Cyprus 1957-1963
From Colonial Conflict to
Constitutional Crisis

The Key Role of the Municipal Issue

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Diana Weston Markides
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Diana Weston Markides' book offers the first comprehensive primary-source based analysis on the role the issue of separate municipalities played in the Cyprus dispute(s). The author is the daughter of a high-ranking British colonial official in Cyprus and has been living on the island for many years. The municipal issue sets the time frame for the strictly chronological narrative covering seven crucial years of Cypriot history. Using her insights into Cypriot society and immense historical knowledge she manages to embed her topic in an impressive analysis of the wider regional and international developments.

The conflict about the establishment of separate Turkish Cypriot municipalities entered the Cyprus dispute in 1957, two years after the Greek Cypriots had launched a violent anti-colonial struggle aiming at the union of the island with Greece. It remained a contentious issue until the breakdown of the constitutional order of the Republic of Cyprus in 1963, only three years after its inception. The municipal issue was therefore more than just an aspect of the Cyprus dispute. It became a *"microcosm of the wider conflict',* as Robert Holland rightly puts it in the foreword to the book, encapsulating the essence of the Cyprus dispute and mirroring the strategies, diplomatic interaction as well as the local and regional power balance of the actors involved in the wider conflict.

Until 1957, the main towns of Cyprus were run by councils elected on the basis of communally based proportional representation inevitably resulting in Greek-dominated bodies run by Greek Cypriot mayors. During the first two years of the EOKA campaign, the municipalities were, according to Markides, *"surprisingly unaffected by the wider crisis'.* But in 1957, the Turkish side shifted its position from the unrealistic demand for Cyprus' "return" to Turkey if British rule ever ended

towards the island's partition between the two "mother countries", and applied the new partition doctrine on the municipal level as well. In a typical example of how the municipal issues reflected the wider conflict, the Turkish side stopped seeking a change in the balance of power within the existing municipal councils. In June 1957, the Turkish Cypriot councillors resigned from the municipal councils of the main towns and demanded the partition of the existing municipalities. But the now entirely Greek Cypriot councils continued to function normally, retaining their Turkish Cypriot employees and serving the whole town. In 1958, the Turkish Cypriots, following – as almost always in their modern history – instructions from Ankara, intensified their campaign of communal separatism and escalated bicommunal tension on the island, fearing that Britain might settle with the Greek Cypriots behind their backs. They also wanted to establish facts on the ground should the British Macmillan plan, which would have shelved the question of the final status of the island for seven years, be implemented. The possibility of guaranteed independence, which was favoured by the Americans, was another reason for this escalation. In any case, separate municipalities would sustain a distinct political identity of the Turkish Cypriots, facilitate Ankara's political control over the Turkish Cypriot community and *"would ensure and legitimise a vote for partition when the question of a change in the status of the island rose again".* In April 1958, in an atmosphere of violence the Turkish Cypriots set up their own non- recognised municipalities in the main towns of Cyprus and demanded their legalisation by the British. London, which had become completely dependent on Turkish and Turkish Cypriot support on the island, acquiesced and incorporated the establishment of separate municipalities into a later version of the Macmillan Plan in August. For Markides, this British move was tantamount to the functional partition of the island. In late 1958, the British set up a commission on municipal affairs led by B. J. Surridge. Its official task was to draw up communal electoral rolls and to study the desirability of separate municipalities. Its real task, however, was to gain time by pacifying the Turks without pushing the Greek Cypriots into violent reactions by actually establishing municipal partition. In the meantime, and this is one of the facts often forgotten in a Turkish Cypriot historical discourse, Turkish Cypriot radicals introduced the concept of ethnic cleansing by driving Greek Cypriots out of their houses in the Turkish quarters of the main towns in order to prepare the ground for communal separation.

When, in December 1958, the Surridge report was finalised it supported the establishment of separate municipalities despite the clearly grave disadvantages that were outlined in the analytical part. Surridge himself described in a private conversation his recommendation as *"administrative nonsense but a political necessity".* However, Britain, saved by the solution of independence reached in negotiations in Zurich and London, never published the report. Moreover, despite the Turkish policy of ethnic cleansing, it was still not possible to delineate the

boundaries of separate municipalities without including a substantial number of members of the opposite ethnic group. This problem, the British fear of a violent reaction from both communities and the agreements reached in Zurich and in London over Cyprus prevented the British from legalising or implementing municipal partition in a geographic sense until the end of colonial rule in August 1960. The problem of delineation remained, according to Markides, the main reason for the failure to set up separate municipalities until 1963.

The Greek Cypriot leader, Archbishop Makarios, originally did not consider the issue of separate municipalities to be important once partition had been ruled out and he had not opposed them in his talks with the Greek foreign Minister, Averoff, prior to the Zurich meeting in 1959. In the end, provisions for separate municipalities in the five major towns for a four-year trial period, were included in the basic structure of the constitution of the Republic of Cyprus in the Zurich and London Agreements. But, pushed by the Greek Cypriot mayors, and gradually realising the practical problems and at a later stage the Turkish strategic considerations behind their insistence on communal municipal separation, Makarios soon started to stall on the issue. In September 1959, an opportunity to settle the municipal dispute before independence was lost when Makarios agreed to give the British the right to delineate the boundaries. But Governor Foot had no intention of imposing municipal boundaries on the Cypriots jeopardising the uneasy calm on the island after the end of the EOKA struggle. At the end of 1959, Foot partially and temporarily legalised the Turkish Cypriot municipalities instead allowing them to collect fees and levies but not to exercise any other municipal function since there were still no agreed boundaries. The chapter on the Transitional Period shows well how during 1959 and 1960 the main controversial issues of the British bases, the constitution and disarmament were interrelated and how they contributed to the shelving of the municipal conflict. Shortly before independence, it was agreed to set up a joint Cypriot commission to work on the establishment of separate municipalities after independence. But, again, the commission could not reach an agreement over the delineation of the municipalities. As a result, the unresolved issue of municipal separation together with the 70:30 ratio in the public service and the establishment of a Cypriot army remained the bones of contention between the communities after independence. The absence of a final settlement of the municipal dispute would prove to be highly detrimental for the newborn Republic. During the first two years after independence, the international dimension of the municipal issue was obscured since the Turkish government was anxious to maintain the status quo and exerted a moderating influence on the Turkish Cypriot community. Between August 1960 and December 1962, the temporary municipal law stemming from the Transitional period was extended eight times giving legal cover for the de facto Turkish municipalities to collect taxes from Turkish Cypriot citizens but not legalising any geographical administrative control. As the months passed without the legal

establishment of municipal partition, the conflict started to escalate. In 1961, the Turkish Cypriot representatives vetoed vital tax legislation in order to force the Greek Cypriots to comply with the agreements reached during the Transitional Period, mainly the 70:30 ratio and the municipal question. Confronted with political paralysis on vital issues, the Greek Cypriot leadership embarked on a dangerous course to change the constitution. In January 1962, Makarios spoke for the first time publicly to that effect. However, in the course of the same year, he went a long way to accommodate Turkish Cypriot demands within the framework of unified municipalities but remained strictly opposed to Turkish Cypriot control over municipal territory. In March, he proposed unified municipalities with a predetermined budget for the Turkish quarters to be spent according to the wishes of the Turkish councillors, proportional employment of Turks by the municipal councils and a Turkish Cypriot deputy mayor in the main towns. But this reasonable proposal was - as all others during 1962 - rejected by the Turkish Cypriot leadership following instructions from Ankara which regarded separate municipalities as essential for reasons that had nothing to do with municipal administration. By December 1962, a solution to the municipal question still seemed to be in sight though a frustrated Makarios escalated the situation. He did not prolong the provisional municipal law stemming from the Transitional period but the Turkish councils simply ignored this move and continued to function outside any legal framework. In the same month, the Turkish Cypriot leader, Fazil Kutchuk, was finally persuaded that geographical municipal partition was impracticable and that municipalities should eventually be unified. This alarmed the Turkish Cypriot separatists led by Denktash as well as Ankara. At this juncture the Turkish government stepped in and insisted on the maintenance of communal autonomy in municipal affairs. Consequently, the Turkish Cypriot leadership reversed its position and insisted on the establishment of separate municipalities which could be unified on one unspecified day which, as Markides points out, was Turkish camouflage language for never. A concerted effort by all parties involved, including the British, to solve the municipal dispute in the first four months of 1963 failed again. Ankara insisted on municipal separation and the Turkish side refused to commit themselves to a date for the unification of the municipalities in the case of the establishment of separate municipalities for a transitional period, the maximum the Greek side was willing to accept. After the failure of talks in May, no more efforts to settle the dispute were made. The Greek Cypriots shifted their policy from attempting to modify problematic aspects of the constitution to seeking ways to modify the Zurich and London Agreements in order to achieve full sovereignty independence and Greek Cypriot majority rule while Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot leadership prepared for the partition of the island.

Markides claims that the dangerous course pursued by the Greek Cypriots in late 1963 to attempt to deprive the Turkish Cypriots of their political status gained in the

Zurich and London Agreements was mainly a response to Turkish Cypriot intransigence and mainland Turkish insistence on municipal separation: *"It was, more than anything else, the realisation of the lengths to which Ankara was prepared to go to prevent municipal unification that, in 1963, shifted the Greek Cypriot political agenda in a more radical direction".* Moreover, after May 1963, the support of the British High Commissioner, Sir Arthur Clarke, the lack of coordination as well as a power struggle between different departments within the British government resulted in ambiguous signals to Makarios. He misperceived them as British governmental support for his plans to change the constitution and as British willingness and ability to restrain Turkish reaction. In late November 1963, Makarios, in close cooperation with the British High Commissioner, handed Kutchuk 13 proposals to amend the constitution. In substance, their implementation would have reduced the Turkish Cypriots to minority status and taken away any aspect of Turkish separateness including the establishment of divided municipalities. Unsurprisingly, the Turkish side rejected the highly offensive proposals. Within days intercommunal violence broke out, which Makarios used as a pretext to abolish the existing municipal administration, on December 29.

Particularly, in this part of the book, Markides' occasional bias towards Greek Cypriot positions and interpretations of history is felt though the text is far from being uncritical of the Greek side. Markides emphasises the determination of the Greek Cypriot leadership to make the constitution work but could have stressed more that the Greek Cypriots – for understandable reasons – had, since independence, not adhered to agreements reached during the Transitional Period on both the municipal as well as the 70:30 issue. Moreover, they had no intention of considering the Zurich and London Agreements as permanently binding, as Markides states herself in the conclusion. The Greek Cypriots had put themselves clearly in the wrong as far as the adherence to and implementation of agreements is concerned and had thereby created an atmosphere which inevitably increased the suspicions of the Turkish side hardening their stand. Greek Cypriot determination to overcome the agreements of 1960 prior to 1962-1963 is mentioned but is not as systematically assessed as the impressive analysis of the destructive and separatist activities of the Turkish Cypriot side and Ankara during that period. Moreover, the author should have dealt more thoroughly with the conflicting views on the breakdown of the constitutional order and the outbreak of intercommunal violence in December 1963. It is a pity that this excellent study does not explicitly mention, explain or analyse the so-called *"Akritas plan"* in connection with Makarios' 13 proposals and the events after December 1963. It is only referred to in two footnotes as a plan to seal off the Turkish quarters in case of the outbreak of intercommunal violence and in one or two vague allusions in the main text, missing the essence and far reaching dimensions of it. Markides claims that Markarios' 13 points were *"not a unilateral decision to revise the constitution by the Greek Cypriots[...] They were proposals*

to the Turkish Cypriots offered in good faith" and states that the proposals represented *"the first part of a Greek Cypriot plan"* which is never outlined to the reader. The Akritas plan, developed by close aides of Makarios, was much more than a plan to seal off the Turkish quarters in case of intercommunal violence. In essence it constituted a blueprint aiming at reducing the Turkish Cypriots to minority status by force if necessary and achieving union with Greece at a later stage. Since the official view of the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot side is based on the assumption that the Akritas plan was the Greek Cypriot guide to overcome the Zurich and London Agreements, one would have expected at least a detailed presentation of its content and an analysis of the arguments of this school of thought. Moreover, there is historical evidence outlined in Claude Nicolet's book *United States Policy Towards Cyprus, 1954-1974* that Makarios had originally intended to simply announce and then implement the amendments and was then convinced by the American and British representatives in Cyprus to give them the form of proposals. This, coupled with the radicalism of its substance, sheds doubt over Markides' claim that the proposals were offered in good faith.

Notwithstanding these points of criticism, the book provides a well structured and in most parts well balanced analysis. Diana Weston Markides' work will remain the authoritative study of the municipal conflict closing an important gap in modern Cypriot historiography. Moreover, the well researched study illustrates impressively how many of the issues which are at the core of the Cyprus problem today have actually been there for decades: political equality versus majority rule, Turkish Cypriot control over territory (though this time not any more on a municipal but on a federal state level), mainland Turkish control over Cypriot politics via the Turkish Cypriot community, the possibility and right for Turkish intervention or limitations on the national sovereignty of Cyprus, to name but a few. Given these historical continuities, the book of Diana Markides provides a valuable and highly recommendable read not only for anybody who wants to learn about this crucial period of modern Cypriot history but also for those who want to understand the Cyprus problem today.

Hubert Faustmann