

Let's shut ears to demagogues

Critical, free thinking is a daily exercise for whatever we hear and do

By Professor Constantinos Christofides, Rector of University of Cyprus

We live in a beautiful home country, however an odd and divided one. An island where its people are afraid of moving freely, with refugees and the enclaved ones, with barricades in place, with no free access to all its corners, with identity checks and physical search performed at “border” crossing points! But all these cannot be our fate. Although rightfully hurt experiencing these feelings as an unhealed wound, we have never allowed them to trigger hatred and animosity, but only a strong desire for solution and love for this luminous and dark at the same time country.

New Year always brings a note of optimism; the sense that something new is about to come; that we can look ahead into the future and hope for the best.

In 2016 Europe was shaken by many challenges: Migration - refugee crisis and the Brexit referendum on EU membership. The world has been shaken by the terrorist attacks in the heart of Europe and across the globe. A new geopolitical landscape is being formed in the Middle East, which continues to be ablaze.

Donald Trump's US presidential victory reflects people's reaction towards the system and the established status quo, in which trust has eroded, but also the emergence of populism. In Cyprus, the negotiations on the island's solution settlement are facing challenges.

The aforementioned events that took place in 2016 will shape greatly the outcome of 2017. Rhetoric of hate, erratic behavior as a result of the growing disappointment of citizens for events and situations constantly repeating, racism, xenophobia and nationalism are trends which form a worrying international scene. Today we have the moral and historic duty to overcome decades of frivolity.

It is time to evaluate successfully at last the international developments and read carefully the international politics. We must decode the new framework of geopolitics and geo-energy that is being developed. We must align our interest with the interest of our Western allies and march towards freedom and justice.

How can we hope for better days? My wish for 2017 is for every citizen to take his personal responsibility; to shoulder the responsibility of shaping a better society, a

better country and also a safer world. 2017 will also be a presidential campaign year, thus we must distinguish those who truly care about the new generations and those who merely care about the next elections.

First of all, let's shut our ears to demagogues. Critical, free thinking is a daily exercise for whatever we hear and do. Hence, we should be careful; we should filter whatever others impose on us. We must develop information review mechanisms. To achieve these we should be educated properly at school, at our family environment, and wherever we work. Such education is not only a result of teaching, but mainly an addiction to the truth, to discovering and promoting it.

The protection of the environment and public health, as well as the improvement of the latter one, continue to constitute major challenges for the future of our homeland. As far as the first one is concerned, it is indispensable, as active citizens, to foster a culture for respect of the environment and promote effectively climate-friendly measures and policies. A great deal can be done in this direction. As citizens we need to raise our voices to demand the future we envisage for us and our children. No one will be willing to do the things that need to be done without levers of pressure. Let us 'be' these levers for change.

Regarding the improvement of public health, I shall focus on the University's agony and efforts for contributing to the improvement of the health services through the successful establishment and operation of the UCY Medical School and through the synergy establishment between the University and the public hospitals. We have been actively engaged in attempting to ensure that an agreement between the Ministry of Health and the doctors of the public sector will be finally reached, allowing citizens to have access to high quality healthcare services.

Additionally, UCY is aiming to recruit high caliber academics, scientists of diaspora. We want them to return to their country of origin, so as to create alongside them the new Cyprus of excellence in research and education, innovation and entrepreneurship.

There are many challenges, countless opportunities for the New Year. Economic growth can be achieved through the practice of consistent and responsible politics. Despite Cyprus' success in completing its bailout program, it is clear that there should be no room for complacency. Many have to be done. Distortions must be countered decisively, not only in the context of the coming elections.

Nevertheless, there is a greater challenge yet, the final resolution of the Cyprus problem. I have faith in our young generation, it will be the generation of peace and the final reconciliation. As Sophocles's heroine said, we were born to join in love, not hate. The time has come to leave behind the hatred and mistrust of the past, to believe and "dare" the better Cyprus.

There is no secret about what is at stake for the University; that is to inject the value of dialogue, democracy and the spirit of continuous reflection and concern into our young people for 2017 to be better and the years to come brighter for all the Cypriot citizens.

We are dreaming of a different direction and ethics in our collective course of history. We want to contribute in establishing a new in-every-aspect state, where we can be proud and also responsible and creative citizens.

Happy New Year!