

A book that sheds light on the past and future of Cyprus

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If there was a genre such as academic journalism, Kızılyürek's book '*Glafkos Clerides: The Course of a Country*' would certainly be considered a good example.

When I had met Niyazi Kızılyürek a few months ago in Brussels, the book had already been finished. And he was full with an enthusiasm of a journalist who had managed to get a "scoop". "Yes, we visited him at his home by the sea, we talked for hours, for days; he told me things that he did not tell to anyone before. Yes, he is 87 and in a very sound mind. He is bitter with today's turn of events in Cyprus. Of course, he is pessimistic after the failure of Annan plan. He is bitter, too. In order to assess Clerides you have to check his early years, his background, his upbringing, his studies in England. The book will come out in Greek but you should read it in Turkish. How is your Turkish?"

Coffee at the Mickey Mouse

That hasty conversation over a coffee at the Mickey Mouse cafeteria in the European Parliament building, was enough to trigger my curiosity over why a Turkish Cypriot academic like Niyazi who heads the Political Science and Turkish Studies Department of Cyprus University and likes to call himself a "borderline case", would decide to swim into the murky waters of Cyprus politics and try to make any academic sense out of it. Born in the mixed village of Potamia, near Nicosia, and having seen his family becoming immigrants during the clashes in 1963-64, Kızılyürek, had many reasons to feel strongly about Cyprus. Having chosen the Cyprus issue as his subject and teaching it since 1995 in the state Cyprus University in Nicosia, he has positioned himself in a unique way to have both access to Turkish and Greek sources. And by now, in a minefield of nationalism and vested interests, he has also acquired enough academic respect from both sides to be able to voice out his analyses on a chronic problem like that of Cyprus that, to the outsiders, may seem incomprehensible.

His latest book with a series of long dialogues with the now retired Glafkos Clerides was an interesting step. He tried to throw light into the contemporary history of Cyprus by using a living source. If there was a genre like academic journalism, Kızılyürek's book "Glafkos Clerides: The Course of a Country" would certainly be considered a good example. It is a book that by now has been published in Greek and Turkish and political analysts and journalists are still digging into its content, picking up whatever suits their side. After all, by covering a period between 1950 and 2004 through the memories of one of the prime players of Cypriot politics, there is ample material to go about for long time ahead.

An historical failure

But my interest was more on the writer. What prompted Niyazi Kızılyürek to spend long hours with a cigar smoking and whiskey drinking anglophile Cypriot politician, who is now approaching the ninth decade of his fascinating life? It was, of course, the failure of the Annan plan, in 2004 :

*"I was convinced that Cyprus had lost a historic opportunity to achieve peace and reconciliation. For someone like me who for many years had been involved in peace activities, that was a very painful moment. I felt the need to study and understand this historic failure. In 2005, I published a book in Turkish ("*Doğmamış bir Devletin tarihi: Birleşik Kıbrıs Cumhuriyeti*") where I analyzed the recent political*

history and the political culture in Cyprus and tried to give an answer about the failure of the common statehood in Cyprus. In 2005, I decided to approach Mr. Glafkos Clerides with the same motivation, namely, to search further why the Greek Cypriots had refused the only comprehensive settlement ever offered to the Cypriots. I found out that Mr. Clerides himself was also sharing the same feeling of pain and was posing the same questions. So, he accepted my proposal and we started to talk. Soon our conversation turned into a "journey" through the recent history of Cyprus" described Niyazi Kızılyürek which confirmed that even the most stringent academic work requires a deep emotional involvement. Kızılyürek's book "Glafkos Clerides- a journey through the recent history of Cyprus- ,in Turkish has been received very favorably while in Greece is taking time to sink in. When I asked Kızılyürek, what was for Clerides the main reason for the failure of a solution in Cyprus, he points at AKEL:"For Glafkos Clerides the main factor which hindered the solution of the Cyprus Question in 2004 was the political attitude of AKEL which decided first to support someone like Tassos Papadopoulos as President the Republic of Cyprus and then followed him in rejecting the Annan Plan"Kizilurek quotes Clerides words in the book"AKEL sacrificed the solution of the Cyprus problem in order to come to power and to remain in power."There were mistakes on the part of the UN, too."According to Mr. Clerides, the Cyprus initiative of the UN was monopolized by the Americans and British while other members of the Security Council were excluded. That was a serious mistake."

Papadopoulos' 'illogical' policy

Kızılyürek tells me that Clerides calls Papadopoulos' policy is "illogical" and believes that the present situation will not last long. The Turkish Cypriot North will slowly turn into a legal entity. Hence separation in the near future is inevitable, Clerides thinks.

"Clerides believes that the north will be recognized as a legal entity, not as a sovereign state at first, that will take a few years, and the separation will be based on the existing dividing line," says Kızılyürek.

In our collective Greek and Cypriot psyche, Glafkos Clerides has been imprinted as that short, permanently smiling, smooth talking man, with ageless smooth face, always capable to handle even the most aggressive reporters. How was Glafkos Clerides as a person? Did Kızılyürek manage to form an opinion of him as a leader? "My opinion on Glafkos Clerides differs, according to the different and partly contradictory policies he followed during his long political carrier. For example I believe that he made serious mistakes during his first five years as a president in 1993-1998. He did not invest enough to prepare the citizens for a federal solution. His second period, 1998-2003, was much better and he worked hard. He was flexible in order to find a solution but the Turkish side did not help him.

To my mind the "best Clerides" was the one who during the Referendum campaigned for the "Yes" vote. This is what brought me to make a book with him. And my book is more a book to be judged by future generations.

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