

## PROGRESSIVE THOUGHT INSTITUTE

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### **An Iceberg in Eastern Mediterranean: “Negotiations Process in Cyprus”**

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*Quite the contrary, the aim must be to produce “a winner” at the end of this process and that winner need to be the people who live together in both parts of the Island in peace and prosperity...”*

Negotiation Process in Cyprus is an important issue that has come back to the burning agenda of international diplomacy with the Joint Declaration that was made on February 11, 2014 in Cyprus. This Declaration, due to its timing, the characteristics of its preparation stages, its form as well as its very content, constitutes a critical turning point for Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and Turkey as it would bear close effects on the respective positions of the two in areas of foreign policy matters, domestic political developments, economic and social policy.

Progressive Thought Institute organized a one-day Working Meeting, **“Cyprus Negotiations: Search for Solutions and Alternative Approaches,”** in İstanbul on March 7, 2014. The purpose of the meeting was to study and review these critical developments and conduct a comprehensive impact analysis by the participation of former high level diplomats, politicians, parliamentarians, academicians and journalists from TRNC and Turkey.

In this meeting, the participants deliberated extensively on the respective negotiation positions of the parties, the implicit as well as explicit risks and opportunities that negotiations would pose for the people on the Island. The participants also expressed and emphasized their most sincere support for all negotiation efforts that seek a fair and sustainable resolution for the Cyprus problem. Finally, the participants made a broad assessment of the available models of resolution with varying implications and consequences, including a “two-state approach” as a viable and lasting alternative.

The participants, in their presentations and comments in the meeting, emphasized specifically the importance of the need to reject the status quo and the long-lasting deadlock in the negotiations with their possible effects that would arrest and overshadow the future of the negotiations; and, focused on concrete policy proposals to enable the meaningful integration of the Turkish people of Northern Cyprus with the contemporary global community in the world.

As such, they highlighted the sanctions and embargos on the Turkish people of Cyprus as belated violations of human rights in all meanings of the word and underlined strongly the urgent need for the lifting of these sanctions in line with the earlier commitments of the international and especially the European Union. They finally asserted that any concrete steps that are taken in the direction of lifting of the sanctions would serve as the most meaningful “test of sincerity” for the international community.

The participants all agreed that expected negotiations would entail all the technical points that are normally expected in the negotiation process. Furthermore, they specifically stressed that the final resolution model that would ultimately come out would uphold the principles and issues of shared sovereignty, bi-zonality, political equality, treatment of both sides in the status of “founding states,” acceptance of EU jurisdiction as “primary law,” preservation of the citizenship status of the present citizenry, fair sharing of natural resources and the like.

Last but not the least, the Study Group made detailed references to the need for the preservation of the current Agreements of Guarantor States and Alliance Treaties along with the critical characteristic of ensuring and conducting an environment of equitable relationships and dialogue between the direct parties to the Conflict and between Greece and Turkey as closely associated parties to the Cyprus issue. These points were especially emphasized with relation to their sensitive nature in making a critical contribution to peace and stability in the whole region.

In this respect, the Study Group stated that the success of the negotiations would depend on the level of transparency with which the process is carried out; and, it is imperative that the highest possible level of information efficiency that the nature of diplomacy would allow be attained internally for the effective management of the process.

One of the main conclusions of the discussions at the meeting was that the abovementioned principles and positions that underlie the Cyprus negotiations would be put to reality successfully only on the condition that these principles enjoy a healthy and broad base of public support. As such, the Group was keen to underline the need for a campaign of Public Diplomacy that would be pursued on a continuous basis over a general platform of public relations, reflecting timely, correct inputs on the process and operating in a participatory manner.

The Study Group also addressed the importance of the negotiation process for a fair and sustainable solution of the conflict in Cyprus and its likely outcomes as they relate to the Turkey. In this respect, the participants reviewed topics like changes in the regional energy panorama, issues of new energy resources, energy security and the political-military developments in the region with regards the foreign policy positions that Turkey has traditionally adopted and likely to adopt in the coming years.

The Study Group noted that important shifts have taken place in centers of global competition and global conflict among the super powers in the world. As the focus of the future of conflict has been shifting to the Pacific Region, the search for new alliances and models of cooperation at the regional level has gained added importance in the Middle East and larger area of Eastern Mediterranean. This geopolitical development has introduced new parameters to be managed for Turkey in its regional policies together with the new and changing economic, financial, social and political balances that a possible solution would bring about in Cyprus.

On the other hand, a possible model for the solution of the Cyprus conflict would have inevitable legal and political consequences on Turkey's accession process into the EU, exactly how and in what form Turkey would be positioned in the European Expansion efforts. This question was also especially taken up and evaluated during the discussions.

Lastly, the participants pointed out that Turkey has certain legal, political and military commitments with respect to its position as a Guarantor State, arising out of its obligations in Zurich and London Treaties that serve as the original legal framework on the status of the Island and the respective positions of the Greek and Turkish sides. It is, therefore, very important to see how Turkey will conduct its position in the upcoming round of negotiations with regards these obligations.

The Study Group registered a note of caution for Turkey in its discussions that; to what degree Turkey will stand by its international commitments on the Cyprus issue shall have direct bearing on how the international community will view the creditability and reliability of Turkey in similar cases that are likely to occur in the region in the future as a new regional geopolitical architecture is underway amid its changing political and economic panorama.

Looking at the content of these discussions and commentaries, we are faced with the question to see if we are at a "point of break" with the new stage that Cyprus Negotiations have reached with this latest declaration.

Considering all different frameworks of solution in the past periods of negotiations, reviewing the nature of the current topics of discussions at the present stage of negotiations, having a forward looking view of the determining factors in the upcoming round of discussions, it would be a more appropriate approach to characterize the point we are in today not as a "point of break" but, rather, as a valuable "window of opportunity."

In the past, when the topic of Cyprus was mentioned, it used to be referred to as a huge "aircraft carrier" in the Eastern Mediterranean. Though Cyprus retains its characteristic as an "aircraft carrier" to a good degree, in the light of the shifting axis of regional as well as global geopolitical developments, it would be more accurate to refer to Cyprus as an "iceberg" in the Eastern Mediterranean.

In this region, the Cyprus Game was undertaken by a limited number of players up to today. We now see that this condition has also been undergoing a transformation and becoming a chess game on a wider plane. We see in this chess game the rather traditional players like the U.S., Russia, the EU at the table. However, we also see, this time, new players from a broad geography that extends from the Red Sea to the Pacific, starting from Israel, Iran, Saudi Arabia all the way to China who take individual as well as collective interest in the outcome of the game.

There exist a number of combinations whereby "the winner" in this chess game might end up the real loser at the end. However, it is obvious that the aim ought not to embark on making the necessary strides towards ensuring that there will be no winners so as to avoid falling into the position of the loser, either.

Quite the contrary, the aim must be to produce “a winner” at the end of this process and that winner need to be the people who live together in both parts of the Island in peace and prosperity.

It is possible that the international actors from outside the Island shall have to assume serious costs that might contradict with their interests and be viewed as substantial compromises from their ideal objectives in the region. Yet, these costs would be absolutely necessary to realize the necessary legal, political, economic and humanitarian conditions and to attain peace and stability in the Island for all who live there.

Therefore, these compromises must be recognized not as “costs” but meaningful and lasting “investments” towards regional and global peace and stability.

Hence, first and foremost the direct stakeholders of the negotiation process and together with the international community must display utmost care and ensure a conduct of diplomatic behavior at the highest level of sensitivity to avoid any strides and initiatives that would cause an overt case of “Titanic Tragedy” in Eastern Mediterranean.