David Madden KCMG**, British High Commissioner in Cyprus 1994-1999 and British Ambassador to Greece (1999-2004); **Mr Hugh Pope**, Turkey/Cyprus Project Director for International Crisis Group; **Rt Hon Jack Straw MP**, Home Secretary (1997-2001); Foreign Secretary (2001-2006); Justice Secretary (2007-2010)

The seminar took the form of an opening address by the **Honourable Alexander Downer**, followed by a panel presentation. Lively, even passionate, debate took place at the conclusion of the presentations.

Speakers identified the following main themes:

Opening Address: While the UN remains committed to a settlement, the definition of what form this should take remains a ‘monumental’ task. The conventional formula of a bizonal, bicomunal federation with a single international personality was not the first preference for either the Greek or the Turkish communities. The former wanted a unitary state with protection for minority rights; the latter wanted separation. These hesitations had been reflected in the 2004 referendum, especially on the Greek side. Nonetheless, the Cypriot leaders had reached a wide range of agreement on constitutional and economic issues, much of this driven by the chapters of the *acquis communautaire*. Whether more progress could be made depended on a compromise on the Turkish side whose preference was for a ‘grand bargain’ and on the Greek side where internal issues like boundaries and property rights were pre-eminent. Regarding

the gas discoveries in Cyprus territorial waters, it seemed likely that these would be ‘dowry’ to the united state, not a catalyst to a settlement.

An absence of urgency: speakers noted that for much of the Cypriot population the status quo was tolerable. One speaker called the Cyprus problem ‘different’ and said that the search for a solution had taken many ‘blind alleys.’ Another said there was no ‘asphyxiating pressure’ for a settlement and that the present round of negotiations had run its course. Thus, while the UN asserted that the negotiation process must be ‘Cypriot owned and led’, this was in itself a recipe for delay. The role of the outside powers was thus a delicate one. They wanted to push the process along, but at the same time had to work with the grain of Cypriot opinion. Some speakers urged a more active role for the Greek and Turkish governments, including working on the education systems in both communities and offering confidence-building measures.

Attitudes in the two communities: several speakers identified the absence of ‘buy in’ to and ‘detachment’ from the settlement negotiations at the grass roots levels. Both Turkish and Greek Cypriots tended to regard the negotiations as proceeding between the leadership without their involvement. Speakers recommended an invigoration of civil society engagement. The issue of ‘distrust’ was central.

The guarantor powers: While speakers underlined that Greece was obviously distracted by its economic problems, it was clear that Greece wanted a harmonious relationship with Turkey. Greek-Turkish friction was no longer a barrier to a solution and Greece was best described as ‘semi-detached from the process. Cyprus should be careful, however, not to obstruct Turkey’s accession process to the EU. Turkish politics were also a complicating factor.

Legal issues: These complicate property settlements. A key problem would occur if the ECHR were to become involved in property adjudication. If possible, this should be best avoided.

A possible catalyst? With many speakers emphasising the need for new ideas, the proposal was made that partition might – albeit reluctantly – be the best outcome. In many ways this was already the *de facto* situation on the ground. If the international community were to embrace this as its preferred solution, this might stimulate the two communities toward a rapprochement.

The post-presentation Q&A session was an intense one. It perhaps reflected the entrenched positions of the two communities all too accurately. It thus reinforced the speakers’ central point that distrust between the two communities remained the main obstacle to progress.