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In an effort to discredit the Association, its ideological adversaries argued on several occasions, that the New Cyprus Association – Νεοκυπριακός in greek, Yeni Kıbrıs Derneği in turkish – was a creation, a by-product of the colonial times. The truth is quite different. In actual fact the Association had 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 didn't 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 19<sup>th</sup> March 1975. Without it being realized, that day was the day of birth of Cyprocentrism.

The Association has no party affiliations. Indeed the nine founders had different ideological backgrounds. What united us at that time, was the concern for the future and the need for an immediate change in course for the country.

The original declaration of the Association was reflecting the prevailing situation of those times : of 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 have dried out, that rage and despair have subsided, we have to think afresh ... We have to search into our conscious and souls ... and out of the fires of Pendadaktylos, we have to learn our lesson.

This country is inhabited by Greeks, Turks, Armenians, Maronites and others, who inspite of their differences, real or imagined, have common interests and pursuits, which determine our Cypriot identity, which only us 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 the Republic of Cyprus
- The rapprochement of the two major communities and
- The consolidation of a democratic way of life, the peaceful co-existence and welfare of the people of Cyprus as a whole.

These objectives can be easily understood, if one recalls that there had just been a coup d' etat, which had violated all democratic rules and principles as well as an invasion which was aiming at dissolving the Republic of Cyprus and keeping apart the two communities.

During the first couple of years of its life, the Association functioned smoothly and made its presence felt in the 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 the 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 and certain steps were made to the President of the Republic but Makarios did not react. As for the Extreme Right, it felt discredited at that time, as a result of the coup and cut off from the people.

The activities of the Association, more so at the beginning, were many and multifaced, ranging from articles in the local press, lectures, speeches and other related events, to rendering assistance to T/Cs who had not yet been removed to the North (providing food, newspapers, medical care etc). At a later stage, a team was organized, comprising a turkish speaking member, which would visit villages where one or two odd T/Cs were still residing, trying to solve their specific problems including, in one or two occasions, the 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 of their cultural roots, which of course is 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 antigreek or antiturkish. 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, to show the difference between cultural and political identity. Unfortunately, owing to the ethnocentric educational systems on both sides, the confusion is still there. Cypriots are culturally related to Greece and Turkey respectively but between them they share one common political identity and have 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 Greeks and Turks and that there were no Cypriots, as Mr Denktash has repeatedly argued, inciting the violent protests of TC/s. 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 crossfertilization in ideas, habits or behaviour. More so, in a country that is hardly more than 9000km<sup>2</sup> and the population, until '74, used to live in mixed towns or villages.

Without us realizing 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". Yorkis from the village of Houlou in Paphos, would not be associated to his fellow – villager Ahmet but rather to Homer and Socrates who lived <sup>and a half</sup> two thousand years ago and had never been in Cyprus. 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...

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 recognized languages and cultures, is a nation by consent. Bearing this in mind we argued that the hoisting of the greek flag by the State and the adoption of the greek national anthem, is politically wrong and damaging and in the case of the flag in particular, unconstitutional. Because they are both related to the Greek State, having nothing to do with the greek spirit or culture. Nations have no flags and no anthems. Is there a flag of the Arab nation? No, there are twenty two different flags for the twenty two different arab states. The term "nation" or "national" is now-a-days, used in its modern sociopolitical context, which is identical to the state, not the nation as we had known it in the past. When Americans refer to the "nation" they refer to a conglomerate of people of different ethnical backgrounds, that make up the people residing in the United States, the American nation.

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 communities. Because 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. Suffize 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 never attempted to do, is to culturally untaint the Greek – Cypriots from Greece and the Turkish – Cypriots from Turkey. Moreover the Association is not opposing Turkey or Greece, which could play a constructive role upon reunification of the country. Nevertheless, we are not prepared to accept any political or other guidance or rather "leading by the hand", on the part of these two countries and we would definitely not like to see them treat Cyprus as a protectorate. We would like to see a healthy relationship developing between Cyprus, Turkey and Greece, not one of political subjugation or mother / daughter relation, because there comes a time when kids become of age, unless they are retarded ...

I need not state the obvious, that we are strongly opposing any form of partition but 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.

What we have been striving to achieve all these years, was 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 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, expressing freely their cultural identity, sharing their common homeland, not only geographically but in 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 feel the members of the Association, in that order.

We don't wish in the Association to be told that we were right. But as things shape out to-day, with a buried Enosis and partition – with the exception of Mr Denktash and his court – not appealing to T/Cs, with an increasing awareness of Cypriotness – more so in the North I must admit – and a genuine wish for reunification, we feel that our platforms have been vindicated.