

## Cyprus in My Life

Testimony of a Turkish-Cypriot Diplomat

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**Cyprus in my Life**  
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*The author in 2001*

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## Foreword

The author of the book does not intend his work to be in any way a full account of the history of Cyprus over the last few difficult decades. Nor does he attempt to make a scholarly analysis of the Cyprus problem and Greco-Turkish relations, even though he is a political scientist and a diplomat. Ozdemir Ozgur's work is autobiographical in nature, the personal testimony of a courageous man who has played a special role in the events of his homeland. He is a Turkish Cypriot, born and raised in the town of Paphos, who refused to follow the Turkish Cypriot leadership's decision for the separation of the two communities in Cyprus and the country's eventual partition.

The birth of the Republic of Cyprus - the occasion of the enforced and ill-fated compromise of August 1960 - found the Turkish Cypriot leader Mr Denktash predicting that the new-born Republic would not last. Later he recorded his prediction in his memoirs, and indeed made every effort to materialise his prediction. Even the Ambassador of Turkey to Cyprus, Emin Dirvana, warned his Government about Denktash's fanaticism and its likely consequences for inter-communal relations in Cyprus.

After the inter-communal incidents of December 1963, Denktash ordered the Turkish Cypriot Civil Servants to quit their Government posts. Ozdemir Ozgur was at that time a civil servant, and found himself faced with a difficult choice. He realised it was the beginning of the separation of the two communities. Ignoring Denktash's orders and threats, he decided to remain at his post.

Ozdemir Ozgur's decision was a courageous one, for he knew the dangers, which would probably ensue. The Turkish Cypriot leadership had already demonstrated that it would punish those who opposed them. The assassination in 1962 of Ozgur's friend Ayhan Hikmet and Muzaffer Gurkan, two liberal journalists and lawyers who supported the peaceful co-existence of the two communities in Cyprus, was ample proof of the possible consequences of his decision. The author also knew of the assassination of the two trade unionists, Turkish Cypriot Kavazoglu and Greek Cypriot Mishaouli, who were killed because they were friends and co-operated closely. Despite threats, insults and the high probability of personal danger, Ozdemir Ozgur followed his principles.


In 1974, the treacherous coup d'etat in Cyprus opened the door wide for the Turkish invasion of Cyprus and the displacement of thousands of Greek Cypriots from their homes. The Turkish Cypriot leadership followed this up by forcibly removing tens of thousands of Turkish Cypriots from their homes and relocating them in the Turkish-occupied area of Cyprus. This act of ethnic cleansing again posed a fearful dilemma for Turkish Cypriots. The author witnessed the departure of his friends and relatives, many bidding tearful farewells to their Greek Cypriot neighbours. He had to take the most momentous decision of his life. As a person who had always opposed any form of fanaticism and extremism, whatever its

source, he decided to remain loyal to the Republic of Cyprus. The Turkish Cypriot leadership has not forgotten nor forgiven this stance and indeed continues to insult him.

This book is based on two sources: the writer's wide political and diplomatic experience and the ideas and influence of his Uncle Dr Ihsan Ali. The author returns to his roots and describes Cyprus society as he saw it and lived it through his life. He presents an increasingly ignored truth about Cyprus and disproves the widespread lie that Greeks and Turks can never live together. He also relates his many experiences in the diplomatic service of Cyprus and in the service of the United Nations in New York. His narrative has a gentle and endearing sense of humour which makes pleasant reading.

Mr Ozgur fully recognises his debt to his Uncle Dr Ihsan Ali, one time adviser to President Makarios. He makes reference to many letters of his uncle, which constitute an important source of information. Very clear in the narrative is the passionate sincerity of Dr Ihsan Ali and his vision of Cyprus. Equally clear is the bond of love, respect and trust between uncle and nephew.

In the present climate of Cyprus this book will no doubt lead to discussion, both for and against some of the assertions of the author. It is undoubtedly a useful contribution to understanding the hopes, fears and aspirations of the people of Cyprus as a whole.



George Iacovou

Former Foreign Minister of Cyprus

## Preface

For over a quarter of a century, the Turkish Cypriot leadership has been propagating that Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots cannot live together peacefully. In order to prove this, they have made a lot of efforts. All this started in the mid-fifties during the anti-colonial struggle of the Greek Cypriots for *Enosis*. Under the benevolent eyes of the British authorities, who wanted to neutralize Greek ambitions, and under the secret guidance of the Turkish General Staff, Denktash and others put up the underground movement (TMT) *Türk Mukavemet Teşkilatı* - Turkish Resistance Organization). The strategic aim of this organization was the division of the island between Greece and Turkey and its annexation by the mother countries.

In order to achieve this, several steps were necessary. Most important of all was the destruction of the century-old inter-communal peace. The two ethnic groups on the island had to be made to fear and hate each other. This was achieved by provoking inter-communal incidents. In 1963-64 a new wave of force hit the island and the fanatics on both sides did their best to push the development towards civil war. The "Green Line" was established, while the migration movement of the Turkish Cypriots towards the Turkish enclaves on the one hand and the flight of the Greek Cypriots to the areas with a Greek majority assumed the character of a mass exodus. The separation of the two communities had been achieved to a great extent; alienation began.

During that period the mother countries became more and more involved and in 1964 a Turkish invasion could only be stopped by a massive American intervention. The United Nations intervened and sent UNFICYP to keep the peace on the island. In Turkey the Greek minority of Istanbul became hostage to the developments in Cyprus.

The Greek-Junta inspired coup d'état against Makarios in 1974 gave Ankara the opportunity to intervene militarily and this time the US (Henry Kissinger) did not intervene. In the course of this invasion an ethnic cleansing took place: the Turkish Cypriots fled north, often harassed by Greek Cypriot fanatics, and the Greek Cypriots fled south out of fear of the advancing Turkish army. The alienation process was strengthened by Ankara's policy of settlement of Turkish mainlanders on the island. But there was a positive development, too, at the same time: in both societies the "normal" people discovered their Cypriotness, i.e., that they have much more in common and that they are much more European than their mother countries. Unfortunately, these people do not have say. Efforts by international bodies to overcome the division have been frustrated for many years. The separation has grown stronger from year to year and there is no silver brim on the horizon for a solution.

This is the historical background of the "testimony" of the book. The author was born and grew up at the time when the Cypriots were still living together peacefully. His liberal-minded and principled uncle Dr Ihsan Ali, who believed in a

united and independent Cyprus as home for all Cypriots and who later became Political Advisor to President Makarios, influenced young Özgür's thinking. When the struggle for *Enosis* began Özgür left Cyprus for law and political science studies in Ankara. He returned when independence came to Cyprus.

Interestingly, during the 1963-64 unrest he decided to continue to work for the Government though the Turkish Cypriot leadership had ordered all Turkish Cypriots to quit their jobs. Özgür understood that this was the beginning of the destruction of the unity of Cyprus and rejected this order. He knew that this was extremely dangerous since already in 1962 two Turkish Cypriot lawyers and friends had been murdered by fanatic followers of the Turkish Cypriot extremist leadership because they had advocated the peaceful co-existence of the two communities. Özgür was spared their fate because in early 1964 he was transferred to Bonn as Commercial Attaché. However, two other well-known protagonists of cooperation, the Turkish Cypriot Kavazoglu and the Greek Cypriot Mishaoulis were murdered.

After his retirement from the diplomatic service of Cyprus and later from the UN, where he served as Senior Political Affairs Officer, Dr Özgür returned to Cyprus at the beginning of 1989 and subsequently taught for nearly five years at the University of Cyprus. His teachings provoked some Greek Cypriot fanatics to slander him. Bravely he fought back, but came to the conclusion that an open mind will admit that the Cyprus Problem is the product of the faults of both sides and that a peaceful and viable solution will need the efforts and the good will of both sides.

Özgür's reminiscences and observations contain many new pieces of information. He has become the free voice of the silent majority of the well-meaning Turkish Cypriots who cannot speak out their ideas without great risk. His testimony is very objective and bound to the truth. The author's unassuming nature and fine sense of humor make the book a pleasure to read and I cannot but warmly recommend it to the readers.

Heinz A. Richter

## Prologue and Acknowledgments

*Truth emerges from the clash of ideas.*  
Namık Kemal

I have thought it advisable to write my reminiscences and experiences from, as well as my observations on, especially my political and diplomatic life, mainly, but not only, those relating to the Cyprus Question. I have concentrated on aspects which I thought were most relevant or in which I was somehow involved, not on the whole story of the Cyprus problem which is very vast. I have followed a chronological order where possible. I have also replied to certain slanders and accusations against me.

As I am in possession of more than one hundred letters from my late uncle Dr Ihsan Ali, a real Turkish Cypriot, and as most of them have political content, I will refer to them, where necessary, in the hope that they will be useful and that the reader will thereby gain a better picture of him. Dr Ali was very much involved in politics in Cyprus. For a number of years, he was Adviser to the late President of Cyprus, Archbishop Makarios. He was a strong supporter of the unity, territorial integrity and independence of Cyprus, as against the Turkish Cypriot leadership's policies of separatism. He therefore became politically controversial within his own community. In 1995, a group of Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots established a Foundation in Dr Ali's memory, named Ihsan Ali Foundation, in the Republic of Cyprus. More will be seen on that subject in due course.

Both Dr Ali and I have been criticised by fanatic Turkish Cypriots for collaborating with Greek Cypriots. In fact, all we wanted to do was to keep Cyprus united and independent. My uncle, Dr Ali, was intelligent, broadminded and mature, and I was surely influenced by him in many situations. Most people would have been influenced. That is why in many cases the Turkish Cypriot leadership prevented or tried to prevent people, especially visitors from Turkey, from seeing him. He had a strong personality, with logic and convincing power. But, ultimately even he himself realised, as will be seen later, that he was an idealist. He was, to some extent, like the Greek politicians, placing too much hope in international support for principles of international law.

The readers will judge for themselves the validity and usefulness of this book. But, it will need an open mind to admit that the Cyprus problem is the product of the faults of both sides and that it will need the efforts and good will of both sides to achieve a peaceful and viable solution. It is not written to blame, or to propagate for, either side. I have written this book in the spirit in which I was brought up. Since childhood, I have learned, especially from my uncle Dr Ali, that one should not tell a lie, that one should have the moral courage to tell the truth, and that it is a sign of nobility to admit one's mistakes.

Naturally, the book contains not only facts, but also judgements. I am not so naive as to think that there will be no disagreements with its contents. But that is an

unavoidable risk that one has to take. One cannot please everybody, especially on political matters and more so on the Cyprus question, which is so much enmeshed with half-truths. It will be seen that I use the terms "the Cyprus problem" and "the Cyprus question" interchangeably. At the United Nations the item on Cyprus on the agenda was the Question of Cyprus, but in practice it is often referred to as the problem of Cyprus. Also, in or about 1985, the Supreme Court of Cyprus in its decision on the difference between the Executive and the Legislative powers, under articles 139 and 140 of the Constitution of Cyprus, used the term "the Cyprus Problem."

I must also clarify that whenever I say "my uncle" hereinafter in this book for the sake of brevity, I mean my late Uncle Dr Ihsan Ali.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to Mrs Athena D. Cannock for typing the manuscript, to Dr Andreas Cl. Sophocleous for his helpful comments on the draft, and to Dr John Harvey for helping in the editing of the text.

Ozdemir A. Ozgur

## Introduction

*I hope for nothing, I fear nothing, I am free.*  
N. Kazantzakis

Both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots hear negative descriptions of each other since childhood. Turkish Cypriots, for example, hear that Greek Cypriots cannot be trusted, that "*domuzdan post, giavurdan dost olmaz*" (meaning that as no hide can be made out of the skin of the pig, so no friend can be made from the infidel, alluding to the Greeks). Some Greek Cypriots referred to the Turks as dogs, while some Turkish Cypriots referred to Greeks as pigs. Such characterisations go on forever. There is a lot of suspicion and mistrust that is created or fed by long-term formal or informal education and socialisation as well as by historic experiences and cultural differences. Turks tend to regard the Greeks as untrustworthy, while Greeks tend to think of the Turks as barbarians. Turco-Greek wars of the last two centuries have had a negative effect.

A few years ago, a colleague of mine from the University of Cyprus and I participated in a seminar in Germany on the subject of history books taught in Cyprus on the Ottoman period in Cyprus in both Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot secondary schools. He, a Greek Cypriot, examined the Turkish Cypriot history books and I, a Turkish Cypriot, examined the Greek Cypriot books. A number of prejudices and exaggerations appeared in the books of both communities.

Also a few years ago, in one of his reports on Cyprus, the Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN) made a recommendation, that when a solution to the Cyprus problem is found, there should be established a mixed committee to review the history books and revise them where necessary. I am not aware of the Turkish Cypriots' reaction, but I remember some negative criticism in the Greek Cypriot press, questioning whether others have the right to tell them how to write their history. I believe that the Secretary-General's suggestion is very useful.

Before I went to the elementary school at Vretcha village (Paphos, Cyprus) where I was born, I remember having lived for some time at Aynikola (Ayios Nicolaos) village (Paphos). I am sure that my parents, my sister Selma and I lived there in 1933, because I remember the birth of my other sister Ayten at Aynikola in that year. I was about four years old then. Both Vretcha and Aynikola were purely Turkish Cypriot villages. We had a number of relatives in Aynikola. The apples of that village were, and are still, well known, especially the groves of Niyazi Efendi who later became the Head of the Gendarmerie, with the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus. His wife was a relative of ours.

I also remember having visited, with my parents and some relatives, the nearby village Pretori, which was mainly a Greek Cypriot village, but where we had a couple of Turkish Cypriot relatives. Once, I remember going with my parents from Vretcha to Aynikola through the mountain by donkey and falling off the donkey. Aynikola had a pleasant climate and good, potable water, apart from its delicious

fruits. In that village, I remember that my sister Selma and I was each washed regularly by our mother in the big earthenware jar in the yard of the house of Uncle Naim and Aunt Munuse. The jar looked like the jars in the movie "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves." Sometime before I went to the elementary school, we returned to Vretcha. Vretcha was at the edge of the mountain where, at the appropriate season, we gathered wild mushrooms. The villages of Kilinia and Panayia (Greek Cypriot) and Ayyanni (Ayios Ioannis, Turkish Cypriot) surrounded it. A fair used to be held in Panayia twice a year, on 15 August and 8 September, days related to Virgin Mary. People from surrounding villages passed through our village to go to the fair. My mother told me that I was born on one such day, that is, on the eve of the fair. In other words, my birthday is either on 14 August or 7 September, not 20 September which is the official one. My father was so happy that his first child was a boy that he began celebrating and forgot to register my birth immediately with the office of the village headman (Mukhtar).