

FIRST DRAFT
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THE CYPRUS CONFLICT IN TURKISH-CYPRIOT TEXTBOOKS

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Introduction

Cyprus is a deeply divided community. At various periods during this century its two communities have been locked in violent encounters. Although the relations between the Turkish and Greek-Cypriots had been relatively peaceful during much of British colonial rule (at least up to the mid-1950s), no functional integration between the two communities had occurred. Under the millet system introduced by Ottoman rule (1571-1878), each community controlled its own system of education and religious institutions; British rule did little to alter this pattern of social segregation between the two communities. Disputes between the rival metropolises outside of Cyprus had the effect of perpetuating separate self-views and inhibiting the development of a pan-Cypriot identity. Furthermore, both the Greeks and Turks of Cyprus had established a pattern of appealing to their "big brothers" in Greece and Turkey respectively.

A major vehicle for the process of political socialization has been the separate educational systems maintained by each of the two communities. For centuries, Greek and Turkish-Cypriot children have attended separate schools. The curricula and standards of Greek and Turkish-Cypriot schools (at both the elementary and the secondary levels) have been tailored to correspond to the Greek and Turkish educational school systems respectively.

Since there is no intercommunal university in Cyprus, the great majority of Cypriot students attend universities in Greece or Turkey. The Greek and Turkish governments have provided these Cypriot students with more generous scholarships and facilities than those made available to their own

mainland students. Consequently, Greek and Turkish graduates returning to Cyprus have been socialized into the historical self-images of the mainland communities, which has hardly encouraged cultural bridge-building between the Greek and Turkish-Cypriot youth.

Addressing the role of education in developing a sense of separate Greek and Turkish nationalism in Cyprus, a Greek-Cypriot scholar wrote:

The importance of this cultural aspect of ethnic differentiation cannot be adequately emphasized. It provided the context within which the two Cypriot communities became conscious of their primordial attachments and the basis of their socialization into Greek and Turkish nationalism respectively. As a result, a commonly shared system of social communication that could conceivably form the basis of an integrated Cypriot society was precluded from developing.¹

My assigned task in preparing this paper is to examine the various Turkish and Turkish-Cypriot texts used at various levels in Turkish-Cypriot secondary schools which have been furnished by the Georg-Eckert Institute für Internationale Schulbuchforschung. In doing so, I have noted that the objective of this conference,

...is based on the fact that -whatever Cyprus' political future might be -all sides ought to aim at unbiased textbooks which tend to reduce conflicts. A bearable coexistence - no matter what the constitutional structure would be - will be possible only through the removal of hostile images. Textbooks essentially contribute to this removal and represent an important component for a peaceful coexistence in the future.

To begin with, I would like to acknowledge the work done by Barbara Hodge and G.L. Lewis in their slim but instructive booklet entitled "Cyprus School History Textbooks" which was published in London by the Education Advisory Committee of the Parliamentary Group for World

Government in 1966. I also commend the spirited introduction of that volume written by Professor J.A. Lauwerys in which he challenges the critics of textbook revision who insist on teaching "objective" history, by stating that "the total number of historical facts is so vast that selection is evidently necessary: according to what criteria, what aims, should one select?"² After surveying the extracts from Greek and Turkish history textbooks of the time, Professor Lauwerys argued that "in neither case do we have scientific, balanced, scholarly, 'objective' history at all: it is simply a matter of selecting events or quasi-events from the past and then arranging them so as to glorify a particular nation."³

There is much food for thought in Lauwery's essay, and perhaps we can address some of them in the discussions that will be generated at this conference. It is noteworthy that the books which Hodge and Lewis examined were published either before the outbreak of civil strife in 1963 (as appears to be the case with the Turkish texts), or so soon after in 1964, (as was the case with the Greek texts) that there is barely any reference to the bitter events that unfolded after December 1963. To put it mildly, a lot of water has flowed under the bridge since then, in Cypriot history. The addition of fresh wounds on both sides has made the challenge of revising textbooks a more formidable task than before.

The History Texts

1. Vehbi Z. Serter Kıbrıs Tarihi (The History of Cyprus) [approved for use in Middle School 1-3 years, in 1975 but with later revisions to include events up until 1989].

2. Vehbi Z. Serter and Ozan Z. Fikretoglu Kıbrıs Türk Mücadele Tarihi, 1878-1981, (The History of the Turkish-Cypriots' Struggle, 1878-1981) Nicosia: 1982.(For use in Lycee 1-3).
3. Vehbi Z. Serter and Ozan Z. Fikretoglu Türkiye Cumhuriyeti: Inkılap Tarihi ve Atatürkçülük (The Turkish Republic: The History of The Revolution and Ataturkism), Nicosia: 1980. [For use in Middle School 1-3 years].

The Ottoman and British Periods

In keeping with what I understand to be the ultimate objective of the conference, in addition to providing brief commentaries of the coverage of the Ottoman and British rule in the texts, I shall also identify examples of passages that I deem to be negative and offensive to Greek-Cypriots and Greeks; these passages may be appropriate examples of the type of partisan history that might be considered for revision in the future. Obviously, like beauty, what is offensive and stereotypical is in the eye of the beholder. Given my background as a Turkish-Cypriot, I readily acknowledge that it would be far more appropriate for a Greek-Cypriot to identify what is offensive to him or her.

The texts which I have examined were written by local teachers. It may be worth noting that the same author (Dr. Vehbi Serter) has written one of the above texts, and has co-written the other two. For the most part, there is little difference among the texts, particularly those parts that deal with Cypriot history.

Whereas Text No. 2 begins with a brief treatment of the Ottoman period before describing the political events during the period of British rule, Text 1 has an introductory section entitled "The Geography of

Cyprus". In this part, the island's physical features are described and population figures are given showing the Greek and Turkish composition of the island's people. I found it noteworthy that whereas the results of the 1960 census are reported in the section are non-controversial, the current Turkish-Cypriot population of 200,000 would be disputed by Greek-Cypriot and other observers of the island; additionally, the number of the Turkish-Cypriot communities abroad (400,000 in Turkey, 70,000 in the United Kingdom, and 40,000 in Australia) would be challenged by Greek-Cypriots.

However, from the point of view of fostering negative images of the other community, of greater note in this section of Text 1 may be a comparison of the importance of the island to Turkey and Greece. In the section dealing with Cyprus' significance to Greece, the author has asserted the following:

Never in the history of Cyprus has Greece had any sovereign rights in Cyprus. Those few colonies which were established in ancient times for purely economic reasons do not confer any rights on the Greeks. (Text 1:8)

The author further argued:

The Greeks who live in Cyprus today are not Hellenes. As accepted by numerous foreign historians, they are the residue and remnants of the many nations that occupied Cyprus through its history. On this score too, there is no connection between Greece and Cyprus. (Text 1:8)

In the chapter dealing with Ottoman rule in Cyprus, the authors provide a good deal of information concerning the causes of the Ottoman invasion of the island during the 16th century, the numerous battles that were waged before its eventual conquest, as well as the administrative system of

Ottoman rule. The authors emphasize the progressive and equitable nature of the administration, and list the many cultural and historical monuments that were created during the three-century long Ottoman period.

As well, the authors describe the high status and authority conferred on the Greek-Orthodox Archbishop by the Ottoman Sultan. In what I believe to be a description that many Greek-Cypriots would find objectionable, the authors state that "the Greek-Orthodox Church abused the goodwill shown to them by the authorities, and regularly incited the people to rebel against Ottoman rule". (Text 1: 68) On the other hand, the authors also acknowledge in the same paragraph that missionaries from France and Russia, as well as the "erroneous conduct of some Turkish rulers" (Text 1: 68) were factors in the revolts of the island's inhabitants. Nevertheless, the alleged disloyalty and treachery of the Greek-Orthodox clergy is repeated and emphasized. As well, Greek-Cypriot clergymen are described as avaricious and accused of single-mindedly enriching the Greek-Orthodox Church.

The account of the British period up until the outbreak of the EOKA insurgency in 1955 is relatively measured, and its presentation of facts broadly corresponds to that of some British accounts, with some exceptions. An example of such an exception is the authors' description of Greek-Cypriot provocations when British rulers took over the island's administration in 1878, and their judgment of Greeks. Thus, the authors argued:

As they had done through their history, the Greeks of Cyprus readily accepted their new masters. They were delighted to see the departure of Turks who had saved them from serfdom and provided them with every opportunity. (Text 1: 65)

As the communal relationship deteriorated between the two communities as a result of the Enosis struggle, one could detect the authors' increased partisan tone. Thus, in describing an episode of intense communal violence in 1958, the authors wrote:

Intercommunal violence continued with all its ferocity. Through a statement issued through the terrorist organization EOKA, Grivas threatened to set fire and destroy Turkish neighbourhoods. In responding to these threats, a handful of unarmed faithful Turks bravely faced down their adversaries and never sacrificed their principles. In the meantime, many Turkish villages were destroyed by barbaric EOKA killers. (Text 1: 93)

I fully expect Greek-Cypriot readers would find such a passage deeply offensive.

Independence and After, 1960-1989

Arguably, Greek and Turkish-Cypriots could afford to be more detached about events in the distant past; they may be more reticent to do so about more recent events. It may be useful to examine three separate periods after independence, and how they are viewed in the texts:

(i) The Partnership Government in the Republic of Cyprus:1960-1963:

In covering the short-lived independence period, all three texts lay the blame for the collapse of the partnership government squarely on Greek-Cypriots. In this context, the Akritas Plan conceived and operationalized by Greek-Cypriot leaders in order to do away with Turkish-Cypriot constitutional rights is cited in all the three texts.

(ii) 1963-1974: More than one observer of Cypriot affairs has commented that the trouble with Cyprus is that Turkish-Cypriots cannot forget and Greek-Cypriots cannot remember what happened in their recent past. The

period that Turkish-Cypriots recall with particular bitterness is the decade between the collapse of the bi-communal government when civil strife began in late 1963 up until Turkey's military intervention in 1974. The writing in Texts 1 and 2 covering this period is very similar, and in some places identical. The sufferings of the Turkish-Cypriots, and the military operations conducted by Greek-Cypriots against them have been described at length. Texts 1 and 2 provide numerous photographs which depict Turkish suffering (e.g. Turkish-Cypriot refugees as they are driven from their homes or in camps).

(iii) Developments During and Since 1974:

The events of 1974 represent a turning point in the history of the Turkish-Cypriots as indeed in all Cyprus. I am well aware of how Greek-Cypriots view the developments in 1974 and the succeeding years. In Turkish-Cypriot eyes, Turkey's military intervention assured them security of life, and put an end to many years of suffering. Thus, the authors stated that "the second operation that started on August 14, 1974 enabled Turkish-Cypriots to have their own space where they could live in peace and without fear, and cleared of enemies." (Text 2:89)

In both the texts dealing with Turkish-Cypriot history, the "Peace Operation" refers to Turkey's military intervention in 1974. As with previous accounts dealing with Greek-Turkish clashes and confrontations, the descriptive accounts of the events are quite partisan, and there are a few passages that would be deemed distorted and offensive to Greek-Cypriots. An example of the latter is the following statement:

After 7 September 1975 no Turk remained in south Cyprus other than a few mentally ill people. By contrast a certain number of Greek-Cypriots preferred remaining in the Turkish Federated State of Cyprus by staying in the Karpas area in the north. (Text 2: 93)

A Note on the Geography Texts:

The Georg-Eckert Institute provided me with photo-copies of the few pages dealing with Cyprus in five separate geography texts that have been in use at the secondary (Middle and Lycee) levels in Turkish schools. All contain pictures from Cyprus, and four out of five feature a map of the island. All the pictures depict Turkish scenes, and there is nothing that indicates the Greek presence on the island. The only picture in one text (Resat İzbirak *Geography*, Istanbul: 1992, p. 151) is that of the monument erected for the Turkish martyrs of the 1974 war. Nonetheless, it is highly instructive that the short summary on Cyprus in one of the texts (published in 1962) makes no mention whatsoever of the ethnic disturbances that preceded the founding of the bi-communal Republic of Cyprus. This demonstrates that the contents of textbooks generally mirror the state of relations between Greeks and Turks, on the island and in the respective mainlands.

Some Thoughts on Cypriot Textbook Revisions

The case that Cypriot textbooks are partisan, are highly selective in their presentation of facts, and glorify the community and nation of the textbook writers is easy to make. That they foster negative images of the "other community" is also beyond doubt, even when such depiction is subtle and implicit rather than direct and explicit. There is nothing in the texts that draw attention to the commonalities in Greek and Turkish-Cypriot societies (e.g. the remarkably high premium placed on education in both societies).

At the same time, I am of the view that scholars who are analyzing such phenomena, need to go beyond the common sense assumptions that negative images in school textbooks encourage ethnic misunderstanding. I believe it would be very instructive to examine studies that may be available which show how and in what circumstances negative images and stereotypes in texts actually encourage the development of ethnic misunderstanding.

I am aware that the revision of textbooks in order to excise them of the prejudicial and derogatory images of the "other community" is one of several of the confidence-building measures that have been promoted by the United Nations Secretariat in its attempt to facilitate a political settlement in Cyprus. I believe the goal of textbook revision is worthy of support, and that it could yield some positive outcomes. However, I do have some caveats.

To begin with, I have been preparing my paper at the time when the Bosnian tragedy has been unfolding in all its fury. The events in the former Yugoslavia have been profoundly sobering because of the "return of history" to that fractured country, and the revival of the ghosts of previous eras. By all accounts, the history texts used by Tito's Communist regime were thoroughly sanitized to remove unfavourable views and images of any of the national groups within the Yugoslav federation. After close to a half-century of using such texts, what does the former Yugoslavia have to show for itself in terms of ethnic amity?

While the tragedy of the former Yugoslavia should be studied to derive useful lessons, the terrible events there need not immobilize those who are dedicated to the goal of studying school texts in order to promote a better understanding in ethnically divided societies.

Obviously, schools are only one forum in which children are socialized where they are exposed to the notions of 'us' and 'them'. In some respects, the family may be even more important an agent of politically salient socialization in divided societies. In Northern Ireland, for example, for many years schools have actively discouraged students from joining the paramilitary groups active in that divided society. It is apparent that hundreds of young people have defied their schools' counsel by affiliating themselves with such groups that employ violence against the other community.

It is clear to me that textbook revisions as a means of fostering greater communal understanding should not be tackled in isolation from other attempts intended to bring about greater intercommunal understanding. I do not think that efforts to promote greater understanding through textbook revisions will yield positive results unless some parallel progress is achieved in terms of dealing with the insecurities of the two Cypriot communities arising from their double minority situation. Textbooks that are magnanimous and 'fair' about the other community can only result in an atmosphere of confidence.

Given that many years of negotiations have failed to yield a political settlement in Cyprus, and many more years may transpire before such an outcome is attained, does that mean that no attempts ought to be made to revise texts? My own answer is that the effort is well worth making without waiting for a final settlement.

To be sure, virtually everything that involves both Greek and Turkish-Cypriots on the island has political implications. Thus, any meaningful attempt at examining Turkish and Greek-Cypriot textbooks will be a political act. It is essential that the leadership on both sides endorse the

effort because that will help diminish the resistance from numerous quarters, not the least from historians themselves. This may not be unduly difficult since neither side would be asked to commit itself to making such fundamental choices as to territorial divisions or external guarantees. In any case, as is well known both sides have endorsed the idea in principle as one of several confidence-building measures which have been proposed by the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General.

To my knowledge, no attempt has been made to date to examine school textbooks in Cyprus with a view to making revisions that would contribute to a better understanding, or diminishing the sense of divide between the two communities. A panel of Greek and Turkish-Cypriots (to exclude lawyers, for sure !) need to be selected to consider the task. Members of such a panel may be receptive to the participation (perhaps in their preliminary deliberations) of non-Cypriot resource people. In this connection, the Georg-Eckert Institute comes to mind. It may be that in dealing with the presentation of the history of Ottoman and British rule, the authoritative four-volume history of Cyprus by Sir George Hill may be acceptable to both sides as a major reference source.

One area in which the histories of each side could be revised would be to draw attention to the common experiences of the two communities in history. For example, Hill cites several examples of Turkish and Greek-Cypriot peasants joining forces in popular revolts against the authorities during Ottoman rule. Other revisions could take note of the harmonious co-existence and cooperation of the two peoples in all spheres, except that of sharing political power.

Parallel to such endeavours, there are some other thoughts that I would like to share. At the risk of undue repetition, it is essential to ensure that

what progress may be achieved in one sphere, such as the revision of textbooks, not be negated in another. It will be no use to have sanitized texts while continuing to have a steady stream of jingoistic material in Greek and Turkish newspapers and other media. There are no easy solutions for this problem. However, greater interaction between Turkish and Greek journalists, and freedom of access for them on both sides of the island could help. In this connection, I might recall that "in March 1961, at a meeting of Greek and Turkish editors and publishers, an understanding was reached 'aimed at improving and increasing the flow of reliable news and views between Greece and Turkey'."⁴ Could a similar initiative be envisaged before a final settlement emerges on the island?

There are some other thoughts that come to mind: even though Greek and Turkish schools are totally segregated, might it be possible to have one or more integrated classes alternately at a Greek or Turkish University on the island? The establishment of a Turkish program in the Greek-Cypriot University may well be a good omen. Another option may be to create a Greek-Turkish chair that will rotate between a Greek-Cypriot and a Turkish-Cypriot university on an annual basis, to teach about the Ottoman period in such a way that does not focus primarily on the clash between Greek and Turkish nationalisms. Such scholars as the Greek-Canadian Professor Dimitri Kitsikis, who has provided a revisionist account of Ottoman history, and who has promoted the idea of a Greek-Turkish confederation, come to mind as a suitable candidate for such an appointment; such a chair could be held by a Greek and Turkish scholar on a rotational basis.

Yet another possibility is the creation of the Cyprus equivalent of the *Abdi Ipekci* prize which is awarded each year to the person who is selected

by a joint committee of Greeks and Turks for having made a noteworthy contribution to Greek-Turkish understanding. This award has had the support of some prominent Turks and Greeks. Regardless of what form it takes, the principle of offering prizes to those individuals who strive for intercommunal understanding deserves consideration, and would benefit greatly from the support of the political leadership on both sides.

There are a good many other thoughts on what could bring Greek and Turkish-Cypriots together so that they could view each other in a context that is removed from the political discord that pervades their lives. Student exchanges and meetings at various levels are another possibility. A few years ago the members of the United Nations Peace Force invited Greek and Turkish-Cypriot school-children to Ledra Palace Hotel situated on the Green line dividing Greek and Turkish-Cypriot zones in Nicosia. This admittedly was a controlled experiment in intercommunal interaction with the Canadian peace-keeping troops acting as hosts. Nonetheless, the civility of the exchanges were widely reported.

As one who has studied the recent history of Cyprus, and of Greece and Turkey in recent decades, I am cognizant of the impediments that lie ahead in bringing about a greater understanding between the two Cypriot communities. The potential does exist to contribute to a diminution of the misunderstanding and mistrust of the two communities through school textbook revision. If nothing is ventured, then nothing will be gained. At the very least, an attempt should be made to get such a process started even though one must not lose sight of the need for other institutional arrangements that would make Greek and Turkish-Cypriots feel more secure with each other.

Protracted ethnic disputes have proven difficult to settle, and Cyprus is no exception. Still, one should think of the long term, and not discourage easily. Any progress achieved in bringing about greater intercommunal understanding is bound to be modest, and an uphill struggle. Of course, the biggest service that can be performed for better intercommunal relations would be the reaching of an agreed political settlement. That would make the task of those dedicated to fostering better communal relations through textbook revisions and other remedies immeasurably easier.

Notes

1. Paschalis M. Kitromilides, "From Co-Existence to Confrontation: The Dynamics of Ethnic Conflict in Cyprus," in Michael A. Attalides (ed.), *Cyprus Reviewed*, Nicosia: Zavallis Press, 1977, p. 44.
2. Barbara Hodge and G.L. Lewis, *Cyprus School History Textbooks*, London, 1966, p. 8.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
4. Alexis Alexandris, *The Greek Minority of Istanbul and Greek-Turkish Relations, 1918-1974*, Athens: Centre for Asia Minor Studies, 1983, p. 276.