

Speech: High Commission in Cyprus celebrates the Queen's Birthday in 2017

The British High Commission hosted its annual national day celebration – the Queen's Birthday Party – on 20 June – an occasion to celebrate the breadth of UK-Cyprus bilateral relations.

This year's celebration saw the event take on a Harry Potter theme, celebrating one aspect of UK creativity which has reached worldwide renowned, given that June 2017 marks 20 years since the publication of the first Harry Potter book.

Below is a summary of High Commissioner Matthew Kidd's opening remarks at the event, in the presence of H.E. President of the Republic of Cyprus, Nicos Anastasiades and building on the Harry Potter theme.

"I guess that I don't need to explain the references. The car out front is not there for trade promotion, even though I saw that Phileleftheros the other week reproduced an advertisement for a Ford Anglia from the 1960s – when it cost C£620. Our servers are not all from the same school, nor have they all visited the same optician. Harry's Bar is not a copy of Venice.

But you will have seen through all that. It's twenty years since the first Harry Potter book was published. The first eventually of seven volumes: a huge success, films, translations, merchandise. A generation of children, including my own, stimulated and enthused to read books.

So what? You thought you were coming to a Queen's Birthday Party, not a book promotion. So what's the link?

There are three (there always are). The first is determination. As she wrote that first book, JK Rowling was an unemployed single mother, short of money. She spent her days scribbling in the public library, no space at home. She struggled to find a publisher. But she kept at it, managed the difficulties, didn't give up – and success came.

The second is that the success came through the young: not the older generations, the katestimeno, telling her that it would never sell, who on earth would want to read the adventures of a bunch of apprentice wizards at a boarding school? But the young responded to the imagination, the fantasy, the jokes, even the fake Latin. I take a clear lesson from that: if you have vision or ambition, it is the young who will respond, and help you to deliver it. I hope those here tonight who feel that they fall into the "young" category recognise the responsibility we put on their shoulders; and those who no longer do, recognise the need to educate and help them to deliver, for all of us.

Third is rebirth. Those of you who know the books will know that there is a key role for a phoenix, the bird that is consumed by flames but then miraculously revives from the ashes, glossier and stronger than before. I've often heard Cypriots make parallels to the phoenix story in their own emergence from disasters. I know that Anorthosis supporters do the same.

The UK is in some ways being reborn, following our referendum a year ago. We know it will not be straightforward to build a new place for ourselves in the world, to continue to be secure, prosperous, and influential in helping others to achieve the same. But we have many strengths and assets, including the creativity and determination reflected in the Harry Potter story; and we shall call on all of them. We will still value our old friends, including Cyprus, but learn to collaborate with them in new ways. We will have to show that we recognise their anxieties about how what we are doing may affect their interests too. As far as Cyprus is concerned, Mr President, I promise that we will give that our best shot.

In the specialised vocabulary of Cyprus Settlement, to say that Cyprus too is on the verge of rebirth would be politically controversial. So I shan't; but you see the link. Cyprus and its citizens, from both communities, stand on the edge of being able to emerge from two generations of division, disaster, handicap. It's a tremendous opportunity to achieve a brighter, liberated future. But it will take tremendous imagination and vision to design and grasp its full potential.

It's always easier to say "It'll never work". The more who do, the likelier they are to prove themselves right. In the financial sector, there are rules against creating self-fulfilling prophecies like that. Not in politics, unfortunately. But my hope for this evening is that all those here tonight, from whatever field, who dare, who imagine, who create, who look to the future, will leave this party feeling boosted and backed by the rest of us".