



February 19, 2004 (1<sup>st</sup> part)

## Cyprus – Mitrovica

### The Story about two divisions

**On 1974 when the border that was dividing Greeks from Turks was put up to Cyprus it was said: “it is a temporary check-point”.**

**The same thing was said to Mitrovica populace on 1999**

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Citizens wake up to find a dividing line. Their fate would change to the extreme forever: till a week ago it seemed that one ethnicity will dominate over the other, or one ethnicity will do, even by expelling the other and yet after it seemed that one ethnicity will utterly dominate abolishing the other.

In the morning, soldiers sealed their fate: they would set up a physical border and on one side of it there were no members of the ethnic group that were on the other.

Some will loose their lives, others their houses but all them together will loose their town.

This is how every Mitrovica citizen will compress the story: Albanians were evicted from their houses by Serbian military forces assisted by Serbian community, and than the twist of the doom on the war arise: Albanians came home and caused the departure of Serbs.

Afterwards, NATO forces deployed to draw a dividing line.

But, a story of this kind I heard years ago from Cyprians. And, bizarrely, in London.

Cyprian Greek barber, living in southern London, would tell me how one day they lost Lefkosa and Nicosia. How he would meet Turkish Cyprians no more except in London. Accidentally, while looking for grape leafs for sarma<sup>1</sup> he met a Cyprian Turk living in north of London.

Both had fled Cyprus to move to London leaving behind their towns and the morning, which rose with a border.

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<sup>1</sup> Traditional Balkan specialty.

When for the first time I visited the divided town of Mitrovica on 1999, I minded the remark of a senior NATO officer while describing the separated town: “the checkpoint on the bridge of Iber river is of a temporary nature”. The division of Cyprus on 1964 and then ultimate division of 1974 were depicted as of temporary nature; UNO forces deployed to avert Greeks and Turks from killing each other. And here we are now, year 2004, forty years of temporality.

This temporality has a double impact for Mitrovica. According to ESI’s report, a very serious non-governmental organization based in Berlin, which carried research for months in Mitrovica, revealed that out of 19000 industrial jobs assured by gigantic Trepca only 1300 remain. It has been stroked by the undefined status of the separated town of Mitrovica, sort of a vicious micro cosmos of the undefined status of Kosovo. Southern part of the town, where the Albanian community lives there are 4000 salaries provided by the Kosovo budget whilst in the north, mainly inhabited by Serbian community, Kosovo and Serbian budget (through “parallel institutions”) assure another 4000 salaries. Private sector on the both sides of Iber River is there to serve those with budgetary salaries and those working with UNMIK. And this is temporary, as long as there is a determination to keep Mitrovica breathing by means of both budgets.

There is a presume that things are close to a culmination. A plan compiled by, Koffi Anan, General Secretary of UNO, has a deadline of two months time to display its successful results. And for the very first time, after forty years, there is a realistic political willingness from the Greek as well as from the Turkish side to unify the isle.

With Anan’s plan Cyprus will become a federal (or confederation depending on the viewpoint), with broad decision making rights of both ethnicities and with a combination of the decision making, which would make the state functional on one hand, and consensual on the other.

Within this plan, re-composition of the Cyprus ethnic map through territorial concessions between both ethnicities would be reached in this plan and the Turk side would have to give most part of the land.

There are three major factors that pledge the proposal for a unified Cyprus to have realistic chances to succeed.

The first is integration into the EU. If the Turk side would not accept Annan’s plan in referendum, then, only the territory controlled by Greeks will enter the EU and so will leave the part controlled by Turks in even a bigger backwardness.

The second factor is the transformation itself occurring in Greece and Turkey. In Greece, the stream of Greek nationalism that tried to annex Cyprus was replaced by a pro-European transition, which culminated with a reformed Greece, integrated into the EU. In Turkey, the symbiosis of military juntas with a corrupted regime was replaced according to the biggest reforming project, since Ataturk’s time. The Government of PM Erdogan, determined to make Turkey a part of the EU, made series of reforms, which were unimaginable in Turkey until recently. These two states, which waged a cold war through Cyprus people, now are real pushers of the integration of the isle.

And the third factor is exhaustion because of the division. When Cyprus’ dividing check points opened for the first time, residents of both sides of the isle visited the sides that were forbidden to them. And, after 30 or 40 years of mutual hatred, they saw they could

communicate in Cyprus as they do in London. The psychological boundary of division is broken, especially in the Turkish side, which is the one that suffered economically the most in this political and military conflict.

The principles offered to the Turk leaders were almost the same for many decades: Cyprus should remain one country, autonomy of entities should develop there, territorial corrections should be made, displaced persons should return, it has to be demilitarized and it has to integrate into the EU... For one reason or another, these principles were either opposed, or it was said that they are in detriment of one or in the detriment of the other. After 30 years, the same negotiating skeleton that sat in the table is sitting now as well.

There are chances that Mitrovica for the very first time identifies the scheme to resolve the problem. ESI, the NGO based in Berlin, proposed an all-inclusive plan, which was surveyed on the levels of the international community, by which has received a silent support and that it is now being offered to the public.

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## **HOW TO SOLVE MITROVICA CORD?**

Principles for solving the Mitrovica cord are being offered now to public by ESI, which has a silent support of international decision-making centres. They will start with a simplified form by redrawing the administrative lines in Mitrovica north so that together with Zvecan they make a municipality with Serb majority and considerable Albanian minority. They end with dissolution of parallel structures and integration of new administrative forms of the north within the Kosovar administrative system. Of course, as a common 'carrot' for both sides of Mitrovica an eventual financing of economic projects by the EU is offered..

Regardless of big differences between the Cyprus crisis and the one in Mitrovica, both of them have things in common. The principles for solving Cyprus' division have the component of redrawing the ethnic-territorial administrative units (which in Mitrovica's case would be new municipality with Serb majority), integration into a united administrative system (which in Mitrovica's case is that Kosovo exercises its power in its whole territory) and the EU's support (which in Cyprus case is entire admission, while in Mitrovica's, it is economic support for integrating projects).

Comparison of the Cyprus crisis with the movements in the Balkans is not an accidental one. Cyprus had all the elements that we had in the Balkans: ruining of the Ottoman Empire, intervention of western forces for installing their influences, birth of new states, cold war...But viewed from the angle of the principles on the international politics, it took comical dimensions sometimes. During the war in Bosnia, Greece, which

was working on unification of the Cyprus isle, supported Bosnia's division into the Serb and Bosnia-Croat sides. Turkey, which was supporting the Turk Republic of Cyprus, was against Bosnia's division, so against the Serb Republic of Bosnia as well.

Now, the roles have changed and almost all world crisis with the syndrome of division - starting from Kashmir to Bosnia and Mitrovica - will have their influence on the principles that have big chances to be approved in Cyprus.

At the time when the principles for solving the Cyprus issue were made, everything was anticipated, except the time factor. This is applied in Mitrovica's case too, where the real nature of solution gets de facto legitimised for the first time: the clash between the special rights for the Serbs and Kosovo's right to have its territory and population integrated entirely. And it is the place where for the first time a great part of the mess about Kosovo's status may be identified. Also, for the first time, solutions are found out of the spheres of the 'senior policy'; there is a possibility for Mitrovica to be treated by the local politicians and not to depend on "Standards for Kosovo", on different working groups for dialogue or if Co-ordination Centre for Kosovo should participate or no.

According to this context, the solution of Mitrovica's cord may give a completely new political dynamism to Kosovo and the relations between Kosovo and the international community.

The problem, which cannot be identified by any analysis of any institution, is the definition of the moment: is there a political force between the Albanian and Serbs in Mitrovica or wider for starting such an ambitious project?

For Mitrovica and Kosovo as a whole, Cyprus may be more than a lesson. Whatever exists now on the table of talks, it will return again. The value of the Mitrovica project is that it brings to discussion an all-exclusive project, which may be realised. For Mitrovica and Kosovo citizens, this is the time when they should say what has to be done further on with this project; if it has to be changed, how and why, if it has to be applied, how and why?

In fact, this project brings a new dimension to our political life so that we do not deal with generalisations any longer. From them, Mitrovica citizens have seen only the fact that the border still divides their city. Same as Cyprus residents saw it 40 years ago.