

Transcript for the To The Point Debate Held on July 9th, 2015 at 20.00 at Point Centre for Contemporary Art in Nicosia, Cyprus:

Title: *Let Sleeping Dogs Lie: Will a Truth Commission to Investigate the 1963-1974 Atrocities Help or Hinder Current Attempts at a Solution to the Cyprus Problem?*

Speakers: *Achilleas Demetriades, Dr. Bulent Kanol, Dr. Yiannis Laouris, Erol Kaymak*

Moderator: *Andromachi Sophocleous*

Intro of all the speakers and moderator by Dimitrios Ikonomou

Intro of the rules of the debate by Andromachi Sophocleous

Dr. Bulent Kanol's Opening Statement:

When you talk about the Cyprus Problem, it starts in 1974 for the Greek Cypriot Community, but if you are in the Turkish Cypriot Community it starts in 1963. So this is a kind of dilemma, and I am excited to hear of an organization run by a group of young people in the Greek Cypriot Community willing to talk about what happened before 1974, which is why I decided to come talk to you. I am certainly not an expert on Truth Commissions, so I am not here to lecture on a Truth Commission.

I am here to discuss about my personal experience, as my age allows me to talk about. If we want to make a Truth Commission, it has to remain neutral, legitimate and objective; otherwise it will have harmful effects on the peace process. I looked at the literature a bit, and I have found that many Truth Commissions that were organized in the past around the world experienced few failures. Very many advantages, but few failures.

I believe there is a misinformation about what happened in Cyprus from 1963-74. During the years of 1963-1974 atrocities were not only inter-communal, but intra-communal as well. I can give you a few examples from my own experience. In 1963 I was forced out of my home and had to stay with my family in a cinema hall for 3 months. My grandfather returned to my village at one point to bring supplies, and never came back. To this day, we don't know where he is, why he is missing, if he was killed, or taken. There must be some type of commission where people with the will and courage can talk about these things and bring new information forward.

Another striking incident: I had a neighbor in 1964 who had an affair with another woman in

the neighborhood. Because of this affair, he was taken away by the Turkish resistance force and killed. Later he was declared a martyr. Something needs to be done about this misinformation in our history.

Dr. Yiannis Laouris' Opening Statement:

There are two important questions for me that need to be answered.

One is: Is there ever a good time to approach an apology? Is it better if I apologize immediately? Is it different if I apologize in 20 years? For me this is the easy question, because my experience from life in general is that an apology is always appreciated. If it is something that hurts, and hurts after many years, it is always appreciated.

I had the honor to participate in many bi-communal meetings in the nineties, facilitate the gatherings of Turkish and Greek Cypriots. Hundreds of people, thousands some times. I made a very important observation during these gatherings: when one person in the group apologizes in the name of his community, all the other members of the other community were very happy, and the group discussion moved forward. When that first apology did not happen, everyone, Greek Cypriot or Turkish Cypriots would both complain, and it becomes a conversation of victimization.

The second question is a bit different. Some crimes are painful, like the killing of Bulent's grandfather. Is it a good idea to open the crimes of the past? Is it a good idea to rehash these issues, or is it better to close it? I do believe, unfortunately, that these crimes must be examined. And I will tell you why.

I have a strong belief that if you do not investigate when you are alive, the grievances one feels for the crimes suffered are passed down generationally, and become more and more difficult to alleviate. Because no one apologized to my grandmother for the crimes committed against her, there is something inside me that will be passed down to my daughter, and like a demon, it may wake up one day and do bad things. These grievances may resurface one day. We see things like this happen, recently in Yugoslavia. It was a peaceful country which erupted. We will see it soon in Libya. These grievances don't die. It's not enough to close it.

I ask myself why these grievances resurface after so many years. Because a solution to the Cyprus Problem is not enough. A solution needs to take into account a need for long term integration. In Belgium, for instance, where long term integration is not on the agenda, the rift between the two communities is growing, even though the country is unified in theory.

I would dare to say that the future belongs to the youth. The youth needs to take ownership of the future. If they want to live together in future, they need to make decisions which will have them moving forward together.

Erol Kaymak's Opening Statement:

I think I have to play devil's advocate; everyone here, including the audience, are in favor. Beware what you wish you for because you just might get it.

The Truth Commission will be a difficult process, attempting to investigate atrocities which occurred almost half a century ago. It will be difficult to move forward with independent investigations. Even the administrative aspect will be extremely difficult. I think that the reconciliation of the two communities could happen independently of an investigation for truth. The question is not whether or not I am for or against truth, but whether or not it will facilitate any type of reconciliation. And it won't, because we are never going to set it up. A settlement is a pre-requisite for a Truth Commission, because we have two separate jurisdictions.

If they wanted to, the two communities could move forward independently with their own Truth Commissions. There are also questions of fratricides within the two communities, and nothing is stopping either community from investigating these crimes right now, but they are not. The question of why this step has yet to be taken is still unanswered.

Furthermore, a Truth Commission would be lowering the bar of justice. We are discussing instances of people being murdered, and the murderers must be brought to justice. A Truth Commission will not allow for said justice to be exercised, as it will give carte blanche, allowing people to confess and be absolved. A Truth Commission will whitewash the past.

A Truth Commission was omitted from the Annan Plan, and instead in its place there was the request for a Reconciliation Commission, to set up a common history board.

Rebutting Yiannis' point on Belgium: I believe that the situation in Belgium is a step up from the current situation in Cyprus, and the Belgian situation is one which we should aspire to, where we can, at best, ignore each other.

Furthermore, for many atrocities which occurred, the authorities are complicit, and there has been a cover up by both sides. There are many things we will never know. The work of the CMP will attest to this cover up. There are many things that could be done short of a Truth Commission that are not being done. Even forensics on bodies that were found is lacking. The leaders' call to step forward and share information with the CMP has also been unanswered.

Achilleas Demetriades' Opening Statement:

Let me first congratulate you on your endeavor.

The idea behind the Truth Commission is to investigate the truth and bring closure to families. Families have the right to know, and authorities have an obligation to tell.

How does such a commission work? Normally, it will grant immunity to someone who is otherwise a murderer in exchange for truth. This is the normal dilemma. There are more than 40 Truth

Commissions in the world operating, perhaps the most important being the one in South Africa. And the normal dilemma is, do we exchange immunity for the truth? But we do not have to face this dilemma in Cyprus: in 1990, when the Committee of Missing Persons was set up, the basis of that community was one of immunity for any witness in exchange for information: none of the information generated has resulted in prosecutions, as the attorney generals on both sides of the island are already committed to the agreement made with the CMP. So we do not have to face the dilemma, because on the ground we have the CMP.

So my proposal is to upgrade the CMP, to expand its mandate to allow for the ability to investigate all over the island, military zones or not, have an ability to dig up wherever it likes, have the ability to determine the circumstances surrounding the disappearances, without giving it the ability to prosecute.

Why do we need a Truth Commission now? Because it is urgent: irrespective of when the Cyprus Problem begins, we are looking at almost 50 years since the passing of the crimes, and the people involved in these crimes are dying or dead, so closure must happen now. Declarations of remorse are necessary for these people. In exchange of a declaration of remorse, I am willing to grant immunity. The dilemma is between justice or truth; for me truth is more important.

Rebuttals:

Yiannis: I will make only one suggestion: the focus of the Cyprus Problem and the monopolizing of the Cyprus Problem by the T/C's and G/C's is a problem in itself, the focus of a Truth Commission for only the dead and the missing is a problem as well. The issue of the truth should be looked at in a larger way. It's not only about the Cyprus Problem. In Canada, theft was also investigated, and criminals involved in bribery were also given immunity. This is a good exercise for society to reflect upon mistakes of the past and move forward. A Truth Commission should be embedded in a bigger project of investigating crimes which are ongoing or more recent, focusing not only on the atrocities of 1963-74. Think of all the crimes that have happened in the last ten years.

Erol: I agree with everything mentioned by Achilleas and the broadening of the mandate of the CMP. This tackling of white collar crime proposed by Yiannis? Maybe focus on one thing at a time. Bulent: Now that Erol is on our side we don't have much to say! I think we have been promoting the correct question of changing the history books on both sides. A lot of work has been going on, but as of now officially neither side is telling the truth. Anything which would contribute to the clarification of the history of Cyprus will help in the construction of a unified Cyprus, and this should be the goal of the Truth Commission.

Nowadays, there is a lot of talk about guarantees for example. I have Greek Cypriot friends asking why we as T/C's are so concerned with guarantees, especially now with the accession to the EU. I think G/C's need to put themselves in the shoes of T/C's, to understand the history from our perspective so they can see why guarantees are so important to us.

Achilleas: Bulent, two points: the mono-communal problem. I think there are problems of truth

on a mono-communal level. You look at the coup on our side and the denial of certain things. You look at some of the martyrs on the other side, and the denial around this. You look at some of our cemeteries and see where the coup's dead were buried and they haven't been opened up. You look at the martyr cemeteries; you want to know who buried them there and who killed them. Some of the people who generated these mono-communal problems are using as a pretense the difficulty of a bi-communal Truth Commission in order to cover up their own problems. I see a level of truth at both the mono-communal and bi-communal level.

Regarding security guarantees. I don't like to talk about security but insecurity, the problem that one community feels threatened by the other community. In a way the common denominator of insecurity is the same, and that is the way to address it.

Yiannis, I have no problem with the approach to create a wider Truth Commission, but we should remain focused on the question at hand. I want to expand on that, by taking Australia as an example, the Sorry Day which occurs in Australia every year, where apologies are offered towards the aborigines of Australia for the atrocities incurred during colonialization. I'd like to see reconciliation messages coming out of communities. There should be a movement away from the culture of heroes and martyrs. I'd like to think of victims. There should instead be a memorial for the unknown victim. That's the way to start.

Erol, I don't know what to say because we convinced you! But in summation, I want to deal with the problem on two levels. Regarding the question of timing: do we want truth to emerge at this point? As Yiannis asked, is timing ever right?

Questions and comments from the audience:

Andromachi Sophocleous(moderator): We are now opening the floor to audience contributions. I was supposed to say that the first question will not be a follow up, but Yiannis mentioned that the timing for a Truth Commission is now. And perhaps that would be a good place to start. Keep in mind that Erol mentioned that a Truth Commission should have as a prerequisite the solution of the Cyprus Problem.

Neoclis: I'd like to comment on the issue of timing: there is never a right time. But strategically and in terms of the current atmosphere, there are times which could be better. The positive atmosphere and confidence building occurring now is on a new level than any other time. If there ever was a good time, it's right now for a Truth Commission. Mentalities are changing, people are moving forward, and people need the truth. When people feel that we are moving towards the end of the road regarding the Cyprus Problem, this could be a good time for a Truth Commission.

Andy: The only institution currently that could create a meaningful Truth Commission is the civil administration on the island, on either side of the island. My issue is that the political establishment and the civil service establishment are, or at least might be, linked to the atrocities. Therefore, any attempt to have a Truth Commission right now could be hindered by those people who actually did the atrocities. Maybe the right time is after a generation has passed, new people come in, and

the youth will be free to investigate without the influence of a generation that brought us here.

Harris: Looking first at the question posed by Achilleas: Should the commission start before the solution of a Cyprus Problem? Given the current pace, maybe we could start after the solution, given our current momentum, and maybe it could even be better.

Achilleas also asked, is there anyone against truth? Yes, me, perhaps. First of all, I don't think objective truth can be achieved, or even if it exists. What we are looking for is a communal narrative to stop violence. So making people agree. And to start this, there are different levels of truth: the level of EOKA and TMT, on the level of international influence on the island, and on the smaller level of individuals killing individuals. I am not sure how much good we are doing if we only address the issue of individuals killing individuals in creating a common narrative for the island, and how much closure we are offering. Is it necessary on that level in creating a communal narrative?

I also disagree with Yiannis on Belgium and Bosnia. I don't think it was old hatreds which made people kill each other in the case of Bosnia, it was new stories. It was the whole creation of a context that these two communities hate each other. There are even grudges between football teams in Cyprus.

Dr. Yiannis Laouris: To both Neoclis and Andy. I don't know if you have ever spoken to someone who has lost. People with big pain forgive easier than us: it's an amazing phenomenon that you can only experience when you talk to someone (who has experienced such pain). It is very powerful, when someone who has a victim in their family forgives, because that sentiment spreads. To answer Harris, there is a lot of sociological analysis, that there are in a sense demons inside people. A new narrative will not create these (demons), there is something preexisting inside you that makes you a hardened killer.

Achilleas Demetriades: Two points. To Andy: people are of course implicated, and somebody covered up, and we are not doing enough to bring facts to the surface. I think truth is essential in order to build something. Of course truth is painful, and the biggest pain is truth about yourself, and if you do not see yourself in the mirror to understand what you did, you will not be able to understand what others did.

To ask for forgiveness, simply saying sorry can go a long way. And I agree with Yiannis: people who are in pain have a much greater capacity for forgiveness. They are able to forgive quicker than someone who has taken on a cause which does not affect them in the same way personally.

And this is another issue we have here: I have not seen anybody on this island for the last 40 or 50 years asking for criminal prosecutions of those who are known to be involved in the killings. In fact, if you look at our police forms from the digging up of graves of unknown persons, there isn't even a criminal investigation. It is well known that these are missing persons from one community or the other, there is no attempt to identify the remains, so the act of disappearance which generates the pain stops, and time can heal the pain.

I don't want Cyprus to be a Franco situation, where they are only now digging up the graves of the missing of the Spanish civil war, and they are now carrying out an archaeological exercise (as opposed to a reconciliatory exercise). We still have some spouses and children to whom we owe the ability to understand and thusly create the common foundation for the creation of a country in which we can live. We need to clear this mess in order to rebuild. This is why I think it is urgent.

Dr. Bulent Kanol: To Andy, regarding the question of the mechanics of how we will form the Truth Commission, because you were questioning the organizations involved. I think we can certainly take an example from the CMP. It was formed with the involvement of the UN, and I can see this as a potential to create something more neutral and can alleviate this concern regarding certain implicated members of the civil services.

Erol Kaymak: Some people mentioned the issue of timing: it is going to be a big problem. There are areas now we cannot investigate because they are still under military jurisdiction. There is no way Akinci can override that; he can't even deal with the situation in Varosha effectively (there was recently a spreading fire in the city of Varosha/Famagusta, which is now under occupation by the Turkish Armed Forces and entirely depopulated). And if we are going to build on this Committee of Missing Persons (CMP), then we have to build a consensus but also take it to the cultural committee they set up. I actually brought it to their attention, but no one seems to want to talk about it. They just ignore my emails.

Marianna: I was thinking of the scale of this whole endeavor. I think that in Cyprus we have a bigger issue of insecurity which has been exploited by both sides over the years. I believe that a Truth Commission at this stage may be less helpful and more harmful. We need to build more steps towards feeling secure with each other as communities before we are able to address the atrocities. Otherwise we go down a path where we expend a lot of emotional capital, and we might find ourselves hurting each other again. I can understand how a person who has been personally impacted can find closure in receiving an apology, but I wonder if within the rest of the communities, there will be greater harm than good if we dig these events up before we create a level of trust.

Andromachi Sophocleous: Marianna raises a good point: besides the closure for the families, how about the community? How will the community react to the Truth Commission? The Truth Commission will give immunity from the justice system, what about immunity from the community? How will a Truth Commission provide closure for the community in general, and not only for individual families?

Dr. Yiannis Laouris: It relates to what I mentioned before about demons. If I lost someone and Achilleas provides me with closure, it's good for me and my family, but might not be good for the community at large, because the others will relive this atrocity, and it will give birth to a demon which they could carry for a long time. The only way to deal with it will be difficult: in my ideal world, the person to whom we have given closure could say so publicly. That person has the power to forgive which can carry through the community. This is why I mentioned my grandmother.

When my grandmother was alive, she could forgive. But no one can forgive on her behalf, and this is how the demon survives and is carried through her children. So a Truth Commission must happen now, and must be public.

Achilleas Demetriades: If your grandmother has not forgiven, it is a matter of duty passed on to the children and grandchildren. The great grandchildren will have to preserve the legacy of the great grandmother in not forgiving.

Dr. Yiannis Laouris: Exactly.

Achilleas Demetriades: Therefore, the ability of the victim to forgive is essential in building a reconciliation process. Clearly there will be conflict in society. But that conflict will have a predetermined result in that forgiveness will be granted and society will stabilize again. If you allow the grandmother to die without forgiving, you are simply building another martyr or hero, which will not aid in reconciliation of society.

Addressing the public nature of a Truth Commission: I think the expression of remorse is essential in any such process. There is a need for people to come out in the open and express their remorse for what they have done. Primarily because of immunity. Truth and remorse are things that should be offered in exchange for immunity in order to help put society back on track.

Erol Kaymak: One of the problems we have with this exercise is the linkage between the closure of the individual and communal reconciliation. They don't necessarily have anything to do with one another, and there is no empirical evidence that they could. In the case of South Africa for instance, there are skeptics. I am not saying that there are no cases of individual remorse and forgiveness accompanied by societal reconciliation, but I am questioning why we insist it will work that way.

Why don't we segregate the two issues? On the one hand, we have this criminal issue for which we need closure. But not every solved homicide leads to reconciliation. In fact, publicity for these grotesque events, if we somehow make ISIS ask for forgiveness for all the decapitations they committed, it does not take away the ghastly fact that these acts occurred. I am not against broadening the mandate of the Truth Commission, but I am hesitant to say that this process will lead to reconciliation of the two communities.

Andromachi Sophocleous: Erol raises a very valid point; let's see if there is a link between a Truth Commission and reconciliation. And let's look and see if these two can be linked in Cyprus.

Anonymous: I wanted to follow up on how I see that there is this division between the prosecution model and the reconciliation model. Why can't we say that everyone has five years to come forward, tell the truth, otherwise the prosecution will seek punitive justice?

Achilleas Demetriades: Because it is not a credible threat. It's taken fifty years to get a prosecution going, and you didn't, so no one will believe you can do it in five.

Anonymous: Then how will a Truth Commission be any different?

Achilleas Demetriades: Because in exchange for truth you can be granted immunity. The ability to come out with the truth in this way will help the person offering the truth, and especially help the people receiving it.

And I will just make a simple comment about tombstones: in our culture, in both religions of the island, tombstones are very important in the grieving process. People whose relatives are missing do not have a tombstone, and we owe them a tombstone. In order to get this tombstone, someone has to come forward and give information regarding the remains of the missing bodies.

Chrystalla: My comments are mixed. I agree very strongly with both yes and no arguments. I think as Achilleas says, the power of confession is very important for the families of victims. On the other hand I agree with Erol's hesitation to make a link between individual and community forgiveness. I think what we need to be prepared for in Cyprus is that group psychology is not the same as individual psychology, and people in this room may not be representative of the spectrum of opinions in Cyprus on this issue. While a Truth Commission may be important for the people in this room, if we look at this broadly, it will threaten a lot of people, as well as a lot of people's identities. Many people's identities are entrenched in the conflict.

This time of a peace process is fragile. People are afraid of change, as well as hopeful. So if we start talking about something as sensitive as what we've done to each other in the past at a point where we are afraid, attempting to come to an agreement now, we risk triggering a lot of things that could bring us counter-beneficial effects. We have to think about the sensitivity of people, and that doesn't mean don't deal with this now, but to think very carefully of how to create truth telling processes, the different tracks, and how to bring people on board. People across the country need to have a clear understanding of how the Truth Commission might be, and it needs to be non-threatening. How do we create a buy-in at a country wide level, especially now?

Another thing: South Africa is a classic case of putting a massive amount of pressure on victims to forgive, and that's unfair. Victims may forgive much more easily on the whole, but to put the onus of forgiveness on people who have already lost a lot is not a fair thing, and the benefits of forgiveness must not be over-weighted.

Finally, there are already organizations working towards truth, such as Together We Can, the bi-communal organization of survivors and victims which goes from village to village communicating the consequences of what we've suffered, and how to avoid such crimes in future. So, there are already initiatives working towards doing this work on a smaller level, so why not ask their opinion? Why not speak with them about creating space for truth? Forgiveness opens a generative space, so being generous with forgiveness can create a space where we can create.

Stephanie: Hello I am from Australia, and I wanted to talk about the Sorry Day in Australia. The apology was made when people who experienced the atrocities and their children were still alive,

and I think that this was very important for the reconciliation of the communities in Australia. The bridge that was built was effective in many ways, but it was a one way bridge: one community who committed atrocities towards another. In Cyprus it needs to be a two way bridge, and the apology needs to go both ways.

Just regarding the upgrade of the CMP. Do you believe that something else that might be helpful, to allow families, for instance T/C families who have found the remains of family members in the South, or vice-versa, to leave the remains there, and have the gravestone there rather than being required to move the bones? It could be an effective tool in understanding each other. The movement of people from one side of the island to the other to visit these gravestones will help with reconciliatory efforts, and create new connections.

Hassan: a number of points, most importantly timing. For the people who are still alive, it is important that they do not die and take the truth with them. In the absence of truth, lies and the demonization of one community against the other prevails. Also, the Truth Commission needs to be used to create a future of Cyprus. The size of the Cypriot community as a whole is so small, that every family on the island was affected by the events of the past. We need to ensure that the truth finally does come out.

Anonymous 2: Before this investigation happens, has there been any research as to how people may react to a Truth Commission?

Erol Kaymak: People tend to be supportive of conflict resolution measures. The problem with public opinion is that people don't know what you're asking them. When a soft question is asked, people tend to be supportive; this is one of the problems of asking for public opinion on complex issues. If you ask a hard question, like which political party someone supports, they are more ready to respond. In general, people are supportive of these types of issues. Regarding statistics, I used to work with a group called SEED, and you can look them up, that deals with this issue.

Dr. Bulent Kanol: If we see the Truth Commission as something on its own, it may be deceptive. It should be part of a process, and complemented by institutional reforms, courts, police, etc. to move towards a right kind of reconciliation. When we talk about a solution, in my mind we are not talking about two political leaders coming together and striking a deal. This was done in Palestine and Israel, and we saw that it wasn't a solution, it was merely an agreement which needed to be supported by other initiatives, and a Truth Commission is one of those many other initiatives. About timing, maybe some people are right that a Truth Commission shouldn't happen now. But it should happen, whether it is after the signing of a referendum or before. The referendum is only a part of a reconciliation process, and a Truth Commission should also be another part of that process.

Achilleas Demetriades: We have a type of Truth Commission operating, the CMP, a very serious exercise which is neutral, representing both committees, and surprisingly it works. The problem is that they are running out of graves to investigate due to lack of information. We need to create a mechanism to generate more information for the CMP to function. As Hassan mentioned, people

who can provide information are dying. We need to go to the source of the information and we need to do so quickly; and that is all I need to say about timing.

This is not a theoretical exercise we are doing here, this is something that should have been done 40 or 50 years ago depending on how you count and hasn't been done. We are in an urgent need, and I simply don't buy the 'don't rock the boat' argument. I can tell you, my friends that the boat is sinking, so rocking the boat is not an important question.

In response to our Australian friend: I like your comment that the Sorry Day is a one way exercise in Australia. Perhaps we can have two Sorry Days here. I like Sorry Day in Australia, because the State, the system, or aggressor, or however you want to characterize them, decided to institutionalize and commemorate the loss of one community. This gives a focus for this exercise (of forgiveness). We don't seem to have a focus, and as Erol said, we need simple questions for simple answers.

So, perhaps we can pick a Sorry Day today. Not 9th of July, because it has connotations already for the Greek Cypriots. But whichever day we choose, it can be a focus of attention to the problem, and the start of a process to understand the other side. That process is sometimes lacking, and simply by choosing an arbitrary date where people start thinking about it, perhaps something will change. And I'll close with a Chinese proverb; the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Let's take a step.

What is the date of the Sorry Day in Australia?

Dr. Yiannis Laouris: (*looking up on his phone*) 26th of May.

Achilleas Demetriades: Does anyone have an objection to that date?

(*General laughter*)

Akis: I have an idea: in a post solution state, we could use the dates of the respective constitutions, to transition the connotations of those dates, just a thought.

On the question of cultural maturity, we must not underestimate the importance of collecting truth for future historians to be able to create a cohesive narrative for the island and to make better sense of what happened on that period. Perhaps we can separate that question from the question of reconciliation and the psyche of reconciliation: that is much more complicated though I think we've addressed that very well.

We are examining the psyche of the victim, but not that of the perpetrator. When you are called upon to do something wrong, or to support someone who has done something wrong, the moment you do that, you seek justification for your action which is desperately needed to remain sane and preserve humanity. A lot of people in Cyprus are self-deceived in our seeking of justification. It's very difficult to escape that vicious circle, it's like a collusion between the two communities,

seeking wrong types of justification for the wrong-doing, and both communities are very good at that. A Truth Commission can provide an outlet for that.

Andromachi Sophocleous: We will take three final points or questions, and then we need to close.

Thodoris: I would like to ask a question to all of you, because you have memories of what really happened, where I do not. If we would have the results of a Truth Commission investigation tomorrow, and know exactly what happened, my question is if someone who lived through the events would accept the findings as truth?

For example, what if the truth contradicts what my grandfather told me? A foreign person, perhaps from a different country, came to a different conclusion than what I have accepted as truth. Parts of our education are so strong. How can I accept that what I was told was wrong, and that this different narrative is in fact truth, and where would that lead?

Dr. Bulent Kanol: There are actually grandfathers who have actually changed their mind on the issue. There are certain grandfathers who are now accepting that their previous actions were short-sightedness, and they shouldn't have done them. At least in my community. People are now realizing many things that they have done is stupidity.

Achilleas Demetriades: Truth is a threat to short term history, but also truth is the best friend of real history. So if you can analyze those two, perhaps you can see how truth changes people's minds. People committed atrocities thinking it was the right thing to do for their communities.

Dr. Yiannis Laouris: I'm on the same wavelength. People say that truth liberates. Truth Commissions are not only for the victims but also for the perpetrators. And there are many stories about them wanting to get it out of their system, but they are also afraid. And like Bulent said, they may have changed a long time ago.

Erol Kaymak: Something that was raised earlier about the one sidedness of the apology in Australia. We have jealously guarded identities as victims in both communities, not perpetrators of atrocity. The regimes of both communities sustained this. To what extent blowing up myths will lead to a new cultural understanding of what the Cyprus Problem was and who we are in relation to another: I could be optimistic about this, but it will also require regime reconciliation. In South Africa, they stated that Apartheid was bad, and so were some of the crimes that the ANC committed, but at the end of the day, everyone knew that the past was bad and the future will be bright.

In Cyprus we don't see it this way: we are still stuck the past in some sense. Many people agree that the past was better than what we have now, especially if you're Greek Cypriot. Many people voted Yes to the Annan plan in 2003-2004 with the view that anything is better than what we have now and we should move forward. Many people said it was sub optimal, it wasn't good enough, it whitewashed history and took away your victimology, your right to be aggrieved. Now, since we have this current situation where no one has apologized to one another, maybe the first step is for leaders to get up and say something. The truth in and of itself does not translate into a narrative of

why we killed each other, and why our human values must prevail over our ethnic values.

At some point leaders need to articulate this message and then that's built into curriculum.

Andromachi Sophocleous: Could it be that people did not vote yes in 2004 because there was no Truth Commission? Could it be that we were victims to such a huge misinformation at the time, that we need a Truth Commission to understand our history?

Erol Kaymak: I am conflicted by this, because you can't write a history without truth, but I am extremely concerned with what will be done with the truth.

Andrea: There is definitely a conflict of disciplines: history, sociology, the law, and each person has his own perspective. I find this fascinating, and I came across the quote: Should lawyers be historians and historians lawyers? This question is fitting here. We need to find the linkage between the practical (and historical?) aspects of a Truth Commission. There are specific families with specific histories, and victims need truth to reconcile their own historical narratives, but then we have society in general. I think Cyprus has done a great job with looking at individual cases: people have been looking for answers and finding them through the work of the CMP for instance.

But society has been suffering a lot, and this has to do with our education. I was sixteen the first time I heard that there are missing persons on the Turkish Cypriot side as well, that Northern Cypriots are also refugees. So we need to choose: should this be a practical Truth Commission, finding a legal basis for reconciliation and so forth? To some extent this is already happening.

But if we look at facts, or newspaper clippings from a Turkish Cypriot paper and a Greek Cypriot paper covering the events of the time, and see them make their own judgments, we can see what happens. This is the approach for finding truth for the community.

Andromachi Sophocleous: And the final question.

Madeleine: I came in to this discussion sitting on the fence, mainly because I am influenced by the negative impact that the Truth Commission had in South Africa, the negative press it received. During the debate I crossed into the camp of being in favor. And I think it is correct that this issue is multidisciplinary in scope. I think a Commission will be imperative towards a solution to the Cyprus Problem, mainly because of the psychological liberation it could provide.

Having heard the discussion, I am concerned about how a Truth Commission may be good for me but bad for my neighbor. In preparing for something like this, we need to define very clearly what we are trying to do to reduce the level of misgivings from the public. It will never be perfect: we will not find absolute truth, but if we prepare and enlist experienced professionals who have done similar work in other countries, we will hopefully have as little disappointment as we possibly can.

Andromachi Sophocleous: We are now finishing up with the discussion. Our speakers have a

few minutes for closing statement. Then we will move outside to carry on the discussion more informally.

Closing Statements (Erol Kaymak declines a closing statement):

Dr. Yiannis Laouris: An American friend of mine who worked at the embassy was leaving the island for good, and I asked him how he felt about it, and he actually said he was very happy to be departing. When I asked him why, he said he was so tired psychologically, because he has yet to meet a Cypriot who is not a victim. And I urge you to think about it. We have a very small village mentality, where we all feel we are treated unfairly. It is time for us to grow up, to air our dirty laundry and get on with it.

Continuously, we are talking about the past, and the only way to stop talking about it is to find closure. There is no other way. Part of the reason we failed in 2004 is because people couldn't see the future. We have to look at the future. Ten years have passed since the rejection of the Annan Plan, those ten years could have fixed a few things that were wrong with the Annan Plan.

A Truth Commission is only one element of a hundred that are needed towards a solution. Let's say yes to this measure so we can continue building an organic country. A child is not created the moment it is born; you have to do a lot of other things to raise a child. It is the same with a country. We cannot simply sign a piece of paper, we need many more steps we are not talking about, and that's my worry. We are only talking about a negotiation and reaching an agreement. What happens the day after an agreement is reached?

Dr. Bulent Kanol: As Cypriots, we have been immersed in emotions for many years. We have been immersed in a power struggle which has had us move away from truth and instead act upon our emotions. A Truth Commission will be one aspect of a complex attempt to go back to it (the truth).

Achilleas Demetriades: I will re-read the motion: will a Truth Commission investigating the 1963-74 atrocities help or hinder current attempts of the Cyprus Problem. This is the question we must answer. Everything else we heard is extremely interesting but irrelevant to this question. So at the end of the day, you have to decide whether you're a gambler, an optimist, you want to look at the future, and take a stance on this question. And before I close I want to thank you for giving us the opportunity to discuss this topic, and I hope that we adopt the 26th of May as a Sorry Day.

Results:

Andromachi Sophocleous: Just to note about the vote before our debate. **We had 18 people voting Yes, 10 No, and 14 people voting Undecided.**

After our second round of voting, the vote has changed to 23 Yes, 14 Nos, and 5 people voting Undecided.