

Policy Brief: Prospects for Reunification in Cyprus

The Republic of Cyprus, an island country in the east Mediterranean Sea, is a member of the European Union, uses the Euro as its currency, and has one of the thirty highest GDP per capita in the world. However, its northern neighbor the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is internationally isolated and economically disadvantaged. The two entities still remain as one of the few examples of intra-state division in the Western world. The dispute between Cyprus and Northern Cyprus also has consequences beyond its own borders. It still casts a shadow over the unity of the European Union as the organization's only divided member in addition to presenting an obstacle for possible Turkish accession to the EU. The conflict has also complicated relations between Greece and Turkey in NATO. I will discuss the recent history of the disunion, present three possible outcomes in the conflict, and then give my own policy recommendation¹.

History of the dispute since 1960

In 1960, Cyprus gained its independence from the United Kingdom; however it was far from a united island. There were two theories for the future of Cyprus, which more or less split down cultural lines. Greek Cypriots desired *enosis*, or union, with their Greek neighbors to the west. Turkish Cypriots preferred *taksim*, or partition, in which Cyprus would become two distinct states. Albeit a minority, the Turkish Cypriots felt underrepresented in the government. They were concerned that potential union with Greece would result in even less say in the administration of the country and increased efforts of Hellenization. Throughout the remainder of the decade, Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots clashed in a period of inter-communal violence.

A military junta overthrew the democratically elected leadership in Greece in the late 1960s and the new administration in Athens put increased pressure on the Cypriot leader, Archbishop Makarios, to achieve union with Greece. He did not approve of the Greek martial government and in 1974, pro-enosis paramilitary forces in Cyprus with the support of the Greek military junta, led a coup to overtake the Makarios-government. Turkey responded by invading the north of the island in order to protect Turkish Cypriots. The United Nations intervened and an eventual ceasefire was agreed upon, thus establishing the so-called Green Line that divides the island to today. Pro-enosis forces were not able to realize union with Greece, primarily due to the fall of the junta back in Athens. Nevertheless, the result was a Greek Cypriot run Republic of Cyprus and a unilaterally-declared, Turkish Cypriot-led Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Turkey remains as the only country to recognize Northern Cyprus. The island is partitioned into four sections: 1) the Republic of Cyprus in the south, 2) Northern Cyprus, 3) the UN-administered Green Line, and 4) two Sovereign Base Areas in Greek Cyprus that are under the jurisdiction of the United Kingdom.

¹ When referring to the citizens of the Republic of Cyprus, I will use Greek Cypriots. When referring to the inhabitants of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, I will use Turkish Cypriots.

Little progress was made in the following three decades in the peace process. During the fighting between Turkish and Greek/Greek Cypriot forces in the 1970s, thousands of Greek Cypriots living in the north fled to the south and Turkish Cypriots in the south escaped to the north. This displacement of Cypriots remains a contentious issue to today. Greek Cypriots' rights to return to their former homes in the north along with the continued Turkish military presence remain as the main topics hampering the peace process negotiations.

In 2004, the European Union desired that Cypriot accession to the EU would include both sides of the island. However, an UN-led referendum to reunify Cyprus was rejected. The outcome is that only the Greek Cypriot contingent represents Cyprus in Brussels. I will discuss the referendum further in the "international-led reunification" section. Enthusiasm for reunification of the island has increased since February 2008 after the Greek Cypriot election victory of Dimitris Christofias, who has put the peace process at the forefront of his goals while in office. His initial conversation with Northern Cyprus leader Mehmet Ali Talat has also created an atmosphere of optimism for a reunified island.

Possibility 1: Cypriot-led reunification

The distinction between "Cypriot-led reunification" and "international-led reunification" is not clear from the outset because in both cases the United Nations and the European Union would likely be involved. Cypriot-led reunification refers primarily to the main players in the peace process and support for reunification. This is best portrayed by the current leaders of Cyprus and Northern Cyprus. However, the 2004 efforts can be best classified as international-led reunification because the UN and the EU demonstrated more support for the proposed resolution than either the Greek Cypriot or Turkish Cypriot leadership.

Cypriots themselves have taken several positive steps in the last few years toward reunification. Although the 2004 referendum failed, the support of Turkish Cypriots marked a reversal in the long-held position of the island's northern inhabitants. Since the referendum, the event that arguably went the farthest in promoting the peace process was the February 2008 election in the Republic of Cyprus. Dimitris Christofias was able to fend off Ioannis Kasoulidis in the second round of voting and both candidates led campaigns calling for resolution and reunification. More important, anti-reunification incumbent Tassos Papadopoulos was defeated, which hopefully indicates that Greek Cypriots have rejected his hard-line anti-reunification approach to the conflict.

It is quite remarkable how fast positive movements in the peace process have progressed given that as recent as January 2008; there was a strong likelihood that there would be continued years of diplomatic inactivity between Cyprus and Northern Cyprus. Now there is an aura of optimism considering that Christofias and his Cypriot Communist Party AKEL have a history of good relations with Turkish Cypriots. His past positive relations with the Turkish Cypriot labor movement in particular should make talks progress as smooth as possible. His Northern Cyprus counterpart Talat is equally enthusiastic about the peace process and believes that the two parties may come to a solution to the crisis as early as the end of 2008. They met in late February 2008 in order to agree to officially reopen diplomatic relations with the goal of reunification. These

initial meetings supported the governmental structure suggested by the Annan Plan, although it should be noted that this will be a domestic-led reunification project.

The two leaders will meet again in June 2008 for the start of fully-fledged negotiations under the auspices of the UN; however some progress has already been made in the first month of Christofias' presidency. He and Talat were able to agree in principle upon the reopening of a crossing on Ledra Street, a main thoroughfare in the capital of Nicosia that has come to symbolize the partition of the island. There is reason for optimism, but as always there are roadblocks in the peace process. The most recent barricade comes from the fact that in exchange for its support in the February elections, Christofias promised Papadopoulos' centrist party DIKO the influential foreign ministry post.

Possibility 2: International-led reunification

Although the EU has certainly been at the forefront of international support for the Cypriot peace process, the Annan Plan envisioned by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan goes the farthest in terms of suggesting policies for reunification of the island. It began with a governmental structure similar to the Swiss model in which Cyprus would become a loose confederation composed of a Greek Cypriot state and a Turkish Cypriot state. There would be a Presidential Council, made up of four Greek Cypriots and two Turkish Cypriots that have voting privileges, as well as another two Greek Cypriots and one Turkish Cypriot that are not able to vote within the Presidential Council. The Presidential Council would choose the President and Vice-President from among its members and one would be from the Greek Cypriot community with the other from the Turkish Cypriot population. They would alternate their functions every twenty months during the Council's five year term in office. The Senate would have forty-eight senators with an equal number of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot representation. The lower house, the Chamber of Deputies, would consist of forty-eight deputies with the numbers representative of population figures, although there would be no less than twelve Turkish Cypriot deputies. Finally, the Supreme Court would have an equal number of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot judges in addition to three foreign judges to be assigned by the Presidential Council.

Despite the initial optimism for a solution to the ongoing conflict, the referendum failed. It was supported by 65% of the Turkish Cypriot constituency, however rejected by 75% of the Greek Cypriot vote. Turkish Cypriots saw it as an opportunity to end the isolation of Northern Cyprus and hoped for improvements in living standards. Greek Cypriots saw the referendum as unbalanced and pro-Turkish Cypriot. They argued that it would not guarantee that all Greek Cypriot refugees would have been returned their homes in the north, that it still maintained a minimal Turkish military presence on the island, and that Turkish settlers in Northern Cyprus would be permitted to stay. Even Kofi Annan admitted that his Plan failed to meet all the demands of both sides, but that acceptance of the referendum presented a historic chance for peace. Although the Annan Plan fell short in its goal, it looks to be a key part of the renewed domestic-led reunification effort as mentioned previously.

Possibility 3: Continued division

Due to the delicacy of issues regarding land reclamation and the presence of Turkish military forces, there is still a strong likelihood that the maintenance of the status quo will continue and Cyprus will remain a divided island. There are several potential negative effects to continued division. First, Greek Cyprus may experience escalating tension from the international community due to the stalemate in the peace process. There will also be the loss of land that may have been returned by the north in a settlement, the continued presence of Turkish troops, and the arrival of more Turkish immigrants on the island. Economic losses might ensue from the lack of access to the Turkish market and the possibility to increase the Greek Cypriot industry's value as an eastern Mediterranean hub. Northern Cyprus may experience negative aspects relative to not being an EU member such as slower economic development, a tougher struggle against crime and security issues, and the lack of certain civil rights guaranteed to all EU citizens.

Policy recommendation

Both the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leadership is now committed to the development of a peaceful solution. However, the true test will come when leaders formulate a solution and then have to gain its approval from their constituencies. It appears as if Greek Cypriots are more willing to accept reunification than arguably at any other time in the last thirty-five years. Certainly the fact that hard-line conservative former President Papadopoulos was not even able to advance beyond the first round of elections in February 2008 signals a shift in the opinion of Greek Cypriots regarding the issue of their northern neighbors. Granted there were elements other than reunification that influenced voters' decisions, it cannot be ignored that both candidates that advanced to the runoff, eventual President-elect Christofias and eventual runner-up Kasoulidis, campaigned on a relaunch of peace talks and reunification of the island, whereas their opponent warned against the "selling out" of Greek Cypriot interests. The compromises made between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots must be both *precise* enough to produce tangible results and *dualistic* enough to gain the satisfaction of both populations. The encouragement of the international community and the desires of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots can only go so far; the success will come from the implementation of wishes into a realistic plan.

I argue that the best solution for the Cyprus dispute is the implementation of the governmental structure suggested in the Annan Plan coupled with domestic deliberation on the contentious issues of Turkish military presence, a unified constitution, territorial claims and the return of property to Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot refugees. This also seems to be the path adopted by Christofias and Talat, although we will not know the full plan in detail until later in 2008.

In closing I would like to make some remarks regarding the near future for the peace process. Domestic and international actors must work to maintain the pro-solution momentum. The delegating parties must also be aware of human rights laws when discussing the returning of land and property lost or abandoned over the past three decades. One measure that would also go a long way in producing a successful peace process is ensuring that Turkish Cypriots are fairly represented within the European Union. This can be accomplished in the immediate future through the establishment of an

EU Delegational branch in Northern Cyprus. This would be a gesture of good faith in the peace process and imply that the European Union is steadfastly behind the reunification of the island, in addition it will serve as the first avenue for the integration of the north into the EU bureaucracy under a reunified Cyprus. Finally, a difficult issue as well as a topic of paramount importance is the Turkish military on the island. The encouragement of Turkey to remove all or at least some of its troops from Northern Cyprus is a key component to the peace process, not only for Cypriots, but the stability of Hellenic-Turkish relations as a whole.

Note: References available upon request. Please contact me at prpass@indiana.edu if you are interested.