Fifty Year Anniversary of the Republic of Cyprus (1960–2010)

Keynote Speech at the American Hellenic Institute Foundation (AHIF) Conference, Washington, D.C., 4 October 2010

I am honoured and delighted to have this opportunity to address such a distinguished audience, including so many friends and colleagues. Tribute is due to the American Hellenic Institute Foundation for organizing this great conference to mark the half century anniversary of the Republic of Cyprus, and to the Greek American community for all you have done for the cause of Cyprus over the years.

In the circumstances prevailing in August 1960, many had misgivings about the future of the new Republic and doubted whether its creation was a cause for celebration.¹ In light of the eventful and turbulent experiences of the past 50 years, it can be stated with conviction that statehood and independence, even subject to the limitations imposed by the Zurich-London Agreements, have been an asset to be treasured and defended against the constant attempts to diminish and destroy it.²

In the summer of 1960 I returned to Cyprus, having completed my studies in Law and Public International Law. At the suggestion of Glafcos Clerides, I was appointed by Archbishop Markarios to be a member of the first delegation of Cyprus to the United Nations³ and was present at the admission of Cyprus to the Organization on 20 September 1960. During the bulk of these 50 years, I had the privilege to represent the Republic of Cyprus in key positions at such bilateral posts as the United States and Germany and

¹ Let me remind you that the actual date of independence was 16 August 1960 – it was later that the official National Day was moved to 1 October.
² Some may recall the admission in 2006 of “mea culpa” by a former President of Cyprus who, in London in February 1959, was one of the few advisers of Archbishop Makarios to have voted against it.
³ I was then assigned Cyprus diplomatic passport number 3!
at multilateral positions such as the United Nations and many international conferences.  

This, of course, is neither the place nor the time for a personal memoir but perhaps it might be in order to invoke some memories at key turning points to illustrate the contribution of this small newly independent Republic to international political and legal developments, drawing from my personal experience.

But before getting into this, I think it would be appropriate – particularly speaking to an American audience but also objectively – to briefly touch on Cypriot-US relations and the US role in Cyprus developments. There is a tendency among some in Cyprus to, generally and uncritically, take a negative view of the United States. No doubt, there have been many issues on which such criticism is well-founded. The George Ball and Dean Acheson activities in 1964 and certainly Henry Kissinger’s policies and “tiltings” in 1974 are such examples and of course Turkey, over the years, has been considered by US policymakers a major factor weighing heavily in their decisions. But it is often overlooked that there is also another side.

Back in 1962, President Kennedy invited President Makarios on a State Visit to Washington with full honours attaching to such visit. It was then that the Archbishop asked me to draft his proposed major speech in Congress. When I, a green 25 year old junior diplomat, appeared overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task, he calmly reassured me: “Just put yourself in my position and write it as if you were Archbishop and President!”  

There followed several other visits by successive Cypriot Presidents to the White House since then, the last one being that of President Clerides in 1996.

In July 1964, it was President Lyndon Johnson’s letter to Premier Inonu that was instrumental in averting the then threatened Turkish invasion.

In 1967, it was Cyrus Vance’s dexterous diplomacy that defused the crisis over the Kophinou incident, and averted another threat of an invasion.  

In 1972, the US averted an impending coup by the Greek Junta against Archbishop Makarios through the timely action of Ambassador David Popper

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4 I had the extraordinary luck to have served under 5 Cypriot Presidents (Makarios, Kyprianou, Vasiliou, Clerides and, briefly, Papadopoulos) and to have experienced 5 US Presidents (Kennedy, Carter, Reagan, Bush 41 and Clinton) and 6 UN Secretary-Generals (Hammar斯基öld, U Thant, Waldheim, Perez de Cuellar, Boutros-Ghali and Kofi Annan).

5 I drafted many of President Makarios’ speeches over the years at the United Nations, at several Commonwealth Conferences, at the Non-Aligned Summit in Colombo, and during his 1966 visits to Latin American states. I also drafted many of the speeches of Presidents Kyprianou and Clerides.

6 Makarios in New York in 1974 after the coup is supposed to have said to Vance – only half in jest – “If only I had consented in 1967 to the dissolution of the National Guard, we might not have had the coup and the invasion!”