

Beyond the Deadlocks: Redesigning the Cyprus Peace Process

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The current peace talks have reached an impasse. 'Cyprus 2015' argues that what has passed for a 'Cypriot-led' process over the course of the past four years falls far short of the participatory ideal it promised. The process itself has alienated people and limited the leaders' scope for negotiation. On the surface, it seems that the sides have reached a point where a negotiated settlement has proven beyond their grasp, requiring a reassessment of the settlement framework.

To revitalize the peace process, 'Cyprus 2015' recommends the formal adoption and implementation of a new approach which will not only build on existing convergences, but also will fulfill the promise of a genuinely participatory process that would serve as a bedrock for a new Cyprus, as well as regional stability and prosperity.

In more specific terms, 'Cyprus 2015' advocates that the following five principles should be adhered within the framework of the negotiations:

1. **Develop an effective process for resolving existing deadlocks in the talks, by generating and evaluating multiple alternatives.** Such a process is essential if the current polarization of the two sides is to be overcome in a creative and rational manner. While external arbitration might appear promising as a way to overcome deadlocks, it would be far superior if the problem solving and deadlock resolution capacity of Cypriots is enhanced, as this would be useful to the communities well after a settlement is reached. The case of reaching to the peace agreement in Northern Ireland where participatory processes were involved is encouraging and that experience should be well studied for lessons for the Cyprus case.
2. **Develop mechanisms of public consultation, to ensure two-way communication between the leadership and society at large, thus creating a peace process which is owned by the grassroots.** Societal ownership is the only possible basis for long term political stability, both in seeking a settlement but also in the post solution era. Without such ownership, which can only come about through the effective engagement of society at large in a transparent peace process, blame games, information distortion and spoiling through maximal positions will predominate.
3. **Insert an international dimension to the peace process, to run in parallel with internal aspects of the talks.** The international dimension of the Cyprus peace process, involving several complex topics such as security and guarantees of implementation, is too critical to be left for last-minute negotiations without appropriate preparation. Best practices in international treaty-making mandate prior committee work at a level of delegated representatives, before international conferences and other such instruments of summit diplomacy take place. The same should apply in the case of the peace process in Cyprus.
4. **Embed Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) more firmly within the formal peace process, in such a way that they have maximum impact and are not neglected.** Developing social cohesion and fostering reconciliation is an essential prerequisite and companion for any political settlement, and cannot be treated as a 'side-show' to remember whenever the 'real' negotiations are faltering.
5. **Institute a monitoring and auditing mechanism, to assess levels of adherence to the above principles as the peace process moves forward.** Without an independent mechanism to evaluate adherence to principles, even the best designed process will gradually disintegrate under the weight of accumulated political habit and the agendas of individual actors.

This dormant period in the talks represents both a threat and an opportunity. Although it is anticipated that the peace negotiations will probably resume after the elections in February 2013, without a proper redesign of the peace process, there is no reason to anticipate a 'break' in the pattern of deadlock. **Meaningful change in Cyprus will only take root via genuine engagement of the public in the peace process.**



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