

**THE EU'S IMPACT ON THE CYPRUS CONFLICT:  
CATALYST FOR REUNIFICATION OR FOR PARTITION OF THE ISLAND?**

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The Cyprus conflict is an old and complex problem with several dimensions. It has essentially developed on three main levels: the local level of the two communities or ethnic groups, the regional level with the involvement of Turkey and Greece and the international level with the involvement of several actors; the United Kingdom, the United States (US), the Soviet Union, the United Nations (UN), NATO, and finally the European Union (EU). It should be also noted that following 1974 Turkey's strong military presence has turned it into a disproportionately strong party to the conflict.

This ethno-political conflict may be reconstructed looking at five main phases: (1) the politicization of the ethnic question (2) the outbreak of hostilities between the two groups (3) the internationalization of the conflict (4) the Europeanization of the conflict and (5) the last developments after EU accession. The politicization of the ethnic question in the Republic of Cyprus started already in 1960 with its Constitution which institutionalized communal dualism in all spheres of government, rather than promoting integration of the two ethnic groups. The first outbreak of violence took place in December 1963 after President Makarios' proposal of 13 points to revise the Constitution. There were other outbreaks of violence in August 1964, November 1967, and then in 1974 when the Greek coup to overthrow Makarios led Turkey to intervene militarily and occupy 37% of the territory of the island. The internationalization of the conflict after 1960 started with the first outbreak of violence, when Turkish and Greek troops stationed in Cyprus (according to the Treaty of Alliance) joined respectively Turkish and Greek Cypriots in the fighting. The US intervened, for the first time, in order to avoid a conflict between Turkey and Greece that would have weakened the south eastern flank of NATO, and then, in March 1964 the UN Force in Cyprus was deployed (and is still present today). The Europeanization of the conflict began in 1993

when the EU recognized Cyprus as an accession candidate country and had, therefore, the possibility to condition accession to the settlement of the conflict. This phase ended in May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2004, when, after the rejection of the Annan Plan by the Greek Cypriots, the whole island became a member of the EU, even if the *acquis* is applied only in the government controlled part. The last phase has been characterized by two main developments. On the EU side, for the first time, something has been done for the Turkish Cypriot community (a trade regulation has been proposed and a financial aid regulation has been adopted). On the domestic side, in September 2008, after four years of stalemate, direct negotiations between President Christofias and the Turkish Cypriot leader Talat started again.

What has been – in the period 1993-2004 – the EU's impact on the Cyprus conflict, and will the EU be able – after 2004 – to act as catalyst for reunification of the island? It can be argued that in the period 1993-2004 the EU did not prove to be a catalyst for reunification for several reasons, two of which are: First there was no real conditionality on the Greek Cypriot side, and this may partly explain the strong rejection of the Annan Plan. However, several Greek Cypriots suggest that even if there was conditionality there would still be a no vote; furthermore, they argue that the EU could not have put this conditionality because essentially this would have effectively given veto power to Turkey and also punished the Greek Cypriots for the Turkish occupation! Secondly, and most significantly, the EU was not actively involved in the substance of the plan that should have reunified the island, because of Turkey's opposition that did not perceive it as a neutral party.

However, the EU can still learn from its past mistakes and become a catalyst for reunification of the island. First of all, it should make an accurate use of its conditionality on Turkey, as most Greek Cypriots are in favor of a solution different from partition. This means that the EU has to give Turkey a concrete perspective of membership, but at the same time it has to condition this 'carrot' to the reunification of the island. Second, the EU should be present during the direct negotiations, together with the UN envoy, to help the parties

identify a comprehensive solution, and not be present only once the leaders have agreed such solution 'to accommodate the terms of the settlement in line with the fundamental principles on which the EU is founded', as stated by the European Commissioner Olli Rehn during his recent visit to the island.