Short personal view articles Vol.1 – Author: Panagiotis Loules

The aim of this special issue on Cyprus Reunification with the contribution of prominent experts (academia, EU institutions and the parties of both communities there) is to give a pluralistic and long-term outlook to the influence of this reunification process on the European Union, depicting the different approaches and theories embedded with optimism and pessimism. The focus of our special issue is placed on the current developments of Cyprus reunification, the future outcome of the negotiations, and the technicalities of this crucial political process. A reunified Cyprus will mean modified weights of member states in the European institutions (EP, Council qualified majority, etc.) as well as it will create a different security environment in the Eastern Mediterranean region. It may also influence the EU-Turkey relations, which is another interesting European aspect to be touched upon.

Our NGO, Centre for European Progression (CFEP) asked the personal view of the experts on various issues and benchmarks. Subsequently, some questions that were addressed among others are: The role of the European Union in the Cyprus issue – Can the EU become a key player in the Cyprus conflict?, Will 2016 see the end of one of Europe's longest-running conflicts? Is the political will and momentum clearly there? Is it now or never?, What are the impediments for the negotiations and how can they be overcome now?, Why Cyprus is closer now than ever to a solution? It's the economic impetus of reunification that has helped to build the current momentum for a deal? We firmly believe that the process of reconciliation needs to begin immediately so that it can lay the groundwork for open dialogue, trust building, and understanding which are all essential to the success of any settlement of the Cyprus problem.

Historical background – What's at stake?

In 1967, a military junta seized power in Greece. The relationship between that regime and President Makarios of Cyprus was tense from the outset and became increasingly strained. President Makarios made it known that he was convinced that the Athens junta was involved in efforts to undermine his authority and policies through extremist underground organizations in Cyprus conspiring against his government and against his life. On 15 July 1974, the Greek military junta and its Greek Cypriot collaborators carried out a coup against the democratically elected president of Cyprus. Five days later, using this act as pretext, Turkish armed forces invaded northern Cyprus in response of the coupe d'état by the Greek Cypriots who were still believing in the idea of "Enosis", or, in other words, unification of Cyprus with Greece. In a two-phase invasion in July and August, and despite calls by the UN Security Council [Resolution 353 (1974)] and the quick restoration of constitutional order on the island, Turkey occupied 36,2 percent of the sovereign territory of the Republic and forcibly expelled about 180.000 Greek Cypriots from their homes. Another 20.000 Greek Cypriots, who remained in the occupied areas, were also forced to eventually abandon their homes and seek refuge in the safety of the government controlled areas. Today, fewer than 500 enclaved Greek Cypriots remain in the occupied areas.

The Republic of Cyprus will celebrate its 56th anniversary this October as the only divided country in the EU, following the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The Cyprus problem is amongst the longest-standing international disputes in recent history, accounting for the most protracted peacekeeping mission since the creation of the United Nations ('UN'). Situated at the intersection of important transport and communications routes linking Europe to the Middle East and the Orient, Cyprus aspires to become the region's economic and financial operations center, a communications and transport hub, and a meeting place for peoples and cultures. An examination of Cyprus unravels a myriad of interrelated strategic issues which do raise the possibility that the path to resolution could be longer, more fraught and more delicate than anticipated. Just like in other community conflicts and confrontations, Cyprus Island's history tells us one or two things about the difficulties and promises of living together.

The negotiations timeline and the main stumbling blocks

In broad terms, the post-colonial problem of Cyprus can be divided into two phases. The first one covers the period from 1960 to 1974, and the second one the period from 1974 to the present. During the first phase, from the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus in 1960 (especially after the 1963 bicommunal flare-up) until 1974, the problem was basically an internal dispute between the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots in which external powers became involved.

Since 1974, the problem has entered a new phase that led to the present status quo. Following the coup d' état which was staged against President Makarios by the Greek military regime in July 1974 and the subsequent Turkish invasion, drastic changes took place on the island including the de facto division and a painful demographic surgery that led to the displacement of about one third of the population. Since the Turkish invasion of 1974, Turkey has implemented a systematic policy of colonizing the occupied part of Cyprus, from which it expelled 170,000 Greek Cypriots. The arrival and establishment of the Turkish settlers is the most notable demographic occurrence in Cyprus since 1974 (This is the conclusion in the 1992 report by A. Cuco,). The forced movement and exchange of population, which led to ethnic

segregation, have been widening the gap between the two communities and undermining efforts for reunification. Besides the division of the island, the presence of a sizeable Turkish army in the north and a shared feeling of insecurity among the two communities have been some of the striking features of the problem ever since.

Cyprus has been divided since 1974 despite repeated efforts under the auspices of the UN to bring the leaders of the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities to the negotiating table. Hopes for reunification were raised in 2002 when then-UN Secretary General Kofi Annan suggested a two-part federation with a rotating presidency. For many years the negotiations on the reunification of Cyprus hit one stumbling block after another, and at times even seemed to have reached an impasse. Since 2003 it has been possible for both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots to cross the buffer zone at designated crossing points and visit either side of the Island after showing their ID. Tourists can pass through after showing their passports. One of the biggest obstacles in Turkey's relations with the EU is Ankara's refusal to recognise EU member Cyprus, the Mediterranean island divided for four decades between the Turkish-controlled north, which is recognised only by Ankara, and the Greek Cypriot south where the government has international recognition. According to a Turkish official, Turkey's cabinet has approved waiving visas for EU citizens once Europe relaxes its own visa requirements for Turkish. That's to say, Greek Cypriots will no longer require visas to visit Turkey under an EU-Turkey agreement on visa liberalisation, but this does not amount to Turkish recognition of Cyprus.

Several efforts for a solution made so far by the UN, or in the name of the UN, have failed. A recent and almost successful one, which lasted four years, culminated in the submission of a comprehensive plan for a settlement in 2004, known as the Annan Plan. On 24 April 2004, the two Cypriot communities held separate, simultaneous referenda on the Annan Plan which provided for the establishment of a new state of affairs on the island based on a bizonal bicommunal federal political system. It was a huge text comprising a federal constitution of about 250 pages, two constitutions for the constituent states, and about nine thousand pages of laws for the new United Republic of Cyprus.

At the referenda the voters in the two communities were asked to answer yes or no to the following question: "Do you approve the Foundation Agreement with all its Annexes, as well as the constitution of the Greek Cypriot/Turkish Cypriot State and the provisions as to the laws to be in force, to bring into being a new state of affairs in which Cyprus joins the European Union united? The majority of the Greek Cypriots (75.83%) voted no and the majority of the Turkish Cypriots (64.91%) voted yes. The Greek-Cypriot rejection of the Annan Plan disappointed the international community, especially the UN and the EU. Thus far a succession of Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders, including the current leaders, have been unable to achieve agreement on the difficult issues of territory, property, governance, citizenship, and security guarantees, acceptable to both sides.

In response to the the rejection of the Anan Plan and the failure of having a united island becoming an EU member, the Council adopted unanimously on its conclusions on 26 April 2004 EU policy with regard to the Turkish Cypriot Community. Therefore, the Conclusions provide for measures for the economic development of the Turkish Cypriot community, with particular emphasis on the economic integration of the island and on improving contacts between the two communities and with the EU, with a view to the reunification of Cyprus. European Commission has set up a "Task Force for the Turkish Cypriot Community" to deal with the consequences of the unique and complex situation in Cyprus.

In addition, the Council, adopted the Green Line Regulation (EC) 886/2004 ('GLR') to regulate the movement of people and goods from the non-government controlled, occupied areas of the Republic of Cyprus to the government controlled areas, as well as the Aid Regulation (EC) 389/2006 aiming at providing assistance to facilitate the reunification of Cyprus by encouraging the economic development of the Turkish Cypriot community. The overarching objective of reunification is to be achieved through particular emphasis on the economic integration of the island, on improving contacts between the two communities and with the EU, and on preparation for the acquis. Two years later, the Council approved the "Aid" Regulation (Council Regulation No 389/2006) on 27 February 2006, establishing a legal instrument for encouraging the economic development of the Turkish Cypriot community. The financial resources allocated amount to €259 million.

The failure of the Annan Plan, the accession of Cyprus, and the commencement of accession negotiations with Turkey, created a new reality, additional urgency and a promising prospect. A new momentum is also emerging for the reunification of the island, which is too small to remain divided but big enough to accommodate its entire people as a reunited EU member-state. Current enthusiasm among Turkish and Greek Cypriot leaders to reach an agreement along with statements of support from the Turkish government signifies a changing tide.

It is also important to note that this time the negotiations are Cypriot-led and the two leaders have full ownership of the process. The repetition of previous bad experiences from the 2004 period would like to be avoided where the direct involvement of the UN in filling up the gaps in the Annan Plan with bridging proposals that were not agreed upon by the parties, was one of the reasons that the plan was rejected by the Greek Cypriot Community.

However, it seems that substantial progress has been made on the issues of governance, EU matters and the economy, while the more contentious issues of (1) property and territory, (2) security and guarantees and (3) Turkish settlers have yet to be resolved. Even though natural resources have recently become one of the most popular parameters in the discussion of the Cyprus issue and it appeared that energy might become yet another area of confrontation between the Republic of Cyprus and Turkey.

More precisely:

- Property issue is correlated with the territorial adjustment issue and it has to do with the future of Greek Cypriot properties in the prospective Turkish Cypriot constituent state and Turkish Cypriot properties in the prospective Greek Cypriot constituent state has been one of the most sensitive issues - The Greek Cypriots still lay claim to their properties in the north, and in the landmark Loizides case, the European Court of Human Rights ruled against Turkey as the occupying power, demanding that the properties be returned
- Security and guarantees are expected to be the last to be discussed in bicommunal negotiations. Solving the security problem of Cyprus is a key element in these negotiations. Greek Cypriot security concerns vis-à-vis Turkey and Turkish Cypriot security concerns against Greek Cypriots. The starting position here of course is that Greek Cypriots supported by Greece claim that there shouldn't be anything like troops or guarantees, and the position of Turkish Cypriots supported by Turkey is that there should be something like that because the minority needs some external protection

- Turkish mainland settlers: The poor Turkish Cypriot economy led many Turkish Cypriots to leave their country. They have been replaced by settlers from mainland Turkey in search of economic opportunities. Over the last thirty years 160,000 settlers from Central Anatolia have been brought into the north by the Turkish government, thus modifying the demographic composition of the area, putting the Turk-Cypriots in the minority. One result is that there has been a widespread tendency for the latter to emigrate to the United States, Great Britain and Australia: a drain that has reduced their numbers from 135,000 to 80,000.

Even if we try to give an explanation to this deadlock through the theories of realism and social constructivism, there are still many issues at stake. Is the Cyprus conflict finally a matter of security and a broken balance of the power on the island as the realism commands? Or it is a matter of identity as the social constructivism lays down, where prejudices and hostilities rivalry comes from the past and people define themselves like "Turkish" and "Greek" or "Muslim" and "Christian" rather than "Cypriot"?

A European future for a reunited Cyprus and the good chemistry of the two "Limassolians"

Cyprus's partition is a headache for the European Union. As the island is still divided, the Republic of Cyprus is represented in the EU by its Greek Cypriots, with veto-wielding rights over Turkey's wish to join the bloc. A settlement on Cyprus in the context of European integration has the potential of producing only winners and benefiting all parties involved in the island or concerned over peace and security in the Eastern Mediterranean. With the election of Mustafa Akinci in 2015 as the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community, the Cyprus peace process gained a new momentum. Akinci was the Mayor of Nicosia in the 1980s. The end of a conflict means new possibilities, as well as new challenges and unknowns. A few years ago, or even just a few months ago, who would have imagined that the reunification of Cyprus could be a realistic possibility? But now that it is a realistic possibility, this historic opportunity must be seized. What is known is that Cyprus was an exception to enter the European Union (EU) as a divided country. The hope that Cyprus would be reunited prior to becoming an EU member did not transpire.

The plan's failure disappointed EU officials, who had agreed to allow Cyprus to join the EU that year partly in the hope that doing so would encourage a solution. In May 2004, the Republic of Cyprus became a full member of the EU. However, based on protocol 10 of the accession treaty 2003 the Republic of Cyprus has acceded to the EU in 2004 with its entire territory but the *acquis communautaire* is suspended in those areas that are not under the effective control of the government of the Republic of Cyprus (northern part of the island) till the event of the settlement of the Cyprus problem. At their December 2004 summit, EU leaders agreed to open accession talks with Turkey on 3 October 2005.

The EU favours a settlement that will reunite the island and its people under a bizonal bicommunal federation. Such a solution will, of course, guarantee the civil, political, economic and cultural rights of all Cypriots without any restriction or discrimination. The security of all Cypriots in each and every respect – and not only in military terms – must also be guaranteed through institutionalised arrangements that go beyond Cyprus and beyond Greece and Turkey. Urging rival leaders to grab the "unique opportunity" of reunifying the Eastern Mediterranean island nation, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker said Europe would be "deeply involved with the financing" of a peace accord and praised Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades and Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci, for

their "common determination" to achieve progress in United Nations-mediated talks. The fate of Cyprus rests in the hands of two men. Both were born in the southern city of Limassol.

The European context appears to be a promising one in that respect. The institutions, legal order, principles and policies of the EU – the acquis communautaire – can provide a conducive framework (and more) in the search for a much needed solution on Cyprus. A settlement based on the law, policies and practices of the EU can provide a sound basis for peaceful coexistence and prosperity for all Cypriots. There are many questions Cypriots are asking themselves. The fact that Turkey does not recognise the Republic of Cyprus – a full member of the EU – can lead to political complications. How can a candidate country conduct accession negotiations and sign an international treaty (like the accession treaty) with a country it does not recognise?

The possible reunification really depends on the evolution of the negotiations between Turkey and the EU. Cyprus fate is sadly not in Cypriot's hands. However, and despite the past failures, the integration of the Cypriot republic into the European Union and Turkey's willingness to participate in it are positive elements in a middle term perspective. The Cyprus issue must be seen as a European issue, and its say outlies in a European perspective. After all, if reunification becomes a reality, all Cypriots will benefit - politically, economically and culturally.

Current enthusiasm among Turkish and Greek Cypriot leaders to reach an agreement, along with statements of support from the Turkish government signify a changing tide. From a security and energy standpoint, as well as EU-Turkish relations, reunification can be a turning point and a boon to regional peace and stability. "The ambition is that Cyprus will be a unified European country and that's why we have involved much more than previously the EU," said the United Nations special adviser for Cyprus, Espen Barth Eide.

EU accession process can indeed be the most important factor effecting on the situation in Cyprus today. However, the EU process has not, per today, had the positive effect towards a solution as initially foreseen. Despite the new impetus of the negotiation process, many have remained wary over the EU's role claiming that the accession negotiations give too much importance to economic rationality over societal security, and perceiving EU as a biased party, accused by Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots of privileging Greek over Turkish interests. There has been vast criticism that the EU played a perpetuator role towards the conflict rather than being a conciliator. After all, is the Europeanisation of the Cyprus question a model for conflict resolution?

The solution per se and the "red lines"

Andreas D. Mavroyiannis | Negotiator of the Greek Cypriot Community for the settlement of the Cyprus problem

Cyprus' long overdue reunification

More than 41 years since the Turkish invasion, occupation of the northern part of Cyprus continues to produce its tragic effects to the country. However we have as of recent seen the prospect of ending occupation, ending forcible division and achieving reunification, gather an unprecedented momentum.

Substantial progress has been achieved at the negotiating table over a range of issues that under discussion. This is the result of the series of factors both internal and extraneous, which create a positive outlook. Over-optimism is, however, not in order. Situation remains fragile and no decisive breakthrough has taken place.

The ongoing full–fledged negotiations, under the auspices of the United Nations, have indeed, invigorated hopes for a comprehensive settlement to the Cyprus problem. The two communities of the island, Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, embarked on this negotiating process, reaffirming their commitment to the reunification of Cyprus based on a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation with political equality between the two communities in a forward looking approach, building a modern European democratic society combining the above features with full respect of the principles and values of Europe, the full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the implementation of the European acquis throughout the island. Cyprus should be able to fully take its stride without external interference and have a fully autonomous existence in the Eastern Mediterranean, being the outermost post of the EU in this part of the world and fully playing is part in the process of European integration.

There are three main tenets a priori agreed between the two communities, which could be construed as the reunifying components of the basis of the pursued settlement, what is called 3-Ss; single international legal personality, single sovereignty, and single citizenship. Next to those necessary pouvoirsregaliens consubstantial to the reunited Federal Republic of Cyprus, there will be ample space to build a relationship of trust and confidence through such tested principles as synergy, complementarity, subsidiarity and proportionality. Distinct identities, roots and cultural traditions will thus become factors of richness through diversity.

In order to put things on an irreversible course a number of requirements have to be fulfilled. Notwithstanding the substantial progress achieved in the negotiating process, it is evident that considerable work lies ahead and that, still, difficult issues remain to be discussed. Most of those issues contain an important extraneous dimension and require movement mainly on the part of Turkey, in order to be successfully addressed. Whether they will do it in order to unlock the prospects and bring the sought after solution within reach, remains to be seen. Security and guarantees, withdrawal of occupation troops, meaningful territorial readjustments, preservation of the demographic character of the island, financing and implementation of the settlement, are just a few of such issues.

The long-overdue solution to the Cyprus problem is now at a critical juncture which can produce a rare, favorable alignment of stars. Time is ripe, especially considering the concurrence of dynamics that are molding together both on the island and in the wider region.

Kati Piri | Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament - Rapporteur of the Progress Report on Turkey, Netherlands

There is political will and courage on both sides and the negotiations have progressed more than ever, so the solution seems near. However, we should not forget that being one of 'Europe's longest-running conflicts' means that there are deeply rooted concerns among both communities of the island. During the coming weeks and months, when the most delicate issues are to be agreed upon, it is very important

that all concerned parties play a constructive role so before the end of the year the historic step of reunification of the island can be made.

Election campaigns are about amplifying the differences between political parties - not about consensus. I, however, don't expect that this will hamper the settlement talks - which is about the long-term future of all Cypriots. It is clear that in order to convince the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities to agree with the reunification, it has to be in their interest. Tomorrow's united Cyprus must bring them more than the current status quo. I'm convinced that when the leaders of both communities come to a comprehensive and viable agreement, a majority of the Cypriots will support it. A solution could have a very positive effect not just on the EU, but on the entire region. In the midst of political turmoil, a decade long conflict has then been solved.

The stage reached in the negotiations means that the most sensitive issues are being negotiated currently, which in itself is not an impediment, but does require all relevant actors on both sides of the island to act in utmost responsibility and caution.

Costas Mavrides | Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, Cyprus

The UN-brokered negotiations for the comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem have entered a very delicate phase compare to previous years. An unprecedented positive atmosphere stemming from the relationship between the Cyprus' President Nicos Anastasiades and the Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci, led them into deep negotiation process. However, the core issues can be solved only if Turkey is engaged. Good atmosphere cannot solve these difficult issues. No doubt that if Turkey shows a constructive approach then the road towards the comprehensive settlement will be widely open.

Eleni Theocharous | European Conservatives and Reformists Group, Cyprus

A solution to the Cyprus issue cannot be based on the faits accomplis of the Turkish invasion (1974) and that can be considered as a 'red line' for us. As long as Turkey does not recognize the Republic of Cyprus, fulfills its obligations towards Cyprus by withdrawing its military troops and settlers, does not allow the return of the displaced to their homes, fulfils the Additional Protocol, respects the Exclusive Economic Zone of Cyprus, respects its own citizens, respects freedom of expression and freedom of the press and most importantly respecting human rights, then we cannot give our consent towards its EU accession.

Considering the aforementioned, one can realize that my personal view with regards to the ongoing negotiations on the Cyprus issue is that, 'No', we are not closer than ever to a solution. A fundamental principle, the recognition of the Republic of Cyprus, is neither respected by Turkey nor by the T/C leader. I have repeatedly stated that the proposed framework of a solution, based on a bi-zonal bi-communal federation will result in the dissolution of the Republic of Cyprus and the permanent partition of the island.

The bi-zonal bi-communal federation is not compatible with the implementation of human civil and civic rights of all Cypriots and the acquis communautaire. Such solution will therefore not be fair nor will it be

sustainable or viable whereas it will be a massive strike within the foundations of the EU itself. That was proven in the past, with the referendum concerning the Annan Plan in 2004. The momentum was supposed to be the best even then, but we have seen the proposed solution being rejected only a few days before Cyprus officially joined the EU. The example of the Dayton Peace Agreement also suggests that such con-federations are neither functional nor sustainable.

The people of Cyprus, both Greek and Turkish Cypriots have laid their hopes in the EU for the solution but the EU has so far let them down. I am not aiming at being pessimistic nor am I objecting any proposed solution. I am simply expecting a proper solution that will respect the rights of all Cypriots and that will ensure full implementation of the *acquis* on the entire island. That I will support by all means.

Prf. Dr. Ilias Kouskouvelis[1] | Professor of International Relations, Department of International and European Studies, University of Macedonia, Greece

"Why reunification won't happen! "

Perhaps there are many people from both sides of the dividing line that may want to see the reunification of the island. Perhaps, also, there are major powers that may think it is in their interest the illegal occupation to end… Yet, it is not going to happen!

The reason is that Turkey does not want to. Or, if Turkey wants, it is not in the way that the free Cypriots are going to accept or the European Union would want to accept…

Emre Iseri | Lecturer, Yasar University, Department of International Relations, Izmir, Turkey

Considering there has not been any concrete progress on security guarantees, rotating presidency, property, demography. I do see any prospect for lasting peace in the Island. Discovery of energy resources have only complicated the conflict further rather than serving as catalyst for positive change. Without the EU and the US's constructive mediation to push the Greek Cypriot (and Greece) to Annan Plan of 2004, I do not see any prospect for permanent peace on the island.

Dr. Michális S. Michael | Honorary Senior Research Fellow at La Trobe University and Director of the Centre for Dialogue – which is associated to Global Reconciliation. He is currently in Cyprus researching his forthcoming book, Cyprus and the Roadmap for Peace: A Critical Interrogation of the Conflict

The Cyprus conflict has many identities. The challenge confronting Cyprus ultimately lies in its capacity to transform itself into a postmodern society with a political arrangement that transcends its historical insecurities. Often a climate of uncertainty and ambivalence demands risk-taking. In this sense the EU offers itself as a surrogate for creative politics. As Cypriots need to overcome their past and create their

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[1] Webpage: www.kouskouvelis.gr

own history, there is the danger that continual rejections will prolong stalemate, and stalemate will ensconce partition.

If the Cyprus conflict is seen as driven by adversarial ethno-nationalism, both on the local and sub-regional levels, then imposing a political settlement from above without the necessary social renewal would simply add another divisive layer, heightening the intercommunal "trust" deficit and endangering any fragile peace settlement at its first major test.

Cypriot rapprochement and reconciliation, consistently advocates track-two diplomacy as a precondition to transforming the conflict. By emphasizing the social factor in the conflict equation, the constructivists aspired to transform the conflictual relationship between the two communities by shifting the identity-based parties themselves. For this transformation to have taken place, however, the contextual frameworks in which they operated and the conflict structures that were in place needed to be changed.

The issues in dispute pertain essentially to the terms of coexistence, the meaning of equality, access and equity (including wealth distribution and employment opportunities) and ways of redressing the legacy of past injustices (restorative justice). From a transformative perspective, any political settlement of the Cyprus conflict needs to meet two fundamental prerequisites: it has to satisfy all stakeholders by limiting further victimization, and thus to safeguard against future discord; and a successful settlement must incorporate mechanisms, incentives, and processes for intercommunal integration rather than entrench communalism.

Dr. Nicolas Jarraud | Associate Center for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development (SeeD)

"The long road to reconciliation, why the people of Cyprus hold the key"

With parliamentary elections looming in the Greek Cypriot Community, and the troubles facing the coalition in power in the Turkish Cypriot Community, analysts are asking the usual question: will changes at the political level jeopardise the ongoing peace negotiations? But this question is to a certain extent bypassing the real issue: are the people of Cyprus ready to live together again? In other words, is all that matters to obtain a "yes" in both communities in a putative referendum somewhere down the line, or is it more important to obtain a settlement which corresponds to a common vision of the people of Cyprus, a vision that they are willing to take ownership of into the foreseeable future?

This question, of course, cannot be answered by the international community supporting the peace process, nor can it be answered by discussion between a handful of negotiators behind closed doors, or in a referendum which puts the communities in front of a fait accompli. The only way to answer this question is to ask the people themselves: what are their hopes and fears relating to reunification? How deep is the momentum for reconciliation? Are people ready to build a common future together?

Fortunately, a tool exists which was designed specifically to take the pulse of public opinion and to judge the current levels of social cohesion, and the momentum for reconciliation. The Social Cohesion and Reconciliation index (SCORE), was developed by the Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic

Development (SeeD) on behalf of the UNDP- and USAID-funded peace-building programme in Cyprus, Action for Cooperation and Trust. It is not simply another poll, but rather an advanced statistical tool, drawing upon Structural Equation Modelling techniques, developed through a participatory approach where representatives of different social groups in both communities were actively involved in framing the actual questions of this ambitious survey, which for three years now has sought to examine the social trends underlying the peace process. Its fundamental premise is the inter-relationship of social cohesion and reconciliation, and the necessity to understand how a range of processes, including human security, social distance, trust, the representativeness of institutions, stereotypes, prejudice as well as demographic factors (age, gender, level of education, level of income) interact with each other to affect the chances of sustainable coexistence.

In Cyprus, the SCORE results have yielded potentially surprising results. For example, it was found that one of the key factors positively correlated with social cohesion in both communities was the perceived representativeness of institutions. If that is the case, and if as the SCORE shows, social cohesion and reconciliation are interrelated, then it follows that ownership by people in both communities of post-settlement institutions must be a priority, which can only be achieved through a participatory process such as the one experienced in post-apartheid South Africa or Rwanda. It may seem paradoxical that Turkish Cypriots who feel more represented by institutions tend to be less willing for a political compromise with the Greek Cypriots, however, this can be interpreted as meaning that they are comfortable with their "own" institutions and so feel no need to build shared institutions. But in both cases the conclusion is the same: if social cohesion is to be achieved at the island-wide level, rather than intra-communally, Cypriots must build common institutions that they feel represented by, to the same or greater extent as their mono-communal institutions. Also, younger people in both communities tend to feel more socially excluded, which in turn could affect their attitudes in a reunited island: for example, younger Greek Cypriots are more resistant to a political compromise with the other community than their older peers. Again in the Greek Cypriot community at least, there are also gender differences in terms of propensity for reconciliation, which once again points towards the need for a more inclusive peace process 2.

Beyond the SCORE, which is now being deployed to other post-conflict environments such as Bosnia and Hercegovina, Nepal and Ukraine, many studies show that the most sustainable peace processes are those which are the most participatory 3. Unless the participatory process is taken more seriously, the ongoing talks, like their predecessors, are, at worst, doomed to fail, or at best, to lead to a settlement which has lukewarm popular support, and which may lead to social discord and centrifugal tendencies within the newly reunified island.

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[2] For moreinformationabout the SCORE index and itsconclusions, see: UNDP, 2015. «Predicting Peace – The Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Index as a Tool for Conflict Transformation", Second Edition.
[3]For more on the need for a participatory process, see: Nicolas Jarraud , Christopher Louise &GiorgosFilippou (2013) The Cypriot Civil Society movement: a legitimate player in the peace process?, Journal of Peacebuilding & Development, 8:1, 45-59, DOI: 10.1080/15423166.2013.791536

Doga Ulas Eralp | Professorial Lecturer, School of the International Service, American University, Washington, DC

"A unified Cyrus: is it possible?"

This is the big question that has been bothering the decision makers on both sides of the Aegean for decades. Over the last fifty years third party initiatives to broker a negotiated agreement on the political future of the island have all failed. The island has also been a laboratory for several mid-level conflict resolution attempts. Thousands of people received trainings on how to better address their frustrations and talk about underlying interests and needs with a set goal of building trust. In international relations classes Cyprus is still being studied as a case study of an intractable ethno-political conflict. There are four main negotiation topics upon which a durable peace could be built: financing the re-integration of the island, joint management of natural resources, demilitarization and untangling the overlapping sovereignties.

Demilitarization
Demilitarization is still one of the more important topics in the negotiations. Competing interpretations of Turkish troop presence in the North more or less gradually blended into need for a compromise where a limited of Turkish military contingency will remain in the North to meet the need of the Turkish Cypriots for basic security in exchange for the return of the closed Varosha hotel district to the new republic. Another sticky issue is the future of the two British Royal Air Force bases. These bases proved to be quite instrumental in living up the challenges of the Syrian Civil War. The United Kingdom, as the former colonial power and one of the designated three guarantors in London and Zurich Agreements has paradoxically avoided stepping up its engagement in the peace process. Opening the future of the RAF bases to discussion might push London to take up the role of a catalyst for developing a joint framework for demilitarization of the island.

Overlapping Sovereignties
At the core of the Cyprus impasse are different interpretations of sovereignty by all sides. Turkish Cypriots' TRNC is 33 years old, only recognized by Ankara; is a claustrophobic place for young people. Greek Cypriots' exclusive use of the Republic of Cyprus worked in their favor, securing the full membership in the EU regardless of the no-vote in the 2004 reunification referendum. Turkish Cypriots are as frustrated as ever with their on-going exclusion from the EU trade regime despite promises made by Brussels in the aftermath of the yes vote in 2004. Turkey on the other hand, leveragesTurkish Cypriots disillusionment with the EU in its favor via pushing for a further economic integration with the North. The completion of the pipeline that brings much needed fresh drinking water to Cyprus signals Ankara's continued interest to remain the key player in the political future of the island.

Any peace building framework needs to take the sticky issues into account. There is a silent majority in the island of Cyprus who yearns for a united, prosperous and peaceful island. It is now up to the politicians to pay attention to the needs of their citizens and look for optimal solutions across these four issues that would help transform the negative relationships and win-lose mentality that dominated the minds of many for so long. It just needs a bit of courage.

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Reunited Cyprus: A Beacon of Hope?

Few years back, almost no expert would have cited any positive developments on the Cyprus problem; since the collapse of the peace process in 2004, the Cypriot stalemate has been deepening and different forms of partition options have entered the public debate. However, at the grassroots level, bicommunal peace activity has emerged as a critical actor in reuniting the island's civil society while the Cypriot electorate itself has questioned partition again and againby bringing to power prominent pro-unification figures.

In my latest book, I provide a template for policy-makers in Cyprus on how to manage future challenges in negotiating peace. The book, entitled *Designing Peace* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016) makes use of case studies from nations around the world to show how conflicts can be effectively managed to ensure inclusiveand functional power-sharing and human rights for vulnerable groups. I focus particularly on Cyprus throughout the book, showing how it could inspire similar conflict transformation elsewhere and provide an inspiring model for the entire Middle East.

Designing Peace identifies effective support mechanisms for victim groups which have been used in different ways across divided societies. It also highlights strategies to maintain grassroots support in negotiated settlements, particularly in peace referendums and emphasises three critical examples of institutional innovation of relevance to Cyprus and other divided societies.

- The d'Hondt process, a Northern Irish innovation on power-sharing through which membership in the cabinet is automatically determined by electoral strength. By avoiding uncertain post-election negotiations, this arrangement contributed to unprecedented political stability in Northern Ireland. Combine with earlier proposals for cross-voting, a broadly inclusive d'hondt would avoid lengthy deadlocks in forming future governments.

- The property, policing and electoral design provisions for the victims of ethnic cleansing in post-1995 Dayton Bosnia, empowering community mobilization for peaceful voluntary return. Balancing human rights with multi-ethnic federalism in Bosnia has helped maintain peace and stability in the country and the Balkans. *Designing Peace* in Cyprus presupposes that a bizonal federation would enhance not inhibit human rights for displaced persons through win-win arrangements for both communities.

- The early mandate referendum in South Africa which enabled De Klerk to preempt outbidding challenges in 1992 while concluding a peace agreement with Mandela. Early mandate referendums could safeguard a peace process from often unavoidable reversals in public opinion and prepare otherwise skeptical communities to endorse such peace settlements.Opposition parties in the Greek Cypriot community have demanded an earlier referendum as to the guiding principles of the settlement. *Designing Peace* provides the rationale and evidence for peacemakers in Cyprus to accept this challenge.

I further question the intractability/partition view in Cyprus by presenting several counter-intuitive stories

of peacemakers. I consider five levels of society: a municipality, showing how the mayors of divided capital Nicosia have dealt effectively with the city's most difficult environmental problems; a village, investigating how the Maronite residents of Kormakitis have regained their village despite the non-settlement; a movement, looking at how the Bu Memleket Bizim (this homeland is ours) movement mobilized Turkish Cypriots for peace in 2002–2004; a party, investigating how DISY risked its party unity by supporting the 2004 Annan Plan; and finally an institution, focusing on how the CMP became a successful bicommunal project on an issue that other divided societies have failed to resolve even after a peace settlement leading to a breakthrough in exhumations of the missing after 2003, described by Ban Ki-moon as a model of successful cooperation between Greek and Turkish Cypriots.

Countering conventional wisdom, I argue that societies in conflict can choose to reverse the most difficult aspects of their territorial division. Reversals of partition are not dependent only on (hostile) neighbors; rather, it is often a society's own choice.Active citizenship is the foundation of a democratic andplural society and Cyprus provides an insightful story of how civil society can play a critical role for peace. In the past few years, peace organizations in the island reframedhumanitarian and scholarly terms rather than speaking exclusively in Greek or Turkish Cypriot terms reaching out to new audiences particularly with regards to refugee, property and missing persons issues. Debating at the same wavelength with members of the other community (despite disagreement on issues) makes a highly convincing case for reunification. For those observers recently suggesting partition, the best response comes from joint bicommunal actions mushrooming across the island.

Admittedly, decades of failures of reaching peace in Cyprus and more broadly the absence of a prominent regional model for the island and its immediate region is problematic. In the Balkan and Middle East regions, federal arrangements have generally failed making the endorsement of subsequent settlements more difficult. Yet this gap could be addressed by identifying these less-known examples and promising lessons across the world. Being the only hopeful place in its troubled region, Cyprus could also inspire similar attempts elsewhere and provide an attractive and inspiring model for the entire region. At the symbolic level, a peace settlement for Cyprus could be as equally transformative for the eastern Mediterranean as the fall of the Berlin Wall was for Europe. A federal Cyprus would be the first example of an ethnically partitioned society to reunify, after four decades, and, importantly, with themutual consent of majorities in referendums in both communities.

Hasan Felek | President of the DEV-IS, Devrimci Isci Sendikalari Federasyonu, Hasan Felek

The solution of the Cyprus problem, the reunification of our country and our community still keeps its importance. The class struggle in Cyprus supports the principles of the negotiation process which will serve for the interest of the Cypriots, not for the interests of the external actors in the region.

 In addition to the meetings held by two leaders, the common activities and struggle of the workers are mainly concerned on the support for the solution of the Cyprus problem, but also this struggle has had the purpose of fighting against nationalism, chauvinism and against division of the island. Therefore, the left and democratic forces in both communities should not give any opportunity for the rise of racism, nationalism and fascism in Cyprus.

We call the leaders to work in a good will with the purpose of reunification of our country and for the people living in Cyprus, for a mutually acceptable, politically equal solution at the closest period of time, based on the previously agreed principles. As it is stated in the United Nations' decisions, we strongly support the solution of the Cyprus problem in a bizonal, bicommunal federation based on the political equality of two communities, with a single sovereignty, single citizenship and single international identity. We strongly support the reunification of Cyprus leading to a free, independent, demilitarised solution of the Cyprus problem that will be a common land for all Cypriots.

We do confirm our support the negotiations carried by Mr. Akıncı and Mr. Anastasiadis. Therefore, as DEV-İŞ, we also confirm that we will continue our support to establish an order in which the workers/emekçi (in Turkish) will leave in a free, fair and prosperous order.

The Turkey factor

Kati Piri | Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament - Rapporteur of the Progress Report on Turkey, Netherlands

The key to Turkey's relations with the EU lies mainly in Ankara. However, Turkey's constructive role in solving the Cyprus issue could of course also have a positive effect on the overall relations. Cyprus solution certainly has the potential to benefit Greece-Turkey relations if there's a clear willingness both in Athens and Ankara to support the reunification in Cyprus.

Costas Mavrides | Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, Cyprus

A constructive role by Turkey means its readiness to assume its responsibilities on the settlers issue, on guarantees and on withdrawing its army, on effective territorial readjustments, on financing, and on implementation of the settlement. Is Turkey ready for a settlement that is geared towards supporting the rights of Cyprus and Cypriots and not its own?

Eleni Theocharous | European Conservatives and Reformists Group, Cyprus

The fulfilment of the visa liberalisation roadmap was among the issues agreed between Turkey and the EU in order to end the irregular migration from Turkey to the EU. However, the decision of the European Council in its last Conclusions made it clear that the visa liberalisation Road Map has strict conditionality. Visa liberalisation can only take place once all agreed benchmarks are met and implemented in a non-discriminatory way, towards all Member States.

Non-discriminatory access to Turkey for citizens of all EU member states includes the Republic of Cyprus, which, as mentioned earlier, Ankara does not officially recognise. Turkey must meet its obligations towards Cyprus, stemming from the Additional Protocol. The citizens of Cyprus may only obtain the e-visa as nationals of the "Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus", which is not the correct denomination of the Republic of Cyprus as recognised by the UN.

Prf. Dr. Ilias Kouskouvelis | Professor of International Relations, Department of International and European Studies, University of Macedonia, Greece

If one sets aside Erdogan's domestic authoritarian behavior and its neo-ottoman ambitions abroad, Turkey is now stronger than in the past. It has a population of around 75 million and a military machine that keeps increasing its strength. At the same time, given the failure of its policy in Syria, the Kurdish uprising, and its frictions with Russia, Turkey feels threatened and hurt. This means that the context is not opportune for its government to withdraw its occupation forces from Cyprus. Because, no one should doubt that the key to any solution is precisely the withdrawal of the Turkish military from the island.

Besides, and assuming, for the sake of reasoning, that the domestic and international contexts were favorable, does Turkey want the reunification of the island?

The answer is no, for two reasons. The first is that Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots have shown interest for negotiations after the discovery of hydrocarbons in the Mediterranean by the Republic of Cyprus. And the second is the true thinking of the Turkish ruling elites. This is what Ahmet Davutoglu wrote in his book:

> "It is not possible for a country that neglects Cyprus to have a decisive say in the global and regional politics ... Even if there was not one Muslim Turk there, Turkey had to maintain a Cyprus issue. No country can stay indifferent toward such an island, located in the heart of its very own vital space ... Turkey needs to see the strategic advantage which it obtained ... in the 1970s, not as the component of a Cyprus defense policy, directed toward maintaining the status quo, but as one of the diplomatic main supports of an aggressive maritime strategy".[4]

If there is a major change in Turkish politics or a major change in the international power structure, then and only then may Turkey change attitude towards its citizens, towards Cyprus and the Europeans in general. Until then, Europeans should learn to deal with a state that is not as Europeanized as it wants to appear or some Europeans would have wished it to be.

The role of the EU

Kati Piri | Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament - Rapporteur of the Progress Report on Turkey, Netherlands

While the Cyprus issue is to be resolved under UN auspices, the EU is of course an important player. It is imperative that the EU supports the leaders of the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities in every possible way in their efforts to reunite the island. It is important that the EU stands ready to contribute financially in order to reach a viable and long-lasting settlement.

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[4] Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik. Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* (Istanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2001).

Costas Mavrides | Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, Cyprus

That's also why the European union has an essential role to play by ensuring on the one hand that Turkey will help constructively the negotiations process and on the other hand that the solution of the Cyprus problem is in line with the principles and values of the European Union and in accordance with the relevant UN resolutions in order to have a functional European member state the day after a settlement.

Eleni Theocharous | European Conservatives and Reformists Group, Cyprus

When Cyprus decided to join the EU, the reasons were not only economic but of course were related to the solution of our long standing problem. Ensuring that a possible solution would be based on the values and principles of the EU was and is our main objective.

Unfortunately, over the years we have seen Europe neglecting our objectives and what is more, supporting Turkey's EU progress when the latter continually disregards the UN resolutions on Cyprus, the founding values and principles of the EU, the international humanitarian law and the Republic of Cyprus itself, which Turkey does not even recognize as the official entity of the island.

Once Turkey fulfils all three Copenhagen criteria, establishing a democratic state and to that end fulfill its obligations towards Cyprus, then we would not object its EU accession. But as long as Turkey illegally occupies 37 per cent of Cyprus, an EU member state, then we simply cannot accept that and we cannot accept the opening of any negotiation chapters.

Unfortunately, the crises faced by Europe currently, especially migration and economic recession, have made things even more difficult. And of course these affect the EU's role in the Cyprus issue, especially now with the EU-Turkey agreement and the latter's role in dealing with the migration crisis.

I do hope that the EU and more precisely the European Commission will not 'turn the eye' and make any further concessions. The EU's obligation is to respect its own values and principles and not push for any sort of solution to the Cyprus issue just because Turkey is considered a valuable partner in terms of financial interests. Cypriots are only demanding what is considered a 'given' for all other Europeans.

Emre Iseri | Lecturer, Yasar University, Department of International Relations, Izmir, Turkey

There were several differences between the two prominent third parties, the EU and the UN, in their stance on Cyprus settlement. On the one hand, the UN under Kofi Annan took a relatively impartial stance toward the dispute and this approach bore fruit with the emergence of the Annan Plan. This plan foresaw a balanced win-win solution on the basis of the political equality of both sides of the conflict. The basic principles of each side were observed in the Plan.

The EU, which became the prominent third party with the opening of accession negotiations with the Republic of Cyprus, took a partial stance in favor of the Greek Cypriots. The EU could use its accession tool to enforce a balanced solution and contribute to peace on the island. For instance, the EU could punish the Greek Cypriots for hindering the Annan Peace Plan by suspending their accession. The EU did not consider any of these options and refrained from contributing to the peace process. Therefore, it could be argued that the EU assumed that integration of Cyprus with the EU would lead to a solution of the Cypriot dispute, by relying on neo-functionalist theories. However, the EU was wrong. This

approach of the EU led to the perpetuation of conflict on the island rather than putting an end to it on the basis of a win-win solution.

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"The EU's Challenge in Transforming the Cyprus Conflict"

Asymmetry, inequality, disparity, and inclusion/exclusion, continue to define and redefine inter- and intra-communal relations in Cyprus, often-underscoring class, gender, generational, and other social cleavages. The pervasive disposition of the status quo sits uncomfortably with Cyprus's historical order. In the interim, new trends have pegged Cyprus's particularism to regional and global transformations. Europeanization is but one manifestation of Cyprus's modernization as it teases out the boundaries of Western expansion and incongruous/contradictory convulsions of its own search/self-definition.

In this sense, for the EU the Cyprus conflict challenge is fundamentally philosophical. Whether or not Cyprus could unify and transcend physical, ideological, and historical barriers goes to the heart of the European project. Cyprus's accession to the European Union, and its conflict (and resolution), constitutes a pivotal test case for the European vision of "peace through unification." The Cyprus conflict throws up a series of challenges that threatens to compound rather than alleviate its "post-enlargement crisis." As an intrastate conflict, Cyprus is also a test case for the EU's peacemaking discourse and capacity to mitigate the causes and manifestations of conflict. Cyprus offers the EU the opportunity to trial its regional pattern/model in circumventing the internal/external divide when dealing with ethno-territorial contestations.

Within such a context, the Europeanization of the Cyprus conflict promises to transform the conflict itself not only by providing the political, economic, and security incentives necessary for coexistence, but also by offering itself as an alternative source of identity (euro-nationalism) to that of primordial (Greek and Turkish) ethno-nationalism. Europeanization is much more than simply a normative process by which the EU's instrumentalities provide governance frameworks for readjusting national public policy. Inspired by Jean Monnet's postwar vision of a transnational Europe, the expectation is that EU-ization of the Cyprus conflict will potentially impact on their national identities.

Ultimately, the EU's capacity to neutralize, or at least absorb, excessive ethno-nationalism, by presenting itself as a third identity source for conflicting groups, rests on its capacity to aid, and politically enhance, those elements who advocate a multicultural perspective of Cypriot national identity. This euro-nationalist perspective envisages an ideological intervention by which Europeanism interfaced with ethno-specific nationalism, enhancing those "shared" elements that, for historical reasons, had been prevented from steering the political culture toward civil nationalism. By integrating euro-nationalism with local nationalism, it is hoped that those ethnic, religious, and racial components negatively affecting trans-communal relations would be absorbed and eradicated.

The imposition, however, of a parallel—and rival—transnational identity raises a series of conceptual and normative difficulties. The premise that pan-Europeanism offers a strong, cohesive set of cultural ideas that would resonate with both communities and an alternative "shared" history is very much an untested premise. Such fluid identities could quite easily bring into the equation periphery versus metropolitan concentration of power, giving rise to separatism and sub-nationalism. Such an approach eventually brings into focus the broader question of deconstructing the nation-state by shifting and sharing its sovereignty. If Cyprus were to relinquish part of its sovereignty to Brussels, the EU might be able to impose measures, standards, norms, and values, and also act as an agent for the modernization and liberalization of the political, economic, and ethnic fabric that is Cyprus's divided society.

Whilst most interventions purport to create conditions that are conducive to the recommencement of settlement talks, as a "turning-point," EU-ization of the Cyprus conflict is premised on its capacity to alter the context and the scope of the conflict. EU activities have precipitated change in terms of processes, parties, issues, and history. In this respect, the challenge for the EU, and the UN, lies in their capacity to handle a process that strengthens peace-building measures through situational, procedural, institutional, structural, and cultural intervention. Attaining a sustainable peace within Cyprus requires reconciliation of competing values, interests, and needs: these can only be addressed in a consolidated democratic environment.

The economic impetus and the geostrategic energy chessboard

Kati Piri | Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament - Rapporteur of the Progress Report on Turkey, Netherlands

Many factors have played a role in building the current momentum. Economic factors have naturally played a role, as have the conflicts surrounding the region and the unsustainability of the status quo on the island. At this stage, the election of two constructive and pro-reunification leaders, who have a long history of working towards reconciliation, has been the driving force which put these factors in motion.

Doga Ulas Eralp | Professorial Lecturer, School of the International Service, American University, Washington, DC

Economic reintegration of the island
Reintegration of two economies continues to be the thorniest subject in the negotiations. Turkish Cypriot economy lacks resilience and is dependent on from Ankara's annual financial assistance to pay the salaries of the public employees, a sizeable portion of the working population in the North. Greek Cypriot economy suffered heavily from the lack of transparency in its public finances and banking system. The real economy in South Cyprus struggles to lift itself from a deep recession. The IMF-EU bailout package definitely prevented the Greek Cypriot finance from complete collapse in the short term; however the high ratio of corporate non-performing loans threatens a healthy recovery. Another significant uncertainty is the weakness of Greek economy and its negative impact on the future trading position of the Greek Cypriot market. Greek Cypriot economy, being the more advanced and globally integrated one will have to bear most of the burden of financial reintegration, expected to be around 40 bn USD. It is

highly doubtful that EU's pre-accession funds be made available to offset some of the cost or whether Ankara would be asked to pick up the tab. For these reasons alone, reintegration in the short-term sounds more like aw wishful thinking.

Joint Management of Natural Resources
The natural gas reserves were first discovered in the Mediterranean south of the island, Greek Cypriot government quickly declared exclusive economic zones. Tensions quickly built up when Turkey sent its own survey vessel along with naval ships to declare its own exclusive zones. Once the initial excitement settled parties started looking for ways to expand the pie. One suggestion was to have Turkish Cypriots share the drinking water supply they receive from Turkey with Greek Cypriots. In return Greek Cypriots would involve the Turkish Cypriots in the joint Egypt-Cypriot and Israeli initiative. Biggest hurdle in such an exchange would be the inclusion of bigger actors from the region into the quagmire that might complicate the energy extraction and distribution question.

Emre Iseri | Lecturer, Yasar University, Department of International Relations, Izmir, Turkey

"Despite the optimistic views that Aphrodite's gift will fuel peace on Cyprus, this will not likely to happen without transforming the present "cold peace" regional security environment into a "warm peace", but not the other way around"

Dark clouds have been gathered over the sunny island of Cyprus making predictions concern-ing the hot issue of natural reserves explorationand exports along with the ongoing Turkey'sproblems with both Israel and Greek Cypriot extremely difficult to make. The discovery of huge amounts of natural reservesin the "Aphrodite" block of the Cyprus EEZ may have caused many Cypriot officials to think thata bright future is ahead.

Cyprus Island, which has been divided between Greeks and Turks since 1974, is again in the spot-light due to a pristine rivalry over the natural gas reserves found nearby the Israeli waters, known as the Aphrodite field. To further complicate the island's already complex relations with Turkey, the Greek Cypriot's new partner in this gas endeavor is Israel. In this context, many analysts have warned about the deterioration of security in the region in light of these new discoveries and even some are anticipating "a coming Mediterranean energy war." Actually, this "new energy triangle" among Greece-Greek Cyprus-Israel is the tip of the iceberg—that is, a "soft-balancing" act against an emergent threat perceived from Turkey. To put it another way, their energy cooperation is built on an alliance that already exists, albeit unofficially, against Turkey. At a time of such a regional "rivalry," it is therefore unlikely to expect Aphrodite to lure the sides to reach a "warm peace" within the Eastern Mediterranean. Ankara's efforts towards balancing its security and energy interests will be detrimental to Aphrodite's prospects in revitalizing the Cyprus peace process, but not the other way around.

Conclusion - Who holds the key?

In 2016, Cyprus enters its 52nd year as a politically separated nation and its 42nd year as a physically divided country with a permanent solution to end these divisions still proving to be elusive. The small

island is the battlefield of contradictory interests from the different powers that surround it. The situation currently seems to have no say out with on the one side Turkey unwilling to release its control over the north third of the island, with a hands-off approach to the talks by Mr Erdogan and on the other side the European Union struggling to find a solution but facing the Turkish integration case. Turkey has many interests in keeping a strong influence on the north of the island.

It is essential that on this occasion the two sides in Cyprus should take full ownership of whatever is negotiated. Naturally there will have to be some outsiders involved in facilitating the negotiations and helping to nudge the parties towards compromise. But that external involvement needs, we believe, to be more discreet than in the past. While the European Union is at the heart of this whole nexus of Eastern Mediterranean problems, the simple fact that Cyprus and Greece are members while Turkey is not makes it sensibly more difficult for the EU to aspire to play a leading part in negotiating their solution.

On the other hand, some express the belief that, if the two sides do not want to live together or either side's goals are unattainable, then, instead of being forced into a new and unworkable 'marriage', they should agree a 'divorce' on friendly and pragmatic terms. A partitioned Cyprus, however, would be a constant source of conflict and anomaly. It would constitute a threat to peace and stability for the whole Mediterranean area. A frontier running between the Greek Cypriots and a Turkish occupied part of Cyprus would be volatile and fragile. A partitioned Cyprus would not serve the interests of the Cypriots, or of Greco-Turkish relations, while the continuation of the Greco-Turkish tension would be costly for Turkey's European orientation.

A partitioned Cyprus, moreover, would not serve the interests of the European Union, which would prefer to have a united Cyprus as a member. Such a united Cyprus could become a European outpost in the Eastern Mediterranean, serving the political and economic interests of the EU in the Middle East. In the event that reunification efforts do not succeed, the security of the Mediterranean region and greater US interests in the region may be negatively impacted. Tension between Turkey and Greece may escalate, creating problems within NATO. Cyprus would see a permanent Turkish military presence on the island, encouraging it to continue blocking Turkish accession to the EU.

The 'last chance' rhetoric is getting widespread across the EU and the parties involved. Are the political pundits right then to assert that this is the last chance to re-unite the island? So long as there is breath in the body of Turkey's EU accession aspirations, there will be some hope for a Cyprus settlement. The feeling in Cyprus is that it's now or never. If Anastasiades and Akıncı can't broker a 'remarriage', permanent 'divorce' might lie ahead. Turkey and the EU (through its membership offer) retain the key to allowing a political settlement in Cyprus. Even though this implies that Ankara should be given a clear prospect of EU membership if it manages to meet all the EU requirements? Mr Akinci protested last year that Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots should have a "relationship like brother and sister, not like a motherland and her child", a reminder that Turkey and not the Turkish Cypriots holds the key on the deal.

There is one last obstacle to the process of reunification: the Cypriots themselves. Because of the Parliamentary elections in the Republic of Cyprus on 22 May 2016, a slower pace has been noticed in the negotiations since February. For that reason, President Nicos Anastasiades, whose economic policy has caused some serious rifts in the electorate, has received critism and building a consensus will be difficult for him. Voter turnout was however only 67.37 per cent, indicating the highest-ever abstention rate

barring those of the European Parliament elections. Cyprus will have an eight-party House including the far-right ELAM party and two other small groups. For the first time, Cyprus will get a nationalist party in its parliament casting a worrying point on reunification talks, and subsequently, it will be very interesting to see if and how this new eight-party parliament will affect the negotiations.

The President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, stated that Europe more than ever, is in dire need of Cyprus fulfilling in the best possible way its destined role of a political and geographic bridge in the region. A peaceful and creative coexistence between Greek Cypriot Christians and Turkish Cypriot Muslims may also serve as a model beyond Cyprus. Cyprus, the birthplace of the Greek goddess Aphrodite, should seize the momentum to become a beacon of peaceful co-existence and cooperation between communities of different ethnic and religious origins.

The omens appear better than ever and Cyprus does indeed have a chance to bring an end to 42 years of division in 2016. Reunification requires Turkey's honest and constructive support and the consent of both communities, but as a British diplomat, David Hannay, once claimed, no one ever lost money betting against a Cyprus solution, making clear that there is still everything to play for.