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Bojana Meyn

Archives, politics and histories

A report from the world's last divided capital, Nicosia, Cyprus

By legend, the birthplace of the ancient Greek goddess of love Aphrodite, Cyprus, the third largest island in the eastern Mediterranean, has been fought over and reconquered through the centuries. Following the end of the British colonial rule and the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus in August 1960, the modern history of this 'love' island has been marked by a divide and even enmity between the Greek and Turkish population from 1963 to the present time, due to the "frozen" conflict between the Greek Cypriots majority and the Turkish Cypriot minority. The Turkish military forces invaded the northern part of Cyprus in July 1974 and, despite international condemnation, until the present day occupy 37 percent of the island's territory. As a result of this invasion, the new border, called "Attila line" or "Green line", is dividing the island and its people, preventing Cypriots from moving freely. Even Cyprus' capital, Nicosia, is also divided into the southern Greek Cypriot part, belonging to the Republic of Cyprus, and the northern Turkish Cypriot part belonging to the so-called Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. The latter, a self-declared state from 1983, is recognised only by Turkey.

The crossing of the Greek-Turkish checkpoint in the middle of Ledra Street, the main shopping Street in Nicosia, is a unique fascinating experience. Walking down this street, you move from the vibrant, modern and expensive Greek Cypriot shops and restaurants to the quiet and cheap Turkish Cypriot cafes and shops selling bootleg branded goods. This is indeed one street with two faces! The divided city of Nicosia also hosts since 1964 the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), making it the longest UN mission ever since.

The aim of my visit to Cyprus was actually to carry out research for my PhD-thesis on "Yugoslav-Greek relations 1949-1962" at the Department for Southeast European History of the Humboldt University in Berlin. A part of the thesis examines Yugoslav policy towards the Cyprus problem in the 1950s and the establishment of Yugoslav-Cypriot relations after the independence of the island (1960-1962). With a view to completing this task, I visited two important archives in the south-easternmost EU capital, Nicosia: *The State Archive of Cyprus* and *the Private Archive of Archbishop Makarios III*.

The State Archive of Cyprus (*Kratiko Archeio Kyprou*) is part of the Ministry of Justice and Public Order of the Republic of Cyprus. There is also a diplomatic archive within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Nicosia, but it is not open to the public. Instead, the diplomatic archive material is available via the State Archive of Cyprus where all official state documents should be found. Because of the 30-year access rule, one is only allowed to view documents dating back to 1984. Since Cyprus was under British rule until August 1960, a large part of the State Archive of Cyprus contains both the British appointed Governors' Archive, and the Secretariat Archive from 1878 to 1960. These documents are all in English. However, upon leaving Cyprus, the British colonial administration took a large amount of documents back to

England. They are to be found under the title “Migrated Archives, Cyprus”, which is part of the larger Foreign and Commonwealth Office Archive within The National Archives in London. Following the declaration of independence and the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus on August 16th 1960, Greek became the official language, thus the archive material from that date onwards are to be found only in Greek.

As in every other archive, certain rules are to be followed in this archive as well. In order to help other future researchers I shall give a short presentation based on my experience. One can find about all these rules only by visiting this archive in person, since no information is available on the internet or by telephone. After filing a research application, the researcher is asked to present a passport and a letter of recommendation from an institution or department in which the research project is being conducted. The reading room is open on weekdays from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., except Friday. Currently, the director of this archive is Mrs. Eleni Parparinou, a very pleasant and helpful person, like all the personnel in the reading and photocopying rooms. The only disadvantage is that material has to be ordered one day in advance. At least one is allowed to have access to eight boxes per day. For foreign researchers, it is important to know that only 30 percent of the contents of each box may be photocopied or scanned. It is, therefore, advisable to plan a rather longer stay in Nicosia for making notes, etc. Another difficulty has to do with the amount of photocopies allowed, i.e. after photocopying twenty pages consecutively you need to skip at least ten pages and then you are allowed to copy further. Furthermore, for copies made on the spot, i.e. without prior order a day before, there is a surcharge of 50 percent on the total copy bill. I personally found the charge of 1 Euro per page quite expensive. It was actually the most expensive archive I have ever visited. Hopefully, the high cost will not deter researchers from visiting and working in this archive.

Coming to the results of my research: Files in The State Archives of Cyprus dealing with Yugoslavia and development of Yugoslav-Cypriot relations 1960-1962, although recorded in the archive, were missing from the file boxes or were declared by the archive staff to be ‘wanting’. Nevertheless, what I found helpful for my research was a huge amount of documents about the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) dating from 1961-79. Makarios, the President of Cyprus, set as a leading goal of his foreign policy to join the NAM. This policy was proclaimed immediately after the declaration of Cyprus’ independence, when Makarios was personally invited by Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito to participate at the Belgrade Conference of Non-Aligned Countries in 1961, the first official and thus founding gathering of the NAM. Cyprus and Yugoslavia were the only two European countries to pursue a non-aligned policy in the bi-polar Europe of that time. The Republic of Cyprus even maintained its membership until 2004 on becoming a member of the European Union. Some Cypriot politicians and commentators, with whom I had the opportunity to discuss this subject, have alleged that President Makarios’ decision to pursue non-aligned policy in the middle of the Cold War was wrong. They argue that it would have been much better to take the side of NATO member states in the East-West conflict from 1960 onwards, claiming that this would have prevented the division of the island in 1974.

The second archive I tried to examine was the Archive of Archbishop Makarios III, part of the Archive of Holy Archbishopric of Cyprus. In this archive, the material can only be pho-

tographed with one's private camera free of charge. The material that can be found here includes ecclesiastic records of diverse Cypriot archbishops, the activities of the Cyprus' Church and relations with other churches and religious institutions. The archive documents about diverse Cypriot archbishops from 1767-1950 are open to the public, but the Archive of Archbishop Makarios III is still inaccessible. This is probably due to the still current division of the island, which dates back to Makarios' presidency. Mr. Theodotou, the person currently in charge, pointed out the problematic position in which Makarios found himself in this period. He was not only Archbishop, but also the political leader of the Greek Cypriots and the President of Cyprus from 1960 until his death in 1977. Due to this double function, giving public access to his private documents remains still problematic, since many people involved in this period are still alive, whereas some documents might contain politically sensitive or classified information. The Archbishop Makarios III Foundation, located in the same building, is officially appointed to sort out Makarios' private and church files. Academic staff of the University of Cyprus is to decide which of these files will remain classified, and which will eventually be made available to the public. According to Mr. Theodotou this is a long process, requiring thorough examination that will take years to complete. Unfortunately, after the coup on 15 July 1974, Makarios' political documents were destroyed when the Presidential Palace was burned down, leaving his ecclesiastic archive as the only one containing some of them.

In addition to my research stay in Nicosia, financed by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the only German political foundation with an international office in Cyprus, I also explored the island, staying in diverse cities and villages such as Limassol, Argos, Paphos, Agia Napa etc. After all, speaking to people for a social scientist to a certain degree may be as important as digging out documents in an archive. Moreover, I took the chance to explore the particular divide between the two sides of the island: During my last visit on Cyprus in 2007, I had no time to visit the Turkish area on the island or as Greek called it *katechomena* ("occupied area"). To my surprise, the Greek Cypriot friends of my age, who were hosting me, had never visited the other side of the island either. At first, they were a bit reluctant to visit the 'forbidden' part of their homeland, but today, thanks to my insistence, they can somewhat proudly say they have visited *katechomena*.

The timing of my stay also proved to be very interesting: During my visit to Cyprus in summer 2014, I was confronted, on one side with the Greek Cypriots, mourning and commemorating the invasion of July 1974, and on the other side, with the Turkish Cypriots, celebrating the same date as their national holiday, in remembrance of their liberation. Due to these special circumstances, i.e. the celebrations taking place on the other side of the island, we were unfortunately not allowed by the Turkish army to enter in some areas i.e. the "Ghost city" of Ammochostos or to have a panoramic view of the port of Kerynia. We were stopped almost everywhere by Turkish armed soldiers, who forced us, without any explanation, to turn back.

A special case that in some way epitomised the deep divisions between the Greek Cypriot and the Turkish Cypriot society were the border-crossing regulations. In order to visit the other side an entry visa was required that was issued by the Turkish Cypriot authorities at the border station. Intriguing was the fact that I as a holder of a Bosnian-Herzegovinian

passport received the entry visa without any problems, whereas my Greek Cypriot friend was denied the visa due to the fact that she had only an “older version” of the Greek Cypriot identity card. Because of this she had to apply for a new identity card the next day and was only then able to enter the Turkish side. Sadly, being a native of Cyprus she was able to travel worldwide with her “old” Greek Cypriot identity card, but denied to visit the other part of her home country.

Somehow, especially the rather evident deplorable social situation and the strong military presence in the *katechomena* area, reminded me of my own country Bosnia-Herzegovina, also a state strongly marked by an “inter-ethnic” conflict with a non-certain future, just like Cyprus. Forty years after the island’s division, all attempts to reach a solution to the Cyprus issue remain to this day unsuccessful, making this problem the longest running “ethnic conflict” on the world stage.