

transbordering laboratory

Lefkoşa | Lefkosia

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Lefkoşa | Lefkosia Diary, Day 1

Arrival at 12:30 local time in Larnaca, two hours waiting for the shuttle bus, 20 minutes late. I help an old man load his suitcase.... "That's Cyprus time" he says with a smile. He is a native Cypriot, lives in the US and is now visiting his 90-year-old sister. My hosts in the converted AirBnB garage are very friendly, they give me oranges and lemons from the trees in the courtyard, and a bicycle is also found. My first bike ride into the old town without lights becomes a challenge. I arrive safely, but on the way back my sat nav leads me to a second street with the same name. It has become dark in the meantime. Left-hand traffic is already challenging enough, and then disorientation in the dark, a dual carriageway without pavements and an unclear "signpost". After passing this first test, a cold apartment awaited me - in Cyprus there is no heating in the flat. The solution was the oven in the kitchen. Good night.

Lefkoşa | Lefkosia Diary, Day 2

Es wird fröhlich warm. Erstmal habe ich alle Fenster und Türen aufgerissen, um die Wärme hereinzulassen. Wieder mit dem Fahrrad in die Altstadt, erstmal zum "Home for Cooperation". Der Karton mit meinen Büchern ist angekommen. Einen Gesprächstermin bekomme ich für Montag. Also fahre ich erstmal auf die türkische Seite. Eine freundliche Grenzbeamtin erkennt, dass ich zum erstenmal hier bin, sie wünscht mir einen angenehmen Aufenthalt. Ich radle kreuz und quer durch die Altstadt auf der türkischen Seite. Ich suche die Grenzlinie, denn im Rahmen von "Transbordering Laboratory" haben wir uns die Aufgabe gestellt, sie zu fotografieren... "Fotografieren

verboten" steht da. Das fotografiere ich und sehe, wie ein UN-Soldat auf mich zukommt. Zum Glück verfüge ich über ein Fahrrad. Ich gelange in die Fußgängerzone der Ledra-Straße, tausche Geld, esse einen Kebab-Teller in einem der Restaurants, um dann gemütlich zurück nach Nicosia zu schlendern und die Tourist Info zu suchen. Sie liegt so versteckt, als wolle man hier keine Touristen haben. Ich bat den älteren Herrn um einen Stadtplan, der beide Stadthälften beinhaltet, also auch die türkische Seite. Er verneinte: "Sie wissen ja, eine schwierige Situation hier." Auch die Frage nach der Touristeninformation konnte er nicht beantworten. Ich buche eine Stadtführung für den nächsten Tag, die aber auch nur die griechische Seite umfasst. "Das ist die Politik, die Menschen hier haben keine Probleme miteinander", sagt er noch, bevor ich zum Goethe-Institut radle. Es befindet sich in einer Villa neben dem Ledra-Palace, ein ehemals mondäner Hotelkomplex, in dem sich heute das Hauptquartier der UN befindet. Die Kulturreferentin empfängt mich mit einem Apfelsaft. Sie ist halb Zypriotin, halb Deutsche. Das Goethe-Institut ist für beide Staaten zuständig, auch türkischsprachige Zypriotinnen können hier die deutsche Sprache lernen. Auf dem Rückweg zum Apartment komme ich an einem Fahrradladen vorbei und kaufe noch eine Lampe für das Fahrrad. Der sehr sympathische alte Mann verwickelt mich sofort in ein Gespräch über Krieg und Frieden. "Wenn im Fernsehen Nachrichten über Kriege in der Ukraine, dem Jemen und anderswo kommen, wechsele ich sofort das Programm, das ist einfach zu fürchtbar." Zuhause angekommen noch eine Internetschalte mit Tanel und Miha, der gerade seinen letzten Abend in Giurgiu-Russe an der rumänisch-bulgarischen Grenze verbringt. Ein wunderbarer Erfahrungsaustausch.

Nikosia/Lefkosa Diary, Day 3

It still happens to me that I accidentally start on the wrong side of the road or look in the wrong direction when I want to cross the street.

At 10 am Cypriot time, our city guide Julia is waiting for us in front of the main post office. During a short round of introductions, I meet Dorota and Julien, a Polish-French couple living in Poznań. Julia gives us a brief insight into Cypriot history, from a national Greek perspective. Every nation state needs its own narratives to legitimise itself. As announced the day before, the city tour takes us only through the Greek part of the old town. Again and again we come across the barbed wire fence of the "Green Zone", which owes its name to the UN General who drew the buffer zone on the map with a green felt-tip pen, according to Julia. Again, "no photography", the UN soldiers position themselves menacingly behind the barbed wire fence with their machine guns.

We visit several Greek Orthodox churches. Julia kisses the icons and explains their meaning to us. I ask her what the wax dolls hanging under some of the icons are all about. She explains that the dolls represent sick children. The parents believe that the icons and the saints depicted there can heal their children with the help of the dolls. Julien tells me that the tradition is very similar on the Turkish side. There, the diseased organs are depicted in wax in the mosques and hung up.

In the course of history, formerly Catholic churches became mosques and then Greek Orthodox churches again. We cannot enter most of the sights, the tourist season does not start until April. In the old town, the many cats brush around our legs and follow us part of the way. We find out where to have a good Cypriot meal. Dorota, Julien and I try out the restaurant right away. The lamb with steamed vegetables tastes good, but due to our animated conversation sometimes in French, sometimes in Polish, we hardly notice. I am impressed by Julien's language skills, even though he has only lived in Poznań for less than a year.

Then I went to the Turkish side in search of tourist information. But I can't book a guided tour of the city, there hasn't been one since 2020 due to the pandemic. In general, the Corona rules are stricter here than in Germany. I stroll through the Turkish old town, drink a coffee and chat with two young Kenyans who ask me to take their picture. In general, both sides of the border are teeming with Africans. From Cyprus, it is not far to Syria.

In the meantime, I can find my way without a navigation system, I'm getting closer to the city...

Nikosia/Lefkoşa Diary, Day 4

Today, 01 April, is National Day of the Republic of Cyprus. Revolutionary music, "Bella Ciao", is playing in the house of my AirBnB hosts. Is that a coincidence? I do some research on the internet. There I read that the first of April is celebrated as the Greek-Cypriot bank holidays and marks the beginning of the fight for freedom against the British occupation forces in 1955. This commemorates, among others, the resistance organisation EOKA, which later also fought against the Turkish Cypriots. I read further that today Greek Cypriot children should not wear a red T-shirt, because red is the colour of Turkey.

So today is not a day for socialising. I decide to cycle the "Green Zone" on the Greek-Cypriot side. The only border crossing for motorists, "Kermia Crossing", is very close to my accommodation in Agios Dometios, directly behind the horse racing track. Apparently many Greek Cypriots use the day off for a trip to

the Turkish part of Cyprus, the cars are jammed. Here I start my exploration tour along the border. Again and again I approach and leave. In many places, blue helmets stand behind the barbed wire, sometimes on small watchtowers. I have to pay close attention. On one side the Turkish and Turkish-Cypriot flags are flying, on the other the Greek and Greek-Cypriot flags. Always two flags next to each other. A proxy conflict between Greece and Turkey? Britain still has two military bases and two hundred square kilometres of land on Cyprus. Cyprus is a strategically important location in geopolitical terms.

I drive through small streets with detached houses and gardens, behind which the heavily guarded no-man's land begins. People are living their holiday routine, some have hoisted the Greek flag, relaxed leisure gives the day something serene. On a balcony, an African is cutting his friend's hair, coffee is being drunk on a veranda in the shade of a marquise, and two soldiers sit bored on the watchtower behind the house while I am busy trying not to get caught taking pictures.

The barbed wire becomes shinier, newer and harder. I am standing at the wall of a huge prison. The car park in front of it is full and solemnly dressed families with children walk in, presumably to visit relatives.

In contrast, the UN barbed wire enclosure looks like the ruins of houses behind it, empty since 1974. How might the people feel who had to leave their homes from one day to the next and now can see the decay of their homes every day through fences and barbed wire?

Again I arrive in the old town. Only locals stray into the secluded alleys here. A subculture has emerged, reggae music and techno rhythms penetrate through the barriers to the soldiers.

The bicycle serves me well for this kind of exploration. Leisurely, sometimes quickly, I glide from one dead end to the next, from one barricade to the next. The "IsNotGallery" appears in front of me, unfortunately closed today. But the Centre of Visual Arts and Research is open. The woman in charge of the rather ethnographic collection on Cyprus is very open-minded and immediately puts me in touch with several people. There I also discover the book "The history of the war of Cyprus" by the Cypriot-born artist Socratis Sociatous.

Over coffee under the lemon tree in the courtyard of my accommodation, I study the book, accompanied by the megaphone voice of the sports reporter from the nearby racecourse.

Nikosia/Lefkoşa Diary, Day 5

As late as Wednesday morning, I opened all doors and windows to let the warmth into the winter-cold flat without heating. This morning I closed all the

doors, windows and blinds. It has become really hot today. Yesterday I already burnt my face, neck, hands and arms.

I set out to explore the borders of the buffer zone on the Turkish side. On the internet map, the zone was marked much smaller than it actually is. In fact, the zone accompanies me on both sides of the four-lane motorway. No trees, no bushes, no shade, but at least a pavement. A fence here and a fence there. Behind it, nature takes over the space and makes me think of Garcia Marquez's "One Hundred Years of Solitude". A kind of "white zone" that (almost) no one is allowed to enter. The wiry Cyprus cats are not bothered by the fence. They ignore the prohibition signs and are privileged...

On the Slovenian hillsides near Nova Gorica, "TITO" is written in large letters, here it is the outline of the Turkish flag.

The fence now gives way to sophisticated high-rises, like the "Near East Bank". Opposite a darkly glazed moon rocket is the white minaret of a mosque, which today houses a gymnastics and sports shop for children.

It's not only the left-hand traffic that gets to me. Cyclists and pedestrians are probably not allowed here or there. Again and again I turn off the main road to photograph the edge of the zone. Sometimes bullet holes, presumably from machine guns, can be seen in the façades of the inhabited buildings. That's how I imagine Charkiv or other Ukrainian cities now.

Now I see the large building of the former "Ledras Palace Hotel" from the other side. I cycle past the border crossing there and get back to the Turkish part of the old town. By the way, there are big boards with a map of the old town, both sides... and completely without border and "buffer zone". This time I look for the barriers, which I hadn't documented on the second day. The streams of tourists spread out over a small, manageable area, then it gets quiet. In the shade, a family sits at the lunch table and greets me in a friendly manner. An old woman comes running out of her house to quietly point out to me that I am not allowed to photograph the border fences and barricades. I let her know that I know. But I wonder why there is actually a ban on filming and photographing here? What secrets am I revealing with this photo documentation that not everyone already knows?

The heat robs me of energy. I go to a restaurant that was recommended to me. A combination of antique shop, art gallery, café and restaurant. I take a seat on the first floor at a large table by the balcony door. Around me are books up to the ceiling. A cool breeze blows through the room. At the moment I am the only guest up here, while the cafe downstairs in the courtyard is full of people. There is no menu here, just one menu for everyone. The friendly waiter and chef in one person explains the menu to me in a bright voice, then disappears into the kitchen to come straight back with the food. He tells me that he can

hardly stand the heat in the kitchen. I enjoy the menu, have a Turkish coffee afterwards, then cycle home and look forward to a siesta under the lemon tree.

Nikosia/Lefkoşa Diary, Day 6

Rest day

Nikosia/Lefkoşa Diary, Day 7

During my research on the "Green Line", I happened to pass the "House for Human Rights" in Lefkoşa. I found a phone number for it on the internet today and called it. Kayra explained to me that it is an initiative for the rights of LGBT communities in Northern Cyprus and Turkey. As she is in Famagusta at the moment, we arranged an online meeting.

I found many other interesting initiatives and wrote to them, including "Unite Cyprus Now".

At 15:00 I cycled to the "Home for Cooperation", where I had an appointment with Hayriye Rüzgar. The building is in the middle of the buffer zone, as is the Goethe Institute. To get there, I have to show my ID at the Greek border control. I hadn't been aware of this the first time I crossed the border, I had just driven past and completely ignored the checkpoints. This time I was stopped and explained in a friendly way.

The founder of the Home for Cooperation is the AHDR (Association for historical Dialogue and Research). The first meetings of the association took place in the former luxury hotel "Ledra Palace" in the building opposite where the UN has its headquarters. It supported initiatives dedicated to the encounter and reconciliation of the two parts of Cyprus. In 2011, with the help of funding, the association was able to buy the building across the street from an Armenian-Cypriot family, which they developed into a research, education and meeting centre.

Read more at <https://www.facebook.com/Home4Cooperation>

Hariye and Andri are the two managers of the centre. Both can only converse in English, as one does not speak the other's language.

While we are talking, Lazaro Soteri comes to our table. She has overheard our conversation and introduces herself to me as an artist. Hayriye doesn't have much time. Among other things, she is working on the organisation of the "Buffer Fringe Performing Arts Festival". You can still apply to participate internationally until 24 April: <https://bufferfringe.org/>

Lazaro sits down with me. She explains to me that she is a British Cypriot with Turkish, Greek and other roots and that Cyprus is actually multi-ethnic. She says that it was the British who divided the Cypriots into the two categories of Greeks and Turks. She would love to be a Cypriot cat, casually scratching behind her ears and calmly strolling through the Buffer Zone whenever she pleased. And she would definitely like us to invite her to the Nowa Amerika Kongres in Słubfurt in October. Here on the island, artists would not have a good social position. She had to give up her flat because of the pandemic and is currently staying in a storage room.

I leisurely cycle the now familiar route to my apartment and buy a good bottle of Cypriot red wine on the way. It gets dark shortly after 19:00.

On the following days, contacts with the locals became more intense.

There was no more time to write....