Any property owner who has attempted to build or renovate a home, can tell you how long and complicated this process can be. But the people responsible for the renovation and opening of one particular home in Cyprus, The Home for Cooperation, have experienced a process much more difficult and complicated than most. This group is the Association for Historical Dialogue and Research (AHDR), established in 2003 by Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot educators and researchers interested in creating dialogue across the divide in Cyprus. In 2007 they began to work towards establishing a “home” in Nicosia’s Buffer Zone. This lengthy process involved purchasing the home from the owner, obtaining permission from the United Nations, which controls this area, and applying for funding for renovating the dilapidated building. Cypriots from both sides of the city dedicated their time, services, and efforts to this, what many people considered impossible, endeavor. Their years of hard work and tenacity were rewarded this May 2011 when the Home for Cooperation (H4C) officially opened its doors.

Before: The H4C prior to renovation in November 2008.

After: The H4C in May 2011, ready to open its doors. The leaders of both sides of the island, Demetris Christofias and Derviş Eroğlu, speaking at the inauguration ceremony.
Located just outside of Nicosia’s historic walled center, this structure was built in the 1950s across the street from the Ledra Palace Hotel, the most luxurious hotel in Cyprus at that time, today a working barracks for UN peacekeeping forces. In 1964, after the outbreak of intercommunal violence, barricades were set up adjacent to the building, cutting off one of the city’s main streets. It was then, literally, caught in the cross-fire during the events of 1974. When the city was divided, the building was left to slowly fall into disrepair in a no-man’s land between two checkpoints. In 2007 the AHDR purchased the building and with EEA and Norway Grants, as well as funding from other international donors and supporters including UNFICYP, UNDP, Council of Europe, Switzerland, Sweden, the Netherlands and the United States, renovation of the H4C began. After years of dealing with complicated technical and bureaucratic issues, including coordination with the UN, the AHDR was rewarded this spring when this historic building was officially opened with an inauguration ceremony and four days of festivities. Events included concerts, theater performances, film screenings, an exhibition, and a symposium.

The inauguration ceremony on 6 May 2011 was attended by the leaders of both sides of the island, Demetris Christofias and Derviş Eroğlu, who both addressed the crowd and expressed support for the H4C and its role as a space for intercommunal cooperation and dialogue. The building certainly does have strong symbolic resonance. As AHDR Secretary Meltem Onurkan Samani stated in her opening address, ‘this Association understands the Buffer Zone as not only separating communities, it is also the point at which they meet.’ Thus the H4C will be a major part of their efforts to create a space for cooperation in the Buffer Zone. AHDR President Chara Makriyianni mentioned in her welcome address that peace building is a long and difficult process that continues even after a political solution has been reached. The H4C will be a part of this process by providing a space for dialogue through hosting conferences and exhibitions. It also houses a library and archive, offices, and a café. It will provide opportunities for NGOs and individuals to design and implement innovative projects intended to empower and enhance cross-cultural dialogue. According to Makriyianni, ‘the Home for Cooperation solizes the process and the outcome of cooperation and is, in itself, an example of how praxis driven by theory can result in great achievements.’