

**Conflict in the Mediterranean:
An Analysis of the Turkish-Greek Cypriot Conflict**

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The conflict between Turkish and Greek Cypriots on Cyprus began shortly after the nation's independence from the British in 1960. The origins of the crisis pre-date independence. Although on the surface it simply seems to be between Turkish and Greek Cypriots, the conflict is actually a complex, international ethnic conflict that has not been solved, even after many, serious attempts involving third parties, such as the United Nations (UN) and European Union (EU). The challenge is that none of the involved parties are really willing to compromise.

With the entry of Cyprus into the European Union in 2004, Greece's membership in the EU, and Turkey's bid to join the EU in the last decade, this conflict has become internationalized. Many powerful international actors other than the EU are also involved, such as Russia, which has a strong interest in oil and military bases in Cyprus. These states' ties to the EU make conflict resolution important to economic policy, not only for Cyprus, but for Turkey, Greece, and the rest of the EU as well. With so many failed attempts at conflict resolution, there appears to be only a few good options left. One is EU intervention and sanctions on parties involved and the other is for the Cypriots themselves to come up with a solution. A Cypriot led solution may be the best option, however it will be difficult to achieve as long as the two groups remain unwilling to compromise.

This paper will explore the complexities of Cypriot identity, the origins of the conflict, the perspectives of the parties to the dispute, past approaches to resolution, primarily the Annan Plan, and future options, such as EU mediation and a Cypriot led conflict resolution plan. Particular attention will be given to the conflict after the 1974 Turkish military invasion and the role of the EU as a mediator. I will argue that with the

failure of other attempted solutions at conflict resolution, the EU may not be the best possible mediator despite the beliefs of many in the international community; a plan led by the Cypriots, without much international intervention will most likely be the best solution.

Background

Cyprus is a small island with a population of 1,162,458 (as of 2014), 77% being Greek, 18% being Turkish, and a small minority of other ethnic groups, such as Maronites and Armenians.¹ Cyprus' economy is based primarily on tourism and agriculture, while the Turkish Cypriot economy relies on funding from Turkey. Recently, oil has been an important part of the economy with foreign powers like Russia, who are very interested in the oil reserves off the coast of Northern Cyprus.² Geographically, it is closer to the Middle East than Europe, being farther from most EU member countries than potential member Turkey. Modern Cyprus has more ties to Europe due to its EU membership and its history under British administration, and then annexation after the Ottoman Empire's decision to enter World War I. While Turkey became independent, the island was still under British administration until 1960.

The island became independent in 1960; shortly after in 1963 the conflict between the Greeks and Turks violently began.³ Ten years later in 1974, with no sign of violence and conflict ceasing, Turkey responded to a Greek sponsored overthrow of the newly elected president of Cyprus by a military occupation of the north. This resulted in the

¹ The World Factbook: Cyprus." Central Intelligence Agency. Accessed February 24, 2015. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cy.html>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

north declaring itself the newly independent state of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), which only Turkey recognizes as an independent state. The TRNC created its own constitution after its formation due to Turkish Cypriot political elites disagreeing with aspects of the original constitution.⁴ Since 1974, the island has been divided between the Turkish north and Greek south by a fence that divides the capital, Nicosia. The buffer zone, which has a series of checkpoints that people must pass through to get from one side to the other, resulted in both Turkish and Greek Cypriots being internally displaced and the cultures to become less connected due to their lack of day-to-day contact, fueling nationalist sentiment. Due to the dividing wall, restrictions on movement, and the presence of the Turkish military and UN peace keepers there has been a lack of integration of the two ethnic groups. This may be a factor in the tensions between the two--as one group is not necessarily educated about the other. The presence of peacekeepers and the dividing wall are a “reminder that absence of conflict is hardly the same as real peace.”⁵

The conflict has not been as violent as many other ethnic conflicts around the world, but that does not mean the relationship between the Greek and Turkish Cypriots is very friendly. The Turkish population is limited to the north due to the fence and the Greek population in the north is small as many Greek Cypriots were forced out of their homes after the Turkish military invasion. The conflict is highly politicized due to the physical division between the two ethnic groups, international influence by Greece and

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ “Cyprus: Crossing the Dividing Line?” – Al Jazeera English. November 22, 2014. Accessed February 12, 2015.

Turkey, and a long history of conflict between the two ethnic groups in Cyprus since the island's independence.

The Cypriot Identity and Conflict

The Cypriot Identity differs depending on who you ask. In the northern part of the island most people may proclaim that they are Turkish Cypriots, which means they speak Turkish and identify more with Turkey than with the rest of the population on the island. In the southern portion, more people speak Greek and sympathize more with Greece. In a recent study however, it was found that Greek Cypriots tend to identify more with their Cypriot identity than Greek identity.⁶ A Greek Cypriot once stated for a study on Cypriot identity that "I am a Cypriot but I feel [like] a Greek too...Perhaps we 'feel' Greek because of the Turks."⁷ This particular study did not give information about how Turkish Cypriots prioritize identity, such as whether they feel more Cypriot, Turkish, or Turkish Cypriot, so it would be interesting to see that data as compared with the survey done with Greek Cypriots. This makes the conflict seem like it less over an overarching Greek versus Turkish identity conflict, but more an ethnic Cypriot dispute over territory. However, the conflict has become heavily politicized due to the Turkish versus Greek conflict and the two countries' strong influences in their respective parts of the country. Turkey and Greece have manifested their influence through support of political leadership in Cyprus and their cultural similarities with their respective ethnic group.

The Greek Cypriots are the largest ethnic group on the island and are believed to have come to the island during the Bronze Age almost four thousand years ago, when

⁶ Papadakis, Yiannis. *Divided Cyprus : Modernity, History, and an Island in Conflict*. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2006, 107.

⁷ Ibid,113.

Cyprus had strong relations with Hellenistic Greece (approximately 323 BC to 31 BC).⁸ In modern Cyprus it can be difficult to define Greek Cypriot identity due to the strong international influence of Greece.⁹ Some identify more as Greek than Cypriot, while some identify more with their Cypriot identity and view “themselves as clearly distinct from Greeks from Greece,” as the aforementioned study showed.¹⁰

The Turks are the smaller ethnic group on the island and are believed to be descendants from the Ottomans as well as Greeks who converted to Islam during the Ottoman conquest of the island in 1571. They also view themselves in divided ways like the Greeks--as either more Turkish or more Cypriot. When Turkish citizens began to arrive to settle in the north in 1974, Turkish Cypriot identity became much more complex. Until 2005, with the election of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey, the Turkish Cypriot leader had a base of support in Turkey, but that diminished with the new ruling party in Turkey’s pressure on the Turkish Cypriots to reach a solution.¹¹

As discussed in the previous descriptions of identity in Cyprus, identity has little to do with a connection to territory on the island, but rather one’s ethnic identity.¹² This makes the conflict between the two ethnic groups in Cyprus unique. Many ethno-nationalist conflicts are also based on territorial disputes. This means that the identity of a group is not only based on a shared culture, but on having pride in inhabiting a certain

⁸ Ker-Lindsay, James. *The Cyprus Problem: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, 3.

⁹ Ibid, 3.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid, 5-8.

¹² Papadikis, Yiannis. *Divided Cyprus : Modernity, History, and an Island in Conflict*, 101.

territory. The Cypriot conflict is more ethnic in that the two groups are mainly opposed to the other's culture rather than the fact that land was taken from them.¹³ This may relate to the fact that the two major ethnic groups on Cyprus have strong ties to cultures with their own states. That is, each group's nationalism and identity "are seen to precede the establishment of the state and citizenship to be organically tied to ethnicity."¹⁴ This has led to the conflict being more of a war between cultures than a dispute over territory and culture like the Israel-Palestine conflict.

After its independence in 1960, Cyprus emerged as a consociational state; there are several other states of this type in Europe such as Belgium and Switzerland. Consociationalists believe that it would be better if their state had a set of institutions that helped divide power between competing ethno-political groups, however they have learned from history that this is not always easy.¹⁵ When Cyprus became independent in 1960, it became a consociational state due to the fact that it has two different ethnic groups living on the island, which from the beginning of Cyprus' independence wanted the island to either be divided or unified. With a compromise created by Greece, Turkey, and Great Britain, the consociational Cyprus was born. However, this type of state did not survive very long on the divided island. Christalla Yakinthou, a professor of political science who specializes in conflict transformation, argues that this occurred for several reasons. First, the state failed due to the different desires of the two ethno-political groups, such as the Greeks wanting a unified state and the Turks wanting a partitioned

¹³ Ibid, 102

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Yakinthou, Christalla. *Political Settlements in Divided Societies: Consociationalism and Cyprus*. Basingstoke [England] ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, 10.

state. Second, there was an imbalance of power between the Turks and Greeks in the Cypriot government. The Greeks held more of the power and a consociationalist state needs a balance of power between the parties to create a climate for compromise to be able to occur. Finally, the international actors involved failed to offer incentives that would encourage both sides to cooperate primarily due to the fact that the main international actors involved, Turkey and Greece, have heavily politicized and polarized the two ethnic groups.¹⁶ All of these factors led to the first failure in conflict resolution about a year after Cyprus' independence and their first constitution was written and led to the strong ethno-political divisions in Cyprus today.

Nationalist movements generally evolve due to the real or perceived oppression of one group by another. "According to political psychologists, opponents in ethno-national conflicts tend to 'demonize' each other and attribute the causes of suffering or experiences of injustice exclusively to the other."¹⁷ In the Cypriot conflict, as the Turkish Cypriots believe they are being oppressed by the Greek Cypriots and that their differences are so large that they cannot cooperate as one state, many Turkish Cypriots demand a separate state. The Turkish Cypriots have not had as much power in the government as the Greek Cypriots. Until Cyprus gained EU membership Turkish Cypriots could not move very freely across the border to the Greek side.¹⁸

Ethnic identity is complex and it is often shaped by historical claims. Both the Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots have historical claims to the island as there are

¹⁶ Ibid, 52-69.

¹⁷ Hadjipavlou, Maria. "The Cyprus Conflict: Root Causes and Implications for Peacebuilding." *Journal of Peace Research*, no. 3 (2007): 350.

¹⁸ Kerr-Lindsay, James. *The Cyprus Problem: What Everyone Needs to Know*, 61.

ancient Byzantine and Greek sites as well as Ottoman sites. Both sides have used their heritage on the island to support their claims to the island. Additionally, both sides have left sites from the other uncared for in order to downplay the fact that the other also has a history of being on the island.¹⁹ This is a prime example of two ethno-nationalist groups ‘demonizing’ each other and placing blame for the conflict.

While oppression by the ‘other’ is a strong influence on the shaping of a national identity, education and the media also have strong impacts as they can portray information in a way that biases students and media consumers so that they perceive the ‘other’ differently. Sanem Sahin found that while newspapers in northern Cyprus did sometimes report the views of Greek Cypriot officials along side Turkish Cypriot officials, the views of Greek Cypriot minorities living in northern Cyprus were not always reflected in the newspapers creating a bias towards the opinion of Turkish Cypriots.²⁰ A media culture that influences public opinion of an opposition group can increase tensions as the opposition group may not believe that the other side is willing to compromise if they are portrayed as a powerful oppressor.

While outside players, such as Greece and Turkey, go through phases of being optimistic about conflict resolution, many Cypriots do not share that perspective. The country is not very ethnically integrated. Many Greek Cypriots were forced out of their homes in the north following the Turkish military invasion in 1974, resulting in the creation of a status quo in which Turkish Cypriots stay in the north and Greek Cypriots

¹⁹ Constantinou, Costas M. “Cyprus, Ethnic Conflict and Conflicted Heritage.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, no. 9 (2010): 1600-619.

²⁰ Sahin, Sanem. "Open Borders, Closed Minds: The Discursive Construction of National Identity in North Cyprus." *Media, Culture & Society*, no. 4 (2011): 587.

remain in the south. Pyla, a small village along the buffer zone between the Turkish and Greek sides is one of the few towns that has a mix of Turkish and Greek in their population. This is a rarity and although this town may seem like a positive development, the two cultures have been discouraged from mixing over the years. Cypriots have noticed that there are increasingly fewer mixed marriages and less bilingualism, than in the past.²¹ Education about other cultures, especially the ones living on their own small island is vital to decreasing the sense of the “other.” Turkish Cypriots are more likely to speak English as a second language than Greek, although there are a few towns left in the north where Greek is widely spoken, such as Pyla.²² The more different the Greeks seem to the Turks the easier it is to establish a nationalist identity that deems the “other” as the oppressor, and vice versa. Pyla represents what Cyprus could be, a country with a rich multicultural heritage: a country that is not divided by a wall, one in which its inhabitants coexist with their neighbors despite their differences, and are willing to learn and welcome those differences with open arms, instead of rejecting their neighbors and deeming them as antagonists.

Internationalization of the Conflict: Tensions Between Greece and Turkey

What makes this conflict unique from other ethno-nationalist conflicts is the international aspect. Since both the Turkish and Greek Cypriots have connections to major powers, Greece and Turkey, the conflict has elevated tensions between the two countries and has caused the EU and even Russia to have a strong interest in the conflict over economic policy and the oil off of Cyprus’ northern coast. Russia, in particular did

²¹ Perrier, Guillaume. "A Pyla, Village Turco-chypriote, Quarante Ans De Séparation Et Des Illusions Perdues." *LeMonde.fr*. July 22, 2014. Accessed February 11, 2015.

²² *Ibid.*

not give Cyprus a two billion dollar bailout to simply help relieve the stresses of its economic crisis; it did so with its own interests in mind. This signifies how the conflict has evolved from a domestic dispute to a race between powerful international actors to influence Cypriot politics and determine who can gain access to valuable economic resources first.

Turkey and Greece have long had a history of conflict, from claims to land after the fall of the Ottoman Empire to squabbling over things like who had Feta cheese first.²³ While their disputes may sometimes appear to be trivial, their disagreement has further polarized the two ethno-political groups in Cyprus. Cyprus is an integral component of both states' foreign policy due to their interests in having an influence in the region. Turkey believes it has a right to be in Cyprus mainly for self-defense to protect against a threat to the Turkish Cypriots as well as the Turkish state by Greece.²⁴ Similarly, Greece views Turkey's presence on the island as a threat.

Despite both Turkey and Greece viewing each other as a security threat, each state's government believes that the issue can and should be solved. It is ironic that the two states have urged each other to cooperate, but have failed to do so—and not just once, but repeatedly since 1974. In 2009, the Greek Prime Minister told then Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan “that he fully supported President Demetris Christofias' [Dhimitris Khristofias] efforts to find a solution to end the Cyprus conflict through direct

²³ Sapp, Meghan. “Feta Cheese Name Belongs to Greece, EU Court Adviser Rules.” *Wall Street Journal*. May 10, 2005. Accessed April 16, 2015.

²⁴ Melakopides, Costas. "Implications of the Accession of Cyprus to the European Union for Greek-Turkish and Euro-Turkish Relations." *Mediterranean Quarterly*, no. 1 (2006): 73.

talks” and he urged Erdogan to do the same with the Turkish Cypriot leaders.²⁵ Why then, with all the discussions about cooperation, have relations remained tense? In sum, it comes down to economic resources like oil and tourism and what the two countries believe is in their best interest, even if it might be in their best interest to cooperate. Turkey would like Northern Cyprus to become a part of Turkey to gain the economic resources, such as oil, available in that part of the country, while Greek Cypriots believe it is better for Cyprus to be unified and have EU laws apply to the entire country. Peace in the Mediterranean will mean better economic opportunities for Greece and Turkey and can be used as a model for peace in the Middle East.

Greece, already a member of the EU, with a plethora of economic troubles recently, has been urging Turkey to work with them to come up with a solution. Oddly enough, this will help Turkey’s chances at accession to the EU, which has had challenges within the last few years. Improved relations with Greece could aid in helping Turkey gain entrance to the EU, or at least speed up the process. Turkey’s political climate has been less than ideal for its candidacy for EU membership over the last few years with protests over government oppression widespread across the country since 2013 and especially since former Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s Vladimir Putin-like move to run for President to continue his less-than democratic reign over Turkey as Prime Minister. While the conflict in Ukraine has caused the EU to put pressure on Russia to allow the Ukraine to apply for EU membership, it is interesting that the same is not being done in the Cyprus case.²⁶ Although the Ukrainian conflict has been much

²⁵ "Greek Premier Calls for Cyprus Free of Foreign Troops, Walls, Divisions." *BBC Monitoring International Reports*, 10, 2009.

²⁶ "Intractable--or Insoluble? The Cyprus Problem." *The Economist*, no. 8915 (2014): 48.

more violent and Russia is a larger perceived threat than Turkey to the EU, Turkey's Islamic--and increasingly authoritarian--government has pushed past the limit on how a government should treat its people, decreasing its chances at EU membership and making compromise in Cyprus all the more difficult. With Turkey's chances at EU membership fading, it has less incentive to demonstrate democratic behavior by pushing for a solution to be reached. Moreover, the EU needs to maintain good relations with Turkey, as it is a key buffer state between EU countries and war-torn Syria.

In recent years, both Greek and Turkish government officials have stated that they have urged the other to cooperate. However, it is not that simple. Despite their open-mindedness to get along, issues continue to surface, such as the exploitation of oil off the coast of Cyprus. In reality, both sides find it difficult to give up something they want. Oil tends to be something countries are fighting over quite often, and Greece and Turkey are no exception. Whoever possess the oil seems to be the most powerful or, in Cyprus' case, the most fought over. Turkey has sent oil vessels to the coast of Cyprus to explore the reserves and Greece has been very critical of this. Greek government officials have said that if Turkey removes these vessels, peace talks could resume and be more productive; however the Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu has said that he believes talks could be productive and their exploration for oil could continue.²⁷ This is a prime example of one side refusing to give something up for the sake of reaching a viable compromise to end the Cyprus dispute. Neither side seems to be aware of the fact that conflict resolution does not occur without some compromise, but that even with

²⁷ "Gaz/Chypre: Ankara 'Sûr De Trouver Une Solution'" Le Figaro. December 5, 2014. Accessed February 12, 2015.

compromise, both parties can still achieve their political and economic goals in some fashion.

Recently, Russia has been a major player in aiding in Cyprus' debt crisis by loaning Cyprus around two billion dollars and is supporting efforts to resolve the conflict.²⁸ This act is not selfless. Russia has a huge interest, like Turkey, in the oil reserves off of Cyprus' coast. Russia is the largest oil producer in the world, and gaining access to Cyprus' oil will make it more of a superpower in Europe. If another country had access to Cyprus' oil, it would threaten their position. Russia views their generous loan as a way to navigate their way into being able to drill for oil off the coast because; the more money they lend Cyprus to ease economic difficulties, the more likely Cyprus will be to let Russia drill and prevent other states from drilling who have not aided them in the same way. Russia's interests in Cyprus are not only economic, Russia is also interested in using military bases in Cyprus, which would give it another warm water port. The two governments have even established the Cyprus-Russia Intergovernmental Committee for Economic Cooperation, which creates strong economic and political ties between the two countries.²⁹ This relationship is unique given the recent developments in the relationship between Russia and the EU and may have an adverse effect on conflict resolution depending on how the Russian-Cypriot relationship develops.

Previous Attempts at Conflict Resolution

²⁸ "Russia Extends Cypriot Loan by 2 Years, Cuts Interest: Troika Document." Reuters. May 6, 2013. Accessed March 25, 2015.

²⁹ "The Republic of Cyprus and the Russian Federation Signed a Number of Agreements and Memoranda of Understanding." Cyprus Ministry of Foreign Affairs. February 2, 2015. Accessed March 25, 2015.

The attempts at resolution over the course of the conflict in Cyprus have been as complicated as the conflict itself. No attempt has yet to succeed, and many Cypriots are uncertain that it will be solved in the near future. It is not however, for lack of trying. Both sides have worked relentlessly at trying to come to a solution, but the general issue is that no side is willing to compromise something for the other, as Greek Cypriots feel like Turkey is violating their sovereignty by occupying the northern half of the island. Both sides demand very different solutions and this makes compromise challenging. According to a poll, the Greek and Turkish Cypriots do agree that a federal resolution is not their best option.³⁰ However, the Greeks demand a unitary state, a state that is governed as one single unit by a central government, and the Turks demand a two-state solution, meaning that Greek Cyprus would be one state, and Turkish Cyprus would either unite with Turkey or be their own separate state, similar to what many believe is the solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict.³¹ Both sides do not feel like the other's choice solution will be positive for Cyprus' future. This section will focus primarily on the Annan Plan, once viewed as the most viable solution to the conflict, but like many other attempts, it was a failure.

Prior to the Annan Plan, according to Michàlis Micheal, deputy director of the Centre for Dialogue at La Throbe University who has done extensive research on the Cypriot conflict, the attempts at conflict resolution between 1974 and 1994 failed due to the "facilitating and impending influences [that] clearly favored the negative side of the

³⁰ Kanli, Yusuf. "Cypriot Unity in the EU: Why Not?" Hurriyet Daily News |. June 2, 2014. Accessed February 12, 2015

³¹ Ibid.

ledger.”³² This was due to the fact that during negotiations the parties felt that no resolution could occur unless all parts of the resolution were agreed upon and the “insecurity and mistrust felt by each side” made both the Greek and Turkish Cypriots reluctant to work with one another.³³ And finally, when conflict resolution talks were abandoned, tensions increased as well as nationalist sentiment.³⁴ In sum, negotiations during the twenty years following the Turkish military invasion often failed because of a lack of will to compromise on the part of either or both the Greek and Turkish Cypriots.

For a short time the Annan Plan, led by its namesake former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, seemed to be a viable option. Annan’s plan called for a new Cyprus that resembled a hybrid between a federation and confederation. The Greek and Turkish Cypriots would have shared sovereignty and equal representation in government with a ratio of 50:50 in the Senate and a representation based on population in the Chamber of Deputies and other federal institutions. Another key feature to the plan was that EU membership was to come after the conflict was resolved.³⁵ This new “bizonal, bicomunal federal republic” would be modeled on the Swiss state.³⁶ The plan, revised through several rounds of talks failed when “the Turkish Cypriot side protested the emerging EU decision to begin accession negotiations with the government in the south.”³⁷ This, in a sense, violated a principle term of the Annan Plan, which created

³² Michael, Michális S. "The Cyprus Peace Talks: A Critical Appraisal." *Journal of Peace Research*, no. 5 (2007): 589.

³³ *Ibid*, 589.

³⁴ *Ibid*.

³⁵ Sözen, Ahmet, and Kudret Özersay. "The Annan Plan: State Succession or Continuity." *Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 1 (2007): 125-41.

³⁶ Kerr-Lindsay, James. *The Cyprus Problem: What Everyone Needs to Know*, 64.

³⁷ Fisher, R. (2001). “Cyprus: The Failure of Mediation and the Escalation of an Identity-Based Conflict to an Adversarial Impasse.” *Journal of Peace Research*, (3), 317.

more distrust for the Greek Cypriots by the Turkish since the Greeks decided to go ahead with EU membership prior to the conflict being solved. This removed an important component of the negotiations and resulted in the TRNC entering into economic negotiations with Turkey.

While we will never know if the Annan Plan would have succeeded if the Greek Cypriot government had not entered into negotiations with the EU, it is likely that this plan would have worked as it incorporated many parts of what both sides desired in a solution. The Turkish Cypriots wanted more power in the government, and the Greek Cypriots would get a more a unified Cypriot state. Yakinthou argues that this failure was also in part due to the different goals the elites of both sides have. Yakinthou describes Cyprus as an “elite-driven society,” meaning that the opinion of the leadership on the Annan plan was important to the Cypriot people.³⁸ The Turkish Cypriot elite encouraged the public to support the Annan Plan, while the Greek Cypriot elite disliked the plan because they believed it was an “‘all-gain’ for the Turkish Cypriots and an ‘all-loss’ for the Greek Cypriots.”³⁹ It was considered a loss for the Greek Cypriots because it decreased their power and the Plan did not really give them a completely unified Cypriot state. A large division in support for the plan and the Greek Cypriots’ decision to enter the EU based on what they believed was best for Cypriot economy led to the failure of the Annan Plan, which may have been the most viable conflict resolution plan so far in Cyprus. The Greek Cypriots acted in a way that put their desires ahead of those of the

³⁸ Yakinthou, Christalla, *Political Settlements in Divided Societies: Consociationalism and Cyprus*, 118

³⁹ Ibid.

Turkish Cypriots, which led to more mistrust and a step backwards in the conflict resolution process.

Interestingly, while the Turkish Cypriots blamed the Greek Cypriots for the Annan Plan's failure, the EU and UN thought the Turkish Cypriots were to blame.⁴⁰ They reasoned that the Greek Cypriots, despite violating a term of the agreement with premature entry into the EU, had put the Plan up for referendum and the Turkish Cypriots had not. In the case of the Annan Plan failure, and most of the conflict, both sides should have been held responsible—the Turkish Cypriots for failing to have the public vote on a Plan that could have once and for all ended the conflict and the Greek Cypriots for rushing into the EU membership process.

With the failure of the Annan plan, what is next for Cyprus? Will the EU be able to solve this conflict or will the island remain divided for many years to come? These are not easy questions to answer and there probably is not any correct answer.

What's Next?: The EU and Conflict Resolution

Cyprus, despite only being a member of the EU since 2004 has had relations with the EU since 1973, a year prior to the Turkish military invasion. In 1973, an Association Agreement was signed that allowed Cyprus to trade with European Community countries. It also gave “a 70 per cent cut in tariffs of industrial products from Cyprus, with a few exceptions such as textile and clothing products, which instead enjoyed an immediate increase in quotas.”⁴¹ Additionally, there were other tariff cuts in exports of citrus and

⁴⁰ Anastasiou, H. *The broken olive branch : Nationalism, ethnic conflict, and the quest for peace in Cyprus*, 73.

⁴¹ Ker-Lindsay, J., Faustmann, Hubert, & Mullen, Fiona. (2011). *An island in Europe : The EU and the transformation of Cyprus*. London ; New York: I.B. Tauris, 66.

other products from Cyprus and Cyprus reduced tariffs on products from European Community countries. Cyprus then entered into a Customs Union in 1988 with the European Community, which covered forty-three agricultural goods.⁴² Cyprus then began accession discussions with the EU in 1998, leading to economic growth. However, recently a large recession hit the EU hard, particularly Greece, which strongly influenced the economic conditions in Cyprus due to their close relations, causing a recession in Cyprus as well.

The Greek Cypriots have attempted to use EU membership as leverage to make conflict resolution go in their favor. They hoped the EU would not prevent the Greek Cypriot government from further isolating the Turks and they hoped that they could somehow “bring Turkey closer to the European Union in such a way as to strengthen the Greek Cypriot’s hand in any future negotiations.”⁴³ This meant that the Greek Cypriots believed the EU would come up with a solution that favored them more than the Annan Plan had, since the EU has closer ties with the Greek Cypriots than the Turkish Cypriots.

With the failure of the Annan Plan, the EU is seen as the next possible mediator in the conflict, particularly through EU member countries, as it can push all sides to cooperate by threatening to discontinue discussions on Turkey’s potential EU membership. This could help to solve the conflict by placing economic pressures on Greece. The EU does not want an ethnic conflict within its borders since the founding ideology of the EU “sought to systematically dissociate the nationalist mentality from both the political

⁴² Ibid, 66.

⁴³ Ibid, 155.

culture of the nation-state and the interrelationships of nation-states.”⁴⁴ Turkey’s potential EU membership currently poses a threat to this ideology because of its tensions with Greece over Cyprus. The conflict in Cyprus itself is also a threat as it is putting ethnic identity above that of the integrated, European identity. Cyprus was admitted to the EU despite being a divided island. The EU only recognizes one Cyprus, not Turkish Cyprus or Greek Cyprus. However since the Turkish north is guarded by Turkish troops, the EU cannot apply its laws to that portion of the island; this creates additional political and economic isolation.⁴⁵ Simply ending Cyprus’ EU membership would not solve the problem. Both the Turks and the Greeks would still retaliate, and as has been proven in the years since Cyprus’ accession, both sides have. Member states were interested in solving the conflict before Cyprus’ entrance into the EU because they were reluctant to add an ethnic conflict into the union and they felt as if a resolution “would have strengthened the EU’s image as a community of peace and security.”⁴⁶ This is a key image to the EU as they promote peace, security, and a functional economic community that spans more than twenty countries.

As previously mentioned, the EU has not put the same pressures on Greece and Turkey over the Cyprus issue as it has on Russia and its conflict in the Ukraine. While the conflict in Ukraine has turned into a very violent, deadly confrontation with a weak cease-fire agreement, it seems strange that the EU would not take similar, possibly less

⁴⁴ Anastasiou, H. (2008). *The broken olive branch: Nationalism, ethnic conflict, and the quest for peace in Cyprus*, 4.

⁴⁵ Gordon, Philip H. “Two Countries and One Continent’s Future. (Turkey, Cyprus and the European Union)(Column).” *The New York Times*, 12, 2002.

⁴⁶ Tocci, Nathalie. *The EU and Conflict Resolution : Promoting Peace in the Backyard*. London ; New York: Routledge, 2007, 30.

harsh, position against Greece and Turkey. It has in fact told Turkey that it needs to become more democratic in order for it to fit in with EU ideology. However this is more like a warning than a punishment that will cause Turkey to enact change. Turkey is not the only party at fault here, so action would need to be taken against Greece as well. However, the main issue with imposing economic sanctions on Greece is that it is counter productive to what the EU is trying to do by bailing out Greece. Some other type of punishment may need to be used as economic sanctions will not only hurt Greece, but also the EU. The EU “never proposed a solution to the conflict, and only supported the UNSC resolutions and the Secretary General’s mediation efforts in Cyprus.”⁴⁷ However it has not been very open to the prospect of Cyprus becoming two states.

Only time will tell if the EU will have more or less success than previous attempts. Some involved in the conflict, such as Greece and the Greek Cypriots, believe that while the EU may have some success, real improvements cannot be made until the citizens of Cyprus themselves can reach a solution. Kofi Annan himself was adamant in recent peace talks that occurred in 2008 that “responsibility of finding a solution laid first and foremost with the Cypriots themselves.”⁴⁸ Theoretically, this may be the best solution. However, this solution means that both the Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots must be willing to compromise and that Greece and Turkey must decrease their influence so reaching a deal with compromise is possible. The leadership in both states have said that cooperation is critical, so if they followed through with their promises to compromise, resolving the conflict might be possible. This solution, seemingly simple,

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Michael, Michális S. “‘Cypriot-led, Cypriot-owned’: Cyprus Talks Revisited.” *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, no. 4 (2013): 531.

may not actually be feasible due to the aforementioned fact that the two sides lack the willingness to cooperate. It may be the best option as the two sides are more likely to achieve their goals by working together.

Conclusion

In 2009, UN Special Envoy to Cyprus, Alexander Downer summed up the conflict in Cyprus simply, “There isn’t an easy consensus on this island about how they should live together.” However he also said that while reaching a solution is a huge task, if the two sides “have that will and enough drive and enough statesmanship, then they will achieve it.”⁴⁹ In a sense, this is the root of the problem in the failure of past attempts at conflict resolution, both parties need to feel like the conflict can be solved and put in the effort to solve it. Downer’s statements accurately sum up the mistrust and unwillingness to compromise that has plagued the Cypriot conflict over the past few decades.

Tensions seem to fester between the Turkish and Greek Cypriots, although it is not impossible for the two ethnic groups to inhabit the same island and work side by side. This conflict, which may have escalated due to its ties with major actors in the Mediterranean region, appears on the surface impossible to resolve. Many major international powers are working diligently to come up with a solution despite many within the international community being fairly divided on whether or not this conflict will ever be solved and the dimensions of a feasible solution are just as foggy. The Turkish and Greek Cypriots are not the only groups that have to be pleased by the

⁴⁹ Henley, Paul. "UN Clears Path to Peace in Cyprus." BBC News. January 21, 2009. Accessed February 11, 2015. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7840712.stm>.

solution, with such heavy international involvement by Greece, Turkey, the EU, Russia, and Israel. However, after the lack of success that third party mediated resolution plans have had, the most feasible solution may be to have a solution primarily established by the Cypriots themselves, with a third party making sure discussions are done respectfully. A resolution without third party involvement will be difficult to come by as the international community has such a strong interest in Cyprus' economy. However, as evidence has shown from the past few decades, a Cypriot led resolution may not be reached easily as the two sides are very divided on what they think the future of Cyprus should be.

While Cyprus' EU membership was a "deal breaker" in the Annan Plan for the Turkish Cypriots, it does not mean it is not possible for the conflict to be solved.⁵⁰ It will probably now be a longer and complex process. It would be challenging for the EU to terminate Cyprus' membership, so the Turkish Cypriots must find a way to compromise with the Greeks without Cyprus leaving the EU. This may mean that the Greeks will have to allow the Turkish north to become a separate state or a part of Turkey. The end of this conflict, along with a better political environment in Turkey, may allow Turkey to enter the EU. EU membership of both countries would mean that Turkish and Greek Cypriots could have easier economic, social, and political relations through the third party EU. While this solution does have a third party involved, the EU probably should not propose the solution, as the most viable solution will be one proposed by the two conflicting parties themselves.

⁵⁰ Couturier, Kelly. "Talks on Cyprus Reunification Collapse." *The Washington Post*, 05, 1998.

Although it may not seem feasible for the two sides to come to a compromise it may be in the best interest of the involved parties to solve it. For Cyprus, it could mean a better relationship with EU members and Turkey. Turkey's push for a peaceful resolution could mean a better relationship with the EU and a path to membership. For Greece it could mean better relations with Turkey which, although more beneficial for Turkey, can lead to it having a better image in the EU. Also for Cyprus and Turkey, it means being a symbol of stability and good relations with Europe in the Middle East during a time that needs a view of what Middle Eastern and Mediterranean countries can achieve. All parties involved may agree that conflict resolution is in everybody's best interest, but there is still a strong sense mistrust between the two parties and that cannot be solved easily. EU parliament president Joseph Borell said that this issue of mistrust cannot be solved quickly, but only through "dialogue and a show of goodwill."⁵¹ There has been plenty of dialogue when it comes to solving the conflict, however if it continues to be loaded with mistrust, a solution will not be reached as has been shown in the past. It is primarily up to the Cypriots, and not the international actors interested in the conflict, to remove this mistrust from their dialogue. It is equally important for Turkey and Greece to do the same by encouraging their respective ethnic groups to trust one another. The politicization of the conflict by Turkey and Greece has led to the increased tensions, mistrust, and lack of compromise, if Turkey and Greece become less involved in the conflict and leave it up to Cypriots to solve, there may be a better chance at reaching a solution.

⁵¹ Anastasiou, *The broken olive branch : Nationalism, ethnic conflict, and the quest for peace in Cyprus*, 216.

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