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In relation to the opening of the Checkpoint in Ledra Street

The opening of the path in Ledra Street in March of 2008 constitutes a pivotal point in the process of the reunification of Nicosia and of Cyprus. Today it constitutes the most popular checkpoint and its opening has undoubtedly contributed to the widening of bi-communal social and commercial interactions. From a political point of view it marks the first Christofias-Talat agreement that opened semiotically the process of the ongoing negotiations. What were however the social dynamics and which the political framework that enabled the opening? Let us remember for a moment the history of the checkpoint.

It was the first checkpoint of the division, in the then most commercial street of the capital. After 1974 it was transformed into the symbol of the division, a tool for the “enlightenment” of foreigners over the righteousness of the anti-occupation struggle. As such, it was invested semiotically through the rhetoric of “the last divided city of Europe”, acquiring an increased political weight in the dissemination games of the two regimes. The demand for the opening of the Ledra checkpoint was raised during the difficult period that was followed after the referendum of 2004. As a minimum political objective, that would send the message that the reunification process which began in 2003 would not stop. The opening of the path could potentially lay the foundations for the reunification of the old city.

The first mobilization took place in the northern section in 2005. The shop owners of the area took the initiative, placing pressure on the regime, forcing it to build an elevated bridge (in order to satisfy the Turkish army) and to state its readiness for opening the checkpoint, throwing the ball to the Greek Cypriot side. The Greek Cypriot side was demanding the demolition of the elevated bridge as a precondition for the opening. Greek Cypriot rapprochement supporters responded to the mobilizations of the Turkish Cypriots with the formation of a citizen’s committee that organized two events in 2006 and 2007, pressuring the regime. Finally, with the election of Mavrou as mayor of Nicosia, the Turkish Cypriot regime demolishes the bridge, leaving the Greek Cypriot side temporally exposed, with the Greek Cypriot side responding a little later with the demolition of the wall and the placement of a plastic folding screen. It was only a matter of time before the opening.

But while it was crystal clear that the checkpoint would open, none of the two leaderships took the initiative. The rapprochement mayors north and south expressed their readiness to open it after receiving the political command. A political command that was being delayed. It was then that the idea for a bi-communal movement for the initiative of opening the checkpoint started to circulate. In the end, this information was leaked in the northern section, the Turkish army was placed on alert and the project was suspended. The defeat of Papadopoulos in 2008 acted as the juncture that would enable the opening. Another Greek Cypriot mobilization that was organized through blogs this time, official agreement and massive crowds at the opening. Moments of 2003. Bi-communal celebrations in the northern side. Dances and festivities. A beautiful atmosphere, that the temporary closure of the checkpoint attempted to spoil. The two regimes tried to display their power and to show that they controlled the situation, but the historical fact was one. Ledra Street had opened, and with it a crack at the wall of partition.

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