Chapter I

The Independence of Cyprus

A. THE FACTS

In ancient times, Cyprus was ruled by different powers. A Roman province from 58 BC to 395 AD, it became part of the Byzantine Empire (395–1184), and after periods of Lusignan (1192–1489) and Venetian (1489–1571) reign, the Ottoman Empire took over (1571–1878). Finally, Great Britain administered Cyprus on lease from the Sultan from 1878–1914 and thereafter, upon annexation in view of the outbreak of the First World War, as a colony until 1960. At that date, the population on the island consisted of 80% Greek Cypriots and 18% Turkish Cypriots. They lived inter-mingled, sometimes in mixed villages or towns, and scattered all over the island.

1. The UN General Assembly resolutions on independence

In 1950, the Greek Cypriot Orthodox Church, under the leadership of the newly elected Archbishop Makarios III, initiated a petition. Any inhabitant of Cyprus could sign into large books in which the phrase “We demand the unification of Cyprus with Greece” was printed on each page. Reportedly 215,000 out of the 224,000 Greek Cypriots (and an insignificant number of Turkish Cypriots) expressed their support for union with Greece. The result was transmitted to the UN Secretary-
General. The latter remained inactive. Neither was there a reaction from Great Britain and Greece, who did not want to disturb their bilateral relations.¹

A change in Greek foreign policy occurred after a statement of the then British Minister for the Colonies, Hopkinson, on 28 July 1954. Asked whether some day Cyprus could enjoy self-determination he said in Parliament “it has always been recognised and agreed that there are certain territories in the Commonwealth, which, owing to their particular circumstances, can never expect to be fully independent.”²

This “never” prompted the Greek Foreign Minister Papagos, on 16 August 1954, to send a letter to the UN General Assembly calling for the application of the principle of self-determination in the case of the population of Cyprus under the auspices of the United Nations.³ However, considering the predominantly Greek character of the island, the request was regarded more as a British-Greek conflict on sovereignty over Cyprus than as a case for self-determination of the Cypriot people. Hence, the General Assembly unanimously decided on 17 December 1954 that a resolution on Cyprus would not be opportune “for the time being”.⁴

The military resistance of the underground organisation “EOKA”, under the command of the Cyprus born Greek General Grivas, against the British colonial system since 1955 did not change this international perception. In spring 1957, the British government proposed a resolution to condemn the Greek support of a “terrorist group” in form of arms, munitions and money as a forbidden interference in its domestic affairs. In its competing proposal, the Greek government asked the General Assembly to express its wish that the people of Cyprus should have the opportunity to determine their future by applying the principle of self-determination.⁵ The Assembly, in its plenary sessions of 11 February 1957⁶ and 5 December 1958,⁷ declared that a peaceful, democratic and just solution should be found in accordance with the principles and purposes of the UN through negotiations. In this diplomatic tone, it made it clear that neither the violent methods nor the aim of the “EOKA” fighters that Cyprus should join Greece found sympathy in the international community at large.

¹ P. Tzermias, Geschichte der Republik Zypern, p. 53.
² House of Commons debates, vol. 531, cols. 504–506.
³ Tzermias, loc. cit. (note 1), p. 93.
⁴ UNGA Res 814 (IX) of 17 December 1954 (50 votes in favour with 8 abstentions), reprinted in P. Varvaroussis, Deutschland und die Zypernfrage, p. 135.
⁵ Both proposals are cited in Archiv der Gegenwart of 27.02.1957, p. 6286 A.