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OVERVIEW

Cypriots often joke with peculiar pleasure that their conflict is the most intractable in the world. It is a conflict whose recent past is littered with failed negotiations and rejected reunification plans. Negotiations to overcome differences between the political desires of the majority Greek Cypriot and minority Turkish Cypriot communities have been continuing in fits and starts for half a century. Although the UN-sponsored comprehensive plan to unite the island under a federal umbrella (the "Annan Plan") saw defeat in the 2004 referendum, it is important to note that taking the plan as far as a referendum was largely due to a new usage of regional and transnational linkage politics, meant to overcome the deadlock that had kept Cypriot leaders coming back to the negotiating table for the previous two decades.

At the time, prospective EU membership played an important role in enlisting the support of both Cypriot leaders and guarantor states Greece and Turkey. EU membership prospects for the Turkish Cypriots and the EU's active involvement in Cyprus (the "Europeanization" of the Cyprus issue) was seen locally as a powerful incentive. Another main link in this chain was Turkey's desire to enter the EU, and the EU's offer of candidacy to Turkey had a significant impact on its policy on Cyprus. The linkage politics that developed around Turkey's EU candidacy led to both Greek and Turkish pressure on Cypriot leaders to negotiate the UN plan intensively.

With the failure of the plan and the subsequent deflation of the EU prospect, a period of uncertainty followed, characterized first by a stalling of the negotiations and later by a restarting of them from the beginning, in an effort to pursue a Cyprus-owned, Cyprus-led process, free from external interference, agendas, and timelines. Negotiations proceeded in fits and starts, with neither side fully committed, until the spring of 2015, when the current round of negotiations started, following the election of Mustafa Akıncı to the Turkish Cypriot leadership. Throughout this period, lack of trust, disillusionment, and frustration did not allow the two communities to establish cooperative relations capitalizing on confidence-building measures based on the opening of checkpoints and the Green Line Regulation.¹

Currently, negotiations for the achievement of a comprehensive solution to the Cyprus issue are intensively pursued by the two sides with the facilitation of the United Nations. It is everyone's hope that the negotiations will be successful, leading to a permanent solution of the Cyprus problem and a re-unification of the island after decades of division. Regardless of the outcome, however, Greek and Turkish Cypriots will continue to live in Cyprus. Therefore, it is important that cooperation between the two communities deepens and expands. Increased interaction between the Greek and Turkish Cypriots will bridge the gap between them. If a comprehensive solution is eventually achieved, this will ease and expedite its implementation. In the unfortunate event of a non-solution, this will allow the two communities to enjoy a more peaceful and prosperous coexistence.

The Need for Realism:

Solving the Cyprus problem through linkage politics

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This paper assesses the prospects and challenges of linkage politics in the current round of negotiations, including the lack of strong "carrots and sticks" that existed while the Annan Plan was being finalized in 2004. The opportunities are then discussed for de-linkages in the context of the EU, whose position and leverage has been compromised, and an alternative understanding of linkage politics is proposed that would lay the groundwork for a united island, but also provide a basis for continued cooperation if the comprehensive process fails.

BACKGROUND OF THE CYPRUS CONFLICT

While the physical division of Cyprus began in the latter half of the twentieth century, Cypriot communities had aspired to different futures from the beginning of that century. In 1878, the island came under British administration after three centuries of Ottoman rule. Nationalist leaders in the Kingdom of Greece saw Cyprus as a historical part of Greek territory, and many educated Greek-speaking, Orthodox Cypriots, including most members of the clergy, began in the late nineteenth century to request that Britain cede the island to Greece. In response, Turkish-speaking, Muslim Cypriots,

a minority on the island, expected that in the event of a British withdrawal Cyprus would be returned to Ottoman rule.

The pull between the two "motherlands" continued over several decades, as Greece and the Ottoman Empire went to war over Crete, and as Greece later invaded the collapsing empire after World War I. That war resulted in Greece's defeat, the creation of the Republic of Turkey, and new Turkish identities for Cypriot Muslims. On the island, the pull between the "motherlands" manifest itself through divided educational systems that imported textbooks and teachers from Greece and Turkey, and in distinct political divisions between the majority of Cypriots (75%) who called themselves Greek and agitated for enosis, or union of the island with Greece, and the minority community (20%) that considered itself Turkish and resisted the idea of union.2 Although there were small groups that saw themselves as communist or socialist and resisted these options, they did not gain significant support within their own communities.

After the Second World War, in 1955, Greek Cypriots began an armed struggle aimed at *enosis*, to be countered two years later by the formation of a Turkish Cypriot guerrilla organization that wanted

taksim (or division) of the island and unification of its two parts with their respective "motherlands." Even in the 1950s, it was foreseen that such a division would result in displacement and exchange of populations. Incidents of violence in 1956 led the British to divide the island's capital Nicosia roughly along the already existing line separating the Turkish and Greek neighborhoods (the "Mason-Dixon line"). Violence escalated in 1958, when incidents throughout the island resulted in the displacement of approximately 1,900 Greek Cypriots and 2,700 Turkish Cypriots.

Greek and Turkish diplomatic efforts, supported by Britain, led in 1959 to the Zurich and London Agreements that put an end to the violence but did not satisfy the aspirations of either community on the island. Those agreements established a consociational republic, with a Greek Cypriot president and Turkish Cypriot vice-president, the latter having veto powers.4 In addition, those agreements established a 30% quota for Turkish Cypriots in the civil service. The United Kingdom, Greece, and Turkey became guarantors of the new Republic of Cyprus, an entity whose constitution was particularly disagreeable to the Greek Cypriot majority, given its provisions for the Turkish Cypriots. Although the Republic of Cyprus came into being in 1960, the armed groups that had fought in the 1950's were not entirely disarmed and instead hid their weapons, anticipating another period of intercommunal violence.

That period began in 1963, when President Makarios, Archbishop of the Greek Orthodox Church in Cyprus, proposed a series of amendments to the constitution that would supposedly have increased its functionality. Turkish Cypriots protested, tensions increased, and a new period of intercommunal violence began, in which almost 90% of the

Turkish Cypriot community withdrew into militarized enclaves.⁵ During this period, nearly 30,000 Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots, and Armenians were displaced. Most Turkish Cypriots who fled would not see their homes for more than a decade. In addition, until 1968 the Turkish Cypriots were under siege in the enclaves, which were effectively sealed. During this period, the Republic of Cyprus became a de facto Greek Cypriot state. On March 4, 1964, United Nations Security Council Resolution 186 enabled peacekeeping troops to work on the island, but in effect also recognized the Greek Cypriot government as the legitimate leadership of the island, despite the disenfranchisement of its Turkish Cypriot partners.

A group of disgruntled Greek Cypriot fighters who had struggled against the British to unite the island with Greece had never accepted the idea of an independent republic. By the early 1970's, they formed a second paramilitary organization with support from the junta government in Greece. In July 1974, this paramilitary organization attempted a coup d'état against President Makarios, whom they accused of having betrayed the cause of union. Within a few days, Turkey, as a security guarantor of the Republic of Cyprus, militarily intervened and soon toppled the coup government. In addition, however, Turkey divided the island under the pretext of protecting the Turkish Cypriot community.

During Turkey's invasion, more than 150,000 Greek Cypriots fled their homes in northern Cyprus for the safety of the south, beyond the line of demarcation. Turkish Cypriots also fled to the north, though their movement was curtailed by a Greek Cypriot government that wished to retain Turkish Cypriots in the south to prevent the island's division. Around 55,000 Turkish Cypriots

made their way to the north over the course of the following year as most remaining Greek Cypriots in the north were evicted to or moved to the south. The Turkish Cypriot administration began distributing empty Greek Cypriot homes and properties to Turkish Cypriot displaced persons (and later also to mainland Turks settling on the island), and Turkish Cypriots began building their own state in the island's north. In contrast, the Republic of Cyprus was reluctant to provide permanent housing for displaced Greek Cypriots, as politically this would have signaled that the division was not a temporary one. Over the course of the next decades, Turkish Cypriot state-building continued, even as Greek Cypriots insisted on the transience of the division and called for the withdrawal of Turkish troops. In 1983, Turkish Cypriots unilaterally declared the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, an entity that remains recognized as a state only by Turkey.

Today, the internationally recognized Republic of Cyprus (RoC) is a state de facto run by the Greek Cypriots, while the island's north has developed separately, with heavy reliance on Turkish aid and the Turkish military. Although since 1979 both communities' leaders have agreed in principle that the island should be reunited under a federal system, negotiations to achieve that reunification have so far been unsuccessful.6 In 2004, a United Nations-backed reunification plan, the "Annan plan", was put to referendum but defeated by 76% of Greek Cypriot voters. Turkish Cypriots supported the plan by 65%. One week after that referendum, the Republic of Cyprus became a new European Union member state. Because the UN recognizes the Republic of Cyprus as the sovereign government for the entire island, technically the island as a whole is now part of EU territory, even though the EU's body of law is suspended

in the north. Turkish Cypriots, as citizens of the RoC, hold EU passports, but they cannot enjoy the advantages of EU citizenship in their own homes. The EU now formally considers the island's north to be "the areas not under the effective control of the Government of Cyprus".

Current negotiations continue with the aim of creating a bizonal, bicommunal federation, though in the past Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders and publics have tended to interpret the meaning of this bizonality and bicommunality quite differently. In addition, negotiations continue to snag on issues of power-sharing and now on the issue of property, as many people have lived for more than four decades in property that legally is owned by others.

In addition, the two sides have developed economies that are independent of each other, with the island's north using the Turkish lira as currency and being heavily dependent on Turkish trade, tourism, and aid. The RoC, on the other hand, was until 2013 one of the wealthiest countries in Europe, measured in terms of per capita income.¹¹ In 2013 it was heavily hit by a banking crisis that was tied to Greece's financial collapse. Although this did not affect the north, Turkish Cypriots have since been affected by political developments in Turkey and the fall of the Turkish lira. The economy of the north heavily relies on universities with Turkish and other foreign students; casinos and tourism; and agriculture. The economy of the RoC had been based on tourism and the financial and banking sectors, though the latter has more or less been eliminated by the banking collapse. Although hydrocarbon finds off the Cyprus coast initially generated high expectations, these have been dimmed by subsequent drilling, which has, for the time being, confirmed less than initially anticipated quantities.12

THE CURRENT STATE OF THE NEGOTIATIONS

Since the beginning of 2016, negotiations between the two leaders and their negotiators went through a challenging period, even stalling for a time, but have recently resumed in a more intensified mode. Difficulties were partly due to extraneous factors and partly due to internal negotiation dynamics. On the first point, the election climate in the Republic of Cyprus leading up to the May 2016 elections may be cited as an important factor. This coincided with a governmental crisis in the north. On the second point, a key difficulty is understood to be entrenched disagreements on the substance of some of the more problematic areas, especially property and governance, where previous negotiations have also stalled.

Unfortunately, what should have been predictable, based on previous experience, in this case appeared to come as a surprise to the international community, if not to Cypriots themselves. One of the main reasons for this may be attributed to the extraordinarily hopeful atmosphere created by the May 2015 election of Mustafa Akıncı as leader of the Turkish Cypriot community. Akıncı, considered politically on the progressive side, was well known in the Greek Cypriot community before taking up office, and thus his election produced a euphoria regarding the possibility of a solution.¹³ That euphoria was especially prevalent among Greek Cypriots and the international community. However, as negotiations have deepened, what has become clear is that the inability of previous leaders to resolve certain fundamental issues is not only due to the political positions or personalities of the negotiators but also-and perhaps more importantly-to disagreements between the two sides on the meaning and potential resolution of certain

fundamental issues such as security, territory, and property. On security, Turkish Cypriots' desires for a Turkish guarantee have heretofore conflicted with Greek Cypriot insistence on abolishing guarantees, especially ones that involve Turkey. Discussions of territory have stumbled over which territories the Turkish Cypriot constituent state would cede to a Greek Cypriot constituent state. And the property issue, intrinsically connected to territory, has historically gotten hung up on Greek Cypriot insistence on maximum return and restitution, countered by Turkish Cypriot insistence on maximizing compensation and exchange.

In addition to this, the parliamentary elections in the RoC slowed the pace of negotiations, as President Nicos Anastasiades was waiting for the election results. In general, with the exception of the two (main) political parties, all others have objections to what they perceive as too many concessions made by Anastasiades in the negotiations.14 Even though the actual status of the current negotiation discussions is not publicly known, the rhetoric on this front holds that friendly gestures towards the Turkish-Cypriot leader are misguided, because they appear to absolve Turkey of its responsibilities. According to these arguments, Akıncı is not a significant force within the political dynamics of the Cyprus conflict, because it is ultimately Turkey that makes the decisions. On the whole, this rhetoric has seemed vacuous and largely unconvincing, because it puts more emphasis on well-known themes and less on current problems. By comparison, the main opposition party, AKEL, is in broad agreement with Anastasiades' handling of the negotiations.

The post-electoral terrain in the RoC further perplexes the negotiating process and the prospects for a solution. The two main political parties, which are also the ones in favor of a solution, cumulatively lost 13% of their previous electoral strength. At the same time, three new political parties entered the parliament-including, for the first time, the far right—all of which are rejectionist. This means that 43% of the parliament (including Solidarity Movement, the party of the Parliament's President) is against a solution in the form that this is officially negotiated, as a bizonal, bicommunal federation. Further to the parliamentary reality, the President is expected to face additional challenges within the context of the National Council. The Council, comprising heads of political parties and former Presidents of the Republic and being responsible for the Cyprus issue, has traditionally been a rather conservative and hardline body.¹⁵ The new electoral outcome is expected to render it even more so.

In the meantime, the coalition government in the island's north collapsed in early April 2016 with the withdrawal of the minority National Unity Party (UBP), following the government's inability to negotiate a new aid package with Turkey. In the north's parliamentary system, the president represents the state but not the government and thus is a figurehead primarily in charge of negotiations. As a result, the newly formed coalition of two right-wing parties should not directly affect the negotiations. However, the change of government involved a change of persons that do not share the same vision with the Leader of the Turkish Cypriot community and that could introduce a number of obstacles, both throughout the negotiating process but also as regards the implementation of what shall be agreed.

Another factor that has impacted the process, i.e. the substance of negotiations per se, is that the good will of the leaders is not always seen to be mirrored in the process and in producing tangible results there. The form of settlement negotiated between the parties is a comprehensive solution. This means that nothing is agreed unless everything is agreed. This accounts mostly for the difficulty to reach a solution. It means that progress in one area is not able to be immediately implemented, positively paving the way towards convergences in other areas. It also means that disagreements in any one area undermine the ability of the parties to capitalize on attainments by putting them to practice right away. Thus, while appearing at first sight as an enabling process, i.e. allowing parties to renegotiate parts of their agreement, it is also one where all issues are interconnected and are perceived by the negotiating parties to be dependent on each other. Therefore, the process succeeds on the various fronts as long as no substantial disagreements are noted; but where these are noted, they are not effectively resolved but pushed to the future for renegotiation at a later stage.

In particular, it appears that the property issue, for instance, is at the top of the key matters of emphasis, at least in the current phase. Its main parameters, such as modes of restitution, have been a point of discussion for years, and the broad lines are agreed—e.g., on claims processing. It seems, however, that long-standing issues remain highly challenging. Such issues include the lack of data, the inability or unwillingness to share information, and the inability or unwillingness of the two sides to engage with important policy questions, such as the powers of certain institutions, for instance on property claims in this case. Given the comprehensive character of the solution negotiated, this has a knock-on effect on other areas. In the overall process then, it would seem that this first 'agreement' phase is by now well-trodden, and that the process is entering its most difficult stage.

However, because of substantial lack of shared knowledge (what the situation on the ground is on different areas, what is likely to happen post-agreement, what funds will be needed, etc.) these difficult answers appear hard to find.

Indeed, much of the slowdown has occurred since the two leaders appeared together at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2016. Prior to that meeting, there seems to have been an expectation on both sides that a solution might be financed through outside sources, and that such sources would especially aid in the resolution of the island's tricky property issue.16 However, it became apparent at that meeting, as well as in meetings with other financial entities such as the World Bank, that any external funding of a solution was unlikely. Instead, expertise has been offered to aid Cypriots in self-financing a solution. This seems to have pricked inflated expectations that the primary impediment to a solution was finding the money to finance property compensation. It is critical that a deadlock be avoided in the near future, owing to the nature of the process itself. What would seem most likely to prevent it would be a substantial display of commitment, dedicated research and expertise, public engagement by both sides, and hopefully funds.

Regarding international involvement, it is very important that the international community as a whole, through international organizations as well as a number of key states, has been actively supporting the reconciliation process and efforts. A considerable number of high-level visits have been taking place in Cyprus since the end of 2015, indicating an interest, an engagement in and support of the process by the relevant states and institutions.¹⁷ Turkey, Greece, and the EU now appear to play a more constructive role, compared to the past. Turkey and Greece, as guarantor states,

seem to support the empowerment of the two leaders to deliver and are seen to positively contribute in the areas of their own direct engagement, such as the issue of guarantees. In this area, the EU also plays a pivotal role, as a possible new framework for a modern system of political guarantees to replace the existing one. Important as these indications may be though, it is important to note that, beyond rhetoric, no concrete and tangible steps seem to have been taken.

The United States has led a number of initiatives and remains the country that is by far the most committed to the solution of the Cyprus problem and the one that has made the biggest effort and singularly spearheaded or driven developments. The United States has indeed been actively engaged, being best placed to provide the leadership role needed. The U.S. has been able to provide the broader vision needed for the region and the importance of the Cyprus problem's solution for that. Given the turmoil in the area, the challenges faced by the EU, and various impasses that have brought on or fed the deadlock, the U.S. has played a catalytic role in facilitating rapprochement processes between various local players. Its vision provides a framework for a security architecture that hopefully soothes the fears of some and engages Turkey to cooperate towards a new system of political guarantees to replace the obsolete military ones. Such an initiative constructively addresses the fundamental fears of Cypriots on both sides of the divide and potentially removes one of the most important obstacles to reunification.

At the same time, the U.S. vision also ensures that a security gap in the Eastern Mediterranean would not be filled by other actors, such as Russia, that could, for instance, use energy as an opportunity for an enhanced military presence in the area. The U.S. has

given further important help by actively contributing in the development of an economic plan for financing the solution, chiefly, in the first instance, by offering to provide expertise and technical assistance. However, this engagement has at times been met with obstacles, as unfortunately perceptions regarding international efforts are not always positive; they tend to backfire and often lead to paranoia with respect to perceived motives and goals.¹⁸

Actually, one could talk of a vicious circle: a "Cyprus owned – Cyprus led" local effort faces obstacles through its inability to come to fruition, leading to the need for external involvement that in turn leads to distrust and fears of imposed solutions. It is the continued empowerment of the two leaders by the United States and the international community that has been critical in allowing them thus far to drive developments leading to a final solution. It is important that this continues.

However, the U.S. is also facing important challenges at the moment: Vice President Biden and Secretary of State Kerry have devoted great effort to the cause, but their terms expire at the end of 2016. With elections in November and a new Administration taking over in January 2017, at least a few months will be needed for the new government to become acquainted with the issue and to start delivering. This delay might prove critical for the Cyprus conflict at this stage.

LINKAGE POLITICS IN THE CYPRUS PROBLEM

Linkage politics are usually employed to break impasses or help sides improve their bargaining positions by linking certain issues to other unrelated ones and thereby helping sides to reach a compromise.²⁰ Linkages can also be used for achieving

interdependencies among sides, helping them to move from competition to cooperation, as well as for confidence building purposes. On the other hand, linkages can also be "coercive," and they may be employed by mediators or other third parties to stop on-going conflicts or break deadlocks. They can also be prospective and retrospective. For example, promises, peace plans, and threats could easily be grouped as prospective moves of linkage politics, while rewards or retaliations are good examples of the category of retrospective linkage politics.²¹

The peace process that led eventually to the Annan Plan referendum is a good example of how linkages can give momentum to such a process, but it also reveals how the removal of one link can also undermine it. In late 2002, when the UN put a comprehensive settlement plan on the table, EU membership, both actual and prospective, played an important role in securing the support of both Cypriot leaders and their regional backers. One of the main links in this chain was Turkey's desire to enter the EU, and the EU's offer of candidacy to Turkey went a long way toward softening its policy on Cyprus.²² That was achieved by convincing Greece to lift its veto regarding Turkey's candidacy. The EU, in this case, became both a carrot and a stick—offered as an opportunity should Turkey show flexibility on Cyprus, while threatening Turkey with the prospect of yet another hostile member state, the RoC, represented solely by Greek Cypriots, should negotiations fail.²³

The linkage politics that developed around Turkey's EU candidacy led to both Greek and Turkish pressure on Cypriot leaders to negotiate the UN plan intensively. Once the RoC's accession date was set for 2004, intensified negotiations under United Nations leadership began with the intention of

enabling a reunified Cyprus to enter the EU. However, the weak link in the chain would prove to be the RoC's own candidacy. Until the late 1990's this had been conditional on the reunification of the island, but in 2002 the Council²⁴ invited Cyprus to enter the Union without taking into consideration the island's division.²⁵ Ultimately, the EU's acceptance of the status quo would give both a cause and an excuse to Greek Cypriots to reject the UN-backed plan in 2004. One of the primary reasons for the significant Greek Cypriot 'no' vote was the widespread belief that their impending EU membership would enable them to negotiate a better plan.²⁶

Following this failure, EU members promised to "reward" Turkish Cypriots for their efforts, and Turkish Cypriots expected a lifting of embargoes on travel and trade.²⁷ Instead, any "rewards" were hampered by the newest member state, the Republic of Cyprus, and were boiled down to a bit of targeted grant money and some attempts to encourage trade across the Green Line.²⁸ Moreover, in the years that followed, any efforts at further negotiations were sporadic, truncated by frequent elections on each side of the island, and hampered by an overall lack of political will.

It is everyone's hope that the comprehensive solution negotiated is reached in the foreseeable future. Yet, the two communities are destined to live together on the island, irrespective of a solution to the Cyprus problem. Therefore it is imperative that avenues of cooperation between the two communities are introduced and pursued. This will increase interaction between the Greek and Turkish Cypriots and lessen the gap separating them. In the case of an eventual solution, this will greatly facilitate the implementation process, ensuring that a settlement will not be perceived as de novo and imposed, but rather built on existing cooperation. In the

unfortunate eventuality of a non-solution, this will enable the two communities to enjoy a more peaceful and prosperous inevitable coexistence.

The ensuing discussion examines the prospects and problems of linkage politics in the current round of negotiations, including the lack of the strong carrots and sticks that were available when the Cypriot leaders were finalizing the Annan Plan in 2004. The possibilities are then discussed for de-linkages in the context of an EU whose position and leverage has been compromised and an alternative understanding of linkage politics is proposed that would lay the groundwork for a united island but also provide a basis for continued cooperation if the comprehensive process fails.

THE CURRENT STATE OF PLAY

After the remarkable Annan Plan failure in 2004, Cypriots witnessed four years of stalling, as then RoC President Tassos Papadopoulos, who had campaigned against the very plan he had negotiated, avoided coming to the table.29 It was not until the 2008 election of two "pro-peace" leftist leaders on both sides of the divide—Demetris Christofias and Mehmet Ali Talat—that a new round of negotiations could begin. This new round of negotiations, however, was hampered by the demand of Greek Cypriot leader President Christofias that negotiations would start from the beginning and his campaign promise that the Annan Plan was dead and buried. This time, he promised, they would negotiate a "Cypriot solution," meaning one agreed without the interference and pressure of outside parties, and without timelines. According to Christofias's AKEL party, the Annan Plan was an "Anglo-American plot," one in which allowing outsiders to act as referees and refine the two sides' proposals resulted in a plan that many Greek Cypriots perceived as being to their disadvantage.

The desire to avoid timelines, on the other hand, refers to the hurried nature in which the last version of the Annan Plan was finalized.³⁰

Turkish Cypriots, in turn, suggested that any agreement would be haunted by the spirit of the previous plan. Indeed, they insisted that there is ultimately no way to avoid such an apparition, as the Annan Plan had been worked out on the basis of all previous negotiations and contained many elements that had been present in all such plans.³¹ Elements such as the idea of two ethnic-majority constituent states under a federal system formed the core of the Annan Plan. Guaranteeing an ethnically Turkish state in the island's north, however, meant not allowing all Greek Cypriot property-owners to return to their properties. The Annan Plan provisions for restricted return of Greek Cypriot refugees were one of the reasons for Greek Cypriots to defeat that plan. However, the maintenance of an ethnic Turkish majority in the island's north is a fundamental principle on which Turkish Cypriots have shown themselves unwilling to concede.

Moreover, the backdrop to these negotiations was an EU-member, RoC, that saw membership as a tool to gain an advantage over Turkey, for which it began playing EU gatekeeper. With the advantage of an EU veto in hand, Greek Cypriots were in no hurry to reach a compromise with Turkish Cypriot neighbors. On the contrary, during this time they could use the EU to pressure Turkey to open its ports to ships bearing the RoC flag—a move that most Greek Cypriots believe would be a form of "recognition" of their state by Turkey. In addition, EU membership allowed the RoC to block any moves to bring direct flights or trade to the island's north.³²

The inability of even two avowedly pro-peace leftist leaders, Christofias and Talat, to reach an

agreement that could go to referendum meant that the next several years of negotiations were held hostage to domestic politics on both sides of the island. Although Anastasiades, one of the few Greek Cypriot leaders to have supported the Annan Plan in 2004, succeeded Christofias as president of the RoC, Talat was succeeded by Derviş Eroğlu, a right-wing politician often described as a "hard-liner." Negotiations proceeded in fits and starts, with neither side fully committed, until the north's surprise election of Mustafa Akıncı as Eroğlu's replacement in spring 2015.

As noted, Akıncı's election brought a period of optimism and the international press began to trumpet the expected solution of this longstanding problem. Among local diplomatic circles, some began to refer to it as "the last of the last chances", 34 given that both leaders are strong supporters of a federal solution and have worked for this in the past.

Despite these positive signs, similar to the past, the resolution of issues at the negotiating table has proven thorny. As noted, particularly the issues of territory and property have caused a slowdown in the negotiating pace.35 Despite these predictable difficulties, the media and international community succeeded in creating expectations of a quick solution that, rather than promoting peace, instead led to fears concerning what a quick solution would imply. On both sides of the island, there was fear that a quick solution meant that "their side" would concede, crossing the red lines that have traditionally been maintained. This became apparent in the domestic developments discussed above: During the May 2016 parliamentary elections in the RoC, when solution-skeptical parties took a lead; and the collapse of a left-right coalition in the north and the rise of a right-wing coalition.

While the trigger for that collapse was domestic, it may well have implications for the negotiating process.³⁶

As explained above, in the past, one of the main carrots in the negotiations had been the one presented by potential EU membership. This was a carrot for Turkish Cypriots, for Turkey, and in the early days when the EU insisted on the reunification of the island for Cyprus's accession, it was also an incentive for the RoC. However, once that conditionality was lifted and the RoC joined despite being divided, EU membership became a tool to use in gaining leverage in the negotiations rather than an incentive to encourage concessions. Moreover, following on the financial crises of Europe's southern fringe beginning in 2008, and especially the economic collapse of Greece, Euroscepticism has been on the rise in Cyprus and the region.³⁷ It is certainly felt in Turkey, where the economy had been doing well despite rising political turmoil. Turkish Cypriots no longer view the EU as an objective actor in the conflict but rather see it as one that is directly tied to the interests of the RoC.³⁸

Given these factors, it is suggested that, rather than or in addition to a regional linkage politics that inevitably would engage EU decision-making mechanisms, a local linkage politics is necessary both to lay the groundwork for peace and to push leaders toward it. Particularly given the EU's response to the refugee crisis at its borders and the fears of migration from Europe's fringe that fueled the campaign for "Brexit", it would seem worth considering the many potential gains from disentangling EU aspirations from the negotiations rather than predicating negotiations exclusively on them.

Indeed, while the current conjuncture may be promising for peace, it is not auspicious for the promotion of peace through the sort of linkage politics that was effective in the past. Instead, it is submitted that a more local linkage politics may be used both to build the groundwork for peace and to prepare for a solution, should a comprehensive settlement not be successful.

CREATING NEW LINKS AND AN INTERDEPENDENT FUTURE

While scenarios such as the ones discussed above are well known and point to possible future linkages, they have not so far constituted the sort of linkage politics that was described earlier as breaking deadlocks. Indeed, it would seem that, despite the recent Turkey-EU deal regarding refugee return, there remains a distinctly cool relationship between that country and the Union.³⁹ As a result, although a Cyprus deal would clear Turkey's path to Europe, today there seems little hope of developing a linkage politics around Turkey's desire for EU accession that would help bring about such a deal.

With the EU prospect deflated, there is little to push Cypriot leaders towards the compromises necessary for a solution. While both leaders insist that peace is achievable, the Cypriot public on both sides of the island is becoming concerned that a year of talks has brought no concrete results, despite the progress admittedly achieved. Moreover, a comprehensive solution requires political will as well as leadership and an acceptance of potential radical changes, something that both sides find unattractive given the current comfortable status quo. Despite rising incomes in the island's north and an economic crisis in the south, Greek Cypriots still fear that the north will be an economic burden. Many Turkish Cypriots, on the other hand, do not want compromises that will impinge on their territorial integrity, their perceived zone

of safety in the north. And in the midst of regional instability, a divided island is the devil one already knows and fears less.

It may be time, then, to also consider a new approach and a new kind of linkage politics that does not rely on outside actors but instead ties Cypriots to each other and gives them concrete interests in the reunification of the island. Such steps have been called "confidence-building measures" in the past, but the new measures need to go beyond them. As can be seen with the 2003 opening of the island's checkpoints, such measures have the possibility to change the parameters of the negotiations and create new realities and interdependencies on the island. This would be a new kind of "linkage politics," one that does not absolutely or primarily depend on desire and political will, but rather creates new realities on the ground. These new realities, in turn, both lay the groundwork for peace and push leaders towards it. And in the event that the current negotiations collapse, they could also potentially provide a blueprint for the future, even outside the parameters of a comprehensive plan.

While keeping a comprehensive solution as the ultimate goal, there may be other ways to achieve it than at the negotiating table. We have already seen significant changes in the parameters of the Cyprus Problem over the past decade, especially regarding the property issue. The appeal of individual Cypriots to various courts to resolve their property problems arising from the conflict has given a new dimension to negotiations and has taken a significant number of property cases off the table. Around 20% of displaced Greek Cypriots would be able to return to their homes with the opening of Varosia, the closed city that has been under Turkish military occupation for four decades. Already, there are numerous bicommunal plans for the revival of Varosia and

the entire Famagusta area⁴⁰, and most people accept that the successful return of refugees to the area would set an example for the rest of the island. Not only this, but it would give an economic boost to an area of the north that is languishing.

Current discussions have questioned whether or not it should be opened under Turkish Cypriot or international control. The answer seems to depend on whether or not its opening is a unilateral Turkish Cypriot decision or a negotiated one. A negotiated opening, however, would depend on the simultaneous opening of north Cyprus's ports, which have remained internationally unrecognized for four decades. This seems to be a must for Turkish Cypriot negotiators, despite the fact that the status of Tymbou (Ercan) airport in the island's north has changed significantly in the past decade, with the rise of Istanbul as an international transport hub. Indeed, it could be argued that these days Greek Cypriots might want the opening of this airport for their own economic interests, not only because it would lead to the opening of Turkey's ports to their shipping industry, but also because it would mean flights from Larnaca could land in Istanbul, and passengers could use convenient connections to every part of the world. Today, the airport in northern Cyprus serves that function for the island, and traffic through the airport has increased, as more Greek Cypriots use it to travel globally.

Over time the Cyprus conflict has impacted severely the economic and socio-economic conditions of both communities. The economies in both parts of the island have been underperforming for decades, and unemployment, brain-drain, and migration have been some of the results. Cooperation between the two communities will have significant positive economic impacts on the island, both short- and long-term. Indicatively these

would include removing internal physical barriers to trade, namely the UN buffer zone; harmonizing the Turkish Cypriot economy with EU norms, supervisory practices, and other regulations, thus improving key infrastructure; and investment, e.g., to revitalise Varosia and the wider Famagusta area. Thus, linkage politics to consider could include cooperation in such fields as economy and trade; education; and collaboration to address environmental degradation and climate change planning.

More specifically, sectors where considerable progress is envisaged are tourism, education, wholesale and retail, education, and energy. As things stand, the division does not allow for tourism to reach its full potential. Cooperation would facilitate a more comprehensive tourism product that would combine the whole gamut of tourism (medical, cultural, cruise, religious, agrotourism, ecotourism, and gambling entertainment) with upgraded services. A more integrated tourism product, like combined itineraries, will lower the industry's cost and include the island in varied tours combining other countries in the region. For instance, cultural and religious tourism would attract new tourists to holy sites and ancient sites on both sides of the island, such as the Hala Sultan Tekke mosque in Larnaca and the church and monastery of St Barnabas in Famagusta, or the ancient ruins of Kourion near Limassol and Salamis near Famagusta.41

Cooperation in the education sector would provide increased economies of scale and the removal of constraints caused by the lack of cross-recognition that prevent the sector from reaching its full potential. Education is an area that Cyprus could have a comparative advantage in, enjoying immediate benefits from and use towards an important contribution to the economy. It would not be an exaggeration to think of Cyprus as tomorrow's regional

educational hub, an "education island". Already there is a lot of development in this sector, but its full potential is far from being reached due to the division. At the moment, in the Republic of Cyprus, there are 43 public and private institutions with a total enrolment of 33,000 students, including seven public and private universities. In the northern part of the island, there are 11 locally established universities and two local branches of well-established Turkish universities. These universities attract nearly 75,000 students from the region and beyond, with a projection for these numbers to reach 100,000 in 2017. Education is the second highest local source of income, bringing €1 bn. to the €3 bn. Turkish Cypriot economy, or 1/3 more.42 Each side has connections and advantages to different markets. Cooperation would allow well established institutions, already connected with third partners, to make Cyprus one of the most important educational centers in the region. A unified education sector could create a strong brand to attract students from the region and beyond. Large numbers of foreign students make a significant contribution to the economy and to the creation of job opportunities. Further to economic benefits of course, added advantages include culturally enriched communities and enhanced human capital, finding expression for instance in faculty and student exchanges, common university teams etc.⁴³

To take another example, explicit and concrete encouragement for cooperative trade would also be greatly beneficial. This will lead to increased wholesale and retail trading activities from cooperation, as interdependence will create mutually beneficial production and supply relations. Already, the role of the private sector in all this has been quite significant. The island's chambers of commerce and industry have embarked on commendable cooperation, in an open-minded, business spirit, and long-led initiatives for promoting business

opportunities that would pave the way to the island's common prosperous economic future. As such, they have facilitated contacts across the island and have been promoting the economic prospects of further cooperation. The chambers' strategic vision and collaboration to the day has seen the realization of projects like the linkage between the two sides' electricity grids and the facilitation of others, like the connectivity of mobile telephony networks.⁴⁴

The discovery of hydrocarbons in the Eastern Mediterranean since 2010 has contributed to the re-shaping of facts and perceptions in the region. It has led equally to enhanced cooperation and to heightened tensions between littoral states and other interested parties. In the case of Cyprus, it was quickly hijacked by and fell victim to the conflict of principle, as it was viewed through the prism of the existing Cyprus issue. It thus became a new point of contestation between the two sides, as well as a flashpoint involving Turkey. As the positions of the two parties on hydrocarbons were informed by their differing stances on the Cyprus issue, energy became yet another link in the existing conflict chain.⁴⁵

However, hydrocarbons can be a vital platform for cooperation between the Greek and Turkish Cypriots—possibly the most important one in recent history—paving the way to further collaboration in other fields. This would be an excellent winwin synergy, indeed possibly as part of a wider framework of cooperation on natural resources, for the benefit of all Cypriots. That could also eventually lead to energy and Cyprus becoming the catalysts for broader cooperation between regional states. Finally, such cooperation could contribute to European energy security and supply diversification. Until now, energy was seen through

the prism of the existing conflict, leading to the adoption of diametrically opposed positions and the blurring of a common understanding. Now, the two visionary leaders could engage in a pragmatic appraisal of current realities and collaborate on the hydrocarbons issue showing political will, determination, and a detachment from rooted problematic fixations in practical terms. Their initiative would find fertile ground in new global realities that necessitate synergies; the less than initially expected quantities of gas offshore Cyprus; the hitherto unsuccessful efforts for its exploration; and the prospects this would open for quick cooperation with other states.

CONCLUSION

The Cyprus problem is often described as a dormant conflict. It could also be argued though that it's neither dormant, nor much of a conflict. Thankfully, it is a non-violent conflict with only eight people having perished in the buffer zone in the last 42 years. With a high degree of normality in people's daily lives, the situation has become a rather comfortable one, and the state of affairs is not pressing, thus providing for less incentive to solve the problem.

And yet, given local, regional, and international realities, if it is to be solved, now is the most opportune time, arguably ever. On both sides, leaders are in principle pro-solution; there is excellent rapport between the two leaders; the international community is actively engaged; considerable progress has been achieved in the negotiating process; and Turkey is in principle in favor of a solution. As per a much loved expression of Norwegian facilitators in Cyprus, "the stars are aligned". 46 At the same time, serious thorns and problems still exist, both in fact and in perception. Will the pro-solution leaders manage things during their term in

office? For how long will Turkey continue to be interested, especially given current EU-Turkey relations? Will the international community's interest continue for much longer?

The history of the Cyprus issue is a history of lost opportunities. In order to make sure that the current round of efforts doesn't become yet another lost opportunity, it is important that mistakes of the past are not repeated and a pragmatic stance is adopted. The constituent elements of this would be: realism, political will, responsible political leadership, appreciation of the sense of urgency, and thinking outside the box. Thus, we should be constructive through deconstruction: Deconstruct the perception of the uniqueness of the dispute that leads to a belief that it is intractable; and deconstruct expectations that have been built leading to the lack of incentives to cooperate and negotiate a solution. Unrealistic expectations have often undermined the prospects of a solution. At the same time, for a solution to be reached domestic political considerations need to take a back seat to the national cause. For instance, the prioritization of re-election in the past led to time being lost and ultimately the cooperative leader from the other side also lost. It is imperative that the same mistake is not made twice.

It should also not be taken for granted that the interest of the international community and key states is eternal. At the moment, the United Nations and in particular the Secretary General take a keen interest in the matter and are exerting all their influence. However, the term of Mr. Ban Ki-moon expires at the end of 2016 and it is unclear what the next day holds. Similarly, the EU is also actively involved, but, with dramatic and pressing internal and external developments affecting it, the level and efficiency of its future engagement is not to be overestimated.

At the same time, the issue of perceptions is of central importance in the Cyprus problem and any attempts to solve it. In Cyprus, it is rarely facts that one has to fight; mostly it is perceptions and ghosts. Thus, realistic and responsible political leadership is needed that will convey an accurate picture to the publics that will be called in a referendum to vote on a solution plan. For instance, a significant percentage, if not the majority, of those who are likely to reject a solution would do so to perpetuate the present status quo, which might not be ideal, but is manageable and preferable to an unknown future. However, it is highly unlikely that the status quo is sustainable, for economic, political, strategic, and other reasons, including the continued interest of the international community half a century into the conflict. It is thus imperative that the leaderships give a pragmatic account of the positive and potential negative aspects of "the day after".

Indeed, the subject of communication and public dialogue should be treated as a top priority, as the 2004 Annan plan process showed. There was barely a month from the introduction of the plan to the referendum—far less than adequate time to inform and prepare the publics. One of the most important lessons to be learned from the 2004 experience is that the content of any plan is as important as the way it is communicated. It is imperative then that the leaderships join forces with civil society and other important actors in order to ensure an informed public dialogue and the sufficient preparation of citizens to close the window of opportunity for demagogues that capitalize on fundamental fears, insecurity, reflexes, and misinformation.

All of the above are important elements of the Cyprus issue and vital parameters of the solution process previously followed. At the same time, they represent-indeed are-part of the problem. A comprehensive solution aims not only at creating a new state but also at creating a new society. That society cannot just be created out of the blue. The physical division of the island 42 years ago that separated the two communities and the resultant but continued lack of interaction between them have also accentuated the notional division between the Greek and Turkish Cypriots, constantly widening and deepening the gap that separates them. This is inevitably making the prospects of a solution more difficult by the day, as independent existence is cemented, common Cypriot identity diluted, misperceptions and mistrust thrive, and conflicting, indeed mutually exclusive, national narratives are established.

Initiatives that have been called "confidence-building measures" have always been seen as ways of getting the two sides to trust each other, a means of having them make compromises that would lead to a solution. These, however, have proven inadequate since they can easily fall victim to established perceptions and practices. Their limited success has shown that they were unable to alter the zero-sum, concession-reluctant and risk-averse mentality that have long dominated the negotiations. Indeed one of the problems with previous efforts at confidence-building measures is that the parties themselves link them to the formal negotiations and are afraid of being seen to make concessions. It is submitted that what is really needed is the preparation of the material groundwork for a solution, that is economic, social, and political institutions, interaction, and interdependence. It

is suggested that, if the two leaders are truly serious about a solution, they should demonstrate that now by laying a common ground in preparation for a solution, before one is completed at the negotiating table. Any prospects for reaching a solution and, more importantly, securing its future viability, are doomed if the communities are kept apart, sharing no common present. Doing so also changes the parameters of the problem, making it possible to think about other kinds of solutions, should a comprehensive one not be attained.

The Cyprus issue is changing, but as it changes it remains the same. However, it is interesting that the last poll published before the May 2016 elections in the Republic of Cyprus showed that for the Greek Cypriots, the Cyprus issue was 4th from top on the list of important issues for the election, following unemployment, corruption, and the economy.⁴⁷ It is the first time that it is so, and this could represent an excellent opportunity to see the conflict from a different, more pragmatic point of view. Alas, it might also be the last opportunity to do so. If things do not work this time around, despite the great progress made and political will manifested, the next break, if ever, will be very, very far away. Cypriots though, both Greek and Turkish, will continue to share the island. This is why it is imperative and to everyone's benefit to interact and cooperate more, in the interest of their peaceful and prosperous present and future coexistence. Policies that encourage local linkages would bring an added value to those efforts that so far have not succeeded in breaking the long standing deadlock of over negotiations.

ENDNOTES

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- 7. For the full text see, "The Comprehensive Settlement of the Cyprus Problem," March 31, 2004, http://www.zypern.news/extras/annan-plan-for-cyprus-2004.pdf.
- 8. European Council Regulation No 866/2004 on a regime under Article 2 of Protocol 10 to the Act of Accession, April 30, 2014.
- 9. Negotiations to solve the Cyprus Conflict began in 1968. The first meeting took place in Beirut. Interlocutors were Rauf Denktaş for the Turkish Cypriots side and Glafkos Cleridis for the Greek Cypriot side (for more see Akgün, et. al., *Quo Vadis Cyprus?*). After Archbishop Makarios's death on August 3, 1977, Spiros Kyprianou was elected President. In May 1979, the federal principle for a future settlement was agreed between the new Greek Cypriot leader and Rauf Denktaş.
- 10. The Annan Plan envisaged a Presidential Council made up of 6 voting members, allocated according to population, 4 Greek Cypriots and 2 Turkish Cypriots and 3 non-voting members assigned in a 2:1 ratio. Further, it

- provided for a President and Vice President, chosen from among the members of the Presidential Council, 1 from each community, to alternate in their duties every 20 months during the Council's 5-year term. Finally, a bicameral legislature comprising a 48-member Senate, divided equally between the Greek and Turkish Cypriots and a 48-member Chamber of Deputies, divided in proportion to the two communities' populations, with no fewer than 12 for the smaller community.
- 11. Cypriot households (CY), as measured by both their median and average wealth in 2010, were the second richest in the Eurozone. Median household wealth-half the households had more, half less—of €266,900 was over five times Germany's puny median of €51,400. Average household wealth reached a phenomenal €670,900 (or approximately, \$872,000), 3.4 times Germany's €195,200, and just shy of Luxembourg's €710,100. For more: Wolf Richter, "Total Fiasco: Germans are the Poorest, Cypriots the Second Richest in The Eurozone," April 10, 2013, http://www.zerohedge.com/ contributed/2013-04-10/total-fiasco-germans-are-poorest-cypriots-second-richest-eurozone.
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- 17. Philip Hammond, the foreign secretary of UK, USA Secretary of State John Kerry, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier were among those who visited Cyprus in 2015 and met both leaders, showing strong support for the new peace process.
- 18. Michalis Kontos, Sozos-Christos Theodoulou, Nikos Panayiotides, and Haralambos Alexandrou, "Epilogue," in *Great Power Politics in Cyprus: Foreign Interventions and Domestic Perceptions*, ed. Kontos, Theodoulou, Panayiotides, and Alexandrou (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 225.
- 19. For example, the U.S. Ambassador to Nicosia was amazed with the enthusiasm that he observed in Washington even in March 2014: "I just came back from Washington, and if I say I want to talk about the Cyprus problem, I won't get an 'oh,' but instead, ears perk up. Indeed, there is a great interest right now in the Cyprus issue. . . Just last week, at Secretary Kerry's annual conference for American Chiefs of Mission -there were about 180 of us there—I had the chance to participate in many discussions and hear a number of speeches and Q & A sessions. Secretary Kerry himself and many senior officers in the department whom I respect really gave a lot of emphasis to how interested they were in seeing progress being made on the Cyprus settlement. That helped to engage me to bring them deeper into settlement efforts, and I know we will be seeing more of them in the near future." "Remarks by U.S. Ambassador John M. Koenig at the

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