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# **Exogenous factors underpinning the Cyprus problem: shifting political and societal ramifications**

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# Abstract

Action on the Cyprus problem is urgently needed to break the deadlock in the negotiations and in order to avoid consolidation of the rift between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. In light of the presidential election in the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) that will elect a new leader and against the backdrop of the victory of solution-oriented parties in the Turkish Cypriot local election, this working paper explores four external determinants that are reshaping the Cyprus problem. Firstly, the RoC's European Union membership has helped strengthen Nicosia's international standing but has not brought the Turkish Cypriot community out of isolation. Secondly, the financial crises and dependencies in both the RoC and the Turkish Cypriot community have ultimately deepened divisions between the two and rendered the Turkish Cypriots more dependent on Turkey. Thirdly, the role of the so-called motherlands – Greece and Turkey – has played out differently in each the RoC and the Turkish Cypriot community. Fourthly, and of most concern, migration is being instrumentalised across the dividing Green Line while the changing demographic patterns illustrate how Greek and Turkish Cypriots are increasingly drifting apart. The paper puts forward a number of recommendations, including strengthening reconciliation efforts at the civil society level and instigating trade links between the two sides, even by sharing the profits from the exploitation of hydrocarbons. It also urges that the West should play a more decisive role in the Cyprus negotiations before the chances of a settlement that reunites the island dissipate.

# Introduction

Efforts to resolve the Cyprus problem are at an all-time low with the consolidation of the division of the island looking like a real possibility to both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots alike.<sup>1</sup> The United Nations-facilitated negotiations had been at a standstill well before Russia's aggression against Ukraine, which has now concentrated the West's attention to the eastern border of the European Union (EU) and to minimizing the war's economic consequences, and its (unexpected) impact on the energy front. In fact, there has been no progress made on the resumption of the Cyprus negotiations since the debacle at the Crans-Montana Summit in July 2017. More than two decades have now elapsed since the last significant proposed peace settlement (the United Nations-backed Annan Plan), with the Crans-Montana process also ending in acrimony and finger-pointing on both sides of the Green Line, and yet more missed opportunities. Both Greek and Turkish Cypriot media reported that Turkey was ready to make concessions on the security and territorial elements of the Cyprus problem, including the partial withdrawal of Turkish military forces (Droussiotis, 2020; Morelli, 2019).

Since the collapse of the Crans-Montana Summit, Turkey has maintained that a federal settlement is no longer viable because of "alleged Greek Cypriot duplicity" (Kaymak and Tziarras, 2021). With the election of the Turkey-supported candidate Ersin Tatar on 18 October 2020, the Turkish Cypriot side has also increasingly moved away – politically and diplomatically – from a resolution of the Cyprus problem based on a bizonal and bicomunal federation. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, during his 15 November 2020 visit to the 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus' ('TRNC')<sup>2</sup> stated that "a two-state solution must be discussed and negotiated on the basis of sovereign equality" (Cupolo, 2020). Equally, Tatar has declared that only a two-state solution based on sovereign equality and a cooperative relationship between the two states can achieve sustainable peace in Cyprus. He holds that the bizonal and bicomunal federation proposals of the United Nations (UN) that provided common ground for the negotiations and which have been supported by the Republic of Cyprus (RoC), successive Turkish Cypriot leaders and the EU have now been exhausted because of constant rejections and failures (Rıza, 2022).

In reaction to the hardening position of Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot side, the RoC President Nicos Anastasiades has steadfastly talked of a bizonal and bicomunal federation. But following the collapse of the Crans-Montana talks in July 2017, Anastasiades introduced the concept of a 'loose' or 'decentralised' federation. When in October 2018, having asked the National Council to brainstorm on the concept of a 'devolved federation' and proposing increased autonomy of the constituent states within a Cyprus federation, he caused much confusion among the public. In particular, it raised concerns about the Cyprus government buying into Turkish positions on confederation or even a two-state solution (Kathimerini News, 2018). However, in a press interview given

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Ioannou. Gregoris, 2020 and Osiewicz, Przemyslaw and Joanna Rak, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> This article uses the terms 'TRNC' and north Cyprus interchangeably to refer to the self-proclaimed Turkish Cypriot entity, recognised only by Turkey, that is north of the dividing Green Line, in Cyprus.

in November 2018, Anastasiades clarified that all decisions would be decentralised except for those that have to do with: a) the international personality, sovereignty and citizenship of Cyprus; b) the unity of land, people, the economy and natural wealth; c) defence, security and border control; d) representation and participation in the EU, the UN and all other international organisations; and e) any other competencies that would be deemed “absolutely essential” (Panayiotides, 2020). The Greek Cypriot position of a “devolved federation” was presented to foreign dignitaries in November 2021 as a solution to the Cyprus problem that is workable and sustainable on a ‘day-to-day level’ and that respects the six points of the Guterres framework<sup>3</sup> and Turkish Cypriot demands for effective participation (Georgiades, 2021). It has also since been adopted officially by the Democratic Rally and its presidential candidate Averof Neophytou. Nevertheless, in talks held in 2017 and 2018, former Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akıncı, a left-leaning moderate known for his cooperation with the Greek Cypriot side during his tenure as mayor of the Nicosia Turkish Cypriot municipality in the 1990s, began indicating that he and Anastasiades no longer shared the same vision of what constituted a bizonal and bicomunal federation. Incidents such as the RoC parliament’s decision in February 2017 to approve the commemoration in public schools of the 1950 Greek Cypriot referendum about union with Greece (*enosis*) led Akıncı to assume that Anastasiades was not truly committed to the peace process.<sup>4</sup> Concerns then increased about whether Greek Cypriots were prepared to give Turkish Cypriots the political equality they sought.

In parallel, tensions between Greece and Turkey and Cyprus resulting from disagreements over maritime boundaries, linked to the extraction of hydrocarbons in the Eastern Mediterranean basin, have affected the region’s stability as a whole, further pushing the Greek and Turkish Cypriots apart and even drawing the EU into a diplomatic quagmire. In that context, the UN’s recent assessment of the chances for a resolution to the Cyprus problem is stark. In his latest report, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres observes that a surge in hard-line rhetoric on both sides has led to increased rigidity while the prospects for a mutually-agreeable settlement continue to fade away (UN Security Council, 2023). While attempts to revive the settlement talks for the resolution of the Cyprus problem continue to stall, relations between the two sides are now even further strained and no significant steps have been taken towards reconciliation.

The intractability of the Cyprus problem flows from long-term external determinants on both sides of the dividing Green Line that have over the years (re-)drawn the political and societal geographies within both the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities. This working paper explores these external determinants, focusing on four in particular: the RoC’s European Union membership; the effect of the financial crises and dependencies in Cyprus; the role of the so-called motherlands – Greece and Turkey – that, along with the United Kingdom (UK), are also guarantors of the RoC; and the instrumentalisation of migration and demography in the two communities. The paper also aims to examine the intended and unintended socio-political consequences of these external determinants underpinning the Cyprus problem. The paper demonstrates that the unresolved conflict on the island has diminished the international standing of the RoC and its potential economic outreach. The analysis shows that missed opportunities in the Cyprus problem negotiations have prolonged the isolation of the Turkish Cypriot community. Coupled with

<sup>3</sup> The 2017 UN-proposed Guterres framework for a solution of the Cyprus issue deals with guarantees, security, territory, property, equivalent treatment and power sharing.

<sup>4</sup> The Greek Cypriots’ demand for ‘*enosis*’ (union with Greece) in British-ruled Cyprus became associated with the campaign for Cypriot self-determination among the island’s Greek Cypriot majority was opposed by Turkish Cypriots, who instead demanded ‘*taksim*’ (the division of Cyprus). These opposing views of the two communities constituted a major division in the island’s politics.

the RoC's approach to the discoveries of natural gas resources in the Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) that has ultimately sidelined the Turkish Cypriot community, Turkish Cypriots have become economically (and therefore also politically and socially) even more dependent on Turkey. The paper ends with recommendations on how to instigate reconciliation efforts at the Track II level. It also urges the West to play a more decisive role – despite other major crises on the international agenda – at a time when the chances of a settlement that would reunite the island are quickly dissipating.

# The EU factor – a facilitator?

The accession of the RoC to the European Union marked a transformative moment for Greek Cypriots economically, socially, politically and symbolically. This is particularly the case for a small country such as the RoC that is highly dependent on the EU and greatly affected by its decisions. The RoC saw EU membership as an opportunity to heighten its international status and leverage, to influence EU policy but also to consolidate strong relations through cooperation with its EU partners in the implementation of policy. For the Turkish Cypriot community, however, EU accession of the RoC has been perceived as deception: although the Turkish Cypriots have received necessary EU aid, their relationship with regard to the EU has remained technical and about legal and administrative reforms. The EU has not played a decisive political role in enabling the Cyprus peace process, not even indirectly, since instead the UN is the official facilitator of the Cyprus negotiations.

## **Republic of Cyprus**

Since joining the EU in 2004, Nicosia has made its European membership a central feature in its efforts to strengthen its credibility and upgrade its international role. The RoC presents itself as a country that aims to resolve its national conflict in a peaceful manner and as a credible and predictable partner that promotes stability and security in a region of instability, the Eastern Mediterranean. At the EU level, Nicosia follows the EU consensus as long as EU positions do not jeopardise the RoC's interests in the Cyprus problem (its so-called 'national problem.'). This means that, in critical moments of EU decision-making, Nicosia opts to be constructive rather than stand alone and block decisions (Ioannides, 2017). Indicatively, the RoC gave its green light for the EU to start accession negotiations with Turkey in December 2004 – although this followed arduous negotiations and had to overcome strong resistance. In his book, then government spokesman Kypros Chysostomides (2008:25) explains that, "the clear decision of the Republic of Cyprus not to exercise its right of veto, despite the provocations on the part of Turkey as well as of a section of the Turkish Cypriot leadership, constitutes the most solid proof of the desire by our side to follow a course leading to the solution of the Cyprus problem."

Taking over the six-month rotating presidency of the Council of the EU in July 2012 was an important stepping stone towards the RoC's 'adulthood.' Under difficult economic circumstances, Nicosia used this position to assert itself as a full and integral member of the EU, while also aiming not to let the Cyprus problem interfere in the work of the presidency and therefore deal objectively with dossiers pertaining to Turkey. Overall, Nicosia did not overstep its role as coordinator of EU policymaking at the Council level; nor did it hijack processes or act solely in accordance with its own political views or sensitivities. This was an important moment for the RoC to prove that it is a reliable

partner, in line also with its multilateral policies. A strong defender of multilateralism, the RoC seeks to win broad international support for a Cyprus settlement. It has, therefore, reached out to as many states as possible over time through different international fora – the Non-Aligned Movement (until 2004), the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Commonwealth, and the United Nations.

Nevertheless, balancing between keeping a positive European image while safeguarding its national interests has been a complicated matter for the RoC. As a small state with limited power, including foreign and security policy capacities, the RoC has also seen its EU membership as a way to instrumentalise “the EU as a power multiplier vis-à-vis Turkey” – the RoC’s perennial existential threat (Tziarras, 2018). When it joined the EU in 2004, the RoC believed that becoming a member state would help its efforts to counter Turkey and leverage Ankara into making concessions leading to a solution to the Cyprus problem within the agreed UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions. EU membership was primarily understood to offer security to the citizens of the RoC (Melakopides 2010, 162). This has remained central in Nicosia’s approach to EU decision-making. Former RoC Foreign Minister Nikos Christodoulides (at the time of writing, the frontrunner in the upcoming presidential election) contended that the RoC’s accession to the EU was “possibly the most pivotal moment in Cyprus’s modern history and certainly one of its greatest diplomatic successes” and that “the solution of the Cyprus problem is inextricably linked to the EU and by extension to EU law, values and principles” (Christodoulides, 2020). Equally, EU membership was, and still is, considered by the majority of Greek Cypriots as essential for the long-term survival of the RoC (Demetriades, 2017).

The RoC’s accession to the EU has undoubtedly given the Greek Cypriots a degree of political security as long as they are seen as working towards a solution to the Cyprus problem. The RoC’s EU membership has also made it more difficult for the ‘TRNC’ to gain international recognition. That is because a country’s decision to recognise the ‘TRNC’ would undoubtedly have an impact on that country’s relations with the EU, since the EU regards the whole island as a member (Ker-Lindsay, 2010: 72). In 2015, in an effort to change perceptions at the EU level, the RoC convinced the European Commission to move the aid offered to the Turkish Cypriot community from the European Commission’s Directorate General responsible for enlargement to the Directorate General responsible for regional policy. This move symbolised a change in the way the Cyprus problem would be tackled, going from a foreign policy issue to an internal EU file (Ioannides, 2021), thus also safeguarding that the island of Cyprus would be seen as one entity (rather than two).

Some have criticised the decision to allow the RoC entry into the EU with the Cyprus problem unresolved, arguing that it has facilitated coordinated action by Athens and Nicosia, and hindered the possibility that Turkey could deepen its relations with the EU (Mayer zum Felde, 2020). At the same time, EU membership has been viewed as a conducive setting for the RoC to extend its circle of friends and to increasingly raise the ‘national problem,’ particularly under the presidency of Anastasiades (Ioannides, 2017). The case of hydrocarbons in the Eastern Mediterranean is a case in point. In order to improve its standing in the EU but also its leverage in the Cyprus negotiations, since 2011, the RoC has sought to partner with neighbouring countries on gas discoveries in its EEZ.<sup>5</sup> Following the failure of the Crans-Montana Summit, Nicosia further focused on the EastMed pipeline project (revealed in April 2017) that aims to transport natural gas from the Eastern Mediterranean to Crete and mainland Greece – a project designed to bring

<sup>5</sup> The Levant Basin – the waters of Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey – contains circa 122.4 trillion cubic feet of recoverable gas (Offshore Technology Focus, 2016).



together Cyprus, Greece, and Israel while excluding Turkey. The EU institutions have supported the development of the Cyprus-Israel-Greece energy triangle. Indeed, the EastMed pipeline project received a positive assessment from the European Commission that saw it as an important possible route for the export of gas from the region to the EU. The EastMed pipeline along with the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) established in January 2020 has benefited from financial support from EU institutions and political backing from Italy and France. Apart from encompassing Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan and Palestine as members, the EMGF also counts the EU (along with the United States and the United Arab Emirates) as an observer.

In parallel, the European Council and individual member states have condemned Turkish drilling activities, particularly following Turkey's maritime agreement with Libya. These statements were justified on legal grounds, namely the EU's non-recognition of the 'TRNC' and the nullification of the Turkey-Libya agreement, based on the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. In June 2019, the European Council, "in response to Turkey's unauthorised drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean," decided to reduce the EU's financial assistance to Turkey, to suspend negotiations on an aviation agreement, and to halt all high-level bilateral talks. In February 2020, the Council imposed travel sanctions on and froze assets of Turkey as part of the restrictive measures that it adopted in November 2019, in response to Ankara's unauthorised drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean (Council of the EU, 2019). They reiterated their concern and full solidarity with the RoC and Greece in the European Council conclusions of 26 March, 23 April, 19 August and 1 October 2020. On the latter occasion, the European Council "strongly condemned violations of the sovereign rights of the Republic of Cyprus and called on Turkey to accept the invitation by Cyprus to engage in dialogue" (European Council, 2020b). At the 15-16 October 2020 European Council meeting, EU leaders urged Turkey to respect UNSC resolutions 550 and 789, underlining the importance of the status of Varosha [the fenced-off part of Famagusta]. Yet, the European Council fell short of using tangible sanctions as tensions in the region escalated in December 2020, stressing the importance of keeping channels of communication between the EU and Turkey open. The tone softened in March 2021, when the European Council noted: "The Union is ready to engage with Turkey in a phased, proportionate and reversible manner to enhance cooperation in a number of areas of common interest and take further decisions at the European Council meeting in June" (Council of the EU, 2021). However, just a year later, in June 2022, the European Council cautioned Turkey against escalating tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The RoC has actively pursued the imposition of sanctions on Ankara for its actions against Cyprus, but this has been met with reluctance from other member states. This was, for example, the case in September 2020, when the RoC linked support for sanctions against Belarus to its own gas drilling dispute with Turkey in its declared EEZ at the Foreign Affairs Council meeting (Deutsche Welle, 2020). Nicosia ultimately fell short of using its veto at the European Council meeting that followed, instead choosing to respect the EU consensus. Admittedly, an increasingly authoritarian Turkey had made the RoC's job easier, as Turkey continues to move further away from meeting the EU acquis communautaire. As a result, since the 2015 migration crisis, the EU-Turkey relationship has become almost purely transactional (Janning, 2018). This context has allowed the RoC to convince EU member states to condition the EU's "positive political agenda" with Turkey, including a revised customs union, as well as demands from Nicosia that Turkey open its ports to RoC vessels. Ultimately, the EU has clearly stated its commitment to the territorial integrity of the RoC and to a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem based on a bizonal and bicommunal federation with political equality, in accordance with

the relevant UNSC resolutions. This has been made abundantly clear in the latest statement of the European External Action Service (EEAS) in November 2022, in reaction to Turkey's efforts toward having the 'TRNC' join the Organisation of Turkic States as an observer. Beyond calling for the respect of the RoC's sovereignty, the EEAS noted: "Any action to facilitate or assist in any way the international recognition of Turkish Cypriot secessionist entity severely damages efforts to create an environment conducive to resuming settlement talks under the auspices of the United Nations."

EU membership has also increased the RoC's pro-Western orientation. In particular, since the election of President Anastasiades in February 2013, Nicosia has increasingly seen the firmer anchoring of the RoC within Western political structures as a way to strengthen its standing at an EU level. In that light, the RoC's foreign policy also made a U-turn on its approach to NATO, and set a goal to join the Partnership for Peace programme and has strengthened relations with the United States. This manifested itself with then Vice President Joe Biden's visit to the island in May 2014 reflecting a more proactive stance on the Cyprus problem (Ioannides, 2021). Moreover, it culminated with the United States first partially lifting a 33-year embargo on arms on the RoC and deepening its security cooperation with Nicosia in September 2020, and then fully lifting the embargo in September 2022. Turkey's Foreign Ministry reacted strongly, urging the United States to reconsider its decision, warning that the move would harm efforts for a Cyprus peace deal, lead to an arms race on the island and undermine regional stability. The United States conditioned the embargo lift – to be assessed annually – on the RoC implementing anti-money laundering regulations and denying Russian military vessels access to its ports for refuelling and servicing (Associated Press, 2022), something that Nicosia had initially refused to do in September 2020. The RoC barred Russian warships from using its ports in early March 2022 following the invasion of Ukraine, in line with EU sanctions against Russia.

### **Turkish Cypriot community**

The EU Accession Treaty of 2003, the Green Line Regulation 866/2004 and the Financial Aid Regulation 389/2006 have all attempted to accommodate the territorial division of the island and the unresolved dispute. Ultimately, by using these regulations, the EU's engagement with the Turkish Cypriot community has been highly technical. Since the EU does not recognise the 'TRNC,' it has developed alternative cooperation channels and mechanisms to evade the risk of 'de facto recognition.' The EU has therefore maintained unofficial contact with the Turkish Cypriot community and focused more on the civil society dimension of EU-Turkish Cypriot cooperation (Kyrus, 2015). The EU failed however to take substantial steps to address the isolation of the Turkish Cypriot community or lessen the political and economic dependence of the 'TRNC' on Turkey. The EU's limited financial assistance following the RoC entry into the EU (with the Turkish Cypriots staying outside) is regarded as a symbolic political achievement and a small consolation for being unable to join the EU. In this context, the EU Coordination Centre – a technocratic institution – and a steering committee were established to manage EU efforts aimed at preparing the part of the island administered by the Turkish Cypriots for EU integration.

The Greek and Turkish Cypriot sides held separate but simultaneous referenda in their respective communities on the, the UN-proposed Annan Plan, in April 2004. By voting in favour of the Annan Plan in the referendum, the Turkish Cypriot community had shown its willingness to reach a compromise settlement with the Greek Cypriots and consequently

join the EU. But since the majority of Greek Cypriots voted against the proposed plan, the Turkish Cypriot community stayed outside the EU. As a result, the *acquis communautaire* was suspended in the areas of Cyprus not under the effective control of the RoC (i.e. north of the Green Line) in accordance with Protocol no. 10 of the Accession Treaty. This protocol also envisions a negotiated settlement whereby the *acquis communautaire* would extend to the whole territory of Cyprus (EUR-Lex, 2003). In reaction, the EU committed in the General Affairs Council of the EU on 26 April 2004 to “put[ting] an end to the isolation of Turkish Cypriot community and to facilitat[ing] the reunification of Cyprus by encouraging the economic development of the Turkish Cypriot community.” The Council invited the Commission to bring forward comprehensive proposals to this end with a particular emphasis on the economic integration of the island and on improving contact between the two communities and with the EU. Two years later, the Council adopted the Financial Aid Regulation 389/2006 as a legal instrument for promoting the economic development of the Turkish Cypriot community. With this, the EU allocated €259 million in 2006 for a five-year programme (EUR-Lex, 2006). From 2011 onward, EU financial assistance continued with annual allocations of €30 million. In total, €449 million has been earmarked under the Aid Regulation since 2006.<sup>6</sup>

The main purpose of the Aid Programme for the Turkish Cypriot community within the framework of the Financial Aid Regulation is to facilitate the reunification of Cyprus. In line with the 2004 General Affairs Council’s decision, it aims to bring the Turkish Cypriot community closer to the EU and set the stage for the implementation of the EU *acquis communautaire* upon settlement. The latest Annual Action Programme for the Turkish Cypriot community was adopted by the European Commission in July 2022 and comprises €33.4 million. More specifically, the programme provides assistance to develop and restructure the infrastructure, promote social and economic development, foster reconciliation and confidence building, and support civil society. As of 2020, the aid programme has been managed by the Commission’s Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support. In 2016, the European Commission created the Task Force for the Turkish Cypriot Community for the implementation of the EU Aid Programme for the Turkish Cypriot Community (EU Commission Daily News, 2016). The Commission first established this task force in 2004, which was then integrated into the Directorate-General for Regional Policy in 2014.

Among the diverse projects financed by the European Commission is the EU scholarship programme for the Turkish Cypriot community, established in 2007. It has since allocated scholarships worth nearly €40 million to more than 2,000 Turkish Cypriot students, teachers, researchers and professionals for the purposes of studying, conducting research and training in EU member states. The European Commission awarded the latest scholarships in June 2022 with an overall budget of €5 million for a period of 40 months, which led to the inauguration of a new EU scholarship programme office in October 2022 for the implementation of the programme. This programme was heralded by the European Commission’s Director General for Structural Reform Support, Mario Nava, as constituting “part of a strategy to create access, inclusion and a sense of belonging by placing the educational and training needs of the community at the centre” (Prakas, 2022b). The EU has also aimed to develop infrastructure, protect the environment, and improve the economic conditions and quality of life in rural areas since 2006 in the ‘TRNC’. As part of the Rural Development Sector Programme, the EU provided €40 million for the development of agricultural production and improving animal and crop husbandry

<sup>6</sup> EU Aid Programme for the Turkish Cypriot community, [https://cyprus.representation.ec.europa.eu/business-and-funding/eu-aid-programme-tc-community\\_en](https://cyprus.representation.ec.europa.eu/business-and-funding/eu-aid-programme-tc-community_en)

techniques. The EU has funded several environmental projects, such as the NATURA 2000, which aims to prepare control plans for the protection of special environmentally-protected areas (Sülün and Azizbeyli, 2021).

Simultaneously, the EU's intention to prepare the Turkish Cypriot community for integration into the EU resulted in the adoption of the Green Line Regulation 866/2004S in 2004 to facilitate trade and mobility between the two communities by setting out the terms under which persons and goods could cross the dividing line. The EU delegated the implementation of the regulation to the Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce (KTTO), including issuing trade documents and monitoring of trade (Bouris and Kyris, 2017). Working with the KTTO, the only organisation that could deliver the official documentation regarding EU norms for goods produced in the 'non-RoC government-controlled areas' was a way for the EU to bypass any formal interaction with the non-recognised Turkish Cypriot administration in the northern part of Cyprus. Over the years, additional goods were authorised south of the Green Line through modifications to the Regulation.

The Green Line Regulation provided limited economic and social interaction with the Greek Cypriots, while the aim of empowering civil society was restricted to merely funding various projects (Casaglia, 2019). On the other hand, the negative effects of the political and economic crises in Turkey and the day-by-day depreciation of the Turkish lira have made EU membership even more attractive for the Turkish Cypriot community. In 2021, the Turkish lira lost 44% of its value, with a further 22% decline in 2022. The fall of the Turkish lira has led to increasing prices and the annual inflation rate reached 94.51% in north Cyprus in December 2022. Because of the economic hardship they face in the 'TRNC', currently around 3,000 Turkish Cypriots are working in the RoC government-controlled areas through a special joint labour union programme between the Greek Cypriot Cyprus Workers Confederation (SEK) and the Federation of Turkish Cypriot Trade Unions (TURK-SEN) (Kıbrıs, 2022).

Overall, EU aid for the Turkish Cypriot community is conditional as it has to go through the RoC. Ultimately, it is the RoC who sits in EU Council meetings and decides on EU budgetary matters, including on the amount and kind of funding that will be made available to the Turkish Cypriot community. The EU aims its efforts toward and works with the Turkish Cypriot community through civil society and recognised local bodies, such as the relevant municipalities for infrastructure projects. The prospect of political equality at the EU level has been denied. Efforts to lift this isolation through favourable trade relations with the EU in the form of a European Commission proposed direct trade regulation have been unfulfilled because of the principle of unanimity enshrined in Protocol 10. After all, the economic isolation of the Turkish Cypriots did not end and the Green Line Regulation allowed for only limited trade. The EU's engagement with the Turkish Cypriot community has remained at the level of project funding without triggering any real economic development.

# The so-called motherlands, Greece and Turkey

Greece and Turkey have been protagonists, sometimes reluctantly and at other times actively, in the making and unmaking of the Cyprus problem. Moving away from its role as the 'motherland,' in the post-1974 period of the RoC's history, Greece was first (during 1974-2015) the provider of diplomatic and moral support to the RoC in its quest for a final settlement, playing a positive role in its EU accession and the Annan Plan negotiations. However, in 2016-2017, Greece assumed a rather negative, hardline interventionist role in the peace process. On its part, Turkey has emphasised the geopolitical importance of Cyprus for its own security, its responsibility to protect its brethren on the island, and, under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP), has justified its claim on the Turkish Cypriot community through a culturalist and religious project that dates back to the island's Ottoman past.

## Greece

The Constitution of the RoC (1960) did not allow for ethnic specificities on the island to be abandoned, since it referred to the two ethnic communities, arguably consolidating the 'motherland' role of Greece to Greek Cypriots and of Turkey to Turkish Cypriots. The Constitution stipulates that, "the Greek Community comprises all citizens of the Republic who are of Greek origin and whose mother tongue is Greek or who share the Greek cultural traditions or who are members of the Greek-Orthodox Church." Running parallel, the 1960 Treaty of Guarantee between the RoC and Greece, Turkey, and the UK requires the guarantors to ensure the independence, territorial integrity, and security of the RoC (Article II). Following the 1974 division of the island, Greek Cypriot identity has become much more complex to define. Greek Cypriots recognise they have a Greek identity but in general see themselves as clearly distinct from Greeks from Greece. Neophytou (2007) shows the different responses to ethnic nationalism, highlighting important intra-ethnic differentiations within the Greek Cypriot community usually expressed in the positions of political parties, intellectuals and the press. In that context, he explains the emergence of 'Cypriotism' and 'Greek Cypriotism.'

This has created a situation where Greece and the RoC are natural partners, but where the RoC has increasingly become an independent actor, especially after its entry into the EU, a bond that will always safeguard its interests in the Cyprus problem – and a stance that Greece understands well. When it comes to the Cyprus problem, however, the 'motherland' reflex persists. Greece has played a key role in supporting the RoC in making the Cyprus problem an EU one as well. It did so by following initially a dual approach: on

the one hand, pushing for entry of the RoC into the EU with the resolution of the Cyprus problem not being a precondition, while on the other, pushing for Turkey to be given an EU accession perspective. This strategy was possible because of a certain level of rapprochement between Greece and Turkey with the advent of the Simitis government in Athens in 1996, and in particular after the appointment of George Papandreu as Greek Foreign Minister in early 1999 (Richmond, 2005). This in itself shows how tensions over Cyprus and progress on the Cyprus problem were and are contingent upon the temperature of Greek-Turkish relations. At the same time, the idea that Cyprus could be socialised into a particular mode of 'European thinking,' much like Greece had experienced over the decades of its membership, which would allow for a solution to the conflict in the medium- to long-term, was increasingly adopted both by academics and scholars (Diez and Tocci, 2018).

In that context, the 1999 Helsinki Summit, during which the European Council agreed to grant Turkey EU candidate status, proved to be a breakthrough. Greek diplomacy was instrumental in this result, as it linked Turkey's new status with the RoC's accession to the EU without, however, a resolution to the Cyprus problem being a prerequisite. The conclusions of the summit were conditional, going beyond the standard political Copenhagen criteria, entailing Turkey's rapprochement with Greece over the Aegean Sea, and making specific reference to support the then ongoing UN-facilitated efforts to resolve the Cyprus problem. Nevertheless, it was Greek Cypriot leader Glafcos Clerides who convinced Greece to elevate the Cyprus problem to the EU level by emphasising the need for the RoC to become an EU member state to be able to pressure Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots into resolving the dispute on terms favourable to Greek Cypriots (Terzi, 2005). As a result, Greece succeeded in transforming the Cyprus problem from a Greek-Turkish dispute into an EU-Turkish one. At the same time, the EU had also hoped that the incentive of EU membership would have worked as a catalyst for a solution. Natalie Tocci (2004) explains how EU actors envisaged that the accession process would complement the UN's mediation efforts by altering the incentive structure underpinning the conflict. The prospect of membership that was ostensibly valued highly by all the conflict parties would be the 'carrot' incentivising the two sides to compromise – a conviction that blinded the EU from seeing the signs that the incentives were not bearing the expected results.

When it comes to Greece's role in the UN-facilitated but 'Cypriot-owned' negotiations over the Cyprus problem, "Greece does not try to dictate the terms of a settlement to the Greek Cypriots but respects the decisions they may reach. This does not, of course, mean that Athens and Nicosia are in complete agreement at all times" (Ker-Lindsay, 2011: 103).<sup>7</sup> UN-facilitated efforts were either openly supported or silently accepted by successive Greek governments (because of a fear that their open acceptance might cause a political backlash at home), but were nonetheless rejected by the Greek Cypriots. For example, during and right after the referendum on the Annan Plan, a defining moment in the long history of the Cyprus negotiations, a 'double decoupling' strategy emerged on the part of the new Costas Karamanlis government in Greece. This strategy foresaw that Greco-Turkish issues would be kept separate from Greek Cypriot-Turkish Cypriot relationships. The 'distancing' of the newly-elected Greek prime minister, when confronted with the Annan Plan, aimed at protecting Greece from the RoC's problematic relations with Turkey

<sup>7</sup> According to the Cypriot ownership framework, the leaders of the two communities were to agree on all items on the table of negotiation, endorse their agreement, and support it in simultaneous referenda in their respective communities. Hence, they were bound to take the entirety of the credit or blame for success or failure.

and potentially with the EU, and at preventing any disruption of Turkey's progress towards EU accession (Richmond, 2005).

The discovery of hydrocarbons in the Eastern Mediterranean and the increased tensions between Turkey and Greece, has seen Greece adopting a less compromising position towards Turkey's accession process at the European Council level, as already analysed. Greece and Cyprus are intricately connected since Greece serves as a major hub and a terminal for gas transit. The challenge for Nicosia is to find the appropriate mix of incentives for the Turkish Cypriots to generate an impetus for compromise without endangering the RoC's sovereignty, recognising the self-proclaimed 'TRNC' and/or without freezing its hydrocarbon development in case a compromise proves difficult. With this matter in limbo and the maritime disputes between Cyprus, Greece and Turkey deadlocked, the November 2012 agreement that Cyprus and Greece signed with Israel to discuss the creation of the Eastern Mediterranean Energy Corridor enabling gas exports was seen as a potentially destabilising element in the region and a new source of tension with Turkey (Ioannides, 2021). Although Greek-Turkish relations are strained, Athens harbours strong incentives for both sides to make progress. It also knows that a solution to the Cyprus problem is vital for the normalisation of EU-Turkey relations and that it will not only impact Greece vis-à-vis the Eastern Mediterranean but also other areas, such as migration. Host to some 3.5 million Syrian refugees, Turkey has already shown that it is ready to open its borders if and when things with the EU get rough (Paul, 2021).

The second major intervention of Greece in the Cyprus negotiations took place in 2017, initially at Mont Pelerin and then at Crans-Montana, in the shadow of tenuous relations because of Greek and RoC plans on hydrocarbons. Greece played a vocal and visible role, through its then foreign minister Nikos Kotzias, who insisted on "zero troops and zero guarantees, prior to the implementation of any settlement plan." Kotzias recommended replacing the Treaty of Guarantee with a 'Friendship Pact' between Greece and Turkey. However, certain sources maintain that in this particular instance, Kotzias was acting largely on his own initiative, outside his terms of reference (Panayiotides, 2019). Greece's position was supported by the RoC and ultimately President Anastasiades walked out of the negotiations. In that spirit, RoC Foreign Minister Kasoulides stated following the summit that Greece and the RoC had fought "hand in hand" at the Crans-Montana talks (Athens News Agency, 2017). The bitterness of yet another failure, deteriorating Greek-Turkish relations on oil drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean, violations of Greek airspace and the opening of parts of fenced-off Varosha, have excluded the possibility of a compromise between the two sides.

## **Turkey**

Turkey's own security concerns and protection of the Turkish community in Cyprus have been the main elements of its policy towards Cyprus, which it has defined as a 'national cause' for decades. A nationalistic discourse underpinning Turkey's policy towards Cyprus was manifest from the mid-1950s until the rise to power of the AKP in 2002. This narrative defining Cyprus as a geographical extension of Anatolia contributed to the emergence of the 'motherland-babyland' discourse. The aforementioned maternal metaphor depicts the role of Turkey as the protective, embracing and, even, authoritarian 'mother,' while north Cyprus is mainly perceived to be her 'baby,' that is developing, dependent and also needy (Jorgensen and Latif, 2022). Likewise, after the founding of the Republic of Turkey, the nationalist leaders in the Turkish Cypriot community, who identified themselves with Turkey, developed policies that gave rise to the perception of

Turkey as the 'motherland' of the Turkish community. Since the mid-1950s, Turkish governments and most political parties have used the Cyprus question in their electoral campaigns, and any concession on the Cyprus problem have been associated with high treason. Initially, the AKP government redefined the national stance towards the Cyprus problem and adopted a conciliatory and pragmatic approach. Nevertheless, the rejection of the Annan Plan, the continuing deadlock in Turkey's accession negotiations with the EU and the AKP's electoral considerations all led the Turkish government to revert to the previous nationalistic position on Cyprus. Seeking to receive a date for the start of EU accession negotiations, Turkey did not want to be blamed for the deadlock on Cyprus. However, the AKP's policy towards Cyprus from 2002 to 2004 had changed by 2006 (Latif, 2021). After the failure of the Annan Plan, the partial suspension of membership talks with the EU due to Turkey's refusal to open its ports and airports to the RoC in 2006, and domestic electoral incentives, namely the threat posed by the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) in the 2007 parliamentary election, the AKP duly shifted its policy concerning Cyprus.

The consolidation of the AKP's power following significant electoral success in the elections of 2002, 2007 and 2011, coupled with rising authoritarianism in Turkey since 2018, has been a turning point for the Turkish Cypriots' political, economic, social and cultural affairs. The growing role of religion in public and political discourse in Turkey has led to increasing concerns among Turkish Cypriots regarding the growing infiltration of Islam and thus the abandonment of strict Kemalist secularism in north Cyprus (Michael, 2014). The radical transformation of Turkey after the rise of the AKP and the dominance of political Islam in social, political and education policies has led to an intense debate and strong reactions among secular Turkish Cypriots against the AKP's policies, which aim to reinforce a similar religious framework in north Cyprus.

The AKP government's policies concerning formal education and religion in the public sphere have prompted fears about Islamisation and the rise of religious conservatism in north Cyprus, particularly after 2009 (Latif, 2021). For the secular and non-religious societal factions, mandatory religious lessons at schools introduced since 2009, Quranic readings and summer term courses provided in mosques, and the growth of religious associations, networks and mosques are all regarded as a threat to the cultural fabric of the Turkish Cypriot community. Efforts to foreground the religious dimension of the national identity are perceived as steps towards changing the culture, identity and secular lifestyle of Turkish Cypriots. Secular trade unions, civil society organisations and the leftist political parties have all harshly criticised these policies, which are perceived to represent the cultural imperialism of the Turkish AKP government.

For example, on 12 November 2022, opposition parties and numerous civil society organisations, such as the bar association, and the trade unions of teachers, doctors, architects and engineers protested against the construction of an Islamic government complex (the Külliye project), inspired by the Turkish president's complex in Ankara. The complex foresees the building of a new presidential palace, a parliament building, a mosque and a recreational park, which would be fully financed by Turkey. The protesters claimed that there was no need to spend over €100 million in the midst of an economic crisis. Large segments of the Turkish Cypriot community are clearly not comfortable with the Külliye project as it symbolises Turkey's mounting control and even an attack against the Turkish Cypriots' secular values and lifestyle, following years of coexistence with Greek Cypriots and British colonialism.

Such resistance to Turkey's culturalist policies is nothing new. Reacting to the AKP's policies, former Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akıncı stressed, in 2018, during a national



library renovation that, “We are a community that has fully embraced secularism, we will neither depart from this significant feature nor abandon our particular character and structure” (Gündem, 2018). The increasing nationalist climate in Turkey has strained the relationship between Akıncı and Turkish President Erdoğan more generally. For instance, when Mustafa Akıncı criticised Turkey’s November 2019 ‘Operation Peace Spring’ launched in northern Syria, Erdoğan accused Akıncı of “exceeding his limits” (Kanlı, 2019). On another occasion, in response to a question asked by *The Guardian* newspaper on the possibility of Turkey’s annexation of north Cyprus, Akıncı described it “as a horrible scenario,” which aroused strong reactions in Turkey. Erdoğan had characterised his answer as “very unfortunate” and the Turkish Foreign Minister had claimed that Akıncı was “unreliable” (Aygün, 2020). Growing tension due to Turkey’s increasing political intervention in north Cyprus was already manifest in the beginning of 2018, when *Afrika* newspaper criticised Turkey’s military operation in Afrin, Syria. At that time, Erdoğan had retorted with a statement saying “[his] compatriots in north Cyprus should give the necessary response to this” (Wesselingh, 2018). Violent protests against *Afrika*’s headquarters had followed with eggs and rocks thrown and even former President Akıncı, who had come to the scene to calm protesters, was seriously assaulted.

Turkey’s influence over some elements within the Turkish Cypriot community also became clear during the 2020 presidential election, when Turkish President Erdoğan expressed full support to Ersin Tatar, who was the right wing UBP’s candidate running against Akıncı. Tatar ousted Akıncı, winning 51.69% of the vote in the second round of the election. Following the result, Akıncı admitted defeat but indicated Turkey’s interference throughout the election campaign (BBC, 2020). While Tatar thanked Erdoğan in his victory speech, Ankara’s involvement in the election led to resentment among many Turkish Cypriots. Anti-Tatar circles, including journalists and even the candidates themselves, criticised the fact that Turkey directly intervened in the election through the joint effort of Turkey’s intelligence service, military, diplomats and politicians (Seufert, 2021).

# Financial crises and dependencies

Cyprus has the characteristics of a small island economy. While the ongoing Cyprus problem has generated economic vulnerabilities for the Turkish Cypriots, the RoC economy was able to bounce back quickly following the banking crisis in 2012, managing to exit the EU bailout scheme – similar to Greece, Ireland and Portugal – by 2016. Being part of the global market and of the EU, the RoC received a €10 billion international bailout but was also able to seek new investment opportunities regionally and internationally. For the Turkish Cypriot community, however, the continuing intractability of the Cyprus problem and consequent embargoes, isolation and non-recognition has meant that that Turkish Cypriots are becoming more and more dependent on Turkey. This situation has also made the Turkish Cypriot community increasingly vulnerable to the economic crises in Turkey.

## **Republic of Cyprus**

The global financial crisis (2008) and the subsequent eurozone crisis (2009) had a disruptive effect within and across the EU, including on the RoC, which joined the eurozone in 2008. The serious banking crisis that the RoC experienced in 2012-2013 risked sinking the country into bankruptcy. Although the global financial crisis affected both Greek and Turkish Cypriots, neither community saw it as an opportunity for working closer together. To supplement the international bailout and compensate for the austerity measures imposed by the EU, Nicosia developed a three-fold plan. Firstly, it turned to Russia for financial assistance, but rejected assistance offered by China on the EU's insistence. Secondly, the RoC developed its 'regional policy' that entailed the signature of bilateral energy and commercial agreements with neighbouring states. Thirdly, Nicosia adopted a citizenship-by-investment programme to grant Cypriot (and by extension EU) passports to anyone who invested at least €2.2 million in the RoC, often through real estate investments.

Due to the small size of its economy, the RoC tried to ensure that its allies on the Cyprus problem are not alienated. For this reason, Nicosia has taken a pragmatic approach when dealing with Russia and, to a lesser extent, with China. Relations with these two major global players are important to the RoC. This is partly because of their position in the UN Security Council, where both Russia and China have voted for UNSC resolutions supporting the RoC on the Cyprus problem. In parallel, the RoC was, as of 2013, the single largest channel for Russian foreign direct investment. Moreover, the RoC has been an attractive destination for Russian business and companies since the 1990s, due to low taxes and loose checks on the origins of investments. This changed first in 2013 with the EU instigated reforms of the RoC banking sector and then in 2021 when further rules were imposed following the signature of the new Double Tax Treaty (DTT) between the RoC

and Russia.<sup>8</sup> The changes to the DTT were seen by some as an act of retribution, as Nicosia moved closer to the United States. Russia, for its part, argued that the reasons for a new DTT were strictly economic – to strengthen the country’s fiscal situation (Antoniou, 2020). Moreover, Moscow provided a €2.5 billion loan to support the troubled RoC banking sector during the 2012-2013 Cypriot financial crisis, and has supported the RoC’s exclusive right to produce gas offshore despite Turkey’s objections.

Relations between the RoC and Russia have cooled off since the RoC, as an EU member state, aligned with EU sanctions against Russia after Russia invaded Ukraine. In March 2022, the RoC closed its airspace to Russian aircrafts, which resulted in the RoC’s tourism industry taking a huge hit from the lack of Russian and Ukrainian tourists, with an estimated loss of €600 million in 2022 alone (Wright, 2022). Business suffered the most and, as a Flash Eurobarometer survey published in May 2022 showed, a rift in the RoC society became apparent on whether Russia is first and foremost responsible for the war in Ukraine. Of those surveyed, 48% tended to disapprove or fully disapproved of the RoC government’s decision to join the EU’s economic sanctions against Russia, while the exact same percentage of respondents fully approved or tended to approve economic sanctions (EU, 2022: 70). In parallel, in April 2022, Russia announced it would open a consular office in north Cyprus to cater for its 15,000 nationals living in the ‘TRNC’ (Kathimerini News, 2022). In October 2022, Russia announced plans to begin direct flights to the ‘TRNC’. Putin has also rekindled his alliance with Erdoğan who has played a key role in mediating the grain deal on the shores of the Black Sea (Ioannides, 2022).

In that light, Russia’s aggression against Ukraine has forced RoC leaders to balance the stakes between, on the one hand, political support for the EU and Ukraine and, on the other, the island’s economic dependency on Russian money. While Nicosia followed the EU consensus on sanctions against Russia and support for Ukraine, it has not closed its doors to individual Russians. In 2012, the year before the international bailout for the RoC, bank deposits held by non-eurozone residents amounted to €21.9 billion. These have since shrunk considerably, but still amounted to €6.4 billion in February 2022. Based on what the banks have reported, 80% of non-eurozone resident accounts belong to Russians (Varvitsioti, 2022). Russia makes up about a quarter of foreign investment in the RoC, and before the war, about 20% of tourism revenue was generated from Russians (Ilushina, 2022). According to the Cyprus Statistical Service and the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce, at the end of November 2021, the total amount of RoC exports and re-exports to Russia stood at €60 million, while imports – at €80 million (Pirishis, 2022). Sapienta Economics (2022) reported that Russian business, worth 4.8% of the RoC’s GDP in ‘pre-Russian war’ 2022, was already decreasing. And although Russian trade was significant, it was down from 6.3% of GDP in 2013.

The RoC ramped up its citizenship-by-investment scheme to rescue its economy after the crisis it faced in 2013. More than €7 billion was generated through this programme, along with over 4,000 Cypriot passports granted (GetGoldenVisa, 2021). Much of the investment was Russian, but applicants came from 70 different nations, including the Gulf countries and China. This type of investment was pivotal in keeping the RoC economy afloat (Al Jazeera, 2020). However, the programme was suspended in October 2020 following revelations by *Al Jazeera* of irregularities, including giving passports to persons with criminal records and/or involved in financial crime. The news implicated the RoC’s House of Representatives Speaker Demetris Syllouris and a member of parliament, Christakis

<sup>8</sup> The amendment essentially increased the withholding tax rates (to 15% in most cases) on dividends and interest paid from Russia to the RoC rendering investment in the RoC less attractive.

Giovanis (also known as Giovani), who is also one of the country's largest real estate developers. Following much public pressure, Syllouris resigned. In October 2020, the European Commission started an infringement procedure against the RoC, which resulted in Nicosia repealing the scheme and rejecting new applications as of 1 November 2020. However, it continued to process pending applications. As a result, the Commission decided to send a reasoned opinion to the RoC in June 2021 leading to Nicosia discontinuing the processing of applications as of 15 October 2021. Since then, the RoC has also revoked the citizenship of 39 investors (European Commission, 2022b). Nevertheless, it is still relatively easy to set up a company in the RoC and obtain residency permits for highly skilled workers who meet the €2,500 a month salary threshold, about five times Russia's median wage.<sup>9</sup>

The RoC has also invested in regional partnerships that would be useful both politically (in countering Turkish interests in the Eastern Mediterranean) but also economically to develop the exploitation and export of undersea hydrocarbons. For the Gulf monarchies, Cyprus represents the south-eastern gate to the EU and a viable channel of communication with the European institutions (Andremagni, 2019). One of the major intra-Gulf fault lines in the region impacting on wider geopolitics is the role of Islamist movements, which are supported by Qatar and Turkey but opposed by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Another key factor in this economic equation is that Qatar would like to build a gas pipeline from the Gulf to Syria, which is why the Turkish occupation of northern Syria serves its interests (Csicsmann, 2021).<sup>10</sup> It is in this context that the two mid-tier naval powers, Greece and Israel, and the small-yet-strategically-located RoC have aimed to align their strategies and act as a united front vis-à-vis larger actors, notably Turkey. In January 2020, the RoC, Greece and Israel signed an agreement to lay the EastMed pipeline – a €6 billion project meant to ship gas from deposits offshore Israel and Egypt through a 1,250-kilometer pipeline running via Cyprus and Greece to European markets (Stamouli, 2022). It benefited from the political and financial support of the GCC countries, the EU and the United States.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were seen as key actors able to marginalise the role of the Turkish-Qatari alliance. The RoC and the UAE established official diplomatic relations by opening embassies in each other's capitals in 2007. As tensions between Turkey and Greece increased, relations between Nicosia and Abu Dhabi gained momentum as of 2014. This led to respective visits by the RoC leader and the sheikh of the UAE, a diplomatic breakthrough that allowed the UAE to become an important economic partner for the RoC. Of note, the total general trade volume in 2015 amounted to US\$ 102 million, there are now over 100 Cypriot-owned companies present in the UAE, and Nicosia has awarded two concession agreements to the UAE's marine terminals operator (DP World) at the Limassol port, in the RoC. Similarly, relations with Saudi Arabia have developed on gas, investments, tourism, and maritime security. They have led to high-level visits between Nicosia and Riyadh, which intensified in September 2019, when the first resident Saudi Arabian ambassador to the RoC, Khaled bin Mohammed Al-Sharif, presented his credentials to President Anastasiades (Ioannides, 2021).

<sup>9</sup> The programme has since been replaced by the Cyprus investor permit – otherwise known as the Cyprus golden visa – which is a permanent residency scheme that grants qualifying foreign investors and high-net-worth-individuals the right to relocate to and live in the RoC in exchange for an economic contribution worth at least €300,000. See: <https://www.globalcitizensolutions.com/cyprus-golden-visa/>

<sup>10</sup> The Qatar-Turkey natural gas pipeline would stretch from the Iranian-Qatari South Pars/North Dome Gas-Condensate field towards Turkey, where it could connect with the Nabucco pipeline to supply European customers and Turkey. Including Iran and Syria as partners, both of which do not have diplomatic relations with Israel, guaranteed that this project would be opposed by the Cyprus-Greece-Israel triangle.

## Turkish Cypriot community

The post-1974 political and economic structure of the Turkish Cypriot community was mainly built on the distribution of financial assistance from Turkey. International non-recognition and the economic embargoes increased the Turkish Cypriot community's dependence on Turkey; and Turkish-Turkish Cypriot relations evolved to become an asymmetrical relationship over the ensuing years. Rather than facilitating a self-sustaining economy, this arrangement led to the emergence of a clientelist system based on nepotism and patronage and the development of a complex relationship and institutions between Turkey and the 'TRCN' (Sonan, 2007). This financial dependence was used to keep the 'pro-motherland' political leadership in power and to legitimise the 'TRNC' among the Turkish Cypriots by providing them socio-economic privileges, social security and high income (Lacher and Kaymak, 2005). Under these conditions, north Cyprus has been significantly influenced by political and economic factors in Turkey. At the same time, the way in which financial aid is distributed and supervised has constituted a source of discontent and insecurity on the island. Turkey has continued to provide financial assistance to Turkish Cypriots via a series of economic protocols and financial agreements since 1986. The Development and Cooperation Office (the former Aid Committee), functioning under the Turkish Embassy in north Nicosia coordinates, manages and distributes Turkish aid to the Turkish Cypriot community.

The latest 'Economic and Financial Cooperation Protocol' between north Cyprus and Turkey, signed on 14 April 2022, has received harsh criticism among various segments of the Turkish Cypriot community. For instance, the platform 'This country is ours' organised a protest bringing together several trade unions, opposition parties and civil society organisations (Agapiou, 2022) due to the provisions outlined for economic reforms and non-financial regulations. Apart from the economic reforms, such as the privatisation of power production and ports, as well as the increase of taxes and the retirement age, the Protocol also includes measures to restrict democratic rights and freedoms by law and to strengthen the role of Islam (Cyprus Mail, 2022). The conditions of the Protocol constrain the freedom of expression, limit trade union activities and the constitutional right to assemble, and enable control against disinformation on social media. Of note, there has not been as of yet any constitutional amendment for the implementation of the measures envisaged by the latest Protocol.

In 2011, Turkey's decision to implement a financial assistance package including privatisation and austerity measures to alleviate economic problems in north Cyprus led to similar reactions. Several trade unions organised protests against the new austerity measures rallied under the slogan, 'Ankara, get your hands off our shores'. These protests provoked unprecedented tension between Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot community, with Turkey's then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan retorting that "it is outrageous that those who are fed by our country are behaving in that way", a statement that caused further discomfort among Turkish Cypriots (Karakaş, 2011).

Despite continuous financial assistance from Turkey, the economic performance of north Cyprus has been weak and highly dependent on the political, economic and financial conditions in Turkey (Ekinçi and Özdemir, 2021). After the AKP came to power in 2002, successive Turkish governments have become increasingly reluctant to finance the Turkish Cypriot economy. Since 2006, the extent of financial transfers from Turkey has been subject to austerity policies aiming to restructure the economic system in north Cyprus. The 2008 global recession had adverse effects on the Turkish Cypriot economy and prompted Turkish belt-tightening policies for the Turkish Cypriot community.

Turkey's imposed 2010-2012 economic programme included the privatisation of state-owned enterprises, the reduction of the number and salaries of civil servants, and a raise in taxes (Bozkurt, 2014). The biggest problem of the Turkish Cypriot economy has been a huge budget deficit and high public expenditures resulting from the clientalist expansion of the public sector. Although financial dependence on Turkey and the budget deficit reduced as part of the austerity measures, continual borrowing from Turkey increased the "TRNC"s debt to Turkey (Sonan and Gökcekuş, 2020). Moreover, the reduction of the salaries of public servants, pensions and the number of recipients of social security benefits contributed to the political instability in north Cyprus as governing became harsh.

The relative importance of Cyprus to Turkey's agenda has decreased in recent years because of Turkey's own political and economic problems. However, the discovery of substantial gas deposits in the Eastern Mediterranean, the RoC's approach to hydrocarbon exploration and changing geopolitical dynamics in the region have all served to increase Turkey's interest in north Cyprus. The regional geopolitical context had already been sorely affected by the global economic crisis of 2008-2009 and the consecutive Arab uprisings. The latter had significantly increased Turkey's interaction in the wider Mediterranean region. The reorientation of Turkish foreign policy since the 2000s, based on the 'zero problems with neighbors' approach backfired and Turkey has since experienced conflictual relationships both with regional and global powers, including the United States, Russia, the EU and France. Such souring relationships paved the way for a counter-regional strategy of cooperation, which excluded Turkey and consequently also the Turkish Cypriots from collaborative frameworks.

At first, the European Commission pursued a cautious policy towards Eastern Mediterranean gas due to the political instability and uncertain amount of reserves and commercial benefits. Eastern Mediterranean gas has mostly been discussed in informal frameworks and levels across the EU. However, in early 2015 when the EU's European Energy Diplomacy Action Plan (EDAP) acknowledged the potential of the gas reserves for Europe, there was a change. The detailed EDAP was the EU's first attempt to engage in Euro-Mediterranean energy policy-making. A more assertive step was taken in June 2015, when the European Commission launched the Euro-Mediterranean gas platform that aimed at facilitating dialogue, partnerships and strengthening cooperation among the members of the Union for the Mediterranean.

Overall, the discovery of natural gas resources in the Eastern Mediterranean reshaped the region's existing policies and political alignments at both international and regional levels (Latif and Evcan, 2022). The geopolitical dynamics in the region also led to new strategic cooperation and tensions over energy resources. The ensuing cooperation schemes between Israel-Cyprus-Greece and Egypt-Cyprus-Greece left Turkey out of the equation (Tziarras, 2018). Ultimately, sharing the Eastern Mediterranean subsea areas between Israel, Egypt, Cyprus, Palestine, Lebanon, Turkey and Syria, and the (lack of) delimitation of the EEZ added to the existing territorial disputes, regional security problems and instability.

# Demography and migration – perceptions, illusions and escalation

Population, demography and migration have always been instruments of political debates in Cyprus across the dividing Green Line. In the context of the Cyprus problem, migration has been instrumentalised by both sides. The Greek Cypriots have justified the lack of progress in the Cyprus negotiations as a result of the sensitivities surrounding the issue of the return of Greek Cypriot refugees to their properties in the northern part of Cyprus and the fate of immigrant Turks (referred to as settlers by Greek Cypriots). In recent years, the incoming migrants crossing the Green Line illegally from north to south have reached a peak, becoming yet another pole of contention between the RoC with Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot authorities. Turkey, for its part, has contributed to the change of demography in north Cyprus and thus the character of the Turkish Cypriot community as a result of the immigration policy, which has created a rift between the indigenous Turkish Cypriots and immigrant Turks.

## **Republic of Cyprus**

Due to its geographic position, at the crossroads of Asia, Africa and Europe, Cyprus has long been on the global migration road, a safe refuge for some, and an investment haven for others. By the early 1990s, extensive economic growth in the RoC-controlled areas had transformed Cyprus from a traditional emigration-dominated region to a migrant-receiving country, taking in both migrant labourers from developing countries and distinguished 'elite' business-oriented migrants. According to the preliminary results of the 2021 RoC census, 918,100 persons currently reside within the area controlled by the RoC, among whom 193,300 (21.1% of the total population) are foreign nationals (Statistical Service, 2022). Since its 2004 accession to the EU, the island has attracted a growing number of EU nationals. According to Eurostat's non-national population by group of citizenship (1 January 2021), approximately 97,000 EU citizens live in the RoC, while about 70,000 are third-country nationals (European Commission, 2021). Statistics on social security payments from 2011 and 2019 have consistently shown that about one third of the working force in the RoC are non-Cypriot. Meanwhile, migrant children make up 30% of children in pre-primary education, 16.3% in primary education and 15% in middle school (out of which 7.7% are from an EU country and 7.2% from a third country) (Philenews, 2022).

Moreover, in recent years, asylum seekers and persons with international protection form a non-negligible proportion of the migrant population. In 2017, the RoC was the second EU member state in terms of immigration rate, while in 2019, it was the country with the

highest number of asylum seekers in relation to its population. According to the Cyprus Asylum Service, in 2020 there were 19,000 pending asylum applications of which about 7,000 were new asylum seekers (Hadjigeorgiou, 2021). In 2021, the RoC was host to the largest number of refugees proportionally (about 4% of the total population) accounting for 7.13% of all foreigners. Moreover, the numbers are constantly increasing, with a 50% increase in migratory flows in 2017 compared to 2016 and 69% in 2018 compared to 2017 (Integral Human Development, 2021). The RoC government spokesperson maintained in November 2021 that there was an increase of approximately 30% in asylum applications in 2021, reaching 10,868 new asylum applications that year (Hadjigeorgiou, 2021). In addition, officials claimed that more than 17,000 irregular migrants have arrived since the start of 2022, almost double the number of arrivals in 2021, while the number of unaccompanied minors has almost tripled, creating an uproar in surrounding communities (Euronews, 2022). In 2021, the top five countries of origin of asylum applicants were Syria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, Pakistan and India (Statistical Service, 2022).

Unpacking the numbers on migration in the RoC is a feat, but clearly the number of asylum seekers is increasing and quickly. This has resulted in negative reactions among Greek Cypriots towards Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot leadership. In recent years, immigration has taken centre stage in the national political discourse and policies, with a general sense that RoC services are unable to effectively manage and control these flows. The EU-Turkey Agreements of 2016 on migration have rendered Cyprus a preferred destination on the migratory route, also because of Cyprus's proximity to the Syrian coast. Indeed, Cyprus is hostage to its geography: a neighbour to an unstable and impoverished Lebanon, affected by the 2020 Beirut port blast, the coronavirus pandemic and, as with the rest of the region, the blocking of wheat and food produce in the Black Sea because of the war in Ukraine. Cyprus is also a neighbour to Syria where the latter's civil war is still raging on, and not so far from Afghanistan where the Taliban seized power in 2021. In addition, and as with the rest of EU member states, the RoC is also receiving Ukrainian refugees.

This situation has led to rising public concern and to the RoC government accusing Turkey of instrumentalising migration and pushing south migrants that are landing in the areas of Cyprus not under the effective control of the RoC. The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Interior Costas Constantinou has maintained that 70,000 migrants have crossed the Green Line and are living in RoC-government-controlled areas (Euronews, 2022). In this context, the renewal of the UNCYPFIP and patrolling of the UN buffer zone has become increasingly important. This is also why Turkish Cypriot attempts, which were ultimately unsuccessful, to put conditions on the UNCYPFIP mandate renewal – i.e. the signature of a separate agreement with the Turkish Cypriot community –, were met with uproar south of the Green Line both at political and societal levels. This debacle has led to a debate on the installation of barbed wire along the Green Line. It should also be noted that about 35% of the Green Line is under UK control, since it borders the Sovereign British Areas (SBAs), but only 2% of migrants crossed through the SBAs in 2021 (Hadjigeorgiou, 2021). The Ministry of the Interior has stated that the increasing trend is indeed continuing and that the 11 kilometres of barbed wire that has indeed been placed along the ceasefire line has only meant that migrants have found new areas from which they can enter the RoC-controlled areas south of the Green Line. The Greek Cypriot media and government officials have pointed to Turkish business – particularly Turkish Airlines and Pegasus – as having benefited from what has been labelled as organised migrant trafficking from Turkey to north Cyprus (Euronews, 2022).



In parallel, as the EU's most easterly member, Cyprus has long been a go-to destination for Russian companies and wealthy individuals due primarily to its relatively easy immigration process, low taxes, and openness to attracting as much foreign business as possible. Russians make up about 6% of the RoC's 800,000 population (south of the dividing Green Line) (Varvitsioti, 2022). Thus, following Putin's attack against Ukraine, a significant part of Russia's highly educated, middle- to upper-class workforce – mostly IT workers – flocked to Cyprus, triggering a new migration wave. In fact, according to estimates, up to 50,000 people have moved to the RoC since February 2022, mostly Russians and Ukrainians looking to start a new life away from the war in Ukraine. Most Russians try to settle in Limassol, sometimes dubbed 'Moscow on the Med' or 'Limassolgrad', where the Russian language can be heard extensively due to the sheer scale of the existing community, encompassing a wide ranging network of professionals – from lawyers and realtors to nannies and manicure technicians. The island also has a growing Ukrainian community, with at least 16,000 refugees arriving since the war in Ukraine, according to the RoC's Ministry of the Interior (Ilyushina, 2022).

Despite a history of migration and coexistence with the Turkish Cypriots, the intractability of the Cyprus problem has clearly affected whether or not Greek Cypriots perceive coexistence possible. Only a few studies have examined in a comprehensive manner the Greek Cypriot perceptions of the Turkish Cypriot community. For instance, Psaltis et al. (2019) distinguish in their analysis between the perceptions of those Greek Cypriots, who during and after the Turkish invasion of 1974, lived in the south of the island with those whose families had to flee the north and are therefore internally displaced persons (IDP). The study also differentiates between perceptions of Turkish Cypriots and those of Turkish settlers. In their survey carried out in 2016 (thus before the failure of the Crans-Montana Summit), they find that Greek Cypriots, including IDPs since 1974, would be willing to live as neighbours with both Turkish Cypriots and Turkish settlers. Their survey results show that Greek Cypriots strongly prefer coexistence with Turkish Cypriots (56.6%) to Turkish settlers (11.1%), with minimal variation in the sample of Greek Cypriot IDPs. The study also suggests that male Greek Cypriots are statistically significantly more accepting of Turkish Cypriots than female Greek Cypriots. Younger people are less likely to be accepting of Turkish Cypriots as neighbours than those born before 1974; those without university education have roughly 0.75 lower odds of being accepting of Turkish Cypriots than those with university education; and the non-displaced tend to be less accepting than the displaced.

Moreover, surveys have shown the importance of contact between the two communities as an element of disputing pre-existing clichés and creating positive perceptions of coexistence. A recent study (Şahoğlu, 2021) of families of missing persons across the divide found that a few subtle steps toward reconciliation have been made, and that the opening of crossing points along the Green Line and the work of the Committee of Missing Persons have contributed to reducing the pain of relatives and helping build trust. However, while both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots showed minimal animosity towards one another, noting that there were no problems at the individual level, they continued to blame the politicians and radical groups for their losses. The importance of reconciliation efforts were also acknowledged by both sides. These results are corroborated in Psaltis et al (2019)'s study. Other surveys have shown that Greek Cypriots that have positive contact with Turkish Cypriots have also formed more positive attitudes towards immigrant Turks (Tausch et al., 2010).

## North of the Green Line

Recent research conducted in 2020 corroborates earlier studies pointing out that ongoing immigration from Turkey has led to the emergence of a 'divided society' in north Cyprus. It also indicates clear cleavages between native Turkish Cypriots and Turkish migrants, in terms of values, religiosity and self-identification. The survey results show that the overwhelming majority of native Turkish Cypriots emphasise the Cypriot element in their identity either by labelling themselves as 'Turkish Cypriot' (51.6%) or 'Cypriot' (41.1%). However, Turkish immigrants primarily identify themselves as 'Turkish' (52.0%), whereas only one-third see themselves as 'Turkish Cypriot' (31.0%) and just 4.8% identify themselves as 'Cypriot' (Sonan et al., 2020). The survey defined the natives as those 'TRNC' citizens who have at least one parent born in Cyprus before 1974 and immigrants as those who were born in Turkey and/or with both parents from Turkey. The sample was representative of districts, gender and education level and included all age groups (ranging from 18 to 65+ years old).

According to Hatay (2017), about 28% of the Turkish Cypriot electorate today are either immigrants or descendants thereof. Indeed, the socio-political and cultural implications of migration from Turkey on the Turkish Cypriot way of life have provoked fears within the native Turkish Cypriot community. Academic studies reveal growing resentment among the native Turkish Cypriots, the absence of a common attachment to Cyprus by Turkish immigrants, and the existence of parallel lives among the native Turkish Cypriots and Turkish immigrants (Arkonaç et al., 2011). Native Turkish Cypriots are also concerned about Turkish hegemony (Akçalı, 2019), fears of assimilation and political subordination due to Turkey's population policies (Ramm, 2006) and anxieties caused by the AKP's religious policies (Dayıoğlu and Köprülü, 2019), which are increasing alongside the processes of social and political transformation and the reshaping of identities in north Cyprus (Lacher and Kaymak, 2005).

In addition, Turkish Cypriots' fear of being outnumbered by immigrants from Turkey has led to the exclusion of migrant workers (Kurtuluş and Purkis, 2008), political integration problems (Hatay, 2008), and discriminatory Turkish Cypriot discourse and populist narratives with respect to Turkish migrants (Ramm, 2006). In this regard, a twofold perception exists: first, the erosion of liberal, democratic and secular values adopted by the Turkish Cypriots with the arrival of more Turkish migrants; and second, problems of social integration and belonging have aggravated the negative perceptions regarding the coexistence of native Turkish Cypriots with Turkish migrants (Jorgensen and Latif, 2022).

According to the results of the latest census, in 2011, the population of north Cyprus was recorded as 286,257. From this figure, 190,494 were citizens of the 'TRNC' of whom 31,234 stated that their birthplace was Turkey (DPÖ, 2011). However, the data provided on the population on which the census results are based are contested: in particular, the origins and the birthplaces of 'TRNC' citizens are regarded as a highly controversial matter (Latif, 2021). One point here is that it is impossible to identify the number of children of Turkish immigrants based on the census as it only asks about the birthplace of a person. That means that those children of Turkish immigrants who were born in north Cyprus fall under the category of native Turkish Cypriots in the census. A second controversy is citizenship per se. For instance, while there is a legal requirement to have a work permit of at least 10 consecutive years for Turkish immigrants to acquire 'TRNC' citizenship, this law has been breached, especially by right-wing ruling parties, in order to conflate the electorate and thus gain votes in elections. Another issue is that Turkish immigrant communities from Turkey have a complex composition, including diverse ethnic

backgrounds – Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic and Laz. Moreover, they include those Turkish migrants that are naturalised, long-term residents, those with permanent and temporary residents, illegal workers, and Turkish soldiers and their families (Hatay, 2005).

Since 1974, Turkish governments have promoted the movement of Turkish citizens to the northern part of Cyprus. The first flow of Turkish immigrants, who arrived in the post-1974 war period, were encouraged to settle permanently and were provided housing, agricultural land, and later 'TRNC' citizenship. The majority of them came from poor and rural areas of Turkey as unskilled workers, whose customs and traditions highly differed from Turkish Cypriots. During the second migration wave from 1980 to 1999, educated professionals and skilled workers migrated, which was facilitated by legal arrangements with Turkey, such as labour force and passport-free travel agreements. The third wave, in the 2000s, was driven by economic reasons, most notably a booming construction sector after the Annan Plan (Vural et al., 2015). Legal regulations in 2007 that enabled the settlement of Turkish workers and their families in north Cyprus have led to rapid population growth. Unlike previous migration waves, currently well-educated and upper middle-class Turkish citizens, who are uncomfortable with the conservative and authoritarian regime of the AKP are migrating to north Cyprus. Moreover, while the last wave of immigrants might be temporary, it should be emphasised here that there is very limited research on the descendants of the first and second waves of immigrants, who are expected to remain. Another significant gap relates to the economic immigrants from developing countries, such as Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Pakistan, and Vietnam, who also tend to apply for permanent residency in the 'TRNC.'

# Cyprus at risk of partition?

Since the failure at the Crans-Montana negotiations in April 2021, Turkish Cypriot leader Tatar has held firm on the position that a resolution of the Cyprus problem should be based on equal status for Turkish Cypriots. He has also insisted that unless sovereign and international equality is accepted, the formal negotiation process cannot start (İncekaya, 2022). In addition, he reiterated his commitment to a two-state solution based on equal international status and sovereign equality in a meeting, in February 2022, with the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative Colin Stewart (Daily Sabah, 2022). In support of that narrative, Tatar presented a preliminary 'status of forces agreement' (SOFA) to the UN Secretary-General, in October 2022, at a meeting in New York.<sup>11</sup> A SOFA would require the UN Peacekeeping Forces in Cyprus (UNFICYP) to sign a military agreement with the Turkish Cypriot authorities for the UN to be able to retain its peacekeeping troops in north Cyprus. If UNFICYP refused to sign this agreement, then it would have to withdraw from the two camps (Nicosia/Kaimakli and Famagusta/Varosha) in the northern part of Cyprus. Essentially, the UN officials were informed of the Turkish Cypriot leadership's intention to push for recognition of the 'TRNC' and were asked to either recognise the 'TRNC' or leave north Cyprus (Financial Mirror, 2022). In response, UNFICYP spokesman Aleem Siddique explained that the status and presence of the forces would remain unchanged (Prakas, 2022c). For their part, the United States and the EU have tried unsuccessfully to convince Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot leader to adhere to the negotiation framework under the UN's good offices mission.

At a societal level, Tatar's blocking in November 2022 of the bicomunal anti-racism and peace education programme 'Imagine' on the grounds that it undermines the existence of two states in Cyprus, is the latest in a series of fraught attempts to resolve the Cyprus problem. Funded by the German Federal Foreign Office and supported by UNFICYP and the UN Office of the Special Advisor, 'Imagine' aims to develop understanding and cooperation between Turkish and Greek Cypriots and young people of diverse origins by promoting a culture of peace and unity. Since its launch in October 2017, a total of 6,117 students and 714 teachers have participated, and 518 teachers have been trained in peace education (Prakas, 2022a). The suspension of Turkish Cypriots' participation in the programme was met with strong opposition from the teachers' unions, opposition parties and civil society in north Cyprus.

On the Greek Cypriot side, the only political party to officially react to the Turkish Cypriot leader's decision to cancel the bicomunal programme, referring to it as a "major setback," was the left-wing party AKEL (AKEL, 2022). Looking forward, the main

<sup>11</sup> A SOFA is an agreement between a host country and a foreign nation stationing military forces in that country. SOFAs are often included, along with other types of military agreements, as part of a comprehensive security arrangement. A SOFA does not constitute a security arrangement; rather, it establishes the rights and privileges of foreign personnel present in a host country in support of the larger security arrangement.

preoccupation until 12 February 2023 will be with the presidential election.<sup>12</sup> Pushing for a resolution to the Cyprus problem – and coexistence with Turkish Cypriots – is an issue that is losing traction. Indeed, as a pre-electoral opinion poll carried out in May 2022 showed, respondents' top concern in the RoC (with 69% support) is the cost of living, the economy, and unemployment. The second biggest concern was corruption, and the lack of accountability and transparency (36% of respondents). The Cyprus problem was only in third place (31%), just before "illegal immigration" (20%). The war in Ukraine, which has topped public concerns in polls in Western Europe, was a key concern for only 13% of respondents in the RoC (at fifth place) (Vryonides, 2022). A more recent pre-electoral poll, published in October 2022, revealed that public sentiment towards the presidential election is overwhelmingly negative with 22% describing the campaigns as "terrible" and 23% as "meaningless" (Kades, 2022). The majority of respondents (59%) to the latest poll conducted in January 2023 believed that the results of the presidential election will not affect the future of the Cyprus negotiations (Politis News, 2023). All of this illustrates voters' frustration with the politico-economic and societal situation in Cyprus, but also at the lack of solutions to ongoing challenges proposed by presidential candidates.

However, none of this is a surprise. According to the 2021 Global Corruption Barometer, the RoC (with a rate of 65%) was the top EU member state whose citizens believed corruption had increased during 2021, when the EU average was at 32% (Transparency International, 2021). The government of Anastasiades – including himself – has been accused of being implicated in corruption scandals (Droussiatis, 2022; EU Reporter, 2021). The Cyprus Papers that examined the citizenship-for-investment programme in the RoC, involved 1,471 applications, containing the names of 2,544 people who received a Cypriot passport between late 2017 and late 2019. In just two years, 1,000 wealthy Russians bought 'golden passports' from the RoC. Indeed, many Russians who have applied for Cypriot citizenship made their money through political and economic relationships with their own government, with several having held official state positions making them politically exposed people (PEP). Following much EU pressure, Nicosia introduced new rules in 2019, including banning PEPs from buying passports. In July 2020, the rules were updated to enable Nicosia to strip Cypriot citizenship sold to anyone who was now "considered damaging to [Republic of] Cyprus' national interest" (Al Jazeera, 2020). These scandals have compromised Anastasiades's legitimacy even among his own electorate and have consequently weakened his diplomatic leverage and standing vis-à-vis Turkey.

Moreover, revelations of Anastasiades's handling of the Cyprus negotiations in Crans-Montana have further reduced the government's legitimacy on the negotiations front. More specifically, Anastasiades was accused of walking out of the negotiations unilaterally at a moment when Turkey was, for the first time ever, offering to discuss territorial accommodation (along lines that are acceptable to the Greek Cypriot side) and was proposing the progressive and eventual withdrawal of Turkish troops (up to the level of troops stipulated in the Treaty of Guarantee of the RoC) (Droussiatis, 2021). Given these political circumstances, the RoC government has not only been unwilling but also unable to exert any concrete efforts or to propose a clear plan to push forward with the negotiations. As with other EU member states, nationalistic sentiment has been on the rise south of the Green Line, as illustrated by a lively debate in the House of Representatives, in July 2022, after left-wing opposition blocked state funds earmarked for an EOKA museum

<sup>12</sup> There will be two rounds in the Republic of Cyprus's presidential election, the first one on 5 February and the second one on 12 February 2023.

dedicated to Georgios Grivas, a highly divisive figure in the island's history (Kathimerini News, 2022).<sup>13</sup>

Gas politics in the Eastern Mediterranean region have further entrenched divisions between the two communities. Moreover, and despite some positive developments in 2021, relations between the EU and Turkey also deteriorated in the first half of 2022 due to repeated violations of Greek airspace by Turkish fighter jets in the Aegean and threatening Turkish statements regarding the sovereignty of Greek islands and against Cyprus. The European Commission has continued to caution Turkey against obstructing survey activities in the Cypriot EEZ and has called on it to fully align with EU sanctions against Russia. Yet despite the critical tone used against Turkey, the latest European Commission report recognises that "Turkey remains a key partner for the European Union in essential areas of joint interest, such as migration, counterterrorism, economy, trade, energy, food security and transport." In addition, it also highlights that it "has facilitated dialogue between Russia and Ukraine and played a key role in the agreement on the export of grains, although it has also decided to increase trade and financial relations with Russia" (European Commission, 2022a: 33).

<sup>13</sup> Georgios "Digenis" Grivas, a Cypriot general, is seen as a hero for leading the Greek Cypriot EOKA fight against British colonialism in the 1950s, but as a traitor for his role after the independence of the RoC in 1960 and in the coup d' état against the lawfully elected president of the RoC in July 1974.

# Moving forward

The analysis has demonstrated that the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities are drifting apart. On the one hand, the RoC has developed internationally and built strong alliances, especially through its EU membership. On the other hand, the Turkish Cypriot community has become increasingly isolated and dependent on Turkey both politically and economically, with a ruling AKP government that is also intrusive at the social level. Action on the Cyprus problem is urgently needed if consolidation of this rift is to be avoided. Ultimately, change is the responsibility of both communities and they have proven in the past that they do have agency to bring it about. The latest local elections in north Cyprus are an indication of this.

The Turkish Cypriots, with the participation of 69% of the electorate, voted for political change in the local election last December. Most likely because of the difficult social, economic and political circumstances already analysed, the coalition of the parties on the right, to which Turkish Cypriot leader Tatar belongs, lost in key areas. The left-leaning parties, which are in favour of a solution to the Cyprus problem based on a bizonal and bicomunal federation, won in the major urban centres: Nicosia (Lefkoşa), Famagusta (Gazi Mağusa) and Kyrenia (Girne). The centre-left Republican Turkish Party (CTP) increased its vote from 31.9% in the 2022 general election to 35.4% in the local election and the social-democratic Communal Democracy Party (TDP) more than doubled its electoral support by winning 12.8% of votes. On the contrary, the centre-right National Unity Party's (UBP) vote decreased from 39.6% in the general election to 35.8% and the centrist People's Party (HP) from 6.7% to just 1.8% (Kendirici, 2022). Surprisingly, immigrant Turks also supported left-leaning candidates contributing to this overturn.

Greek Cypriots perceive the change of power, especially in Famagusta, as particularly important given Erdoğan and Tatar's controversial opening of part of the fenced-off 'ghost city' Varosha and their plans for opening and developing more parts of the fenced areas (Frangou, 2022). To optimists, this development may look like a window of hope whereas to pessimists this can be seen as an exception to reality. Regardless of the blockages to the Cyprus problem at the political level, vectors for change either at the level of local authorities or within civil society can keep the bicomunal momentum alive. Moving towards a bizonal and bicomunal federation will require political leadership, vision and will from politicians across the divide to compromise. In that light, three possible avenues for convergence could include:

## **Capitalising on natural gas to strengthen trade between the Greek and Turkish Cypriots**

Studies have already shown the economic benefits that a solution to the Cyprus problem would bring (USAID, 2001). To achieve this, engaging with key energy players on the island to instigate cooperation between the two communities could create momentum for peacebuilding efforts while negotiations are frozen, which in the best case scenario could also spill over onto the political level. In that context, hydrocarbons could serve as a

confidence-building mechanism between the Greek and Turkish Cypriots, thus finding a modus operandi on how to share gas resources on the island, even before a solution to the Cyprus problem is found.

UN-facilitated confidence measures could help reach an agreement on the extraction and export of hydrocarbons and the sharing of profits between the Greek and Turkish Cypriots. Such an initiative would not constitute a substitute for a comprehensive settlement, but it would create an impetus for economic cooperation between the two communities, ease some of the fears of isolation experienced by the Turkish Cypriot community, and provide a basis (or even an impetus) for restarting official negotiations. This method has been used in the past in Cyprus (e.g. the opening of the crossing points along the Green Line).

Sharing profits from the extraction of natural gas would also strengthen trade between the two communities and help the Turkish Cypriots become less dependent on Turkey. The Greek Cypriot position is that any income generated from natural resources would be a competency of the future federal government that would then redistribute it to the two communities. President Anastasiades had even offered Turkish Cypriots a share in the gas revenues on the condition that Ankara recognised Nicosia's energy exploration rights (Michael, 2020). Agreeing on the modalities and the timing of Turkish Cypriot participation has been a point of contention. Out of the three main presidential candidates for the February 2023 presidential election in the RoC, only AKEL-supported Andreas Mavroyiannis has declared that he would be open to sharing the profits generated from the natural gas resources with the Turkish Cypriot community before a solution to the Cyprus problem is found (Cyprus-Digest, 2022). It is unclear, however, whether this concession would be unconditional. Agreeing on such confidence-building efforts would indicate that the Greek Cypriot side understands and takes into account the negative impact and implications that the isolation of the Turkish Cypriots has had and continues to have on building sustainable peace on the island, as discussed in this working paper.

As the EU increasingly turns to initiatives favouring a green economy and alternative sources of energy (solar, wind, hydrogen, and electric interconnectors), natural gas resources have become time-bound and are increasingly losing their value as a potentially useful resource for the European continent. This situation has reduced the RoC's leverage in the Eastern Mediterranean, since natural gas would only be useful to the EU if it could be accessed and used straight away, something that in the absence of a pipeline is impossible. Equally, the United States withdrew its support from the EastMed pipeline project in January 2022, which means that it is likely that the pipeline will be rerouted through Egypt to bypass Cyprus (Stamouli, 2022). This makes the argument for using gas resources to boost energy needs on the island and bring the Greek and Turkish Cypriots closer together, even stronger.

### **Further expanding and strengthening bicomunal civil society engagement**

The consultation and participation of Greek and Turkish Cypriot non-governmental actors in the political decision-making processes is still weak. Despite many years of international engagement through aid and political support by several UN agencies, the EU and individual EU member states to empower civil society organisations across the divide, sustainable local capacities have failed to materialise. Yet, as the survey of Greek and Turkish Cypriot perceptions on coexistence by Psaltis et al. (2019) has shown, given



the positive effects of contact for all groups surveyed, implementing additional confidence building measures, such as contact schemes, new crossing points in isolated areas of the island, school visits and dialogue workshops are necessary.

There is a growing need today to support civil society initiatives against increasing nationalist rhetoric and political tension on the island, on both sides of the Green Line. A useful approach could be to further strengthen citizen-to-citizen contact across the divide to discuss and work on the development of (common) democratic processes and to encourage training and capacity-building skills in this area. The existing structures of civil society, educational activities, youth events, exchange programmes and trainings should be strengthened and increased as an alternative to the 'Imagine' programme. Discussions among professional groups, grassroots engagements, and contact schemes could also start in primary school, well before university. Moreover, pushing for the inclusion of Turkish and Greek language learning in middle and high schools would also sow the seeds of peace at the societal level. Finally, monocommunal and bicommunal civic actions and social initiatives, which could exert pressure on Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders, also need to be instrumentalised to restart dialogue and resume peace talks.

### **A strengthened international engagement in the resolution of the Cyprus problem**

The EU and the United States should continue to search for ways to deescalate tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean region and to motivate both Greece and Turkey to keep communication channels open. Building on the discussions between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders since the Crans-Montana Summit, an EU-led and US-supported conference on the role of the guarantor powers (Greece, Turkey and the United Kingdom) could be organised in an effort to overcome the stalemate in times of war and systemic rivalry. Greek Cypriot politicians have over the years advocated for the idea that the Cyprus problem is also an EU problem and that the EU should therefore be a catalyst in its resolution.

The suggestion of the EU taking a catalytic role in the Cyprus problem is a message that has resonated with the European People's Party (EPP) in the European Parliament (EP), and specifically with both the EPP Group leader Manfred Weber and EP President Roberta Metsola. Indeed, the latter characteristically said before the RoC's House of Representatives, last September: "I am here to say that Europe will not turn away from Cyprus or our joint ambition at seeing the reunification of this great island. That we are one. That your challenges are our challenges, and that – let me say again – Europe will never be whole while Cyprus remains split" (European Parliament, 2022). Such narratives can be instrumentalised for the benefit of both the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities. The European Council has repeatedly reaffirmed its strategic interest in a stable and secure environment in the Eastern Mediterranean and in the development of a cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship with Turkey. However, such an environment can only come about through a mutually-agreed solution to the Cyprus problem.

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# List of Abbreviations

AKEL	Progressive Party of Working People
AKP	Justice and Development Party
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CATS	Centre for Applied Turkey Studies
CTP	Republican Turkish Party
DPÖ	State Planning Organization
EDAP	European Energy Diplomacy Action Plan
EEAS	European External Action Service
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
ELIAMEP	Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy
EMGF	Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum
EOKA	National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters
EP	European Parliament
EPP	European People's Party
EU	European Union
HP	People's Party
IDP	Internally displaced person
KTTO	Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce
MHP	Nationalist Movement Party
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PEP	Politically exposed people
RoC	Republic of Cyprus
SBA	Sovereign British Area
SEK	Greek Cypriot Cyprus Workers Confederation
SOFA	Status of forces of agreement
SWP	German Institute for International and Security Affairs
TDP	Communal Democracy Party
'TRNC'	'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus'
TURK-SEN	Federation of Turkish Cypriot Trade Unions
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UBP	National Unity Party

UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNFICYP	United Nations Peacekeeping Forces in Cyprus
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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