

**Speech made to the General Assembly
of the New Cyprus Association
on the occasion of the 30th Anniversary of its founding**

**Nicosia, Holiday Inn
Saturday 19.03.05**

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In an effort to discredit the Association, its ideological adversaries argued on several occasions, that the New Cyprus Association is a creation, by-product of the colonial times. The truth is quite different. In actual fact the Association has nothing to do with the colonial times, which had ended fifteen years before. Indeed the founding of the Association was the direct outcome of the tragic events of 1974, the Greek coup and the Turkish invasion, which marked indelibly the recent history of Cyprus.

It was only a few weeks after, that nine people – most of whom did not know each other – got together in Nicosia and decided that Cyprus, our native country, should no longer be treated as an extension of others, but should rather be looked upon as self existent. Moreover, from now onwards, it ought to be our point of reference and the focus of our interest. For the first time, after many centuries, Cyprus would be looked upon as a political entity in itself.

After a series of intensive deliberations among the nine, the Association came officially into being on the 19th of March 1975. Without it being realised, that day was the day of birth of Cyprocentrism.

The Association had no party affiliations. Indeed the nine founders had different ideological backgrounds. What united us at the time were the concern for the future and the need for an immediate change in course for the country. Hence the name of the Association which symbolically points to the need to lay the foundations for a New Cyprus, with new objectives and visions and which for the first time would encompass all Cypriots.

It should be noted that, the Association has no political aspirations, in the sense that it does not aspire to power. Nevertheless, this does not imply that it is apolitical. On the contrary, it is very much concerned with political and social developments in the country. We exercise criticism or give credit to actions or positions, due regard being had to our objectives, taking neither a pro-government nor an opposition stance, behaving merely as a pressure group.

The original declaration of the Association was reflecting the prevailing situation of those times: destruction, loss of life, missing persons, unemployment, distress and uncertainty, a fact that had caused ideological differences to be put aside.

The declaration read as follows:

"Now that the tears dried out, that rage and despair has subsided, we have to think afresh... We have to search into our conscious and souls...and out of the fires of Pentadaktylos, we have to learn our lesson.

This country is inhabited by Greeks, Turks, Armenians, Maronites and others who in spite of their differences, real or imagined, have common interests and pursuits, which determine our Cypriot identity, which only we can perceive and protect.

It is not possible to forget our ethnic roots and culture, but as a people we have to look upon our life from the beginning. To start thinking and acting as Cypriots first and then Greeks or Turks"...

These are some extracts from the original, quite sentimental – I must admit – declaration of the Association.

In the ensuing years, the activities of the Association rested on three pillars:

- The reinforcement of the State and loyalty to Cyprus
- The rapprochement of the two major communities
- The consolidation of a democratic way of life and the peaceful co-existence and welfare of the people of Cyprus as a whole.

More precisely, the Association seeks to promote ideas and create the preconditions of devotion to the common homeland for all Cypriots, *independently of ethnic origins and differences in culture*. It also strives to bring together the communities in an effort to foster mutual understanding, in a way that stresses and develops common features and aspirations and at the same time limits and smoothes down differences. Indeed, cultural differences in Cyprus should be looked upon as enriching our lives, rather than a source of bigotry and polemics.

Above all, the Association opposes and fights nationalism, identifying in it the roots of the Cyprus Problem. It also tries to give the message that, the educational system should distance itself from *ethnocentrism*, thus reflecting the official line for reunification and, at the same time, the pluralistic structure of the Cypriot society. It is our belief that this would contribute towards the political survival of Cyprus, serving at the same time the reconstruction of Cypriot society on healthy foundations, rather than racism and prejudice.

During the first couple of years of its life, the Association functioned smoothly and made its presence felt in G/Cypriot society, whereas at the same time did not go unnoticed in the North. The ideas of the Association were at that time well received by the majority of G/Cs, who felt betrayed by the Greek military. At the same time, it enjoyed the approval or tolerance of nearly all the spectrum of G/C political leadership. Nevertheless, the activities of the Association aroused the concern of the Greek Embassy at that time and certain steps were made to the President of the Republic, but Makarios did not react. As for the extreme Right, as a

result of the coup, at that time it felt discredited and cut off from the people.

The activities of the Association, more so at the beginning, were many and multifaceted, ranging from publishing articles in the local press, lectures, speeches and other related events, to rendering assistance to T/Cs who had not yet been moved to the North (providing food, newspapers, medical care etc.). At a later stage, a team was organised, comprising a Turkish speaking member, which would visit villages where one or two odd T/Cs were still residing, to try and solve their specific problems including, in one or two occasions, provision of legal assistance. Upon the death of President Makarios things changed.

His successor was gradually turning towards Greece, whereas the putschists started to re-emerge taking advantage of the oblivion and the changing attitudes towards a progressive Greek government that had succeeded the "sinful" Right. The economy was recovering fast and the '74 events started gradually to fade away. As a result, the Association became the target of nationalists along the whole spectrum of the Right. Indeed, the cyprocentrism of the Association was interpreted as a form of antihellenism and an effort to alienate G/Cs from their cultural roots, which of course is utterly untrue. Being loyal to Cyprus in no way implies being against Turkey or Greece, far from it...

Nowhere in the numerous articles and other writings of the Association, can a reference be traced, which could, *bona fide*, be interpreted as anti-Greek or anti-Turkish. On the contrary, from its initial declaration until today, including its basic publication "13 Answers to 13 Questions", it is explicitly depicted that the Association respects the two basic cultures of the country, all of them in fact...

What the Association has all these years tried to do, is to draw the distinction between ethnicity and citizenship and the relative implications. Alternatively, it has tried to show the difference between cultural and political identity. Unfortunately, owing to the ethnocentric educational systems on both sides, the confusion is still there, more so among G/Cs. Cypriots are related to Greece and Turkey respectively, but between them they share a common political identity and the same native country.

The Association has also tried to bring to the surface similarities between the two communities, something that on purpose had been obscured. For many years, we were made to believe that Cyprus was a country inhabited by just Greeks and Turks and that there were no Cypriots, as Mr Denktash has repeatedly argued thus inciting the violent protests of T/Cs. We tried to argue that indeed there are Cypriots in Cyprus, precisely as there are Swiss in Switzerland, Belgians in Belgium or Singaporeans in Singapore; all three multinational countries, just as Cyprus. I think, it would be absurd to argue that more than four centuries of co-existence left the two communities untouched, with no cross-fertilisation in ideas, habits or behaviour. More so, in a country that is hardly more than 9,000km² and where the population, until '74, used to live in mixed towns or villages.

Without us realising it, the notion of the common territory and its implications was purposely suppressed in Cyprus, and people on both sides were for decades entangled in a game, which Benedict Anderson in his well known book calls "The imagined communities". We have two different languages and two different religions, the two communities in Cyprus, but it should not be overlooked that we share the same values, habits and mentality... We certainly do not subscribe to the false and oversimplified view that the two communities share nothing but differences!

The Association fought bigotry and nationalism and within the framework of the notion of "political nation" or the "nation by consent", tried to bring the two communities together. By the way, Switzerland, with its four officially used and recognised languages and cultures, is a nation by consent. Bearing this in mind, we argued that the use of the symbols pertaining to the Greek and Turkish states is politically wrong and damaging and for G/Cs unconstitutional, because they have nothing to do with the Greek and Turkish spirit or culture respectively.

If one browses through the texts and the articles of the Association, it will be evident that it went out of its way to safeguard the Republic of Cyprus, which signified the political survival of this country. Moreover, the activities of the Association heavily revolved around the rapprochement of the two larger communities. In our view, no solution can survive unless, there is a real rapprochement between the two communities and the divided society of Cyprus fuses into one, with common visions and pursuits. Suffice to remind the events of '63-'64, when the objectives of the two communities were diametrically different.

I would wish to stress once more that, what the Association has never attempted to do, is to culturally untaint the G/Cs from Greece or the T/Cs from Turkey. Moreover, the Association is not opposing Turkey or Greece, which could play a constructive role upon the reunification of the country. Nevertheless, we are not inclined to accept any political or other guidance or rather "leading by the hand" on the part of these countries and we would definitely not like to see Cyprus being treated as a protectorate. We would like to see a healthy relationship developing between Cyprus, Turkey and Greece and not one of political subjugation or mother/daughter relationship; there comes a time when kids become of age, unless they are retarded...

I do not need to state the obvious, that we are strongly opposing any form of partition, disguised or not, including the "those on that side, us on this side". It is perhaps worth mentioning that as early as 1975; we were the first to state, in no uncertain terms, that we strongly oppose Enosis.

In a nutshell, what we have been striving to achieve all these years, is to create the preconditions for the reunification of the country. Moreover, safeguard the welfare of Cypriots in a pluralistic society, under conditions of equality, far from any obsolete notion of majorities and minorities, without any inferiority or superiority complexes. A society devoid of bigotry, chauvinism and alienation, whereby people will enjoy their life without the evils of the past, express freely their cultural identity; share the common homeland, not only geographically but in their heart as well. These are more or less the beliefs of the Association, formulated within a framework, where Cyprus is the point of reference but with an eye on Europe and the rest of the world. I am first human, then Cypriot and then Turk, Greek, Maronite or Armenian. This is how we, members of the Association, feel, in that order.

We do not expect to be told that we are right. But as things shape out today, with Enosis and partition belonging to the past, with an increasing awareness of Cypriotness – more so in the North, I must admit – and a genuine wish on part of the majority of the people on either side for reunification, we feel that our platforms have been vindicated. Having said this, we feel that we still have a long way to go in the direction of doing away with negative stereotypes and re-establishing confidence that has been the victim, not only of our own mistakes but of history, our educational systems, as well as international interests.

We look at the future with confidence in the Association and rest assure that Cyprus will soon be reunified and in the not too distant future, the society will be integrated.