



PROJECT TO REVITALISE THE BUFFER ZONE IN CYPRUS A CENTRE FOR PROMOTING DIALOGUE



Thanks to this project, an abandoned house in the Cypriot buffer zone was acquired, completely renovated and converted into a social and cultural centre. The centre opened its doors at the beginning of May 2011 and has since promoted dialogue between the local population groups. It is consequently making an important contribution to reconciliation and peacebuilding in Cyprus. Switzerland is contributing over CHF 150,000 to this project, which is receiving primary funding from the donor countries of Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein.

Cyprus is the third-largest island in the Mediterranean, and has been effectively divided since 1974. A buffer zone separates the north of the island from the south. Cyprus lacks any form of infrastructure for fostering dialogue between the two parts of the island. The aim of this project in building a community and cultural centre is to promote such a dialogue. The project also seeks to revitalise the buffer zone.

THE FIRST CULTURAL CENTRE ON CYPRUS – WITH HELP FROM SWITZERLAND

The “Association for Historical Dialogue and Research” (AHDR) was founded as a non-governmental organisation in 2003 by a group of historians, teachers, ethnologists, linguists and scientists. Thanks to funding from several donor organisations and countries, the association was able to acquire and renovate an old disused building situated directly in the buffer zone. Switzerland contributed CHF 153,000 towards the renovation and refurbishment of the cultural centre as part of the Swiss enlargement contribution.

The centre opened its doors at the beginning of May 2011 and since then has been organising various activities that foster the open exchange of ideas and opinions among the population. As well as a café, the building designed by a mixed Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot team of architects contains a conference room, a library and multifunctional seminar rooms for training courses, events and presentations. In addition to the Cypriot population, local NGOs also benefit from this project as they have access to the centre’s various facilities.

REVIVAL OF THE BUFFER ZONE – A REALITY SINCE MAY 2011

The community centre is the first such centre to be shared by both population groups of Cyprus. Along with supporting research activities, it fosters dialogue and stimulates interest in history and education. Since the opening ceremony on 9 May 2011, cultural events and training courses have been regularly held in the centre. During the day, the community centre is open to the local population. This project represents a first step towards transforming the buffer zone into a place for meeting and cooperation in Cyprus.

FOSTERING GREATER TOLERANCE BETWEEN THE TWO CULTURES

Much of the history taught in Cypriot classrooms is one-sided, depending on which part of the island you are on. The aim of the AHDR, which operates the centre, is to teach history to Cypriot schools in a more multidimensional context. The organisation is hoping to attract up to 800 national and international teachers a year to various events in the centre with the aim of communicating this multidimensional insight into Cypriot history. Consequently not only schoolchildren in Cyprus, but children throughout the world will learn about the country's rich history. In the long term this will also engender mutual respect and understanding between the two sections of the island's population.

The centre is also aiming to attract more than 2,000 visitors a year to its multicultural museum. Taken together, these measures will contribute to greater tolerance and respect between the two communities.



The idea for the Home for Cooperation (H4C) emerged from the need for an alternative space of sociability in Cyprus. A place that could bring together individuals, informal groups and organisations from across the existing divide, to work together on the basis of trust, mutual respect and understanding. We are very proud that the Association for Historical Dialogue and Research (AHDR), an intercommunal non-governmental organisation with the mission to defend and promote productive dialogue and research in history and history teaching, had the initiative to put this idea into practice. The H4C, located in the buffer zone in Nicosia, is now a vibrant place of dialogue and interaction and a welcoming home for educational resources, research, cultural activities and events. This is the first step in our effort to build a culture of cooperation in our divided country.

Dr. Kyriakos Pachoulides,
President of the Association for
Historical Dialogue and Research

THE PROJECT IN BRIEF

SUBJECT

Supporting civil society

COUNTRY

Cyprus

STARTING POINT / BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since the de facto partition of Cyprus in 1974 into north and south separated by a buffer zone, this Mediterranean island has sought rapprochement between the two factions. This project supports Cypriot endeavours to create open dialogue between the two communities.

PURPOSE

The project seeks to help revitalise the buffer zone and bring the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities closer together.

ACTIVITIES

- Acquiring a building in the buffer zone (without Swiss funding), renovating and fitting it out as a multifunctional centre.
- Creating a multicultural museum that will attract at least 2,000 visitors a year.
- Running seminars for teachers on a multi-faceted interpretation of Cypriot history.

TARGET GROUPS

- Teachers on Cyprus
- The population of Cyprus
- Local and international non-governmental organisations

COSTS

Total project budget:
CHF 1.64 million
Swiss contribution:
CHF 153,150

RESPONSIBILITY FOR PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Association for Historical Dialogue and Research (AHDR)

DURATION

2008 – 2011