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Renewing hope for Cyprus peace: a novel approach to reconcile the negotiation positions of the Turkish Cypriot side and the Greek Cypriot side

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Abstract

Focusing on the achievements and failures of the 2017 Crans-Montana negotiations, this study examines the research question of how and why the last talks failed to resolve the Cyprus issue. It argues that progress in the negotiations was hindered by the enduring mistrust between the community leaders and the inadequacy of their resolve to reach common ground by reconciling their respective differences about the security and guarantees issue. The study suggests the process that helped bring about the Northern Ireland Good Friday Agreement offers a practical and effective approach to compare with the case of a seemingly intractable situation such as the Cyprus problem. The Irish–British negotiations were open to and involved a wide range of parties including the government, civil society, and international stakeholders. Moreover, they benefited from the decision to set a firm deadline for the conclusion of the negotiations. The findings of this study stress that because the previous Cyprus talks lacked an inclusive and transparent negotiation process – one with stated deadlines complete with alternative scenarios in the event of a referendum – they failed to address the broad gap of trust between the two Cypriot communities.

Keywords: Cyprus peace talks; Good Friday Agreement; Crans-Montana negotiations; security concerns; confidence-building measures

Introduction

Following the failure of the 2004 Annan Plan (the first and the last comprehensive United Nations [UN] settlement plan to resolve the Cyprus conflict), the 2017 meetings in Switzerland in Mont Pelerin, Geneva, and Crans-Montana offered a momentous opportunity for the settlement of the Cyprus problem. Instead, the collapse of the Cyprus conference in Crans-Montana in July 2017 proved to be yet another failed initiative that Cyprus-conflict observers had witnessed too many times

since the start of the Cyprus peace talks. Consequently, many outside observers have viewed this latest failure as a case of *déjà vu* (McGarry 2021, 201; Morelli 2018).

Numerous sensible commentators have suggested that, as in the past, there will be new initiatives aimed at solving the Cyprus conflict in the future, just as long as we continue having a Cyprus conflict (Lindsay 2011). However, there are experts who are convinced that the collapse in Crans-Montana was a watershed in the Cyprus inter-communal negotiations, especially in light of the Turkish stance (Faramarzi 2020; Scheindlin 2020). According to them, the collapse went beyond failure, proving that the parameters of the proposed settlement were no longer valid or applicable. In sum, they maintain that the basis underlying the inter-communal negotiations since the high-level agreements of the late 1970s, namely a bi-zonal/bi-communal federation, is no longer applicable, given that it has repeatedly failed. Critically, sources from other works have long considered bi-zonality/bi-communality as a means for Turkey to achieve political-strategic control of the entire island (Coufoudakis 1974, 245; Kıralp 2020, 400–401; Kyriakides 2009, 68–69; Mallinson 2009, 737).

This view that federation may no longer serve as a basis for future rounds of negotiation is evident in Turkey's altered stance since the failure of Crans-Montana, which challenged whether it was worthwhile prolonging the search for a solution based on the existing parameters and negotiation methodology. In keeping with this approach, the governments of Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot side took the joint initiative to open up part of the fenced-off area of Varosha in addition to refusing to negotiate a federation-based solution. Accordingly, if there is a solution now, the fenced-off area of Varosha will be a part of it, whereas, in the absence of a solution, Varosha's fate will be evaluated on the basis of current legal rules and opportunities and will be reopened under Turkish control.

Nevertheless, this analogous move by the Turkish authorities to open Varosha has been deemed a completely illegal action and consequently condemned by the entire international community. The fenced-off area of Varosha is under *de facto* Turkish control as it is in the northern part of the island. However, according to the UN, the area is a part of the UN-controlled buffer zone, meaning it has a certain legal regime under the prevailing provisions of the international law that prohibits any unilateral procedure to open any area of the buffer zone. Such an opening can only take place after mutual agreement.

Further evidence of Ankara's changed approach was the direct intervention by Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi; AKP) in the Turkish Cypriot Presidential Elections of October 2020 by explicitly supporting hard-liner Prime Minister Ersin Tatar of the National Unity Party (Ulusal Birlik Partisi; UBP) who favors a two-state solution. Following Tatar's election as president, Turkey advocated for two sovereign states with equal rights at the informal meeting that eventually took place in Geneva between April 27 and April 29, 2021. It was the first meeting of its kind since the collapse of the Crans-Montana talks in 2017.

All in all, the evidence in the aftermath of the Crans-Montana summit suggests that the Turkish attitude towards federation-based negotiations appears to have reached, if not the end of the road, at least a crossroads, creating uncertainty about what to expect in the future (Faramarzi 2020). For quite some time after Crans-Montana, Turkey's politicians and their counterparts in the Turkish Cypriot

community have questioned the option of the bi-communal/bi-zonal federation. Having at first proclaimed the two-state solution as the only viable “solution,” the official discourse involving Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot authorities begun invoking the terms “equal international status” and “sovereign equality” as conditions for restarting negotiations (Faramarzi 2020).

Given the climate crisis, economic challenges, the Russia–Ukraine war, and energy demands, a settlement to the Cyprus problem is now more pressing than ever. Deriving lessons from what transpired in past negotiations is key to the success of the parties formulating their positions to reach a “strategic agreement” at this critical juncture (United Nations Security Council 2017). The authors of this paper believe such a strategic agreement is a prerequisite for a comprehensive settlement.

This study aims to draw some lessons and to suggest a solution based on the achievements and failures of the Crans-Montana summit. It therefore focuses on what went wrong in the last negotiations and frames a conclusion accordingly. So, the hypothesis presented here argues that the common ground that would enable formal negotiations to resume in earnest depends on the design of a negotiation process and this would have to be shaped by the lessons learnt from the Cyprus inter-communal negotiations. It should entail a deadline and make absolutely clear what would happen in the event of another collapse. For instance, there is much to be learned not just from previous (failed) rounds of the Cyprus negotiations, but also from other contexts such as the 1998 Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland. For example, the latter benefited hugely from the decision to set a firm deadline for the end of the negotiations between the British and Irish parties.

In addition to the need to set an agreed deadline, the negotiation process should be designed with an eye to avoiding outcomes that might end up with a repeat of failures previously experienced either at the negotiation stage or at the referendum proper. In the event of a repeated failure, the authors of this paper suggest partial implementation of the property and territory regimes of the negotiated settlement plan as an option to help institutionalize peace not only as an alternative but as a catalyst for further negotiations. Such a scenario, it should be noted, would require the UN to shift from its long-held policy of “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed” to a philosophy pre-empting interim agreements from crowding out the potential for a comprehensive settlement (The Center for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development 2013).

The study first provides a brief chronological overview of the Cyprus problem to outline the background of the Cyprus inter-communal negotiations with emphasis on how the conflicting sides arrived at their positions on the important negotiation issues.¹ Then, the study investigates the negotiation process that unfolded after the 2004 Annan Plan up to the collapse of the 2017 Crans-Montana talks in a bid to answer the question of why the talks failed. Subsequent sections focus on the importance and the uniqueness of the Crans-Montana negotiations, treating the talks as a benchmark from which the authors draw lessons and look ahead to the prospects for future negotiations. Finally, the study suggests a comparison between the 1998 Good Friday

¹ Former Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akıncı was interviewed by the authors for the purpose of understanding Crans-Montana, with the provision that he would not be directly quoted.

Agreement in Northern Ireland and the Cyprus situation to draw conclusions and policy suggestions.

The study uses the inclusive and transparent Northern Ireland peace process, where the negotiating table was open to a wide range of parties from government to civil society, as both a comparison and a learning example for Cyprus negotiations which have almost exclusively been controlled by the leaders and conducted in secrecy. While more open, transparent negotiations that were visible to the rest of society helped bring an end to violence and reformed the model of governance in Northern Ireland, the Cyprus negotiations ultimately failed to engage with the rest of society in Cyprus. The findings of this study stress the need for an effective strategy modeled on the peace process in Northern Ireland. Accomplishing that entails designing inclusive and transparent procedures, along with defined timeframes and establishing institutions backed by international stakeholders and substantial financial resources. Additional recommendations for viable Cyprus peace talks include identifying convergent points and disagreements, designing innovative bridging proposals, and preparing the island's communities for a final Cyprus conference and referendums.

Background of the inter-communal negotiations and the positions of the conflicting sides

The Republic of Cyprus (RoC) was established in 1960 as a unitary presidential structure with functional characteristics designed to ensure representation for Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots by requiring the consent of both communities in decision making (Sözen 1998, 42). Greek Cypriot perceptions of the RoC as being unfairly decided by external parties rather than based on principles of fairness and proportionality erupted into a spiral of ethnic violence in 1963 that ended with the collapse of the RoC's bi-communal framework (Drousiotis 2008). The conflict resulted in the UN's involvement and the adoption of Security Council Resolution 186 in 1964, which set up the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), thereby authorizing it to maintain peace (Gazioğlu 2001).

The UN lent its assistance to the two communities as they engaged in inter-communal negotiations, which were launched in 1968 but ended in September 1971 without achieving substantive outcomes (Stavrinos 2014). Subsequently, negotiations were initiated anew on June 8, 1972, and persisted intermittently until April 2, 1974. This time, the framework was the Five-Plus-UN format consisting of the two communities plus the three guarantor powers – Turkey, Greece, and the United Kingdom (UK) (Clerides 1990). No matter the negotiation format, attempts to ensure bi-communal harmony in the RoC proved ineffectual (McGarry 2021, 235).

Instead, the tensions persisted, culminating in an attempted military coup engineered by Greece in 1974, which triggered a Turkish military intervention and the division of the island (United Nations 2019). High-level agreements in 1977 and 1979 outlined a vision for a bi-communal federal settlement, with the addition of new language citing the need to refer to the “territory under administration” of each community with its implications of straightforward bi-zonality (Tombazos 2010, 232).

Although the two conflicting sides agreed about the broadly defined structure of any future Cyprus settlement, the devil invariably being in the details, to date, they

have failed to iron out their differences about their respective approaches to the key negotiation issues. Their hardline positions have dominated the constitutional aspects of the Cyprus problem, such being the case with, for example, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's Set of Ideas in 1992, the Annan Plan of 2004, as well as with practical matters like the talks about confidence-building measures (CBMs) in 1993.

Citing the gap of trust between Greek and Turkish Cypriots, Boutros-Ghali initially advocated establishing CBMs to help foster cooperation across various sectors. These encompassed education, transportation, healthcare, environmental protection, and cultural exchanges. Despite the concept being acknowledged in subsequent UN documents, CBMs encountered resistance from community leaders who were sensitive about sovereignty concerns. Turkish Cypriots flagged their concerns about potential domination by the Greek Cypriot administration, while the Greek Cypriots were fearful of the implied recognition of the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" (TRNC). A pivotal step in facilitating interaction between the two communities ended a prolonged period of isolation when in 2003 the Turkish Cypriot authorities eased buffer zone crossing restrictions. This was to lead to increased trust, reduced prejudice, and enhanced peaceful coexistence (Papadakis 2005, 242). Nevertheless, improving the frequency and quality of this kind of interaction while prioritizing engagement with resistant demographic groups like Greek Cypriot youth and elderly Turkish Cypriots remains key to fostering trust between the two communities (Dizdaroglu 2020).

The Annan Plan, another missed opportunity in the unyielding saga of the Cyprus Problem, represented a pivotal moment. For the first and only time in the island's history, a comprehensive peace proposal formulated by the UN was presented for simultaneous referendums on April 24, 2004 within the two Cypriot communities. Despite significant support from Turkish Cypriots, the Annan Plan was rejected by the majority of Greek Cypriots. The failure was attributed to Greek Cypriot concerns about the sovereignty issue and the implementation guarantees as well as the perception that the UN in its role as arbitrator favored Turkish interests, potentially legitimizing the division of Cyprus.

After the failed referendum, negotiations stalled until 2008 when talks resumed under the leadership of Demetris Christofias and Mehmet Ali Talat. Despite achieving substantive convergences on several chapters, progress was hindered by election cycles, financial crises, and disagreements over the role of the UN and the guarantor powers. The most important and vexing of the key negotiation issues are governance and power sharing in the future federation, the property issue, territorial adjustment of the two federated zones, and security and guarantees. In order for a comprehensive solution to be finalized and put into effect, the two sides have to agree on how to resolve these issues. In the course of the decades-long negotiations, the two Cypriot sides have developed deeply rooted positions (with some positive overlaps, it should be noted) – summarized in Table 1 – about what they want to accomplish with regard to these negotiation issues.

The positions of the respective sides with regard to some of the more salient chapters of the negotiation reveal their "maximalist" tendencies (Kıralp 2020). Nevertheless, public opinion polls highlight overlapping "win-sets" that tended to be disregarded by the Track 1 leaders and their negotiation delegations (Psaltis et al.

Table 1. Positions by and overlapping win-sets of the two Cypriot sides on governance and power sharing, property, territory, and security and guarantees

Issue	Greek Cypriot side	Turkish Cypriot side	Overlapping win-sets
Governance and power sharing	Some power sharing with Turkish Cypriots, but mostly majority decision	Power sharing with Greek Cypriots in all competencies	Bi-communal/bi-zonal federation with political equality
Property	All displaced persons to be able to return to their properties	Current users to remain on disputed properties	Principles relating to restitution, exchange, and compensation of immovable property
Territorial adjustment	Substantive Turkish Cypriot-controlled territory to be given to the Greek Cypriot constituent state	Limited territorial concessions to the Greek Cypriot constituent state	Two small but viable minorities on both sides of the federation
Security and guarantees	No guarantees and the end of Turkish military presence	Continuation of 1960 Treaty of Guarantee and Treaty of Alliance	Security of one side will not cause insecurity to the other side

2022). Over the years, island-wide public opinion polls repeatedly indicated the bi-zonal/bi-communal federation to be the only alternative solution model preferable to both of the two Cypriot sides (Sözen 2012, 115–116).

A report from UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to the Security Council in 2011 highlights polls conducted by the civil society group, Cyprus 2015,² which measured Cypriot preferences for alternative solution models like a unitary state, two separate states, bi-zonal/bi-communal federations, confederations, or remaining the same. Greek Cypriots generally favor a unitary state, while Turkish Cypriots prefer two separate, internationally recognized states. However, a notable proportion of both populations consider a bi-zonal/bi-communal federation either essential, desirable, or tolerable, indicating potential progress. Only 19 percent outright reject federation, with the majority viewing it as essential, desirable, satisfactory, or, if necessary, tolerable (United Nations Security Council 2011).

A unitary state or recognition of an independent TRNC faces insurmountable hurdles. Turkish Cypriots seek recognition only with mutual recognition from Greek Cypriots, aiming for a clear and conclusive solution. Effectively addressing the Cyprus problem hinges on a single alternative which entails a bi-zonal/bi-communal federation. Yet reconciling differing views poses challenges. Greek Cypriots advocate for a federation without guarantees or restrictions on freedoms, a stance unlikely to sway Turkish Cypriots. Conversely, Turkish Cypriots seek settlement and property ownership restrictions, retaining the Treaty of Guarantee. The challenge lies in finding a novel approach to reconcile these views, addressing security interests and ensuring community autonomy within a federation framework.

The Cyprus 2015 polls also attempted to map how the political elites' preferences align with their respective communities, with the Greek Cypriots prioritizing a

² Cyprus 2015 was a civil society group and partner in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and was succeeded by the Seed of Peace.

unitary state and the Turkish Cypriots favoring a two-state solution. The findings suggest that when it comes to the Greek Cypriot political elites, their secondary preference, unlike that of the Greek Cypriot public preference for federation, seems to favor the continuation of the existing status quo – i.e. preserving the recognized title of the RoC. Federation emerges as a less favored alternative for the political elites of both communities, with permanent division or a two-state resolution relegated to lower preferences. Turkish Cypriot elites would not accept a unitary state where they are a minority. Instead, they prefer the status quo should a two-state solution or federation not prove to be attainable. This highlights the complexity of the negotiations and the need for innovative approaches to bridge the gap between the opposing viewpoints if talks are to advance towards a comprehensive resolution (Cyprus 2015 Initiative 2011).

Notably, the polling revealed widespread pessimism among Greek and Turkish Cypriots regarding a comprehensive solution. Nonetheless, a significant majority from both communities expressed a strong desire for resolution, bolstering the legitimacy of ongoing negotiations (Seed of Peace 2010).

The Swiss conferences: Geneva, Mont Pelerin, and Crans-Montana

Following the February 2013 presidential elections, Christofias was succeeded by Nicos Anastasiades, the early days of whose ten-year, two-term administration (2013 to 2023) were marked by the RoC's financial crisis, which effectively stalled Cyprus negotiations. In February 2014, a joint declaration between Anastasiades and Turkish Cypriot leader Derviş Eroğlu (voted leader of the Turkish Cypriot community in the April 2010 presidential elections) reaffirmed the principle of a unified international personality and sovereignty for Cyprus. Notably, it also acknowledged that sovereignty as arising from the two political communities, in line with the London–Zurich framework that had established the RoC by means of an international treaty rather than self-determination. Despite the joint declaration, Anastasiades suspended negotiations, attributing the decision to Turkey's hydrocarbon explorations in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Following Mustafa Akıncı's election as leader of the Turkish Cypriot community in April 2015, negotiations recommenced with renewed momentum. Security and guarantees aside, Anastasiades and Akıncı, each with a pro-solution background, managed to achieve considerable convergences in all chapters (particularly on governance, the economy, European Union (EU) matters, and property rights), achieving greater progress than past negotiators had. Both were conscious that they represented the last of their generation, the last to experience a time when the two communities had lived together. Given the division of the island since, succeeding generations have had no experience of life lived in mixed communities. So here were two pro-solution leaders acutely aware that if they failed, it would be almost impossible for the new generations to solve the Cyprus problem with a bi-zonal/bi-communal federation in which the two communities could live together.

Progress achieved in the Anastasiades–Akıncı negotiations led to intensive talks in Switzerland. These paved the way for convening the Geneva (January 2017) and June–July 2017 Crans-Montana Conference on Cyprus with the added participation of the guarantor powers. Two negotiating tables featured in Crans-Montana. The first table

was where the leaders and their respective negotiating teams focused on the internal issues of Cyprus: governance and power sharing; economy; EU relations; property and territory. The second table was where the leaders and their teams were joined by representatives of the three guarantor powers in negotiations about the security system of the new United Cyprus state to be established. Other relevant parties were to be invited as and when needed, but the onus to deliver an acceptable outcome would rest firmly on the shoulders of the three guarantor powers. It was up to them to make the necessary concessions about external security and guarantees so as to end the long-lasting Cyprus problem.³

Both the Conference on Cyprus and the subsequent Crans-Montana meetings turned out to be further missed opportunities, as the negotiations proved incapable of overcoming the sole sticking point that remained – i.e. bringing the security and guarantees chapter to a satisfactory and acceptable conclusion (Miles 2017). And yet, the negotiations on security and guarantees with the added participation of the guarantor powers did provide another standout highlight of the Crans-Montana conference. For the first time since the 1960 Treaties of Guarantee and Alliance, a new security system had been negotiated, a breakthrough that made the Crans-Montana conference highly significant and unique (Cyprus Mail 2017).

Moreover, the Anastasiades–Akıncı negotiations for a settlement proved to be a process that was more Cypriot-owned than the Annan Plan of 2004. Back then, Secretary-General Annan and the UN had to fill in gaps within the text because of the inability and failure of the two parties to conclude a negotiated agreement. The lack of an agreed compromise on the continuation of guarantees and unilateral intervention rights in particular contributed to the failure of the Annan Plan referendum. Since the guarantees issue was not negotiated, what was written in the final text – that Treaties of Guarantee and Alliance would be maintained in accordance with present conditions – was inserted by Annan in keeping with the UN’s role as arbitrator in 2004. During the Crans-Montana conference, however, the role of the UN within the framework of the negotiations remained primarily that of facilitator of the process rather than that of a mediator or let alone an arbitrator.

Nonetheless, when the UN Secretary-General found himself engaged in talks at Crans-Montana that went slightly beyond his mission of good offices, the parties did not object. On June 30, 2017, Secretary-General Guterres presented the parties with a framework to enable them to reach convergences on the major outstanding issues regarding territory, political equality, property, equivalent treatment of Turkish citizens, and security and guarantees. His Crans-Montana intervention (specifically the so-called Guterres Framework) on June 30, 2017 reflected a shift more in keeping with the Annan Plan style of arbitration. Guterres also personally engaged with the parties on June 30 and July 6 to guide them towards a “strategic agreement” since the process had more or less come to an end. Hoping to salvage some form of strategic agreement, Guterres held a series of confidential bilateral meetings at which “key positions and indications of possible openings were put forward by relevant parties, particularly on the issues related to security and guarantees” (United Nations Security Council 2017, 6). Yet, these attempts proved futile in enabling the parties to

³ The Conference on Cyprus on January 12, 2017 stated that “the security of one community could not come at the expense of the security of other” (Seed of Peace 2010, 4).

settle on a package that bridged outstanding differences (Economist 2017). Guterres attributes this to the parties' lack of trust and determination to reach "common ground through mutual accommodation" (United Nations Security Council 2017, 6). Thus, he closed the Cyprus conference without an agreement reached.

The Greek Cypriot leadership blamed Turkey's proposals as the reason for the collapse of the Crans-Montana talks. The Turkish leadership asserted it was Anastasiades' insistence on "zero guarantees and zero troops" that was responsible (Morelli 2018, 22). Turkey maintained its position on the presence of Turkish troops and the future of the guarantee system. Cyprus and Greece advocated for their withdrawal (Grigoriadis 2017). Efforts to reconcile these differences involved proposals to limit troop deployment under international supervision and deliberating withdrawal clauses. Negotiations also tackled the return of part of Morphou, the establishment of a rotating presidency, and property issues. Although the Greek Cypriot leadership's comprehensive proposal showed a willingness to be flexible on property issues – contingent upon specific conditions such as the return of Morphou, dissolution of the guarantee regime, and the implementation of a sunset clause for Turkish troop withdrawal – no resolution was reached (Grigoriadis 2017).

It was almost solved, according to Makarios Drousiotis, former advisor to President Anastasiades, but the latter's hesitance to secure majority support among Greek Cypriots for such a compromise ultimately prompted Secretary-General Guterres to conclude the international Cyprus conference (Drousiotis 2020a). Anastasiades was met with accusations of avoiding meaningful negotiations but the Secretary-General's Special Adviser Espen Barth Eide urged all parties to stop indulging in this blame game. The Special Adviser described the procedure followed during the Crans-Montana negotiations as "a collective failure of stitching together a deal" (Andriou 2017). He pointed out how, towards the end of the conference, they had seen more and more pieces of "the puzzle actually coming on the table that came late, but we were not able to stitch it together to a total deal" (Andriou 2017). It became clear, he noted, that it was impossible to offset behavior on all sides that "continued to reserve the final gives until they saw the cards of the other side" (Andriou 2017). This was why it was "decided to close the Conference on Cyprus which began on January 12 in Geneva, and then ended on July 7 in Crans Montana" (Andriou 2017).

Secretary-General Guterres asserted that "progress in the chapter of security and guarantees was an essential element for reaching an overall agreement and in building trust between the two communities in relation to their future security" (Cyprus Mail 2017). In his view, "a new system of security was needed for Cyprus" (United Nations Security Council 2017, 6). Meanwhile, it was also agreed "to continue in parallel the bi-communal negotiations on all other outstanding issues, starting with territory, property, and governance and powersharing" (Cyprus Mail 2017). Mindful of the number of domestic and regional developments including the issue of hydrocarbons, Guterres invited the two leaders to return home, suggesting they reflect deeply "on the results and on the possible road ahead" (Cyprus Mail 2017). This reflection, he implied, should be carried out without delay, in a mood of "understanding and compromise rather than exacerbating the differences that clearly exist," in order to enable the restart of a meaningful negotiation process (Andriou 2017). The Secretary-General stressed that the UN's facilitator role in the negotiation framework "remains at the disposal of the parties" (Cyprus Mail 2017).

A 2020 interview titled “What really happened at the Crans Montana conference on Cyprus” emphasizes how the Guterres’ framework urged reciprocal concessions from both sides to resolve the Cyprus issue (Parikiaki 2020). The framework specifically called for flexibility from the Turkish side regarding intervention rights and troop size, but also stressed how important it was for the Greek Cypriot leadership to unequivocally recognize the political equality of the Turkish Cypriot community. Former Greek Cypriot foreign minister Yoannis Kasulidis acknowledged the sense of disillusionment prevalent during the Crans-Montana negotiations, especially when Secretary-General Guterres highlighted negative attitudes from the Greek Cypriot side, juxtaposed with the Secretary-General’s awareness of the adversarial stance from the Turkish side (Kıbrıs Postası 2022).

In his book *Crime at Crans-Montana*, Drousiotis (2023) points out how during the Crans-Montana negotiations, Anastasiades engaged in discussions about a two-state model with Turkey’s foreign minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, to the exclusion of his Turkish Cypriot counterpart Akıncı. Using historical parallels such as the annexation of Hatay to Turkey and Crimea to Russia, Drousiotis (2023) warns of the potential consequences of a two-statehood approach, cautioning that it serves the ultimate aim of facilitating annexation of Northern Cyprus through population relocation, citizenship grants, and referendums. He blames Anastasiades for rejecting a European solution and claims that should this trend persist, the remaining part of Cyprus could be absorbed by Turkey and end up living under Ankara’s influence (Drousiotis 2023). Drousiotis (2023) also implicates Moscow in the obstruction of the Crans-Montana agreement, citing Russia’s motivation to maintain the division of Cyprus as a means of creating tensions among North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members. Drousiotis (2023) draws on eyewitness testimonies and substantiated evidence to illustrate the involvement of the Cypriot political elite in acts of corruption and manipulation, ultimately thwarting efforts towards the reunification of the island.

After the collapse of the Cyprus conference in Crans-Montana

In his report of October 15, 2018, Secretary-General Guterres suggests some preconditions for a restart of formal negotiations. These include urging the parties to prepare well, to show resolve and political will, to preserve the convergences that have been reached thus far, to pursue a goal of reaching a strategic agreement, to take risks, and to prepare their respective communities for a settlement. Following the collapse of the 2017 Crans-Montana Cyprus summit, the UN has employed shuttle diplomacy, appointing Jane Holl Lute as a consultant in 2018 to facilitate discussions among leaders (Kaymak 2024). Despite numerous meetings aimed at revitalizing negotiations, such as the November 2019 gathering in Berlin convened by Guterres, consensus on the terms necessary to initiate another round of talks has not been reached (Dizdaroğlu 2020).

It became evident that pro-solution sentiments among Turkish Cypriots and Turkey have eroded in light of the failure of the international community to deliver the anticipated incentives that had been promised the Turkish Cypriots. These included removing isolations by such measures as inaugurating direct flights and the facilitation of free trade, measures aimed at garnering support for the “yes” vote

during the Annan Plan referendum. Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was increasingly vocal in drawing attention to this perceived sense of betrayal. He criticized the EU, accusing it of preferential treatment towards Greek Cypriots, disregard for the outcomes of the Annan Plan referenda, and perpetuating the isolation of Turkish Cypriots. Notably, Turkey's proactive stance in Cyprus has waned since the mid-2000s. This is in marked contrast with the approach observed in 2003 and 2004, and coincides with the deterioration of Turkey's EU accession trajectory.

However, the shift in Turkey's Cyprus policy became even more pronounced following the breakdown of the Crans-Montana negotiations, having been exacerbated by prior failures such as the 2004 Annan Plan referendums and subsequent developments. Crans-Montana caused significant exhaustion and frustration within Turkey, prompting a more assertive Turkish foreign policy approach. Since then, consensus on a federation has diminished, especially within the Turkish Cypriot leadership. The significance of the summit, including the Guterres Framework and his proposals concerning governance, political equality, security, territory, and property, has decreased (Kaymak 2024). Turkey has shifted away from the federation concept, questioning its feasibility and advocating for alternatives based on sovereign equality and equal international status. Turkey now questions the viability of a Cyprus solution based on a bi-zonal/bi-communal federation, within which the two communities would share power and live together. Turkish officials have started to promote other options based on sovereign equality and equal international status, in addition to the federation option. Current Turkish Cypriot leader Tatar demands acknowledgement of their "sovereign equality" and "equal international status" as a precondition for formal negotiations.

Moreover, the governments of Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot side have launched a new proposal – a project to reopen the Turkish military-controlled area of Varosha, which had remained fenced off by the Turkish army since 1974 (Sözen and Şahin 2020, 136). The announcement of Varosha's opening on October 8, 2020 at a joint press conference by then Prime Minister Tatar and President Erdoğan was also viewed as an intervention by Ankara into the Turkish Cypriot presidential election, which took place three days later, with a subsequent run-off on October 18, 2020.⁴

In that election, marked by the Varosha decision and by Turkey's direct and indirect interference, Tatar narrowly defeated the pro-solution incumbent presidency

⁴ Unlike previous votes that have been deemed relatively fair, Tatar owes his triumph to solid support from Turkey's ruling party AKP and to Erdoğan. The announcement of the opening of Varosha was made at the Water Supply Ceremony, following the pipeline repair of the TRNC Water Supply Project, a time when Tatar and others were campaigning as candidates against the then President Mustafa Akıncı. So, just three days before the presidential election of October 11, 2020, the reopening of Varosha was turned into a campaign issue. Erdoğan explicitly voiced his backing for Tatar throughout the presidential campaign. Turkish delegates canvassed voter support for Tatar by paying visits to Turkish Cypriot villages, concentrating particularly on mainland Turks who had migrated over the years and had attained citizenship in Northern Cyprus. Furthermore, many Turkish media outlets that are widely followed in Northern Cyprus gave positive coverage to projects being publicized by Tatar and Erdoğan in defiance of the campaigning ban that takes effect immediately prior to the actual date of the election. Also, the run-up to the vote saw Akıncı become the target of a sustained attack on social media that presented him as the nemesis of Turkey's interests. It can be safely argued that this controversial and widespread vilification was meant to stir up nationalist feelings and promote the turnout of right-leaning Turkish Cypriot voters. See Scheindlin (2020).

of Mustafa Akıncı. Following Tatar's election, the idea of a loose confederation gained purchase as an alternative to a settlement based on a bi-zonal and bi-communal federation. For the Greek Cypriot side, this meant nothing more than a two-state solution. At the April 27–29, 2021 UN-brokered Five-Plus-One informal Geneva meeting that included both Cypriot sides, the guarantor powers, and the EU, the Turkish Cypriots and Ankara advocated a solution model based on two sovereign states with equal rights rather than a federation. However, Secretary-General Guterres was unable to identify common ground during the summit, the first meeting of its kind since the collapse of the Crans-Montana talks in July 2017. The Turkish Cypriot insistence on sovereign equality and equal international status is not considered as a condition for restarting negotiations for the federation-based solution in the context of the UN parameters. The Greek Cypriots stuck to their position, and reaffirmed their unwillingness to negotiate any model other than a federation. Lacking any common ground, the UN Secretary-General called the parties to another meeting to prevent the collapse of the informal Geneva Meeting.

Given Turkey's recent actions, from its unilateral reopening of part of Varosha to its stepped-up interventions in the internal affairs of Turkish Cypriots, the status quo in Cyprus no longer seems relevant. This leaves the Turkish Cypriots at the crossroads. In 2021, the Turkish Cypriot side proposed a settlement plan based on sovereign equality and equal international status to the UN, with Erdoğan subsequently advocating for recognition of the TRNC at the UN General Assembly (Kaymak 2024). Their rhetoric for “sovereign equality” and “equal international status” notwithstanding, both Tatar and Erdoğan are aware that a “two-state solution” cannot be delivered unilaterally (Florea 2017).

A more plausible scenario is that Northern Cyprus would become a *de facto* province or protectorate of Turkey, making it even more subject to the authority and influence of Ankara (Faramarzi 2020). A more upbeat variation on this scenario suggests that the most recent approach adopted by the Turkish Cypriots and Turkey is yet another ploy by Turkey to leverage pressure on the Greek Cypriots to accommodate Ankara's bid to have an acknowledged say about the hydrocarbon exploration issue. Additionally, Turkey's demand for recognition of Northern Cyprus's “inherent sovereign equality” and “equal international status” could be seen as a strategic maneuver to negotiate favorable terms as discussions unfold (Kaymak 2024). Any and all of these scenarios call for immediate action to at least reach a strategic solution if not a comprehensive one. Either way, they place a burden on all the sides.

A resolution passed by the UN Security Council on January 30, 2023 underscores the precarious nature of the Cyprus issue, emphasizing its inherent instability and the looming threat of irreversible developments as well as the inefficiency of the Technical Committees (Kaymak 2024). Moreover, tensions about the exploitation of offshore resources, coupled with controversies surrounding Varosha/Maraş, property rights, and the influx of irregular migrants across the Green Line, collectively pose significant challenges to regional stability and exacerbate the complexities of the ongoing discourse (Grigoriadis 2017).

These developments reflect how the failure of peace attempts has contributed to the growing disillusionment among advocates of conflict resolution and eroded the trust between Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders, so essential for progress (Drousiotis 2020b; Grigoriadis 2017). Research by Dizdaroğlu (2023) indicates widespread doubt

among Cypriot youth regarding the prospects of resolving the Cyprus problem. The reluctance of the parties involved when it comes to achieving a settlement has contributed to the escalation of nationalist discourse within the political and media domains on both sides (Dizdaroğlu 2020). In the wake of the 2023 election cycles, the discontent among proponents of peace within the Greek and Turkish Cypriot spheres has been plain to see. Of special note among the electoral outcomes were the victory of Nikos Christodoulides, the former Cypriot foreign minister, in the presidential contest of the RoC, the successful re-election of President Erdoğan in Turkey, and the triumph of Prime Minister Mitsotakis in an unscheduled legislative election in Greece (Kaymak 2024).

The fundamental challenge arises from the enduring mistrust and lack of determination among community leaders, rather than from any inadequacy of the UN parameters (United Nations Security Council 2017). Despite their differing views, the two sides need to make concessions and reaffirm their commitment to a bi-zonal/bi-communal federation (United Nations Security Council 2020). However, progress in negotiations is hindered by a general lack of willingness to identify common ground (United Nations Security Council 2017).

Peace-making in Northern Ireland: a model for the Cyprus negotiations

The Secretary-General Guterres appointed María Angela Holguín Cuéllar of Colombia as his Personal Envoy on Cyprus on January 5, 2024 (Kaymak 2024). Previously Colombia's foreign minister (2010–2018), Holguín has held diplomatic positions at the UN and in Venezuela. In her new role, she faces the challenge of fostering flexibility and concessions from all sides so as to identify common ground for formal negotiations. Moreover, Turkey has stated that it is not interested in supporting a cut-and-dried, open-ended negotiation process in Cyprus.

In his report to the Security Council of October 15, 2018, Guterres declared that supporting an indefinite process devoid of tangible outcomes is a thing of the past, not for the future (United Nations Security Council 2018). From the Turkish perspective, a UN-sponsored “results-oriented” strategy complete with timelines implicitly suggests they were determined by political agendas (Kaymak 2024).

As a means of getting both sides to show greater willingness to compromise in addressing the Cyprus impasse, the authors of this study believe that a novel negotiation approach integrating inclusive and transparent procedures along with defined timeframes is feasible. Based on their observations from the previously cited Cyprus negotiation process and the Belfast agreement, the authors suggest that Guterres could design a negotiation process that is not open-ended and that makes clear what would happen in the event the process collapses.

Setting a strict deadline for the end of the negotiations between the British and Irish sides forced those involved to revise their attitudes, rather than suffer the fallout of failure. In the case of Cyprus, the Belfast negotiation process offers an example worth emulating. The switch in approach helped deliver the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland. Direct comparison between (Christian) Greek Cypriots and (Moslem) Turkish Cypriots on the one hand, and (Roman Catholic) republican Irish and (Protestant) loyalist Ulstermen on the other, would be questionable. Even though the Northern Ireland and Northern Cyprus issues differ,

drawing from alternative negotiation models could still facilitate progress in bridging the diplomatic gap for Cyprus.

For example, the idea of imposing deadlines for the end of negotiations, while not entirely unique, is worth considering. Setting timeframes as structured sequences with repercussions for missed deadlines, along with a focus on results and adherence to all the convergences reached, can prevent crises and foster a conducive negotiation environment in Cyprus (Kaymak 2024). Both parties should resume negotiations from the 2017 Crans-Montana session, which witnessed significant progress, especially in addressing security concerns, despite the challenges faced (Grigoriadis 2017).

The Cyprus peace process could draw valuable lessons from the Northern Ireland peace process, where multiple stakeholders were engaged and negotiations conducted with a higher degree of transparency (Ertuğral and Torlak 2024). In contrast, the Cyprus negotiations were largely confined to the leaders, and often occurred behind closed doors (Ertuğral and Torlak 2024). Since the onset of the inter-communal negotiations in 1968 and especially since the 1977 and 1979 high-level agreements, the strictly Track I (leaders-level) format has been mostly at a remove from the rest of society. Leaders from both communities have assumed that a settlement negotiated at the elite level would be sufficient to meet the needs of their respective communities and would gain broad acceptance (Dizdaroğlu 2020).

The lack of meaningful involvement from the broader populace, however, has raised serious concerns regarding the *inclusiveness* of the peace negotiations and, to a certain extent, the *legitimacy* of an approach which offers public concerns very limited input into the actual negotiation process. Given the history of unsuccessful attempts to reunite the island, it might be wise to reconsider negotiation formats and promote greater inclusivity by fostering an environment conducive to settlement within both communities (Dizdaroğlu 2020). Various scholarly studies suggest that securing a settlement requires grassroots changes, inclusive peace processes that involve women and youth, and gradual progress (Demetriou and Hadjipavlou 2018; Dizdaroğlu 2023; Drousiotis 2020). Sustaining peace demands daily dedication, bold leadership, and ongoing dialogue between the elite-level and wider society (Dizdaroğlu 2020).

Track II diplomacy with the participation of civil society has proved complementary as well as encouraging to political leaders in the Irish–British negotiation processes (Ertuğral and Mammadova 2024). It is also a prerequisite for continuing Cyprus negotiations. Cypriot civil society can play a vital role in promoting bi-communal cooperation and restarting peace talks within a federal framework (Grigoriadis 2017). Immediate goals such as involving citizens in security discussions can prevent crises. Grassroots initiatives led by citizens could foster cooperation by revitalizing the peace process should political leaders hesitate (Grigoriadis 2017).

In other words, reaching a solution at the leadership level without preparing the two communities for a solution is literally high risk. It represents a serious handicap that can become a liability in the event of a future settlement, possibly rendering a newly established federation dysfunctional in the absence of encouraging a buy-in culture of cooperation among and between the two Cypriot communities. Furthermore, it is already an established norm that any future settlement plan will be put to simultaneous, separate referendums within the two communities. This makes it all the more important to prepare the two communities for the actuality of a

bi-zonal/bi-communal federation where the two communities would be sharing the powers and the competencies of a united state of Cyprus. These concerns have been rightly voiced by the Secretary-General in his various reports to the Security Council since the collapse of the Crans-Montana talks. A new negotiation process that excludes CBMs and a non-inclusive negotiation process will inevitably be doomed to failure.

Overcoming people's security concerns and reassuring them about the outcome calls for a focused strategy that takes account of the environmental, cultural, and governance issues that represent the core interests of all parties if a compromise solution is to be fully realized (Grigoriadis 2017). The inter-communal negotiations have tended to focus almost exclusively on *reaching a comprehensive solution* without taking due account of the existing broad gap of trust between the two Cypriot communities.

Prioritizing the implementation of established CBMs like extra checkpoints, integrated telecommunications, Varosha property returns, and eased embargoes for Turkish Cypriots is vital for bridging this trust gap. Strengthening bi-communal civil society and increasing non-governmental organization involvement across both communities are equally crucial. Additionally, encouraging citizen dialogues on security is imperative for understanding the genuine needs of both Greek and Turkish Cypriots. By emulating the inclusive and transparent approach of the Northern Ireland peace process, in which civil society played a crucial role, Cyprus could promote a more participatory and accountable negotiation framework (Kaymak 2024). Holguín's commitment to a more inclusive approach in Cyprus negotiations is evident in her engagement with civil society alongside political leaders during her initial visit to Cyprus. Notably, her team includes advisers experienced in peace negotiations, including those in Northern Ireland (Kaymak 2024).

Another viable strategy would be to create institutions similar to those in Northern Ireland with a focus on pre- and post-settlement phases supported by substantial international stakeholder involvement and financial backing for the long run so that they can fulfil key roles (Ertuğral and Torlak 2024). International stakeholders, notably the United States (US), played an active role by exerting pressure to bolster political resolve within the Northern Ireland peace process by compelling the Irish and British sides to reconsider their stances so as to avert the repercussions of failure. A US ultimatum stressing the need to conclude the negotiation process with a secured peace, or else face a cut-off of financial and political support, serves as a good example of how external stakeholders can help keep the proceedings on track when facilitating conflict resolution.

Emulating successful international mediation efforts, like the US-brokered maritime delimitation agreement between Tel Aviv and Beirut of October 2022, might prove similarly beneficial used as a CBM for Cyprus (Sözen et al. 2023). Significantly, the Israeli-Lebanon maritime agreement effectively facilitated peace without the need for direct negotiation, showcasing the potential for international stakeholders like the US to contribute actively through adept mediation (Sözen et al. 2023).

Nonetheless, no matter how sensible and laudatory pleas for rebuilding trust between the two communities may be there can be no solution without the UN Security Council's agreement. And such an agreement is highly unlikely, since Russia

will not accept a draft that favors NATO and the effective continuation of what resembles a new type of Annan Plan. Therefore, the most promising course of action appears to be a resumption of negotiations based on the framework outlined by Secretary-General Guterres at Crans-Montana.

Drawing from the above analysis, the authors of this study offer some modest policy recommendations to those charged with finding a sustainable and long-lasting settlement to the Cyprus conflict. These recommendations include: identifying the areas of convergences and the outstanding disagreements; designing creative bridging proposals; preparing both communities for a settlement while avoiding undue politicization of the issue and the process; promoting a final Cyprus conference; and preparing people for the referendums.

Conclusions and recommendations

Under various leaders, the Greek Cypriot side has tried to achieve a strong federation, one that would resemble a unitary state yet in which the larger (Greek Cypriot) community would hold the upper hand when it came to decision making in the federal government (Florea 2017, 337–338). Contrarily, the Turkish Cypriot side advocated broader authority for the component regional governments in order to ensure a loose federation verging on an actual confederation (Kıralp 2020, 400). Given their divergent initial preferences – a unitary state by the Greek Cypriots, a two-state solution by the Turkish Cypriots – the only available alternative solution offering a compromise, the federal solution, has served as the basis for all inter-communal negotiations on the Cyprus conflict since the late 1970s (Cyprus 2015 Initiative 2011).

The rejection of the 2004 Annan Plan by the Greek Cypriots, coupled with the collapse of the 2017 Crans-Montana meetings, constitute significant setbacks that have effectively frustrated expectations for a resolution within the Cypriot context (Dizdaroğlu 2020). Some may perceive efforts to resume negotiations as a waste of time, given that the apparent inclination of the two sides to sustain the status quo stands in the way of any moves promoting the kind of decisive actions essential for reaching a mutually acceptable compromise (Grigoriadis 2017). And yet such views ignore the potential perils arising from the outright cessation of peace negotiations, especially considering the impact this could have on the well-being of Greek and Turkish Cypriots alike. The findings of this study highlight the need to develop an innovative negotiation strategy. Cyprus could benefit from an approach based on an example like the more inclusive process and firm deadline that led to the Northern Ireland Good Friday agreement. A similar approach incorporating inclusive and transparent procedures, laying down clear timeframes, addressing security concerns, and safeguarding community autonomy within a federated framework is essential if the deadlock in Cyprus is to be overcome. Based on these observations, what needs to be done in future Cyprus negotiations is sixfold:

- (1) *Preparation.* The UN should work with the two sides to identify areas of convergences and outstanding disagreements. Here, two major disagreements surface: (i) governance and power-sharing and (ii) security and guarantees. Such issues require political commitment and can only be resolved with thorough preparation. In the event of the process starting

anew, the two negotiation tables that featured in Crans-Montana – one dealing with the internal issues, the other handling security and guarantees – should be retained. In addition, a third table dealing with maritime delimitation should be integrated into the negotiation process. This third table would be informal, allowing for discussion of the delimitation of the maritime jurisdiction areas of Cyprus and Turkey (once a united Cyprus has been established). Otherwise, if the island's internal issues and those pertaining to a new security system are resolved resulting in a united Cyprus but one that lacks an agreement with Turkey on the delimitation of maritime jurisdiction areas, a huge problem will ensue. Should a Crans Montana-type international conference be held again; it would be the ideal venue for conducting the main bargaining on the issues. However, prior to the conference, the parties should have committed to the terms of the agreement. In short, the would-be concluding international conference should be more akin to a ceremonial event to mark the signing of the agreement.

- (2) The negotiation process should be subject to a deadline to ensure that a comprehensive peace plan is ready to put before simultaneous, separate referendums so that voters fully understand the consequences should there be outcomes other than a “yes” vote in each community. The three possible outcomes range from a “no” result in the two communities to Turkish Cypriots voting “yes” and Greek Cypriots voting “no,” or the reverse. Property and territory aspects of the recommended plan can be implemented even in the absence of a double “yes” vote since these issues do not require the unanimity of partnership required for adopting the comprehensive plan.
- (3) *Creative bridging proposals.* The UN should introduce creative bridging proposals on the two outstanding disagreements to help finalize a *strategic agreement* on the fundamental parameters, leaving the details to the experts. The three guarantor powers should be involved in resolving the security and guarantees issues. The push for a strategic agreement must take the interests of external powers into account, keeping in mind that even if the two sides were to agree on some kind of federation, it might well be predicated on NATO interests. In this regard, it is essential to consider the changes and renewed alliances in countries like Turkey, Greece, France, Germany, the US, and the UK since it is no longer possible to take a unified Western alliance for granted.
- (4) *Preparing the two communities for a settlement.* Without delay, the two Cypriot sides should implement as many CBMs as possible in order to generate a positive climate for the two communities, promoting their commitment to the overall peace process, thereby ensuring that they are fully informed about and prepared for a bi-zonal/bi-communal federation. Political leaders on both sides should avoid using inflammatory language and rhetoric likely to incite hostility and mistrust and should not use the Cyprus issue by way of extending their domestic policies and agendas.
- (5) *Final Cyprus conference.* The UN should refrain from calling a final Cyprus conference until the two Cypriot sides reach convergences on all internal aspects of the Cyprus conflict, and have reached agreement with the three guarantors on a new security architecture within the framework of the

- security and guarantees dossier. The final conference should be a formality, its primary function being to seal the *strategic agreement* on the Cyprus issue.
- (6) *Preparation for the referendums*. Once a strategic agreement is reached, and the experts work on the details of the settlement (e.g. new constitutions and federal laws), the two sides should prepare for the referendums by mounting intensive information campaigns designed to make the public fully aware of the issues and the referendum process and preparing people for the day after the outcome, when the settlement is implemented and what that means in terms of everyday life. This is when civil society must come to the fore and play a vital role by pushing for a “yes” outcome in the referendums to be held in the Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities/electorates. This calls for a bi-communal civil society platform, completely independent of the political parties, with a continuing role in all settlement-related and post-settlement information and public awareness campaigns.

Acknowledgements. The authors acknowledge Brian Kelly and *New Perspectives on Turkey's* editor and reviewers for their insightful feedback.

Conflicts of interest. None.

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Cite this article: Sözen, Ahmet and Şahin, Devrim (2024). Renewing hope for Cyprus peace: a novel approach to reconcile the negotiation positions of the Turkish Cypriot side and the Greek Cypriot side. *New Perspectives on Turkey* 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1017/npt.2024.14>