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Heinz A. Richter

A CONCISE HISTORY OF MODERN CYPRUS

1878-2009

VERLAG FRANZ PHILIPP RUTZEN
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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO SOULA. WITHOUT HER PATIENCE AND UNDERSTANDING IT COULD NEVER HAVE BEEN WRITTEN

PREFACE

Reading experience has shown me for quite some time that the German language has become so exotic that most historians who work on Cypriot history do not know it. Thus research on this topic published in German is ignored according to the principle of *quod non est in lingua britannica/americana non est in mundo*. In order to overcome this obstacle I decided to translate the German text of this "Kurze Geschichte des modernen Zypern" into English so that interested readers may have access to my research results via this short version. Those readers, however, who have command of modern Greek can go directly to the Greek edition of volumes 1 and 2 published by Estia in Athens.

This "Concise History of Modern Cyprus" addresses itself to readers interested in Cyprus who want to learn more than what can be found in guide books or perhaps in newspapers but do not have the time to delve into the history of this island. It is the summing up of my four volume "Geschichte der Insel Zypern" which is 2,667 pages long and was written in seven years. It covers the era from 1878 when Cyprus became British to 1977 when Makarios signed the so-called High Level Agreement and died a little later. I refrained - for the time being - from writing a fifth volume which would bring the story to the present because there has been no substantial development since then. The Cyprus question has been marking time. But in order to help the reader to a better understanding of the development from then to the present this concise history contains a short overview of developments after 1977.

On the one hand my "Geschichte der Insel Zypern" is the continuation of Sir George Hill's classic account of the 1940s and on the other hand it is in its present form the only comprehensive history of modern Cyprus at least in the German language. Originally it was intended as a one volume work but soon it became clear that I was entering totally unexplored territory and in order to explore this adequately a certain epic width could not be avoided. While writing more and more new sources became available e.g., the American FRUS volumes, the delivery of which had been impeded by the CIA. This made it possible to put the narrative on a more and more solidified fundament which increased its quality and the number of pages enormously.

Added to this was the fact that I have known many of the protagonists personally since I have been working for 40 years on Greek and 30 years on Cypriot contemporary history. With a lot of them I have been entertaining friendly relations. Thus in my talks with these contemporary witnesses I learned much more than what was written down in the documents. Some of the facts which I described I lived through myself. Only against this broad background it was possible to write the four volumes and this present short version.

The volumes of the long version and the short version describe the genesis and the development of the Cyprus conflict chronologically. Naturally the description focusses on the actions of persons. Makarios and Grivas as well as Clerides left their imprints on the history of the island deeper and for a longer time than comparable protagonists could ever have done in big European states. At the same time it became clear that the history is by far more complicated than that of big states because influence from outside is much stronger. Therefore the narrative must take into consideration developments in and interventions from Athens and Ankara, London, Brussels, New York and Washington.

The Cyprus conflict is the result of British colonial policy in the 1950s designed to repel the ambition of the Greek majority to annex Cyprus to Greece (enosis). The British government played off the two ethnic groups and their mother countries according to the principle of divide and rule in order to keep Cyprus under its control. When in 1956 after the Suez adventure the British position in the Near East collapsed London came to the conclusion that a base in Cyprus would suffice. The result was a state with a limited sovereignty which was rejected by both ethnic groups: the Greeks continued to dream of enosis and the Turks of partition (taksim).

Makarios wanted unfettered independence but was not ready to accept the Turkish minority (18 percent) as equal partners.

These differences inevitably led to a major conflict which broke out in 1963/4 and led to a quasi civil war between the two communities. The mother countries mingled into the conflict. In 1974 the coup by the Greek military triggered the Turkish invasion and the occupation of almost 40 percent of the island and a de facto partition. Since then there have been repeated efforts to find an amicable solution which, however, failed at the intransigence of the one or other side. Since Cyprus' EU membership the Europeans *nolens volens* are involved in this conflict but so far they have successfully managed to bypass their responsibility. The short version supplies the background to the better understanding of this problem.

Essentially the story is based on primary and secondary sources in English, Greek and French from Cyprus, Greece, the UK, the US, France and Germany as well from the UN. Since my original field of research was Greece's contemporary history I had no difficulty in understanding Greece's policy towards Cyprus. At the same time I recognised the differences in the respective political cultures in comparison with those of the mother countries which still are influenced by their Ottoman or Byzantine heritage: their political cultures are clientelistic. In contrast both Cypriot societies are much more europeanised.

When writing the short version I was obliged to reduce the facts to a minimum but the interpretations were retained to a great degree. Naturally the description of many details had to be shortened or completely left aside. Nevertheless, I tried to avoid writing a dry handbook of Cypriot history. The aim was an easy to read fascinating text satisfying all scholarly standards with one exception: I waived an extensive scholarly reference apparatus of footnotes and bibliographies. Such an apparatus would have impaired the readability, inflated the text, made the book bulky and expensive. Whoever wants to check a passage quoted or a statement made or learn more details may take the respective volume in his hand. The four volumes match the four chapters of the short version. As the chapters of both editions correspond it is easy to find the location of the item looked for. But there remains the problem of the language, of course.

Finally a word on terminology. I was often criticised in the past not practising "political correctness" i.e. not using the expression "Greek/Turkish Cypriots" when I am referring to Greeks and Turks living on the island even if it is clear that I mean Cypriots of this or that ethnic community. This is a question of style and not of "political correctness". Similarly I speak of "the north" or "the south" meaning the Republic of Cyprus or the "TRNC". Again this is a question of style and not a case of a political denomination on the basis of international law let alone an acknowledgement of the statehood of the "TRNC" by me.

The translation of this short version was done by me but being no native speaker of English it needed some polishing and in this context I want to thank most cordially Anne Cliadakis and Cathy Eve. They did a splendid job.

1878-1948

The Colonial Period

CYPRUS BECOMES BRITISH

In 1878 Great Britain and the Ottoman Empire concluded a Convention by which Cyprus was leased to the British until that distant day in the future when the Russians would move out of Batum, Ardahan and Kars in Armenia, i.e. forever. This Convention, the *Cyprus Convention* as it was soon known, was the result of highly complex developments far away from the island which had begun half a century earlier. In my following exposition I will try to give an outline of the main strands of the story and their interdependence.

There were two main causes which led to the Cyprus Convention: the growing nationalistic unrest among the peoples of the Balkans and the global rivalry of Great Britain and Russia known as the *Grand Game*. But these conflicts were well known all through the nineteenth century and until 1878 had not had any influence on Cyprus. This time, however, it was different.

The event, which in 1875 triggered the new development, was one of those periodical peasant revolts against merciless tax farmers in the Ottoman provinces of Herzegovina and Bosnia. In the past the Turks had crushed such revolts easily, but this time there were three new factors which gave this local rebellion an international dimension, namely the pan-Serbian and pan-Slav movements, and Austro-Hungarian expansionism. The Pan-Serbs in Belgrade dreamed of a Greater Serbia including all southern Slavs. The Russian Pan-Slavists wanted to unite all Slavs under the lead of Russia. The Austrians abhorred the idea of a Greater Serbia and therefore aimed at the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Both the Russians and the Austrians agreed that the Ottoman Empire had to be dissolved; however, they disagreed about the method to achieve dissolution and even more so about the share each of them should get; consequently war was threatening.

The situation was further complicated by two additional facts: The rivalling Austrians and Russians were allies of Germany in the *Dreikaiserbund* and the latter wanted to preserve this alliance. Furthermore, there was Great Britain which wanted to keep the Russians away from the Mediterranean at almost any cost.

In order to avoid a general conflagration, as in the Crimean War twenty years earlier, the Austrians and the Russians together with Bismarck worked out a compromise solution, the so-called *Berlin Memorandum*, which was accepted by the French and Italians as well. But the British refused to approve the compromise.

Until 1874 Britain, under Prime Minister Gladstone, had followed a policy which was known as "splendid isolation". His successor, Disraeli, was an imperialist, i.e. he wanted to expand the British Empire and secure its maritime routes of communications. In his eyes the old European concert of powers controlled by British balance of power politics had been ruined by the creation of Germany. He wrongly distrusted Bismarck's assurances that Germany was *saturiert* [saturated] and rightly suspected the Russians and Austrians of wishing to carve up the Ottoman Empire. In order to cope with this threatening situation Disraeli did his best to sow the seeds of discord among the members of the *Dreikaiserbund* and took measures to keep the Russians away from the Mediterranean and to strengthen the life line of the British Empire through the Mediterranean to India. Moreover in 1875 he brought the Suez Canal under British control by buying shares from the Egyptian Khedive and despatching naval units to the Dardanelles.

In the meantime, the revolt in Bosnia and Herzegovina had escalated into a war between Turkey and Serbia. In the spring of 1876, an uprising of the Bulgarians was crushed by the Turks in such a brutal way that the *Dreikaiserbund* intervened and forced Turkey to conclude an armistice. In December 1876, an international conference was held in Constantinople, during which the Powers exerted considerable pressure on Turkey to initiate reforms, although the

British secretly backed the Turks, enabling them to continue their intransigent policy. Thus, the conference of Constantinople failed.

This meant war. In order to avoid a direct confrontation with the British, the Russians made a last diplomatic effort. In March 1877, Russia, Austria, Germany and Britain signed a protocol asking the Turks to introduce those reforms they themselves had proposed at the Conference of Constantinople three months earlier. The Turks, however, believed themselves to be in a position of strength and rejected the Russian proposal. Thereupon Russia declared war on the Ottoman Empire on 24 April 1877.

The Russians attacked in two directions: in the Balkans and in Trans-Caucasia. Romania consenting, they crossed the Danube and marched towards Sofia. A strong Turkish attack from the fortress of Plevna on the western flank stopped the thrust until December. But in January the fortress surrendered and the Russians advanced rapidly towards the Straits. At the end of January an armistice was signed which allowed the Russians to proceed to Agios Stefanos (today Yesilköy), a suburb of Constantinople; and on 3 March 1878 the peace treaty of San Stefano was signed.

In terms of British interests this peace treaty was a catastrophe. Among the many territorial changes was the creation of a Greater Bulgaria. The mere existence of this new state, stretching from Lake Ochrida in the West, the Danube in the North, the Black Sea in the East, almost to Adrianople (today Edirne) in the Southeast and the Aegean in the South, was a provocation to all its neighbours and to the Powers. It was clear that this "monster" state could only survive as a Russian satellite, and thus, indirectly, Russia would have become a littoral state of the Mediterranean, a British nightmare.

To make things worse, the Russians gained the Black Sea harbour of Batoum and the strategically important towns of Kars, Ardahan and Bajesid in Armenia. Obviously Russia was moving towards Mesopotamia and an advance towards Alexandretta (today Iskenderun) could no longer be excluded. At the same time the Straits were at the mercy of the Russians. In London the alarm bells rang: this peace treaty threatened Britain's route to India, the Life Line of the Empire. In Disraeli's eyes this treaty had to be completely redrawn.

Ways to minimise the damage for Britain began to be considered when the possibility of a Russian-Turkish war had loomed on the horizon in late 1876. Recollections of the horrible Crimean War excluded any thought of direct armed intervention. Another option had to be found. After intensive discussions among the military, Colonel Robert Home reported: *"England might maintain Turkey at the expense of enormous blood and treasure, but what good would that do? She had better leave Turkey to her fate and seize upon some place that would be of use to her such as the Dardanelles and Cyprus."* Alternatively, Crete, Egypt, or Rhodes or all three might be occupied. The latter was a radical idea which Disraeli rejected. He and his ambassador in Constantinople, Austen Henry Layard, *"believed that England should support Turkey, aid her by diplomatic pressure to reform in the interests of both Christians and Mussulmans alike and thus continue to guard the route to India by maintaining the Sultan's rule over Constantinople, the Straits, and Armenia."* But how this could be achieved was unclear.

In early 1877, London demanded Russian guarantees of British interests in the Suez Canal, Egypt, Constantinople, the Straits and the Persian Gulf, but the Russians refused to guarantee Constantinople and the Straits. During the Russian advance into Bulgaria, London, fearing the occupation of Constantinople, toyed with the idea of entering the war, but when the Russian advance was slowed down, the British politicians regained their composure again and started exploring alternatives.

In view of British interests in Asia Minor and Armenia and the safeguarding of the route to India, the best solution seemed to be the acquisition of a *Place d'Armes* in the eastern