

Strengthening European  
integration through the  
analysis of conflict discourses  
Revisiting the Past, Anticipating the Future

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## Policy Recommendations for Cyprus

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## 1. Introduction

Cyprus, due to its location, was at the centre of the first civilisations to develop in Eurasia. As a result, it had gone through many different periods and been influenced by many distinct civilisations that had occasionally passed through the island. Despite the rich history of the island, the Cypriots have been part of the broader Greek ethnicity since ancient times. Over the years, they maintained their strong relations with Hellenism, but at the same time, they incorporated influences and integrated populations from other ethnic groups. After the conquest of the island by the Ottomans, the population was divided based on religion. At that time a second distinct community was formed in the island, mainly due to the Islamization of part of the Cypriot population and the colonisation by the Ottomans. The two communities, Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, lived peacefully on the island for centuries. Even after the Greek revolution in 1821 against the Ottoman empire, and the emergence of the “Enosis” (annexation Cyprus to Greece) narrative among the Greek Cypriots, the two communities continued to live peacefully and in harmony.

However, the political developments of the 20th century, such as the transfer of the island's sovereignty to the British and the hostilities between Greece and Turkey, were crucial in generating a Greek-Turkish conflict also in Cyprus. Greek Cypriots, who make up 80% of the population of Cyprus, considered their community as the historical inhabitants of the island and thus sought the implementation of their ambition, which was the annexation of the island to the newly founded Greek state. On the other side, Turkish Cypriots, who make up 20% of the population, considered that “Enosis” would degrade their rights and wanted to divide the island in two parts. After a four-year anti-colonial armed struggle (1955-1959), the achievement of the Greek Cypriots’ goal failed and, as a result, the two communities compromised on the foundation of an independent state. The foundation of the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) was not the priority for either of the two communities, so the bi-communal conflicts continued. Finally, in 1974, after the failed coup d’etat by the Greek junta against Archbishop Makarios, the legitimately elected President of the RoC, Turkey used the right of intervention provided by the Cypriot constitution and invaded the northern part of the island. The Turkish invasion resulted in the immigration of Greek Cypriots to the southern part of the island whereas Turkish Cypriots were installed in the northern part of the island. Hundreds of thousands of Cypriots were forced to leave their homes and migrate to the north or south. Since then, Turkey has deployed a large military force in the northern part of Cyprus, while an illegal state was founded which is solely recognised by Turkey. After 1977, the five parties involved in the Cyprus Problem (Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots, Greece, Turkey and the United Kingdom) sat at the negotiating table several times to find a mutually acceptable solution, which has not been achieved until nowadays.

The two communities had lived in complete isolation for many years, as until 2003 the illegal regime in the north did not allow anyone to cross to the other side of the island. In 2003, the opening of some checkpoints, allowed inter-communal contact for the first time in almost 30 years. Nevertheless, to this day, the relations between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots are still considered marginal.

In the RePAST research project, by interviewing policymakers and investigating Cyprus troubled past, we propose policy recommendations which in our opinion are possible to help both communities to overcome the island’s troubled past. We investigated the troubled past by focusing on four different dimensions on which we build our policy recommendations. These dimensions are: i) history; b) politics; c) media; d) arts and culture. Our policy recommendations are in line with the RePAST instructions for WP6.6 set by the University of Ljubljana (in agreement with the consortium) in early 2020. In this document, we present the policy recommendations (a country-specific roadmap) for Cyprus, a document that is one of the final deliverables of the RePAST project.

In the next section, 2, we explain the methodological approach regarding this task, which derives from an overall framework that was drafted by the RePAST consortium in March 2020 based on the project’s Grant Agreement

and is applicable to all case studies<sup>1</sup>. We describe (a) the rules and factors that determined the interviewees' selection and (b) we list the names of the interviewees who accepted to provide their opinions to us. In section 3, we review the EU's historical connection to the Cyprus Problem, from the onset of the Problem (1963) until today. Also, we illustrate both communities' ties with the EU. In section 4, we describe our policy recommendations for each of the four dimensions covered by RePAST. Finally, we conclude our report stating our inferences and the limitations we encountered during our research based also on the feedback received by the selected policymakers and stakeholders.

## 2. Methodology

The methodology for the policy recommendations consisted of a two-phase design to produce a qualitative result that combines the previous RePAST research results along with the feedback received from relevant policymakers and stakeholders. The first phase involved drafting on a set of first policy recommendations, which was completed in May, 2020. These recommendations incorporated the knowledge gained from a thorough research of the relevant literature and the RePAST outcomes produced so far (WP2 – History; WP3 Media; WP4 Arts & Culture; WP5 – Politics) regarding the case of Cyprus. The second phase, which concerned the conduct of interviews with policymakers and stakeholders, started in mid-May 2020 and coincided with the outburst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The disruption caused by the pandemic in the Cypriot society created significant problems in our effort to reach out to policymakers and stakeholders; hence, the implementation of this part took longer than anticipated. In addition, a significant number of individuals that we approached did not respond positively to our request. This was due to the current heated relations between Cyprus and Turkey. Despite the large number of contacts that were made (approximately 40), the end result generated an increasing number of stakeholders who were less willing to speak about inter-communal relations. Finally, eight experts agreed to an interview. All interviews were completed in November, 2020 and conducted online (mainly via Skype), due to the imposed government's restrictive measures against the contamination of COVID-19. These restrictive measures have made almost impossible to cross between the state-controlled lands and the occupied areas. Consequently, the two communities have been cut off (physically) for the first time since 2003.

For the interviewees' selection process, we initially tried to include representatives from the political arena, civil society and academia. Equal representation of women was also essential for us, as for years women's views about the Cyprus Problem and bi-communal relations were not equally valued compared to those of men. Additionally, our sample needed to include representatives from both communities. Due to the controversy surrounding the Cyprus Problem and bi-communal relations, the latter are managed entirely by the political leadership and not by state technocrats, who for the most part remain uninvolved. Thus, we chose to mainly speak with prominent elected politicians and members of the parliamentary committee on education affairs. Although we believe that our sample is sufficient, we must note that no Cypriot MEP or Turkish Cypriot politician accepted our request for an interview.

Below, we list the individuals who participated in an interview and provided their feedback in the first part of our report:

1. (National-level) Efthimios Diplaros, Vice president of Cyprus ruling party, DISY (Democratic Rally), Member of Parliament (2011 – today).
2. (National-level) Annita Demetriou, Vice president of Cyprus ruling party, DISY (Democratic Rally), Member of Parliament (2016 – today), Member of Parliamentary Committee on Educational Affairs and Culture.
3. (National-level) Nikos Kettiros, Member of Parliament (2016 – today), Member of the Central Committee of AKEL (Progressive Party of Working People), Member of Parliamentary Committee on

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<sup>1</sup> Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Spain, Germany, Poland, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo; see [www.repast.eu](http://www.repast.eu) for further information

- Educational Affairs and Culture.
4. (National-level) Andreas Kafkalias, Member of Parliament (2011 – today), Member of the Central Committee of AKEL (Progressive Party of Working People), Member of Parliamentary Committee on Educational Affairs and Culture.
  5. (National-level) Charalampos Theopemptou, President of the Cyprus Greens-Citizens' Cooperation, Member of Parliament (2016 – today), Member of Parliamentary Committee on Educational Affairs and Culture, Commissioner of the Environment (2006 - 2013).
  6. (National-level) Hayriye Rüzgar, Communications Officer at Home for Cooperation (NGO, located in UN buffer zone).
  7. (National-level) Dilek Latif, Senior Lecturer in International Relations department at Near East University (Remarkable research work on the effects of the Cyprus Problem on education and culture)
  8. (EU-level) Androulla Vassiliou, Member of Parliament (1996-2006) (Movement of United Democrats), Member of European Affairs Committee and the Joint Parliamentary Committee of Cyprus and the EU, Vice president of European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party (ALDE Party) (2001-2006), European Commissioner for Health (2008-2010), European Commissioner of Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth (2010-2014), Co-Chair of Bi-Communal Technical Committee on Culture

The conducted interviews provided significant material with a crucial impact on revising the first version of our policy recommendations. In December 2020, the revised version was sent out for internal peer-review, which was done by two experts, one at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Giorgos Antoniou) and the second to one at the Cyprus University of Technology (Konstantinos Vadratsikas). After receiving the reviews in December 2020, the final revision of the policy recommendations document was implemented and was prepared for submission to the EU Participant Portal.

### 3. The EU's approach to the troubled past in Cyprus

The European Union's (EU) approach to the troubled past of Cyprus cannot be compared to the corresponding approaches to the troubled past of the Eastern European countries for specific reasons that are discussed below. The Cyprus Problem differs structurally, socially and legally from the internal problems faced by other European countries in their struggle to recover from their troubled past. The Cyprus Problem is unresolved until today, while the rest of the European countries are already in the process of evaluating the recovery from their troubled past. Sadly, sixty years after Cyprus independence, the two main communities barely hold any meaningful relation between them. Any assessment of the EU's approach to the Cyprus problem should take into account the complexity of the problem and the difficulties that arise from it.

The EU approach to the troubled past of Cyprus (if, of course, it can be called "past") can be divided into three periods mainly based on the magnitude of EU's involvement. These periods are:

- a) the EU pre-accession period (roughly from 1973 to 1997)
- b) the EU accession talks period until the 2004 Annan plan referendum (1998-2004)
- c) the post-accession period (2004 – until today).

**The first period**, which starts a decade after the first major inter-communal violent events, has as starting point the signature of the Association Agreement between the RoC (which after 1963 was solely governed by Greek Cypriots) and the European Community (EC) in 1973. The political situation prevailing on the island at that time was worrying, as the nationalist paramilitary organisations of both the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots were armed and active. Also, the pressure from the Greek junta on President Makarios was constantly

increasing. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the same year, the United Kingdom became a member of the EC. UK, except for a guarantor of Cyprus' constitutional order according to the Zurich-London treaties (1959,1960, 1963), had important trade relations with its former colony. In this context, the agreement between the EC and the RoC was of economic rather than political nature and was intended to facilitate an undisturbed trade relationship between the UK and Cyprus. However, a year later (1974) the coup d'etat against President Makarios, orchestrated by the Greek junta, and the ensuing Turkish invasion did not allow for the development of trade relations between Cyprus and the EC since the island was experiencing the most tragic moments of its modern history (Müftüler-Bac & Güney, 2005).

After the end of the Turkish invasion and the establishment of the illegal occupation on the northern part of Cyprus, two political entities resulted on the ground: the southern part, which was governed by the internationally recognised RoC (ruled by the Greek Cypriots) and the northern part, which was governed by a pseudo-state, recognised only by Turkey (ruled by Turkish Cypriots). The EC involvement in the negotiations for the reunification of the island was merely negligible. Its influence remained marginal mainly until the beginning of the talks for the accession of the RoC to the EU. The most important reason for the non-involvement of the EC was the involved parties' established belief in the UN processes. In addition, the main goal of the Greek Cypriots at that time was the internationalisation of the Problem, which is why they considered the UN as the most appropriate mediator. At the same time though, the EC itself had not shown any willingness to get proactively involved in the Problem at that time (Hutchence & Georgiades, 1999). However, soon after a sequence of events forced the EC (EU later) to take part in the Cyprus Problem.

Initially, in 1981 Greece became a full member of the EC. The main goal of Greece's foreign policy was the accession of Cyprus to the European Community too. Moreover, Greece's accession before Turkey gave a significant diplomatic advantage to Greece in being able to veto the European course of Turkey until the reunification of Cyprus. As a result, the Greek Cypriots disappointed by the stagnation of negotiations and the constant failures towards a solution, launched gradually as a gateway the efforts to join the EC too. In 1987, a Customs Union Agreement was signed between the RoC and the EC. The agreement did not benefit Turkish Cypriots as its terms were not applied in the areas which were not governed by the recognised government (Yakinthou, 2009). In addition to Greece accession and the RoC' Customs Union Agreement, an ECJ's decision practically imposed an embargo to Turkish Cypriot exports to the EU due to property rights by Greek Cypriots over the occupied areas of the unrecognised state in the north. These developments led to an even greater isolation of the Turkish Cypriot community and triggered distrust towards the EU (Kyrus, 2012).

Continuing its European course, in 1990 Cyprus filed an application to become a full member of the EU. The application generated mixed reactions. The accession of Cyprus was considered as an effective mechanism to create new perspectives regarding the already stagnant negotiations for the Cyprus Problem (Barkey & Gordon, 2001). At the same time however, it was seen as imposing a challenge to Turkey since Cyprus' accession to the EU, preceding Turkey's, could allow Cyprus to partially freeze EU-Turkey relations until the withdrawal of the Turkish troops from the island. The Turkish Cypriots also complained on the grounds that the accession of Cyprus before the reunification of the island would only benefit the Greek Cypriot community; also the talks for the completion of the accession would take place exclusively between the EU and the RoC (in which they did not participate) (Müftüler-Bac & Güney, 2005). From 1993 to 1998, discussions within the EU focused on the particular problems of the Cyprus' application as an island under military occupation by a Customs Union member state.

Finally, Cyprus' accession talks started in 1998 as Cyprus met the economic and political criteria to become a full member. This step was interpreted as a strengthening of the justification used for the illegal Turkish occupation, according to ECJ decisions (Nugent, 1997). Furthermore, two more factors led to this decision: a) Greece's intention to veto the accession of Eastern European countries if the application of Cyprus was rejected due to the Turkish occupation and b) the uncompromising attitude of Turkish Cypriot leader, Rauf Denktaş, which was seen as the main reason for the failure of UN negotiation procedures (Kyrus, 2012).



**The starting point of the second period** is the beginning of the accession talks between the RoC and the EU. The start of the talks provoked strong reactions by the Turkish Cypriot leadership. Rauf Denктаş, at the exact moment of the official start of the talks between the RoC and the EU, signed an agreement on further economic and military integration of the unrecognized state in the north with Turkey. He also rejected the proposal by the President of the RoC, Glafkos Clerides, for equal participation of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots in the committee that had undertaken the talks with the EU officials (Stivachtis, 2002). The EU considered that the process of accession would result in the Greek Cypriots making significant concessions in the security issue because Greek Cypriots believed that any attack on Cyprus would mean an attack to the EU. Respectively, the Turkish Cypriots would also make concessions regarding their demands for equal governance as European law would guarantee their human and political rights. Also, for the Turkish Cypriots, the solution of the Cyprus Problem would automatically mean the transition from complete isolation from the international community to the accession in the largest supranational organisation in the Western world (Yakinthou, 2009).

The prospect of the EU accession had a catalytic effect on the Turkish Cypriot community. The progressive forces that wanted the immediate reunification of the island and which had hitherto been overshadowed by the dominance of Rauf Denктаş, utilised the hope and the promised benefits deriving from the EU accession to demand a change in the political establishment. At the same time, the election of Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey (2002) and his more flexible stance on the Cyprus problem reinforced the Turkish Cypriot hope for a solution and in effect the provision of the EU benefits. The Turkish Cypriot civil society spontaneously organised dozens of demonstrations. Their major demand was for a change favouring the unification of the island, which would consequently mean the end of the international isolation and their participation in the EU. Rauf Denктаş was forced by the internal political pressure and the differentiated stance of Turkey to accept the start of a new process for resolving the Cyprus Problem. During the new negotiation round, Cyprus became a full EU member as the accession process was officially finalised in 2003. Once again, the Turkish Cypriot community protested against the political establishment and demanded the opening of the checkpoints between the two entities in order for citizens to be able to cross to the, European by that moment, south. One week after the finalisation of the accession talks, the Turkish Cypriot regime decided to satisfy the demonstrators' demands and opened the checkpoints allowing for the inter-communal crossing for the first time after 1975.

The overall course of Cyprus EU accession in combination with the change of attitude by Turkey had created a momentum in favour of finding a solution for the Cyprus Problem. For the first time in the elections in 2003, the majority of Turkish Cypriots voted in favour of parties supporting a federal solution to the problem, sending this way the message that they want an end to their international isolation through EU membership. On the other hand, Greek Cypriots appraised their EU membership as an important step towards some sort of control over Turkey's aggression (Christou, 2004). Following the completion of the last round of negotiations, the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, has proposed holding a referendum in both communities on whether or not to adopt a reunification plan based on a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation (2004). The positive momentum turned out to be an insufficient condition for achieving a solution since the proposed Annan plan was rejected. It should be noted though that it was the Greek Cypriots that blocked the plan since only 24% of the electorate supported it while Turkish Cypriots approved of it by 65%. The Turkish Cypriots' vote was interpreted as a clear change of attitudes that was triggered by the EU membership and the benefits that could be brought. On the contrary, for the Greek Cypriots the benefits deriving from the EU membership were already conquered and in the view of not having much to lose, they rejected the Annan plan. Therefore, the Greek Cypriots being in an advantageous position in comparison to their Turkish Cypriot counterparts rejected the plan hoping that their European position would lead to the achievement of a second better plan, leaving aside the invasive rights of Turkey. The vote against the Annan plan had significant consequences as it increased mistrust between the two communities, ended a long round of negotiations and proved that the EU's involvement was not enough (Christophorou, 2005).

**The third phase** regarding the Cyprus' troubled past is mainly affected by the failure of the Annan plan. Once again, Turkish Cypriots are facing the consequences of being isolated. In addition, EU support to Turkish

Cypriots, due to legal issues, becomes limited. Yet, by accepting the Turkish Cypriot community as part of the European *acquis communautaire* and considering it as an equal community to Greek Cypriots, the EU had to respond to the community's complaints against isolation. The Turkish Cypriots, based on the acceptance of the Annan plan in opposition to the Greek Cypriots, called for trade relations with the EU. However, this was coming in complete antithesis to the ECJ rulings and was rejected by the RoC, acting now as an EU Member State. The main goal of the RoC was to ensure its legitimacy and remain the only recognised political entity on the island. To this end, any proposals involving the participation of institutions of the unrecognised regime in the north were immediately rejected (Yakinthou, 2009).

In this period, the EU implemented a number of integration policies of the Turkish Cypriot community without cooperating with the institutions of the unrecognised regime. These policies concerned mainly: a) the participation of representatives of the Turkish Cypriot community in various EU conferences and events, b) the establishment of the Green Line Regulation which regulates the movement of products to and from the south, allowing thus for trade exchanges between the two communities and (c) financial assistance to the Turkish Cypriot community in order to improve the social, economic and political standards (Hatay et al, 2008). However, the EU's inability to develop direct relations with the Turkish Cypriots has resulted in increased Euroscepticism and distrust in the northern part of the island.

Meanwhile for the Greek Cypriots, the Cyprus problem had taken a back seat as the Eurozone crisis in 2012 brought great financial difficulties (see Cyprus barometer 2012). The adopted austerity policies had provoked significant domestic reactions. At the same time, the election of the rejectionist Dervis Eroglu, as the leader of the Turkish Cypriots, and the focus on the part of the EU institutions on resolving the economic crisis among the EU Member States at the beginning of the decade, froze the negotiations for the reunification of the island. Even after 2015, when the financial crisis seemed to have been at a more manageable state and the Turkish Cypriots elected the moderate Mustafa Akinci as their leader, the EU initiatives and its participation in the negotiations were almost meaningless. In contrast, Turkey's economic integration into the European Single Market has created a relationship of dependence between EU country leaders and Turkey. In addition, any efforts made by the Greek Cypriots for the EU to participate in the negotiation process as a stakeholder were rejected by Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots. As a final point in the third period we note that the EU's presence becomes even more narrow. This becomes obvious by the limited efforts made in maintaining the Green Line Regulation or sending financial aid to prepare the Turkish Cypriot community for a potential solution and, hence, the implementation of the European law.

#### **4. Proposing strategies for mitigating the challenges arising from the troubled past: consolidating RePAST findings on Cyprus with the Cypriot policy-makers' and stakeholders' views (policy recommendations)**

##### **4.1. Media**

The level of freedom of the Greek Cypriot media is rather good. Cyprus usually scores high in the various rankings of freedom of press and expression. A strict legal framework does not allow the ownership of multiple media outlets by just a small circle of owners. Additionally, the active participation of politicians in the field of media is not allowed, as the law forbids politicians from holding a significant percentage of shares in any media company. So, apart from two newspapers that are considered instruments of the two major political parties, the rest of the media outlets have no significant relations with the political parties, other than, of course, their political alignment. The same cannot be said for the Turkish Cypriot community, as some media belong to politicians or individuals who are members of major political parties.

Despite the purported independence and freedom of the Greek Cypriot media from political parties, the media still adopt and reproduce the dominant narratives about the island's violent past. Mainstream media reproduce the narrative that promotes the victimisation of the Greek Cypriot community and the impasse in resolving the

Cyprus problem due to the Turkish intransigence. In their effort to remain popular to Greek Cypriots, they adopt the same line of argumentation with traditional history textbooks while they also ignore most of the historical events from the 1960s and 1970s. Also, the mainstream media reproduce symbols and images that reinforce Greek nationalism in the Greek Cypriot community, since they adopt an ethnocentric approach. The same is true for the Turkish Cypriot media, since they promote Turkish nationalism (Avraamidou, 2017). Turkish Cypriots in various instances have attempted to resist to the increased pressure exercised by Turkey's growing influence. The latter is a vivid representation of Turkish nationalism, which is eventually promoted by the domestic media in the north. Alternative media are almost non-existent on the island and this is why the role and importance of mainstream media is undoubted. In the past, some efforts were made mainly by the state television to broadcast programs concerning reconciliation and friendship between the peoples of the two communities. Unfortunately, the TV audience's interest for these shows was minimal. Another effort concerned the creation and adoption of a glossary for journalists to replace words that cause polarisation and tension with words and terms that are more 'neutral'. The glossary was never adopted after a heated debate between journalists. The continuous unsuccessful attempts to promote reconciliation narratives by the media in combination with the minimal interest that currently exists in resolving the Cyprus Problem, make any proposals for improvement impracticable or unrealisable. For this reason, our proposal focuses mainly on how the media should cover issues concerning the Cyprus Problem and the Turkish Cypriot community.

News regarding the political developments in the Turkish Cypriot community is only covered by the Greek Cypriot media when it concerns the course of the negotiations while the rest of the actual political events are normally ignored. This approach leads to a representation of a homogeneous image of Turkish Cypriot politicians by the Greek Cypriot media, leaving aside the inter-parties' differences and eventually the various perceptions about the Cyprus Problem between the Turkish-Cypriot parties. To this end, the Greek Cypriot media focus predominantly on covering news in relation to the Greek Cypriot community without any substantial reference to the major news about the Turkish Cypriot community. **Our proposal concerning this fact is for the mainstream media to start presenting news related to the developments in the Turkish Cypriot communities that are not necessarily linked to the negotiations for the Cyprus Problem.** Presenting Turkish Cypriot politicians discussing everyday issues occurring in the Turkish Cypriot community will reconstruct the falsely promoted homogeneous image of them to the Greek Cypriot community. Greek Cypriots will be able to comprehend the concerns and aspirations of Turkish Cypriots overall and not just about the Cyprus Problem.

Something similar applies to Turkey's political developments. In the Greek Cypriot media, the authoritarian image of Tayyip Erdogan monopolises news broadcasts, while the rest of Turkey's political forces are completely ignored. There is rarely some reference to Turkey's internal affairs, let alone to the positions and views of the opposition parties. This creates the impression to the Greek Cypriots that all Turkish political parties adhere to the same authoritarian position towards the Cyprus problem. The Turkish people are represented to have one position aligned with the positions and views of Erdogan that are overemphasised by the Greek Cypriot media. To address this inconsistency, we **suggest that media reports should include a wider range of Turkey's key political developments that are not necessarily linked to the Cyprus issue, and that Tayyip Erdogan's position should be contrasted to the views of the opposition parties and social movements in Turkey.** This way the image constructed for Turkey by the media and is informed entirely by President Erdogan's authoritarian stance, will be undermined.

The media of both communities can work together at an everyday level to exchange and reproduce news that promote a better understanding of what is happening in both communities. The exchange of news content can be even presented by journalists from both communities as invited panellists or commentators on a daily or weekly basis. **Our proposal is to give tangible incentives so that news can be translated to Greek and Turkish, so that it is easier for media to include respective news items in their news agendas and bulletins.** There is a significant number of reconciliation projects as well as NGOs or various other initiatives that could be engaged in providing resources (such as translations). This will require the willingness for a wider initiative to be launched with the view to build a more open and wide informational material in the audiences of both communities. Such actions could evolve and cover local news as well as a variety of media such as television, radio, print and online media. Finally, we consider that the promotion of co-operation between media outlets by

the two communities and the exchange of content regarding everyday events from each community, might be a decisive factor in bridging the gap between the communities.

#### 4.2. History

The relations between the two communities of Cyprus, Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, seem to freeze, since the negotiations do not lead to a breakthrough. Despite the opening of the checkpoints (2003) and the accession of Cyprus to the EU (2004), a series of failed rounds of negotiations as well as the rejection of the Annan plan in the 2004 referendum have led to the stabilisation of a defective relationship between the two communities. The main narratives of the two communities, which are not based on the promotion of reconciliation, have also remained the same, namely ethnocentric and prejudicial (Kyris, 2012). The case is a classic dipole of “we against the others”, a narrative that leaves limited hope for a resolution of the Cyprus problem in the near future. The main objective of the narratives of both communities is to prove that they are victims of the other community. This emerges also by the RePAST survey which revealed that 57,3% of the Greek Cypriots feel that they suffered more than Turkish Cypriots. This victimhood feeling is linked to a series of arguments that make reconciliation difficult such as the jeopardy of human rights due to the actions of the other community and that resolving the Problem mainly requires concessions from the other side. Both communities attempt to promote just the facts and events which provide evidence for the victimisation of one community by the other. However, each community seems to be unaware or to ignore its own mistakes and harmful actions against the other (Papadakis, 2008). 24,2 and 33, 1

The strengthening of those points that emphasise the harmful actions of the other community consolidates the dysfunctional relations between the two sides. Greek Cypriots focus on the atrocities committed during the Turkish invasion (1974) and the bi-communal tensions that began from Turkish Cypriots during the EOKA liberation struggle (1955-1959) against the British colonialists (which sought for annexation to Greece). Meanwhile they almost completely ignore the bi-communal violence and ghettoization of the Turkish Cypriots from 1963 to 1974. On the other side, the Turkish Cypriot narrative ignores or undermines the effects of the Turkish invasion and the events of bi-communal violence from 1955 and 1959 (which sought for partition of the island) and focuses on the violent oppression suffered by the Greek Cypriots from 1963 to 1974. How the past is perceived by both sides is reflected in the history books of each community (Papadakis, 2008).

The review of the history books in Cyprus is a point of political and social intensity since they contribute to the reproduction of the dominant narrative about the violent past between the two communities. History books have been instrumentalised to promote the moral superiority of one community over the other. They also serve as evidence for major political parties' positions regarding the resolution plan which each political party consider as the most appropriate (Latif, 2019). In this context, any attempts to change the history books in Cyprus have provoked strong disagreements, especially in the Greek Cypriot community. Since the issue of history books and, more generally, the investigation of what happened before 1977 has been linked to party competition, possible changes are likely to incur political costs for political parties whose proposed resolution plan is not in line with the historical record of events. To this end, any significant change in the history books or in the recording of historical events in general, does not seem to be happening in the near future, even in the case of the Greek Cypriot history textbooks which mostly skip major events between 1960 and 1973 (Papadakis, 1993:1998).

Based on the above, **our first proposal is to review history textbooks and add chapters that refer extensively to the events between 1955 and 1974, but also to the negotiations that started after the end of the Turkish invasion.** To implement this proposal, a group of dedicated and impartial academics from both sides should consist a task force towards the revision and/or production of textbooks. The selection of the academics should be guided by an independent committee with members from all involved bodies (government, education associations, etc.). Once the group of academics is composed and as its work advances, a series of pilot projects can be launched with the participation of schools, teachers and students who would be exposed to the various versions and/or narratives of history (that would also contain narratives of the textbooks from the other community). The goal of these pilot projects would be to showcase and understand the variety of points of view and prejudices and provide feedback to the group of academics, building this way a multi-step interactive approach.



In addition to clarifying the historical facts that are currently ignored, we also consider important to explain the course of the negotiations throughout the decades. By adding these chapters, students (youngsters) will be able to better understand the preoccupations and perceptions of the other community. The main concern of the Greek Cypriot side is the presence of the Turkish occupation army and the continuation of Turkey's invasive rights after the resolution of the Problem. This concern stems from the trauma left by the Turkish invasion. The main concern for Turkish Cypriots is the preservation of their political rights once they merge with the larger Greek Cypriot community, and this concern stems from the violent repression of their rights that occurred from 1963 to 1967. The demands of each side which are always on the table are directly related to the history of the island. A better knowledge of modern Cypriot history is tantamount to a better understanding of the concerns and demands of each side.

However, due to the impossibility of cooperation between the RoC and the unrecognised regime in the northern part of the island, **our second proposal is to create a bi-communal committee under the supervision of the EU, which will aim at an objective historical recording of events and their adaptation to history books.** We believe that the recording of history should be done upon a scientific and bi-communal basis so that any doubts about their validity can be overcome. The EU as an intermediary in this process increases its credibility among the citizens of the two communities provided that the responsible body will be composed of respected and impartial experts. A climate of suspicion overwhelms still the two communities, and the EU's contribution could be a smooth operator for the implementation of the recommendations of the bi-communal committees.

Moreover, **a joint bi-communal committee under the auspices of the EU will be able to better request data and documents from Greece, Turkey and the United Kingdom.** There are still several unknown aspects of what really happened from 1955 to 1977, and based on these shortcomings, divisive narratives that harm constantly any reconciliation effort were developed. A very large number of documents on what really happened in Cyprus are in the possession of Greek, Turkish and British authorities. Greece recently (2017) handed over the so-called "Cyprus File" to the Republic of Cyprus, and so should Turkey and the UK, issuing documents of similar importance. However, due to the absence of cooperation between Cyprus and Turkey, since Turkey does not recognise the sovereignty of the RoC, these documents can be handed over to a 'mediator' such as an EU institution. For decades, Cypriot citizens from both communities have a blurred idea of what exactly happened and who are the main responsible actors for the current situation on the island. Historical research can be undertaken with a more objective perspective and this can be done only with the help of the EU. In addition, after the handing out of the "Cyprus File" for the first time hundreds of thousands of new data and testimonies were revealed that need to be examined. An expert EU body (through a committee for example) could contribute to reconstructing the Cypriot history with the mobilisation of financial and technocratic resources.

Along with the need for a better understanding and representation of the modern history of Cyprus, the relations between the two communities should be re-examined over time. The two communities have coexisted on the island for centuries, and several times they have organised joint struggles against the Ottomans and the British colonists. **Our fourth proposal is to add a chapter (or chapters) in the history textbook that will focus on a thorough investigation of the common struggles of Turkish and Greek Cypriots.** The historical demonstration of the joint struggles of the two communities against the colonial forces that ruled the island underscores the peaceful coexistence of the two communities before the turbulent second half of the 20th century. It also transmits the message that since the two communities have managed to cooperate putting aside their differences in the past, harmonious coexistence between them can be achieved also in the future at a more sustainable basis.

There are also other communities on the island whose historical origins and current role are still completely ignored by history textbooks. **In Cyprus there are communities of Maronites, Armenians and Latins, whose course on the island dates back centuries. The history textbooks should include references to these communities to make history more comprehensive.** It is important to elaborate on the presence of these communities and their co-existence with the other two bigger communities. However, as to date no special mention has even been made to them. The conflict and the separation between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots as well as the Turkish invasion inevitably affected the lives of all the other communities living on the

island, so the need for a better understanding of needs and concerns of all communities should be more holistic and inclusive.

Finally, despite the atrocities and the traumatic past of the island, even during the difficult times of bi-communal violence and the Turkish invasion, there are dozens of incidents of compassion and reconciliation. **The co-existence of the two communities for centuries has created bonds between the inhabitants of the island, which even in times of polarisation and tension proved that there is still an understanding between the two sides.** There are stories where Turkish Cypriots helped Greek Cypriots escape the onslaught of the Turkish army and, on the other hand, stories from the 1960s when Greek Cypriots tried to protect Turkish Cypriot friends from bi-communal violence. There are also figures in folk stories associated with these inseparable relationships, such as Misiaouli and Kavazoglou, Ioannis Maratheftis and Fethi Akinci, etc. The valuable historiography of the role of such personalities that help bridge the gap are completely ignored by the history textbooks. **A complementary recommendation builds on the fact that generations are important and today different generations who coexisted are still alive. Based on this, we propose the start of an oral history project led by an official service of the Ministry of Education, where teenagers will get in contact and interview elders about coexistence. The results of such initiative can provide material to be incorporated in the new textbooks for educational purposes.**

### 4.3. Politics

The prolonged period of non-resolution of the Cyprus Problem in combination with the non-recognition of the regime on the north side of the island have totally led to a complete isolation between the political forces of the two communities. Indicative of the absolute weakening of relations between the political parties is the fact that whenever a politician of one community visits politicians of the other community, this meeting is top news, as cooperation between them is now considered extremely unusual. The only parties that have established and maintain relations are the Greek Cypriot Communist AKEL and the Turkish Cypriot Socialist CTP (the two biggest left-wing parties on the island). These two parties are the only ones that have maintained bridges of communication and cooperation. Also, their youth branches have established joint actions that promote the reconciliation and reunification of the island (Katsourides, 2013). However, the meetings and joint actions of the two left-wing parties are rather constrained in symbolic actions lately due to the stagnation of the negotiations for the resolution of the Cyprus Problem.

Political parties in both communities are not willing to be actively involved in the peace movement for reconciliation between the two communities, as they consider it insignificant as long as the negotiation process does not bring results. Moreover, parties are reluctant in adopting positions that can render them responsible or accountable in the view of a resolution proposal. The latest active parties involvement was during the referendum of the Annan plan (2004), which cost the current President of the RoC, Nikos Anastasiades, almost ten years of ‘political exile’ due to his position to support the plan. Traditionally the ones with a leading role as negotiators are the President of the RoC and the elected Turkish Cypriot leader, while the political parties of each community push their negotiating side to demand what they consider most important for their own community. So the political situation that has been formulated through the years, not only does not promote cooperation between the political parties but it also makes it harmful for them (Loizides, 2007). Part of the public opinion considers treacherous any attempt for cooperation between parties from the two communities. On that basis, politicians prefer to operate in line with a rather traditional negotiating position that represents their partisan audience rather than to forge cooperative relations with politicians from the other community.

The only common ground that can bring the political parties from the two communities closer is their participation in the collective bodies of party groups of the European Parliament. More specifically, the Greek Cypriot centrist DIKO and the Greek Cypriot Social Democratic EDEK participate in S&D (European political group of “Socialists and Democrats”), as well as the Turkish Cypriot Socialist CTP. Therefore, their participation in the same European party group can help to create better relations between them. In fact, EDEK and CTP are members of the same European party (PES – “Party of European Socialists”), but they do not cooperate at any level. Participation in the same European party families and party groups can be a major motive for the beginning of a constructive dialogue, as long as the European parties have the will to help and bring the two sides closer through their collective bodies. **An initiative can be organised through the European Parliament so that these parties participating in the same party group can come closer.** Even the

arrangement of a social event in Brussels (as none of those parties will accept to cross the Green Line) can contribute to the construction of ties between them, since today communication is absolutely non-existent.

Apart of the two major political parties of the Turkish Cypriot community, the conservative UBP and the socialist CTP, the other Turkish Cypriot parties are not participating in any European party group and do not hold any ties with the European Parliament. **Our second proposal in the field of politics is to start talks between the European party groups and the rest of the Turkish Cypriot parties.** Both communities show relatively high levels of support to the European Union, thus we believe that European party groups can be the right places for the political parties of the two communities to come closer. At the European level the obstacles which in Cyprus complicate any form of cooperation, do not have the same negative effects; thus, we believe that the European institutions are able to formally promote cooperation between the Cypriot political forces. Therefore, the participation of Turkish Cypriot parties in European party groups is considered an essential development which at the same time is possible, as already the two biggest Turkish Cypriot parties participate in European parties.

Apart from the stagnation of negotiations and the relations between the political parties of the two communities, that lead to the consolidation of the problematic status quo, European citizens are largely unaware of the current situation of the island. Also, Turkish Cypriots are in part excluded from the European society, as the majority of them have not developed relations with the European partners. **Our third suggestion is about a completely European initiative. We proposed the arrangement of an annual forum in Brussels with the participation of mainly civic groups and social movements from both communities.** Civil society must be strengthened as its role today is minor; in Cyprus, the existing anomalies and the prevailing situation do not promote a wide-ranging debate among all social groups from both communities. Therefore, we believe that an annual forum on the Cyprus Problem, with the participation of active citizens and social movements from both sides can achieve two goals: first to inform Europeans about what is really happening in the island and what are the main concerns of the two communities and second, to bring active citizens closer together in an environment that does not exacerbate tensions but promotes co-operation.

**The latest proposal, and perhaps the most substantial, is to redefine the EU's role in the negotiation process for the resolution of the Cyprus Problem.** To date, the EU has not been actively involved in the negotiations, mainly due to Turkey's refusal. It is therefore an observer of the process and is unable to exercise significant influence. However, the tension in the Exclusive Economic Zone of the RoC is directly affecting Euro-Turkish relations and it is a major obstacle for the normalisation of the relations between the two sides. Therefore, for the EU there is a significant stake in the solution of the Cyprus Problem, since it is the only way to fully normalise its relations with an important economic partner, namely Turkey. However, we understand that this suggestion is a timeless point of intense discussions that have not led to any results. We believe that the participation of the EU can be a catalyst for resolving the Cyprus Problem, thus its involvement or participation in any form and level, will be very helpful.

#### 4.4. Arts and culture

Probably the only field that has benefited and was developed between the two communities after the opening of the checkpoints is that of arts and culture. During the first years after the opening of the checkpoints and the excitement that came from the reconnection of the communities, social events with traditional dances and music were organised. The common traditional music and dances shared by the two communities for centuries has been promoted as a key point of reconciliation. Traditional dances and music are a common and familiar common ground for the two communities that do not cause any tensions. They also remind the times when the two communities lived harmoniously together. However, due to the stagnation of the negotiations and the consolidation of the status quo, such events tend to vanish. The reconciliation movement used music and dance extensively to promote its actions and increase their reach. Unfortunately, the bicomunal reconciliation movement has been hit hard in recent years, as rising tensions and the halt of negotiations have led the movement to isolation from the rest of society. However, we believe that the arts and culture field can significantly help to overcome the troubled past and create bridges of communication between the two communities.

**Our first suggestion is to set up a student exchange program, like-Erasmus+, so that Turkish Cypriot students will be encouraged to spend at least six months studying at a Greek Cypriot university.** Due to the non-recognition of the regime in the northern part of Cyprus, Turkish Cypriot students have little opportunity to spend part of their studies abroad. It would also be much more helpful to spend a semester at a Greek Cypriot university than to spend time in another European country. With the contribution of the EU, a European program can be set up to mediate between Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot universities in order to facilitate the study of Turkish Cypriot students at Greek Cypriot universities. This program will be the trigger for the creation of relations between the youth of the two communities, while at the same time it will help the Turkish Cypriots to practice their English and to acquire valuable experience even for an academic semester.

In addition to the various social events that began after the opening of the checkpoints, a significant number of camps were organised for young people. Various organisations have organised summer camps with the participation of young people from both communities. These initiatives have been instrumental in setting up the reconciliation movement as most of the people who met at the summer camps are supporters of reconciliation and peace. Various summer camps managed to turn into annual gatherings. One of the largest is the one co-organised by the two major parties of the Left in Cyprus. **The second proposal is to provide an EU financial fund to finance the organisation of bi-communal summer camps.** This fund must be distributed according to strict terms and conditions so that it can benefit the summer camps that through their activities promote the reconciliation and creation of relations between the youth of the two communities. Indicative activities could be small projects of history walks in both sides where narratives about troubled past (even those that have been produced by the RePAST project) from both communities will be included in the descriptions.

Due to the conditions that were formed from the creation of an unrecognised entity in the northern part of the island, the main point of action of the reconciliation movement is the buffer zone. The largest joint actions by the two communities took place in the buffer zone, as the land area there is under the United Nations administration and is considered as a grey zone where citizens from both communities can visit without any problems. From time to time, various bi-communal social movements have chosen the buffer zone as the “venue” for their events and activities. Also, the only building that hosts the reconciliation movement and the NGOs that are trying to overcome the troubled past, the “Home for Cooperation” is located in the buffer zone. At the Home for Cooperation, various cultural events are organised, while from time to time joint visits are made by schools of the two communities. Our experience so far suggests that the buffer zone may be a point of strengthening bicomunal relations, as the conditions on the rest of the island are not very encouraging for such initiatives. **Therefore, our third proposal is to strengthen the initiatives that are located in the buffer zone, such as the Home of Cooperation or even if it is possible to create another similar space elsewhere in the buffer zone.** Due to the fact that the Home of Cooperation is located within Nicosia, the events it hosts are mainly attended by residents of the capital. We believe that it would be helpful if a similar space was opened elsewhere in the buffer zone so that its beneficial effect would be closer to other residents of the island.

In recent years, independent cinema has flourished in Cyprus, in both communities. The most important film festivals are organised mainly in Limassol, located in the southern part of the island which is not accessible to most Turkish Cypriots. **Our fourth proposal is to organise a film festival within the buffer zone only for Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot producers.** In recent years, independent films have been released on the subject of the Turkish invasion or the repression of the Turkish Cypriot community. Independent cinema is almost the only field that deals with the troubled past, so we argue that strengthening and supporting it through an organisation of a festival in a place that can be accessible to both communities may help build sincere relationships.

Finally, the largest cultural event on the island is the Limassol Carnival, for which, strangely enough, hundreds of Turkish Cypriots cross the Green Line to visit. **Our proposal is to promote the cooperation between the Municipality of Limassol, which is the organiser of the carnival, and local government authorities of the Turkish Cypriots so that they can participate in the carnival parade.** The Limassol Carnival is a major event in the social life of Cypriots and can be a point of contact between the two communities. To this day, Turkish Cypriots visit the carnival without participating in the parade.



## 5. Conclusions

In this section, we present our conclusions which were shaped by the feedback we received from the interviewees. In the first part, we discuss our conclusive points regarding the policy recommendations for every dimension separately, while in the second part we outline our broader and final conclusions.

**(1) Media:** Regarding the media in Cyprus, the interviewees stated that they also acknowledge that the way the other community and Turkey are represented is one-sided. However, we have found that implementing any policy or issuing a call to the media to represent a more in-depth depiction of the other side is not enforceable. The media in Cyprus, mainly the Greek Cypriot, are not willing to follow suggestions, as they consider this to be an interference with their freedom of expression. We have seen this in practice with the recent failure to implement a glossary for journalistic use, which recommended replacing words and phrases that cause tension between the two communities. It became obvious to the participants that the one-sided coverage of the events by the media reproduces narratives that maintain the distance between the two communities. However, they claimed that this issue could not be resolved by the government or with the support of any international organisation, since it is an internal issue that must be resolved by the journalists themselves. However, public radio and television stations operate under a legal framework different from that of private media, which facilitates the implementation of rules that promote unbiased news coverage with the representation of both communities' positions. In terms of bi-communal broadcasts and media, it was stated that such initiatives were attempted several times in the past with inadequate results. Public interest was minimal, and therefore all attempts failed. In line with this, their view is that a similar attempt today will be doomed to fail as the interest is even lower. The only initiative that can succeed is the establishment of a bi-communal news agency that will provide ready-made news, in both languages, to private stations in both communities. However, EU assistance will be needed here as such a bi-communal news agency cannot be set up and sustained just by private funds. The EU can assist financially to set up a news agency, which will provide private media with news reports that approach political developments in an unbiased way. An initiative like this existed in the past but could not be sustained due to insufficient funding.

**(2) History:** Almost all interviewees were supportive of recording of historical events and reviewing history textbooks. However, various practical difficulties were raised. First, such a decision will cause tensions and disagreements, something that, as we were told, no one wishes at this time as the Cyprus Problem is going through a critical period. Thus, everyone needs to be focused on finding a solution. Nevertheless, the participants suggested that any attempt to record historical events and revise history textbooks must be made in a correct and objective way. They proposed to assign this task to a large group of historians, both Cypriots and Europeans, and to ask for the active participation of the EU in this effort. The EU's involvement will enhance the legitimacy of the results of the committee, which will be much needed due to the controversy around the issue. The participants agreed that the three guarantor powers need to assist in restoring the truth and handing over whatever information and historical records they hold about Cyprus' troubled past. Also, the participants, especially the AKEL MPs, agreed that personalities and events that prove the historically peaceful and friendly relations between the two communities should be promoted. It should be noted here that only non-political interviewees referred to the other communities living on the island, proving that the Cyprus Problem has evolved into a purely political problem which does not allow for proper consideration of the other community. In summary, if there is a willingness on the part of the EU to assist in setting up a "truth committee", then we believe that a thorough and objective record of history can finally be made that cannot be doubted. Yet, it is unsure whether the EU will be willing to participate since until nowadays its position was that of reluctance in getting involved with issues related to the Cyprus Problem. The results of the "truth committee" will consequently lead to the revision of the history books, since the work of the committee will be evaluated as valid. In addition to this task, another suggestion by an interviewee was to build a museum that will expose the history of the two communities through the years. Greek and Turkish Cypriot students could jointly visit this museum. We believe that this

recommendation is possible once the objective of recording jointly the critical historical events between 1955 and 1974 is completed.

**(3) Politics:** Regarding our recommendations for politics, we found a significant difference between the participants' responses. The politicians considered that the possibly most drastic action of the EU is its participation as the 6th party in the negotiating table for the solution of the Cyprus problem. They stated that the active participation of the EU in the negotiations could provide immediate solutions to deadlocks that have hindered the process of resolving the problem for decades. The non-politicians did not take the same stance on this proposal. However, they focused on the fact that there must be a mechanism that will push politicians from both communities to physically come in contact with the other community. Yet everyone agreed that even simple social gatherings should take place between politicians and NGOs. Here we must emphasise that relations between the vast majority of politicians of the two communities are almost non-existent. For example, after the recent election of Ersin Tatar as the new leader of the Turkish Cypriots, the President of the RoC stated that before any negotiations between them, they should first know each other, proving that even the most popular politicians of the two communities have no relations with their counterparts in the other community.

**(4) Arts and culture:** Regarding our first proposal in this subsection, we realised that they are practical difficulties, such as the fact that Turkish Cypriot universities are certified by the Turkish Ministry of Education, which does not recognise Greek Cypriot universities. Also, Greek Cypriot universities will not be able to evaluate the programs of Turkish Cypriot universities before a Greek Cypriot student chooses to study at them (which is considered unlikely by the circumstances). We, therefore, conclude that this proposal is impracticable. Regarding the next two proposals, the participants agreed that there are indeed several bicommunal initiatives, but they need financial support. We believe that the EU needs to revisit any possibility of providing financial aid dedicated to assist organisations and initiatives that have indeed brought Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots closer together. The same goes for our fourth proposal. There are already some common art festivals, for which, from year to year, citizens' interest decreases, making it increasingly difficult for these festivals to continue their work. Finally, the latest proposal regarding the carnival in Limassol was either ignored or rejected by the interviewees as they believe that there are security issues. Through the interviews, mainly with non-politicians, we realised a significant omission. The vast majority of bi-communal events and festivals take place in Nicosia, which is divided between the illegal regime and the territories controlled by the RoC. Thus, the people of Nicosia are in an advantageous position, as they have easier access to these events, compared to other Cypriots. As a result, the same groups of people are continually participating in these events. We believe that the EU should make it clear that any funding given to bi-communal initiatives should be able to contribute to strengthening relations between all citizens of the island and not just those living next to the buffer zone.

In conclusion, we can say that all participants considered the EU's contribution crucial and positive, but not sufficient. In general, the main problem that prevents rapprochement of the two communities is the continuation of the status quo, which reproduces and reinforces troubled past's adverse effects. Also, the increase in tension between Greece, Turkey and Cyprus, during the last two years, further complicates the already minimal range of possibilities for rapprochement between the two communities. We believe that the EU could play a key role. Unfortunately, the EU's contribution has not been enough to strengthen the efforts made by NGOs and citizens' groups aimed at bringing the two communities together.

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