

Book review: Yakinthou, C. 2009, Political Settlements in Divided Societies: Consociationalism and Cyprus

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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Rezension / review

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Simopoulos, M. (2011). Book review: Yakinthou, C. 2009, Political Settlements in Divided Societies: Consociationalism and Cyprus. [Review of the book *Political settlements in divided societies: consociationalism and Cyprus*, by C. Yakinthou]. *Federal Governance*, 8(2), 1-78. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-342731>

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Special Issue on *Federalism and Conflict Management* edited by Neophytos Loizides, Iosif Kovras and Kathleen Ireton.

Book Review

YAKINTHOU, C. 2009, Political Settlements in Divided Societies: Consociationalism and Cyprus, Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke/New York, p.288.

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'Political Settlements in Divided Societies', one of the latest contributions to the literature on Cyprus, attempts to analyse the failure of the Annan Plan through the prism of consociational approaches to negotiated settlements. In light of ongoing negotiations to resolve the Cyprus Problem, the book serves as a very useful sounding board, particularly given the intensification of the talks in September 2010.

Drawing from the literature on consociationalism), Yakinthou sets four factors (outlined in Chapter 1), segmental isolation, balance of power between the segments, tradition of accommodation, ability of the international community to offer incentives – as analytic tools which determine the success of a consociational arrangement. In the context of Cyprus, the author has correctly identified the 1960 Constitution as a paradigm that the UN interlocutors attempted to avoid. However, according to the referendum post-mortem, the Annan Plan failed to address the 'balance of power' element, as Greek Cypriots considered it to weigh heavily in the favour of the Turkish Cypriot community. The maintenance of Turkey's status as a guarantor power featured high on the list of factors which contributed to the Greek Cypriot rejection of the plan. Factoring in the influence of external power relations has proved a challenge to the application of consociational theory in Cyprus. The model treats as constant the ability of the parties to determine their own fate. Given the importance of Turkey to a solution in Cyprus, the author would have added value to her analysis by considering how Ankara affects the Turkish Cypriot negotiating position.

A subtle critique which is also borne out in the book refers to the inability of the theory of consociationalism to factor in the motivations within elite groups. The monolithic definition attached to 'elites' fails to recognise that, especially in times of political upheaval, partisan and/or ideological considerations play a major part in decision-making. Given the level of dominance exerted by political parties on the public sphere it is hardly surprising that, in times of upheaval, positions are subject to revision. One need look no further than the present chasm of opinion between Greek Cypriot political parties to appreciate that elite consensus is an unenviable task.

Also of value is the author's analysis of the referendum process (Chapter 7) as a safeguard for the legitimacy of the new constitutional arrangement. The author's interviews with officials in Cyprus verify that the UN had become convinced that the referendum, as a mechanism of popular endorsement, would counteract elite intransigence at the negotiating table. Using a solid examination of the literature on referenda, the author is correct to point out that this decision represented a departure from one of the basic tenets of consociationalism; namely that a settlement results from elite compromise. However, like so many other *fait accompli* which characterise the Cyprus Problem in its present state, the referendum process was treated as an unchanging precondition to the acceptance of a solution.

'Political Settlements in Divided Societies' represents a significant addition to the literature regarding Cyprus and negotiated political settlements, and offers a constructive critique of the consociational methodology employed by peacemakers in divided societies. The book would of interest to students and scholars interested in conflict resolution, peace building in divided societies, as well as the application of consociational theory in conflict situations.