



CYPRUS - OVERVIEW OF RECENT HISTORY

Cyprus is a small island in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea and a full member of the European Union. It has an area of 9,251 square km, and a population of 660,000 people. Cyprus gained its independence from Britain in 1960. As it is well known during the British colonial rule there were tensions between the Greek and the Turkish Cypriot communities, the two larger communities living on the island. The conflict after independence despite the fact that the new Constitution offered the 18% Turkish minority a privileged position in public administration, (30% of all the posts in civil service, 40% of the police force and army, 30% of Government Ministerial Posts and 30% of seats in the House of Parliament) the Turkish Cypriot leadership was not satisfied, and the conflict continued. The first three years of independence were characterised by fierce inter-communal hostilities resulting in the withdrawal of Turkish Cypriots from Government and Parliament. Turkish Cypriots were isolated with their leadership insisting on the geographical separation of the two communities. Since 1964, a UN peacekeeping force has been based on the island. Until 1974 the two communities were living under tension even though there were inter-communal talks aiming to find a solution to the Cyprus problem.

In 1974 the Greek junta staged a military coup on the island in an attempt to overthrow the democratically elected president Makarios. Turkey reacted with a bloody military invasion which forced about 200,000 Greek Cypriots to leave their homes and property and become refugees in their own country. Turkish Cypriots living in the south of the island were moved to the occupied north. The Turkish army occupied about 37% of the island's territory, and about 70% of its financial resources. The occupation and the following displacement have left traumatic experiences among Cypriot citizens. Apart from a large contingent of Turkish heavily armed occupying forces (about 35,000 troops), the north has been occupied by some 110,000 invaders from Turkish Anatolia, compared to the 89,000 Turkish Cypriots. Despite extensive efforts undertaken to solve the Cyprus problem both by the UN and by the European Union have so far failed. The Turkish invasion sustains the division of the island and the tension between the two parties is far from over. The island of Cyprus remains the only European state divided by force and Nicosia is now, after the fall of the Berlin wall, the only divided capital in Europe.