



CYPRUS CONFLICT: CHANGES IN NATIONALISM AND MILITARISM AFTER THE OPENING OF GREEN LINE, AND POSSIBLE FUTURE SCENARIOS

Nazim Suleymanov

Cyprus is the third largest among the Mediterranean Sea's three thousand islands. Nicosia, the divided city, serves as the capital of both the Republic of Cyprus and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. The island and its coastline are not only essential to the tourist sector, which is a substantial source of revenue for the economy, but its geopolitical significance has drawn several empires' enormous attention over the centuries.



Demographics of Cyprus

Cyprus was divided since 1974 when Turkey invaded the northern part of the island to defend Turkish Cypriots in the aftermath of an Athens-backed military coup. Before the island's division, the most recent official census was conducted in the 1960s, and Greek Cypriots accounted for nearly four-fifths of the entire population. To comprehensively analyse the division of the island and the future settlements, we need to investigate Cyprus's demographics and the social and historical context of the Cyprus conflict.

Cyprus island has retained strong ties to the broader Hellenic world, for much of its history. It is generally assumed that the first Greek community on the island settled four thousand years ago during the Bronze age. In today's terminology, most Greek Cypriots cannot be characterized solely as Greek in terms of their ethnicity. The majority of Greek Cypriots on the island prefer to emphasise their Cypriot identity, according to Lindsay (2020)¹. The settlement of Turkish Cypriots on the island occurred relatively in recent centuries compared to the Greek community and accounted for a substantially lower number. Following the island's capture by the Ottomans in sixteen centuries, the first Turkish inhabitants of the community arrived on the island. Like their counterparts, nowadays, most Turkish Cypriots regard themselves as primarily Cypriots. The Maronites, Armenians, and Latins are Cyprus's three more constitutionally recognised ethnic and ethnoreligious groups. They were mainly uninterested in government and politics and focused on commerce. However, they all choose to be affiliated with the Greek Cypriot community.

¹ Ker-Lindsay, K. (2020). In *The Cyprus problem: What everyone need to know* (pp 3-5). Essay, Oxford University Press.



How and why the division of the island occurred

Cyprus was traditionally regarded as a vital strategic land because of its location at the far eastern end of the Mediterranean. It was ruled by the Persians, Egyptians, Romans, Byzantines, and Arabs in ancient times. The Ottoman Empire conquered Cyprus and ruled it for more than four centuries before it fell under British control. Despite differences in ethnicity, religion, language, culture, and communal customs, the Turks and Greeks of Cyprus lived in peace and harmony under Ottoman rule. When the island was under British control, the independence movement in the surrounding region did not go unnoticed in Cyprus. Greek Cypriots were more active, and they formed a militia called *EOKA* to end British rule and unify the island with Greece. The Turkish community opposed the island's unification with Greece by creating a *Taksim* countermovement. Although the *Taksim* movement initially supported the continuation of British rule, Turkish Cypriots later emphasized the importance of self-determination rights².

Turkish and Greek Cypriots concentrated their efforts on amassing large armies and spreading nationalist ideologies within their communities. Both sides rejected many peace proposals before the final Zurich-London agreement. On 16 August 1960, following the rapprochement of Greek Cypriot leader Makarios, both communities agreed to form the Republic of Cyprus, which divided the powers among the two communities. Between 1960 and 1974, Cyprus experienced a constitutional collapse as Turkish Cypriots were forced to withdraw from the government. Following Greece's coup d'état in 1967, nationalism and militarism ideologies resurfaced among Greek Cypriots. The EOKA leader Grivas started to bring Enosis's ideas to the political agenda, and a new dangerous conflict arose within the Greek Cypriot community.

² Diez, Thomas (2002). *The European Union and the Cyprus Conflict: Modern Conflict, Postmodern Union*. Manchester University Press. p. 83. ISBN 9780719060793.



Due to Makarios's insistence on maintaining the independence of Cyprus, the Greek military *junta* made several unsuccessful assassination attempts on him³. The considerable number of Greek Cypriots gathered by *EOKA* massacred Turkish Cypriots several times, including "Bloody Christmas," which prompted Turkey to seize control of the northern part of Cyprus as a guaranteed country under the Treaty of Guarantee to defend Turkish Cypriots⁴. The invasion of the island by Turkey caused a slew of events, including turmoil in Athens. The protests in Greece resulted in the overthrow of the military *junta*, which a civilian government later replaced on 23 July. The Northern Turkish Republic declared unilateral independence, which prompted numerous UN Security Council resolutions. The agreed cease-fire line, drawn with a green chinagraph pencil by British Joint Force Commander Peter Young, became a buffer zone known as the "Green Line" between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. Contentious negotiations between the two communities lasted until the Green Line opened in April 2003.

The evolution of nationalism and militarism in Cypriot communities

In post-conflict societies, the concept of nationality depends on borders, which are perceived as more sensitive due to recent changes. Prior to the opening of the Green Line, the number of interactions between Greek and Turkish Cypriots was limited due to strict regulations until the checkpoints were set up in 2003. However, Cyprus's EU accession and Turkey's EU candidacy broke the ice and accelerated the opening of borders to allow freedom of movement.

³ Fitchett, Joseph (4 August 1977). "Makarios: Cypriot Nationalism Incarnate". *The Washington Post*. Retrieved 14 March 2016.

⁴ Treaty of Guarantee, GB-GR-TR-CY, August 16 1960, NO 5475, 3-5



Greek Cypriot nationalism was theoretically based on borders, and their opening had weakened the nationalist militarist 'struggle' ideology. Greek militarist ideology had repeatedly utilized a woman's reproductive function to determine national survival policies. Even though these women were not formally participating in the conflict, the State exploited their femininity by portraying the mothers of the missing persons as emblems of post-1974 Cyprus. Even when the borders were opened, Cyprus continued to portray itself as a victim of 'occupation,' and this discourse persisted in Greek Cypriot society. Furthermore, Greek Cypriots avoided crossing the border during the first years after the opening of the Green Line because they perceived this crossing as accepting the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) as legitimate, which was unacceptable from their perspective. However, as the younger generation had been able to cross the border and communicate with Turkish Cypriots, there had been a noticeable reduction in fear of war. Despite this fear reduction toward the other side, opening the borders did not result in a peace agreement between the two Cypriot communities.

The crossing of Turkish Cypriots to the Republic of Cyprus had various motivations compared to Greek Cypriots traveling to the north. Due to embargos placed on TRNC, numerous Turkish Cypriots are obliged to cross the border daily for multiple reasons, such as work, education, or tourism. The crossing of many Turkish Cypriots to the southern border enabled Greek Cypriots a qualitative opportunity to engage with their "ethnically divided other." After 37 years of living across the border, the frightening and mysterious 'enemy' became a regular human being in Greek Cypriot culture since 2003.

Militarism refers to a government's or people's opinion that a state should maintain a strong military capability and use it forcefully to accomplish national goals⁵. The national survival policy had an

⁵ McKean, E. (2005). *The new Oxford American dictionary*. New York, N.Y: Oxford University Press.



unforgettable effect on Cypriot National Guards over the three decades. Moreover, restricted borders created the required 'distance' between ingroup and outgroup, which was requisite to defense principles. Following the opening of the border, the meaning of military service as a male defense obligation was challenged. The decline in motivation to serve and a considerable fraction of draft-dodgers in Greek Cypriot society showed declining trend⁶. The opening of the Green Line was unexpected, especially from the perspective of Turkish Cypriots, because the TRNC president of the time was a nationalist, Rauf Denktash, who believed that Greek Cypriots still aimed at Enosis. However, the ideology of militarism and defense lost its significance among Turkish Cypriots, while interactions between the two communities led to the humanization of the 'other.'

Possible future scenarios

In the case of a settlement, the UN will continue to play a crucial role. Other choices, such as NATO or the EU, have been presented as alternatives, but the Greek Cypriots are likely to oppose the first, and Turkey is likely to oppose the second. The existing condition may remain indefinitely and in the lack of any prospect of a resolution, the subject of whether the status quo is the best alternative repeatedly emerges. After opening the border, according to polls, neither Greek nor Turkish Cypriots favour federalism as a solution. The most desirable outcome for Greek Cypriots would be to establish a unified state in which Turkish Cypriots hold strong minority rights. The overwhelming Greek Cypriot group firmly holds political influence. Either a

⁶ Pflüger, T. (2008, October). Professional soldiers and the right to conscientious objection in the European Union. europa.eu. Retrieved April 21, 2022, from https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/dv/sede220109rightconscientiousobjection_/SEDE220109rightconscientiousobjection_en.pdf



confederation or a formalized division of the island would be the preferable alternative for Turkish Cypriots.

Are the *Enosis* and *Taksim* still regarded an option or desired by Greek and Turkish Cypriots?

Until the opening of the Green Line, the ideology of nationalism and militarism under *Enosis* and *Taksim* were the main barriers that delayed the peace talks. *Enosis* is not a favourable option for the Greek Cypriots under any settlement formula. After fifty years of independence, Greek Cypriots are content with the Republic of Cyprus. However, their approach to the creation of the independent republic of TRNC is still negative after opening the borders. The potential of annexation of the north by Turkey, on the other hand, cannot be dismissed so simply. Rather, it is a result of changing circumstances. When Erdoğan and his party, AKP, came to power in Turkey, they aimed to solve the Cyprus problem as soon as possible to accelerate the procedure of membership to the EU. On the contrary, from 2009-to 2017, there were apparent initiatives by the Turkish government to make Turkish Cypriots more loyal to their agenda and retain Cyprus as an important pillar of Turkey's geopolitical strategy⁷. As a consequence of this policy, Turkish Cypriots are becoming increasingly dependant in Turkey, and Turkey's influence in Northern Cyprus is growing. During the last election in 2020, approximately forty percent of voters chose two-state solution supporter right-wing nationalist Ersin Tatar from The National Unity Party, who is also a close ally of Erdoğan. Despite all bicomunal linkages and the opening of the Green Line, Turkish Cypriots' rapprochement to the Erdoğan administration has deepened the division in recent decades.

⁷ Moudouros, N. (2019). The AKP's "pious youth in Cyprus" Project and the Turkish Cypriot "deviations." *Journal of Muslims in Europe*.
<https://doi.org/10.1163/22117954-12341385>



Conclusion

Although Cyprus's geostrategic importance attracted the attention of several empires over the centuries, the Ottoman Empire managed to rule the island for four centuries. Therefore, the island became home to two primary ethnic communities: Greeks and Turk Cypriots. There had been no historical hostility between the two populations before twenty centuries, and the Cyprus conflict occurred due to increased nationalism and militarism within both communities. After nearly fifty years of attempts to reunify the two separated communities, opening the border was the first and last move that might be called a successful milestone on the road to unification. Cypriot nationalism has enormous influence on the younger generation regarding how they perceive their identity, while Greek and Turkish Cypriot nationalist movements reject this common Cypriot identity ideology⁸. Furthermore, after opening the Green Line and developing various business agreements, militarist *Enosis* and *Taksim* are not considered a desirable choice by the majority of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. Both communities reject potential federation or other solutions, and in the lack of any possibility of a settlement, the current status quo could endure eternally. While separation may appear to be a fair conclusion from some views, the Greek Cypriot community will continue to focus on reunification for the foreseeable future. On the side of the islands, Turk Cypriots will strive to demand their right to self-determination.

⁸ Aldrich, Alan (17 August 2018). "[Cypriotism in the Twenty-First Century](#)". [Bella Caledonia](#). Scotland. Archived from [the original](#) on 21 August 2018. Retrieved 21 August 2018.