

## Denktaş Güneyde: Kıbrıs Rum Tarafında Bölünmenin Normalleşmesi (Denktash in the South: Normalization of Division in the Greek Cypriot Side)

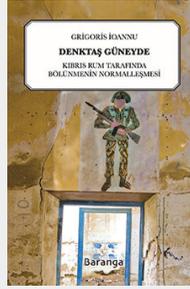
By Grigoris Ioannu

Lefkoşa: Baranga Yayınları, 2020, 213 pages, 50 TL, ISBN: 9789925753529

Reviewed by Hakan Karahasan, Near East University

Discourses, even though they seem so different and opposing, can be quite similar and serve for the same purpose. Grigoris Ioannou's book is a recent contribution to the field. *Denktaş Güneyde* (Denktaş in the South) is the Turkish translation of *Ο Ντενκτάς στον Νότο* (O Denktas ston Noto), published in Greek in 2019. Rauf Denktaş was a Turkish nationalist, politician and leader of the Turkish Cypriot community for over forty years. He was well-known for his secessionist views, advocating the notion that Turkish and Greek Cypriots cannot live together and hence geographic separation is necessary to prevent the assimilation of the Turkish Cypriot community by the Greek Cypriot majority. Especially after 1974, he constantly followed a policy that there should not be any cooperation between the two communities, but rather a complete separation.

Ioannou reveals how the notion of division became the dominant idea in the minds of the Greek Cypriot community. Aside from looking at it from a political point of view, he argues that the issue is more complicated than it seems. Ioannou outlines the role of political history and economics in relation to the Cyprus issue in the Greek Cypriot community. The first three chapters provide a historical overview of the origins of the Cyprus problem. Until the end of chapter two, the book talks about the emergence of nationalism,



intercommunal conflict, war, division, memories, representations, and how the official narrative was created from the 1950s to 2003.

The opening of the checkpoints in 2003 was a milestone in the history of Cyprus because it allowed both communities to see 'the other side' of the island; since 1974 there had been almost no contact between the two communities. Separation had become concrete after the two community leaders of the time signed the Third Vienna Agreement in 1975 and 'encouraged' people to choose sides. As a result, the majority of Turkish Cypriots moved to the northern part of the island and most Greek Cypriots to the southern part. There were exceptions, but these did not change the fact that the island's demography changed significantly; after that, Turkish and Greek Cypriots had their own separate political regimes.

Ioannou's book is an easy read on how this change took place. He outlines how nationalist policies in both communities served division, but also presents the role of trade unions and political parties during the time when the two nationalisms were competing. Explaining why Cyprus is in the situation it is now is not an easy task. One needs to bear in mind social, economic, political and even personal concerns in order to have a clear picture of today. This is what Ioannou tries to provide with this book.

Nevertheless, as a leftist, one can see that throughout the book Ioannou follows what Marx says in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.

Although the book seems pessimistic, and it is indeed when one reads of the transformation on both sides, especially in the Greek Cypriot community, it is more like a warning. Ioannou tries to show that division is not a good thing for either of the two communities in the long run and that the struggle for (re)uniting the island should continue. Hydrocarbons and the tension around the region are one example for that, he argues.

In chapter three, on ‘The Opening of Barricades and the Lost Perspective,’ Ioannou argues that the opening of checkpoints in 2003 was a milestone, one that could have been used as an opportunity to (re)unite the island, especially in the beginning, when people from both sides were so positive and were crossing to see ‘their lost properties/homes.’ In the beginning, even though the Greek Cypriot politicians were against crossings in any way, the majority of society did not pay heed. For Ioannou, the enthusiasm that could have been used as a catalyst for changing the dominant view in political domain, is now a lost opportunity.

Analysing the situation during and after 2003, Ioannou scrutinizes the Annan Plan and the meanings of ‘yes’ and ‘no’ for each community, especially the ‘resounding no’ of the Greek

Cypriots. Ioannou concludes that ‘the big no’ of the Greek Cypriots was not homogenous since different groups had their own reasons. In the end, these groups worked for the same goal and voted ‘no’ to the Annan Plan, hence supporting the division that is still the main political view of the Greek Cypriot political elite.

Discussing the aftermath of the Annan Plan and the convergences and disagreements between leaders, Ioannou shows that, even though at the time there were ‘leftist leaders’ on both sides, internal politics and other issues such as lack of courage did not allow for moves to bring about reunification.

Ioannou, in chapter six provides a detailed outline of how the educational system and the media serve to strengthen the status quo, hence division. He shows the historical development and how, even though the existence of universities was supposed to encourage freedom of thought, their influence on the public level is limited.

Chapter seven shows how and why, even though the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) is a European Union country and the status quo is not sustainable, division can remain the official policy. According to Ioannou, the Greek Cypriot political elite do not want to ‘risk’ anything but are happy with the way the RoC is now: a ‘state of exception’ that they control.

Closing the book, Ioannou warns the reader once more and tries to give the message that despite the fact that the current situation offers no glimpse of hope, still here is room for struggle because, as many examples present, in the long run, everyone stands to lose from the division. According to him since people make history, there is always room to change it.

## **BOOK REVIEWS**

The book is a useful resource for anyone who would like to understand how and why the Greek Cypriot political elite normalized the notion of division. With all its references and footnotes, the book is very rich and would

help anyone who would like to research the contemporary political, economic and sociological history of Cyprus. The book's English translation is expected to be out sometime this year.