

THE CYPRUS QUESTION

A Concise Guide to the History Politics and Law of the Cyprus Question

by Michael Stephen, London, January 2000, pp. 116

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Michael Stephen's *The Cyprus Question* is a rigorously documented and comprehensive survey of the historical, legal, political, economic and cultural aspects of the Cyprus problem. The study convincingly demonstrates that the world community generally perceives the Cyprus issue in a strongly biased fashion, which clearly favours the Greek side while doing serious injustice to the Turkish one. Stephen sets out to correct this distortion by analysing in detail how the Greek Cypriots gradually convinced the international community to adopt a misleading interpretation of the dispute. Two elements of this socially constructed reality stand out:

- i) A widespread assumption that the real problems in Cyprus started in 1974;
- ii) The international recognition extended to the Greek Cypriot administration as the government of all Cyprus.

Assuming that the intervention of the Turkish army in 1974 led to the beginning of the problems on the island, creates a gross misconception where victim and aggressor change places. Turkey's 1974 intervention was not the cause of the problems but rather a consequence of them. In Stephen's words, "Refusal to consider the preceding 15 years means that important legal and political questions wrongly determined in favour of the Greek Cypriots remain undisturbed and remain a continuing source of tension between the parties" (p. 5). The Republic of Cyprus established in 1960 was a unique case, "for there is no other state in the world which came into being as a result of two politically equal peoples coming together by the exercise by each of its sovereign right of self-determination, to create a functional federation within a single territory, and guaranteed by international treaty, to which each of them consented" (p. 9). Not only did the Greek side scrap the constitution of that republic in 1963, but also failed to stop the massacres of Turkish civilians by Greek fanatics which lasted up until the Turkish army restored order on the Northern part of the island in 1974.

Stephen defines these Greek atrocities directed to Turks as "attempted genocide", and notes that "the less numerous Turkish Cypriots need reliable safeguards for their future" (p.5). The continuing hostile military and economic actions of the Greek Cypriot authorities since 1974 only serve to alarm the Turkish Cypriots and strengthen their conviction that the Turkish troops on the island are their only reliable protection.

The second important element of the misperception surrounding the Cyprus issue is the international recognition extended to the Greek administration in the South as the legitimate government of the whole island. Using this status, the Greek side has succeeded to extract one-sided resolutions from the United Nations and other international organisations and to

obtain court decisions that are highly damaging to the Turkish Cypriots. As Stephen notes, the international community have rewarded them for their massacres.

The publication of Stephen's study shortly before the resumption of talks between Greek and Turkish Cypriots is very timely. The major barrier to the solution of the Cyprus problem throughout its existence has been the unquestioning international acceptance of the consciously constructed misconceptions. As Stephen notes, "If the Cyprus question is to be understood it is vital that both of the two peoples of Cyprus have a fair and equal opportunity to be heard, and that the subject be examined anew" (p. 5). Stephen's comments on an earlier statement by the UN Secretary-General seems worth bearing in mind in evaluating the current episode of talks: "The UN Secretary-General thinks that the international community has the right to expect that talks [between the two leaders] will result in an agreement. The international community may justifiably hope for such an outcome, but it has no such right. The two leaders are responsible to the two peoples of Cyprus and no one else, for it is those people who will die, and whose homes and businesses will be destroyed, if one or both are forced by the international community into a settlement which will not work." (p. 74).