

The Journey of the New Cyprus Association – 40 Years of Active Participation

The establishment of the Association, did not stem from nowhere but was the result of the sad events of July 1974, which marked the modern history of our country. As is the case with most of us, the events of that period shocked a small group of people, nine to be exact, which as mentioned in the founding declaration of the Association, decided that “Cypriots should take control of their lives from the beginning.” At the time, the small group of nine began to meet on occasion at a home, at times at an office, and many times in a garage. After much consideration, they decided that we had to re-examine our recent past and, by building on new foundations, establish a new association that would mark a new beginning for this country, whereby , our country would stand on its own, with full awareness of all the cultures, which collectively made up the Cypriot people. From that point on, Cyprus would be the point of reference for all Cypriots and Cypriot society would be looked upon as it really was, a multiethnic society, while all the different ethnic groups would receive the same treatment and respect.

Indeed, a few months later, and to be more exact, on 19 March 1975, the Association was founded and named New Cyprus, precisely to provide the sentiment of a new start for Cyprus.

Taking into account the prevailing circumstances, it is not surprising that the three main objectives of the Association were expressed, through the rapprochement of the two main communities, the strengthening of the Cypriot state and the strengthening of democratic institutions.

As it can easily be understood, these objectives were directly linked to the attempt to separate the country’s two main communities and the abolishment of the Republic of Cyprus by the Turkish invasion, as well as the abolition of democratic institutions by the Greek coup, which had overthrown the legitimate government of the country. Later on, the main objectives of the Association expanded to include support for human rights.

Due to the fact that, with the return of the then President of the Republic in December 1974, democracy was restored to the country, less initiative was taken regarding the objective of maintaining democratic institutions. More emphasis was given to the objective of supporting the Cypriot state, which, to this day, is still undermined from outside, and of course, the goal of rapprochement between the two main communities, which until this moment reside as two separate entities, even though since 2003 the opportunities for interaction have increased.

The appearance of the New Cyprus Association was originally welcomed by both communities and, given that the memories of the Greek junta and the crimes committed against the Cypriot people were still fresh, the actions of the Association were well received. This was all the more so among the t/c community, given that after a decade of adverse discrimination against Turkish Cypriots, a voice of compassion, brotherhood and practical support, was heard from the Greek Cypriot side.

I should perhaps remind you at this point, that after the coup and the invasion, a large proportion of Turkish Cypriots continued to reside in Paphos and in other areas, completely isolated, deprived of goods, and faced with animosity on the part of Greek Cypriot population. At the time, the Association organised special groups and tried to help, to the greatest extent possible, the Turkish Cypriot compatriots still residing in the South, so that they could overcome the problems they were faced with. This included providing them with newspapers retrieved from the North, procuring foodstuff, medical care as and when needed, as well as securing legal support for Turkish Cypriots who were deemed to be wrongfully prosecuted. The Association's attempt to assist the Turkish Cypriots in the few remaining enclaves in the South, continued for some time, even after the transfer of Turkish Cypriots from Paphos and Limassol to the North.

These actions highlight the engagement of the Association in matters relating to rapprochement, since the first moment of its inception. To this day, rapprochement continues to take up a significant portion of time and actions of the Association. Nowadays, rapprochement efforts have been substituted for contacts with individuals from the Turkish Cypriot community, and, since 1980, contacts with Turkish Cypriot political parties and organizations. Also, the publication of articles concerned with current affairs in both communities and the organization of relevant events.

As far as the strengthening of the Cypriot state is concerned, the Association focused on the Greek Cypriot community rather than externally, given that, in the meantime, nationalism had revived in the Greek Cypriot community. This nationalism, leaning towards Hellenocentrism, and the confusion between the cultural and political identities, led to the erosion of the statehood of the Republic of Cyprus, which later proved to be a sine qua non to the survival of the political identity of the country as a whole – even though the events of the decade 1964-1974 and the impermeable division after 1974, had gradually alienated the Turkish Cypriot compatriots.

It is probably worth mentioning several actions, which were meant to apply pressure on the Cypriot Government on behalf of the Association, in order to rescind activities that undermined the State. Whether it came to celebrating Independence Day on October 1, achieved in 1979; flying the Cypriot flag on government agencies from which it was absent; substitute the term "Mixed" for the word "National" in relation to the country's football team, as opposed to the Greek Cypriot nationalists, who claimed that Cyprus could not have a "national" team. Additionally, the Association sought to maintain the genuine cultural identity of the country, speaking of Cypriot literature, highlighting the need for the use of proper state symbols, which was taboo among the Greek Cypriot community, etc.

As early as 1979, the Association attempted to clarify concepts such as "Homeland", "Nation" e.t.c, through the publication of a booklet entitled "13 answers to 13 questions."

Moreover, it could be noted that the Association was the first to reject, in 1975, the notion of Enosis (Union with Greece) as unrealistic, cultivating instead the idea of Cypriotism, not as an end in itself but as a means through which the Cypriot political entity would survive for the sake of both communities.

I should perhaps mention here that, with the ascent to power of the Social Democrats in Greece, in 1981 and the marginalization of the Greek rightwing, to which the coup was attributed to, the Greek Cypriot society in conjunction with the political discourse that was pronounced, helped to revive and strengthen Greek Cypriot nationalism. This, in

turn, created an unbearable, hostile, and completely unfavourable climate for the activities of the New Cyprus Association, which insisted on its Cyprocentric actions. The Association also insisted on the joining of the two parts of the country, which had been so abruptly divided by the Turkish invasion, These were solely considered able to help preserve the political entity and unity of the country, as well as the reconstruction of Cypriot society ,on new and sound foundations.

As a result of the revival of nationalism, the Association faced abuse; a series of false claims were made and some of the officials of the Association began to experience problems in their working environments. I must say that during this period, which lasted for some time, the Association was tolerated and, sometimes, supported by the Left.

The Association never attempted to create a political party or movement, or grow the number of its members, as it had decided to act as a pressure group, distancing itself from party lines and manipulation. It should be noted that there was a time, when the Association held in its ranks members from all of the communities in Cyprus, indicative of the fact that it embraced all the lawful residents of our country, whilst its ideas resonated among the Cypriot people, despite the intense nationalistic polemic from both sides. It is fitting to mention, that for two years the president of the Association was Turkish Cypriot.

Perhaps it is worth mentioning that, in addition to the efforts of the Association which aimed at the reunification of the country and the reconstruction of Cypriot society, for which to this day remains unwavering and consistent in its pursuit, the Association has undertaken great efforts to clarify the difference between the civic and cultural identity of the Cypriot people. This is an issue that still exists ,as we unfortunately have two separate educational systems, which do not function correctly, in as much as they foster intolerance and in the sense that they are not consistent with the objectives of the State, specifically, those which relate to the reunification of the country within a federal framework.

Until this very moment, the educational systems on both sides continue to taint the relationship between the two communities and enhance the psychological gap that has been cultivated for decades. Unfortunately, with the exception of Mr. Talat's presidency in the North, when positive measures were taken within the educational system, the administrations of the two communities were not able to rectify some of the flaws in education, that continue to maintain the wounds of 1974 and which do not bridge the psychological gap between the two communities. Cyprocentric education, in combination with universalism, continues to be a dream in both communities.

A bright exception is the publication by the Association of a trilingual volume, entitled "Cypriot Art of the 20th Century", which for the first time presented in one volume the collective artistry of the communities of Cyprus.

As indicated by a recent survey conducted by the Association among both communities, in relation to the decade 1980-1990, changes have occurred with respect to matters of identity and relations between the two communities. However, in our opinion, Greek Cypriots still fail to realise what a state entails, and in particular a multicultural one, as is ours. Even less so they fail to realise, that in modern societies, the notion of "nation" tends to be replaced by the term "state", as one can clearly observe in the case of the 22 or so Arab states and so many other states in Central and South America.

That which the Association never did ,was to challenge the cultural origin of any Cypriot, nor surely to highlight any cultural or other differences, which in a multicultural society such as Cyprus, create centrifugal forces that foster dichotomous solutions, enhance separation and, in no way, assist efforts to unify our country or to uphold the central state.

In contrast, the Association tries to shed light on the mutual features of society and the space we live in, in an effort to generate common denominators and shared links and, thus, increase the chances of a viable state.

Unfortunately, despite the efforts of the Association, despite the call for educational reform in the South and the changing of the history books in the North a few years ago, which were revoked later on, the educational systems operating in the two main communities far from assist with the fulfilment of the objective of a political solution to the Cyprus P roblem. Indeed, most of us are tired from the decades-long conflict and the use of history to poison rather than bring to light the mistakes of the past, leading to corrective decisions.

Two weeks ago, the New Cyprus Association marked its 40th year of existence and activity. This activity has revolved around the axes of Cyprocentrism, love for the common homeland and detachment from any sense of intolerance and nationalism.

The guiding light of the Association always remains the unification of Cyprus and the reconstruction of Cypriot society, bearing in mind the current composition of the lawful residents of the country, but also the need to avoid repeating the mistakes that led to the current tragic state of affairs, whereby, unfortunately, many things, at least in the short term, cannot be reversed.

The New Cyprus Association has a holistic and inclusive outlook on Cyprus, because it is not comprised solely of Greek Cypriots or Turkish Cypriots but is home to all those who feel loyalty towards it.

Despite the difficulties encountered over the course of these 40 years, which have not been few, the Association has the courage and the will to continue, together with other like-minded companions, its effort to repeal negative stereotypes, in the hope that someday, not too far off, it will be able to witness this country not as it was before the coup and the invasion but, rather, as several other federal, multicultural countries that exist across all corners of the globe experience things, within a framework of tolerance, collaboration and equality.

Thank you.

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