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Navigating the Cyprus Question: The EU's Role in the 2008 Negotiations and the Eastern Mediterranean Crisis

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Abstract

The enlargement of the European Union (EU) in 2004 marked a significant milestone in its history, as it not only substantially increased the EU's membership but also expanded its cultural and political horizons. Nonetheless, the 2004 enlargement did not come free of challenges. One of the most significant challenges was the accession of the Republic of Cyprus due to the Cyprus issue which remained unresolved, despite efforts for resolution before the final accession in May 2004. The current paper will discuss the case of Cyprus by focusing on the role of the European Union during two key post-2004 periods; the 2008 negotiation process and the Eastern Mediterranean crisis of 2018. The effort will be to highlight the role of the European Union in these developments and to analyse the challenges and opportunities for the European Union to engage more actively with the resolution of the Cyprus issue.

Keywords:

Cyprus issue,
conflict resolution,
EU enlargement

Introduction

Following the Helsinki Summit of 1999, optimism toward resolving the Cyprus question became apparent based on the assumption that Turkey's and Turkish-Cypriots' desire to join the European Union would create a "positive cataclysmic effect" (Tocci 2002, p. 126). However, following the rejection of the Annan Plan from the Greek Cypriots and the accession to the EU as a divided island, this optimism gave way to scepticism. The idea, promoted by Greek Cypriot rejectionists, that the EU would create a basis for a fundamentally different settlement was not realised (Ker-Lindsay 2012, p. 62), and 20 years following the accession of the Republic of Cyprus to the European Union, the island remains divided with little hope of reunification in the near future.

This paper discusses the case of Cyprus by focusing on the role of the European Union during two key periods following 2004; the 2008 negotiation process and the Eastern Mediterranean crisis of 2018. The aim will be to identify whether the European Union's role in these developments has had a positive or negative effect and to discuss the challenges and opportunities for the European Union to engage more actively with the resolution of the Cyprus issue. The paper contributes to the literature on the EU as a conflict resolution agent and addresses the limitations of such an agency, especially concerning lessons drawn from the case of Cyprus.

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EU and the resolution of international crises

The EU identifies itself as a successful “peace project” (European Commission 2001, p.5). Indeed, since its creation, the Union has managed to create a framework of peaceful coexistence and cooperation among its members, in a continent that in the past had been tormented by violent conflict. Furthermore, according to Article 21 of the consolidated version of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU) one of the Union’s objectives is to:

“Preserve peace, prevent conflicts and strengthen international security, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, with the principles of the Helsinki Final Act and with the aims of the Charter of Paris, including those relating to external borders.” (21.2.c)

Published in 2016, the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) promoted an “integrated approach to conflicts and crises,” which is broken down into multi-dimensional, multi-phased, multi-level and multi-lateral efforts to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts (EUGS 2016, pp. 28-29; Debuysere and Blockmans 2021, p. 89). The Council of the European Union (2018) conclusions welcomed the steps proposed by the EUGS and stressed the need for further development of the “Integrated Approach.” This novel approach constituted a step forward from the “comprehensive approach” to external conflict and crises, which was communicated by the European Commission and the High Representative in December 2013. In that context, the term comprehensive referred to “not only to the joined-up deployment of EU instruments and resources but also to the shared responsibility of EU-level actors and Member States” (European Commission & High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2013, p.3).

Academic research on the topic of EU and conflict management has produced a diverse body of literature focusing on several issues, such as the evolution of internal processes, coordination among EU institutions, case studies, regional approaches, and so on (for a detailed review see for instance Whitman and Wolff 2012, pp. 10-12). More relevant to the topic of this paper is that part of the academic literature that explores the EU’s transformative effect, which allows it to transform international conflicts through the promotion of integrative solutions that may change perceptions of interests among the conflicting parties. Tocci (2004), for instance, identifies how various elements of the EU framework, namely governance, citizenship, borders, and individual, communal, and state security, could transform a conflict’s underlying conditions and, hence, generate a win-win perception between the conflicting parties, within which the conflict would be settled. Similarly, Tocci (2008) assessed the effectiveness and overall impact of the EU’s contractual relationships concerning the promotion of peace in the neighbourhood. Furthermore, Diez, Albert and Stetter (2009, p. 7) examine the impact of integration and association in border conflicts, especially through “the transformation of the very communication that constructs a conflict in the first place,” leading to the reduction of tensions or the true resolution of the conflict.

In the case of Cyprus, the transformative impact of the EU’s constructive power had already begun to show before 2004. Kyris (2016), for instance, discusses how the prospects of accession and European integration empowered pro-solution actors in the North and allowed Turkish-Cypriot civil society to promote a positive agenda, opposing Eurosceptic voices. Nonetheless, these effects turned out to be limited and in no way caused a “cataclysmic effect” as Tocci (2002) had discussed. As Demetriou (2009, p.73) rightly observes, “the failure to achieve reunification before accession is the fact that most obviously puts this catalysis theory into question.”

Brief historical summary of EU-Cyprus relations

The first step towards creating a stronger relationship and connection between the European Community and Cyprus came in December 1972 with the signing of an Association Agreement, which provided the basis for the facilitation and enhancement of trade between the two parts. The Association Agreement provided for a two-stage process (Association Agreement, Art 2.2). The first stage of the Association Agreement was programmed to be fulfilled in 1977; however, it remained inactive for several years due to the Turkish invasion in the summer of 1974 and the subsequent occupation of 37% of the Cypriot territory (Papaneophytou 1994, p. 84). The protocol for the transition to the second stage, which aimed to complete the customs union, entered into force on January 1, 1988 (Commission 1993, p. 4).

The Republic of Cyprus submitted its application for full EU membership in 1990. Since the very beginning, the idea of Cypriot membership in the EU was received with scepticism. On the one hand, the authorities in Northern Cyprus challenged the legitimacy of the application, and particularly the right of the government in the South to speak for the whole island of Cyprus. This claim was based on the Guarantee Treaty and the 1960 constitution, which provided the vice president of the Republic (a Turkish Cypriot) veto power over the decision to join an international organisation or alliance in which both Greece and Turkey are not members. (Commission 1993, p. 4). On the other hand, the European Community had to decide whether to accept the application as eligible given the particularities of the Cypriot case.

The Cypriot application for membership was finally welcomed at the 1994 Corfu Summit, along with the Maltese application. The Summit Conclusions stated that “the next round of enlargement of the Union will involve Cyprus and Malta,” while a special note suggested that a future solution to the Cyprus issue should be per UN resolutions and “must respect the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and unity of the country” (European Council 1994, Part II, Art B). The inclusion of Cyprus as a candidate country was only achieved after threats made by Greece, which was holding the presidency of the European Union, that it would not ratify the accession of Austria, Finland, and Sweden if the Summit decided otherwise (Zervakis 2004, p. 118). Talat (2005, p. 2) further suggests Greek threats also included a potential veto to the customs union between Turkey and the European Union.

The decision reached in the Corfu Summit laid the groundwork for the accession of the Republic of Cyprus, even before the resolution of the Cyprus problem. Papaneophytou (1994), for instance, observes that not only the Summit Conclusions imply that Cyprus would be accepted even without a prior settlement of the problem, but that parallels with East and West Germany were drawn, as an example of how this accession could take place. In that sense, the Corfu Summit constitutes a turning point, as it is the first time that accession is not conditioned on the resolution of the conflict. From a Turkish Cypriot perspective, the change in the EU approach meant that the Union was no longer an impartial third-party, but instead adopted the role of an “interested secondary party” (Talat 2005, p. 2).

Nevertheless, in 1997, when the EU initiated the enlargement process and opened negotiations with Cyprus (on March 30, 1998), the EU's position was that the political settlement of the issue would be a precondition for full membership (Müftüler-Bac and Güney 2005, p. 282). According to Article 28 of the Luxembourg European Council Presidency Conclusions,

“The accession of Cyprus should benefit all communities and help to bring about civil peace and reconciliation. The accession negotiations will contribute positively to the search for a political solution to the Cyprus problem through the talks under the aegis of the United Nations which must continue with a view to creating a bi-community, bi-zonal federation.” (European Council 1997)

The situation changed dramatically two years later, during the Helsinki Summit when the European Union decided to grant candidacy status to Turkey, an offer that was denied in 1997 (on Turkey's candidacy and the effects of the Helsinki Summit see for example Park 2007; Tsakonas 2001). At the same Summit, and according to article 9(b) of the conclusions, the European Council stressed that a political settlement, despite being welcomed, did not constitute a precondition for the completion of accession negotiations and that the Council's decision would be taken irrespective of the issue (European Council 1999). Finally, negotiations were concluded in 2002, and the decision to admit Cyprus as a full Member State of the European Union was taken at the Copenhagen European Council in December 2002 (Council of the European Union 2003, Art 10-12).

The last act of the accession saga was played in April 2004, just days before the Republic of Cyprus's official accession to the European Union. Greek and Turkish Cypriots were asked to decide on the Annan Plan, which was based on a negotiated plan between Tassos Papadopoulos and Rauf Denktaş, under the auspices of the United Nations. In the referendum that took place on April 24, the Greek Cypriots rejected the Plan, while the Turkish Cypriots voted yes (on the negotiations and political processes leading to the Annan Plan referendum see for example Sözen and Özersay 2006). The result of the referendum meant that the Republic of Cyprus would become a full Member State of the EU with the Cyprus question being unresolved.

The 2008 negotiation process

The rejection of the Annan Plan by the Greek Cypriots caused disappointment not only among the Turkish Cypriots but within the European Union as well (see for instance Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Turkey 2004). At the same time, the willingness of Turkish Cypriots to join the Union was acknowledged and applauded. Following the 2004 referendum, little progress was achieved concerning the resolution of the Cyprus question. On April 26, only two days following the referendum, the Council stated, among others:

"The Turkish Cypriot community have expressed their clear desire for a future within the European Union. The Council is determined to put an end to the isolation of the Turkish Cypriot community and to facilitate the reunification of Cyprus by encouraging the economic development of the Turkish Cypriot community." (European Commission 2004a)

The statement led to the submission of two Commission proposals. The first regarded financial aid towards the Turkish Cypriots, with specific emphasis given to the economic development of the North and the economic integration of the island (European Commission 2004a, p. 4). The proposal was adopted by the Council of the European Union in 2006 with Council Regulation 389/2006 (Council of the European Union 2006) with the support of the Republic of Cyprus. The second draft regulation, known as the Direct Trade Regulation, which tackled the issue of special conditions for trade with the North was blocked (see for instance Rinaldi 2014).

Special mention should also be made to Council Regulation 866/2004 (Council of the European Union 2004), which clarified that the *acquis* would be suspended for those areas that the government of the Republic of Cyprus did not exercise effective control, while including specific provisions on the crossing of persons (Title 2) and goods (Title 3) between the North and the South.

Aside from these efforts which recognized the Turkish Cypriot community's willingness to be part of the European Union and tried to limit the Turkish Cypriots' isolation, the majority of developments had to do more with Turkey's efforts to join the Union, rather than with processes that involved the two communities directly. More specifically, on July 29, 2005, Turkey signed the Additional Protocol to extend the Ankara Agreement to all EU members. Simultaneously, Turkey reiterated that "the signature, ratification, and implementation of this Protocol neither amount to any form of recognition of the Republic of Cyprus," and that it still regarded the "Greek Cypriot authorities as exercising authority, control and jurisdiction only in the territory south of the buffer zone, and do not represent the Turkish Cypriot people and will treat the acts performed by them accordingly" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Turkey 2005).

Replying to Turkey's declaration, the EU (European Commission 12541/05) made clear that the declaration did not create any legal results and added that "The European Community and its Member States expect full, non-discriminatory implementation of the Additional Protocol, and the removal of all obstacles to the free movement of goods, including restrictions on means of transport. Turkey must apply the Protocol fully to all EU Member States" (par 3). The counter-declaration by the European Community and its Member States constituted a strong indication of what had changed following Cyprus's accession. Similar declarations, statements, and decisions that were made or taken in the following years further showcased the EU's support to Cyprus and established the European Union as a secondary party to the Cypriot conflict (for a detailed review of these developments see Melakopides 2009, pp. 100-103).

The first notable effort to enter a new round of negotiations with the Republic of Cyprus being a full Member State of the European Union came in 2008 when Dimitris Christofias and Mehmet Ali Talat started meeting regularly to revive the negotiation process (Axt 2009, p. 69). Earlier that year, Christofias had won the Cyprus Presidential elections, the first following the EU accession, while Tassos Papadopoulos, the former President who had backed the "no" vote in 2004, did not even manage to make it to the second round. The results of the 2008 election are thought to have expressed the willingness of the Greek Cypriot community to enter into a new round of negotiations (see for instance Loizides 2009, p. 166). Mehmet Ali Talat had also been elected after the 2004 referendum. His party CTP/BG had supported EU membership and Talat himself was considered a pro-solution leader (Sözen 2005, p. 467), while the election result was heralded both by the European Commission and political groups in the European Parliament (Sözen 2005, p. 473).

The 2008 negotiation process started with great momentum, with Christofias and Talat meeting very often, while they additionally held private talks following their official meetings (Pope 2009, p. 177). The two leaders met 40 times face-to-face between March 2008 and August 2010, when the first round of negotiations was concluded, while they met 25 more times between September 2009 and March 2010, during the second round of negotiations (Cyprus News, Brussels Edition 2010).

The European Union, although not directly involved in the process, actively tried to support and provide further impetus to the negotiations. Following the two leaders' meeting on March 21, 2008, the Enlargement Commissioner published a statement noting:

"The European Union welcomes the successful meeting between the two leaders and their agreement to take full responsibility for the future conduct of the negotiations... The EU stands ready to support the negotiations and both parties. I also congratulate the leaders on the important symbolic decision to open the Ledra Street crossing forty-

four years after it was closed. The Commission has made more than 100,000 euros available to UNDP to carry out works at the crossing point. I look forward to walking across the Green Line at Ledra Street myself in the near future.” (European Commission, EXME/ 25.03.2008)

A third round of talks took place between May 2010 and May 2012, between Dimitris Christofias and Dervis Eroglu, the new Turkish Cypriot leader who had won the elections in the North in 2010 and had succeeded Mehmet Ali Talat. The negotiations, despite personal efforts by the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, reached a stalemate and were downgraded to technical-level discussions (Morelli 2012).

When looking into the EU's role in the negotiations, we first have to point out that the principal mediating third party on the Cyprus problem has traditionally been the United Nations, which also keeps one of the longest-running peacekeeping missions on the island, the UNFICYP. Apart from official statements made by EU officials, and the funds that the EU has offered, there is little involvement in the negotiation processes that have taken place since the Republic of Cyprus acceded to the European Union in 2004. For example, Marios Matsakis an MEP from ALDE, submitted a written question to the European Commission in 2008, on whether the European Union should take a more active role in the ongoing negotiations between the Christofias and Talat, and whether an EU representative should be present at the negotiations between the two leaders European Parliament 2008a).

The idea of more active involvement from the EU side was also highlighted by the European Greens who published a resolution that was accepted following the European Green Party council meeting in October 2009, a bit over a year into the Christofias-Talat negotiations (EGP 2009). Among others the resolution makes the point that the EU is in a position to safeguard the human rights of both communities on the island, hence suggesting that several trust issues separating the Greek and Turkish Cypriots should be easier to resolve because the RoC was now a Member State of the European Union. Furthermore, the resolution urges the two parties to accept and involve the European Union as a facilitator in the process.

Additionally, it could be argued that the Republic of Cyprus's membership in the European Union caused complications in the negotiations for several reasons. On the one hand, on several occasions and not completely unjustifiably, the Republic of Cyprus's membership itself was perceived as an obstacle by the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot sides, as the European Union was not seen as an impartial third party to the conflict. Furthermore, there was the perception that EU membership has provided the Republic of Cyprus with specific advantages. For instance, while visiting Brussels in December 2008, Mehmet Ali Talat claimed that the Greek Cypriots had less motivation to progress the negotiations as they already enjoyed EU membership (Vogel 2008).

Another complication in the negotiation processes, caused by the Republic of Cyprus' membership to the European Union, is the legal status that the membership itself confers, particularly when it is linked to the EU's relationship with third states. More specifically, the resumption of the Council of the EU presidency by the Republic of Cyprus on July 1, 2012, caused a major upset to Turkey which has consistently opposed the internationally accepted view that the Republic of Cyprus is the representative of the whole island. Before the resumption of the Council's presidency by the RoC, several Turkish officials made harsh statements indicating that Turkey was not willing to engage with the European Union during the six months that the presidency would

last. For instance, at the time, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said that Turkey would not participate in meetings chaired by Greek Cypriot officials (Seufert 2012, p. 2).

The Council's conclusions of 5 December 2011 on Enlargement and the Stabilisation and Association Process (Council of the European Union 2011), further highlighted this issue by referring to Turkey's failure "to fulfil its obligation of full, non-discriminatory implementation of the Additional Protocol to the Association Agreement towards all Member States" (art. 23), and called for Turkey to actively support the negotiation process, aiming towards a solution that is in accordance with the founding principles of the European Union (art. 24).

Similarly, the negotiation process on the Cyprus question raised issues within the European Union on how the EU should respond to the emerging situation. For instance, in 2008, Margaritis Schinas, who at the time was a MEP under the PPE-DE submitted a written question to the Commission on whether the waiver on the implementation of the Community *acquis* should be lifted under Protocol 10 of the Treaty on the Accession of Cyprus to the EU (European Parliament 2008b). Schinas' question refers to Article 1 of the Protocol which mentions:

1. The application of the *acquis* shall be suspended in those areas of the Republic of Cyprus in which the Government of the Republic of Cyprus does not exercise effective control.
2. The Council, acting unanimously on the basis of a proposal from the Commission, shall decide on the withdrawal of the suspension referred to in paragraph 1.

The natural gas crisis

The second period the current paper will examine more closely is the crisis that erupted in 2018 following the obstruction of the Italian company ENI drill ship to execute an exploratory drill within Block 3 of the Cypriot exclusive economic zone (EEZ), citing military activities in the area (see for example Kampas 2011; Kontos and Bitsis 2018). That is not to say that there were no developments between 2012, when the talks between Christofias and Eroglu collapsed, and 2018. Indeed, apart from the financial crisis that hit the Republic of Cyprus in 2012, a new round of talks took place between 2015 and 2017, between Nicos Anastasiades and Mustafa Akinci. The focus, however, will be on the natural gas crisis, as a more interesting case, especially concerning the role and involvement of the European Union.

Initially, it has to be pointed out that the idea for the exploration of national resources in the Eastern Mediterranean did not come about in 2018. Since 2010, the discovery of the Leviathan natural gas reservoir within Israel's exclusive economic zone triggered not only Cyprus's further interest in exploration and exploitation, but international attention as well (Grigoriadis 2021, p. 39). Such interest existed even before 2010, and the Republic of Cyprus had signed exploration agreements in previous years, including the 2008 agreement with Noble Energy, which led to pre-drilling exploration activities later the same year (Tsakiris 2017).

Turkey strongly opposed any "unilateral" activities by the "Greek Cypriot Administration" aiming at oil or gas exploration and raised two main concerns. On the one hand, Turkey repeated its claim that the Greek Cypriot Administration does not represent the Turkish Cypriots, nor the island of Cyprus as a whole, and, hence, is not entitled to enter international agreements on behalf of the whole island. Instead, the issue of exploration and exploitation of the island's natural resources

should be part of a comprehensive settlement to the Cyprus issue. On the other hand, Turkey claimed its legal rights in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea and voiced its intention to protect them (see Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Turkey, n.d.).

The European Union did not remain indifferent to the discovery of gas reserves in the East Mediterranean region. For the biggest part of the 2010s the European Union had become increasingly dependent on Russian gas, which amounted to 31% of EU demand in 2013 (Tsakiris 2018, p. 29) and 56.1% of the imported gas in September 2021.² Energy insecurity and dependency on Russian gas exports were further exacerbated by political developments in Libya and Egypt which reduced the supply from these two countries (Tsakiris 2018, p. 31). As such, the discovery of new gas reserves would allow the EU's major economies, and the EU as a whole, to reduce their dependency on Russian gas and diversify the natural gas sources, thus increasing their energy security.

Given the EU's vested interest in this issue, the European Union early on rejected and condemned Turkey's actions, while it also explicitly characterised these actions as illegal. For instance, the European Council conclusions of 22 March 2018, mentioned that:

The European Council strongly condemns Turkey's continued illegal actions in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea and underlines its full solidarity with Cyprus and Greece. Recalling its conclusions of October 2014 and the Declaration of 21 September 2005, the European Council urgently calls on Turkey to cease these actions and respect the sovereign rights of Cyprus to explore and exploit its natural resources per EU and International Law (European Council 2018, Par. 12 & 13).

Similar remarks were made later on as well. For example, in the Conclusions following the Summit in June 2019, the European Council once again condemned Turkish actions and restated its full solidarity with the Republic of Cyprus (European Council 2019).

The European Parliament followed a similar approach to the issue. In a resolution adopted in September 2020 (601 votes in favour, 57 against, and 36 abstentions), European MEPs expressed their solidarity with Cyprus and Greece (European Parliament 2020). The European Parliament consistently maintained its hard stance vis-à-vis Turkey on this issue, including other issues, such as the case of Osman Kavala and the human rights situation in Turkey (see for instance, EP's 2021 resolution on the 2019-2020 Commission reports on Turkey).

Apart from the supportive statements and resolutions, the most tangible reaction from the European Union came in the form of restrictive measures that the Council of the European Union adopted against entities and individuals. More specifically, following its meeting in November 2019, the Council of the European Union placed under sanctions persons and entities who were involved in unauthorised drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean. The sanctions included a travel ban to the EU and an asset freeze, while EU persons and entities were forbidden from providing funds to those listed (Council of the European Union 2019). The sanctions regime was extended for another year in November 2020 (Council of the European Union 2020) and then for one more year in November 2021 (Council of the European Union 2021). The sanctions were strongly supported by both Greece and Cyprus, while they were also backed by France which also sent naval forces to the area (Merz 2020).

2 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/eu-gas-supply/>

Overall, the EU's reaction to the East Mediterranean crisis was multi-levelled and consistent. All European institutions sided with the RoC while using harsh language to condemn Turkish actions and intentions. Nevertheless, the EU's approach did not intend to distance Turkey or the Turkish Cypriots. The sanctions imposed were relatively light and largely ineffective, as not only did they target specific individuals and entities and not Turkey, but since the setting of the sanctions, only two individuals were affected (these include the Vice-President and the Deputy Director of the Exploration Department of the Turkish Petroleum Corporation). Furthermore, the EU only implemented two types of restrictive measures for Turkey (asset freeze and restrictions on admission)³, and did not succumb to pressures from Cyprus and Greece, which asked for harder measures to be adopted (Michalopoulos 2020).

Despite the EU's "soft" approach, and in a similar fashion to the first case study, Turkey's perception of the EU remained as that of a one-sided actor, who cannot be an "honest broker" on the Cyprus question (Dursun-Özkanca 2022, p. 748). For instance, in a response to the 2021 Commission's Country Report for Turkey, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, rejected the inclusion of the Cypriot and Greek arguments, and characterised the report as both "biased" and "unfair" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Turkey 2021). The country report made extensive references to Turkey concerning Cyprus, noting, apart from the Turkish activities within the Cyprus EEZ, the unilateral changing of the status of the fenced city of Varosha by Turkey (p. 7), the failure to remove obstacles related to the movement of goods and restrictions on transport links with Cyprus (p. 7), and failure to, overall, advance the settlement process (European Commission 2021).

Concluding remarks

Twenty years following Cyprus's accession to the EU as a divided island, one can easily observe that the impact of the European Union on the Cyprus issue was neither cataclysmic nor necessarily positive. Although the limitations of the EU's effect, and the Union's approach overall, were identified early on following the rejection of the Annan Plan by the Greek Cypriots and the failure to resolve the issue before accession (on the failure of the EU strategy which mainly included a combination of punishments and rewards see also Eralp and Beriker 2005), the current paper tried to further investigate the EU's role by focusing on two distinct cases: the negotiations that started in 2008 and the Eastern Mediterranean crisis that erupted in 2018.

On the one hand, the discussion points out the assumption that with Cyprus a Member State of the European Union, the challenges for the resolution of the Cyprus question have increased, while the EU's ability to exert its transformative power has decreased. As an EU member, the Republic of Cyprus became an integral part of a powerful alliance, improved its negotiating power, and is in a position to protect its interests, while negotiating a political solution to the Cyprus question. At the same time, together with Greece, Cyprus is in a position to wield influence from within, either by, for instance, threatening to make use of its veto right or by other means.

It is this empowerment stemming from RoC's EU membership that has increased Turkish Cypriots' and Turkey's concerns about the EU being an biased and one-sided actor (see also Kyriz 2013, pp. 10-11). These concerns posed a significant obstacle both during the 2008 negotiation process and the natural gas crisis, while they also contributed to the deterioration of relations between the EU and Turkey, although they were, by far, not the only contributing factor.

3 For more information on the EU's restrictive measures against Turkey see <https://www.sanctionsmap.eu>

Simultaneously, the Republic of Cyprus's membership creates unintended complications, which make the Cyprus issue more difficult to resolve and further limit the EU's abilities to have a positive transformative effect on the conflict. Concerning the negotiations which started in 2008, these complications were expressed in the form of EU-related issues, which had to be included in the negotiations, and hence become part of the negotiation process. In March 2009, when EU membership-related issues became part of the discussion, the Turkish-Cypriot side was reported to reject the idea of an unconditional implementation of the European *acquis* and suggested that some exceptions should be allowed instead⁴ (on the challenges of EU membership for a divided state see also Villotti 2012). These expectations were not unreasonable, and, as Ker-Lindsay (2012, p. 62) points out, the EU "would be willing to show a high degree of flexibility on a final settlement."

When it comes to the second case, Cyprus's membership meant that natural gas resources could provide a potential solution in the EU's efforts to diversify its energy import sources and increase its energy security. Hence, although the RoC had every legal right to conduct exploration and exploitation activities, the EU's reaction was perceived by Turkish Cypriots and Turkey, as another example of the Union's one-sidedness.

On the other hand, it would be wrong to conclude that the EU's acceptance of the Republic of Cyprus was a regrettable mistake. For instance, Turkish Cypriots were impacted positively, and in a variety of ways, following the 2004 accession. Turkish Cypriots are entitled to citizenship of the Republic of Cyprus and may effectively become citizens of the EU. Tens of thousands have received a republican passport and can enjoy the same rights that EU citizens have elsewhere (Trimikliniotis 2015, p. 5). Moreover, in February 2006, the Council of the European Union established an instrument for financial support aiming at the economic development of the Turkish-Cypriot community. Article 2 of the regulation (389/2006), noted, among other, that support should aim towards:

{T}he promotion of social and economic development including restructuring, in particular concerning rural development, human resources development and regional development...

{T}he development and restructuring of infrastructure, in particular in the areas of energy and transport, the environment, telecommunications and water supply.

Apart from the impact on the lives of the Turkish Cypriots and despite the hitherto limited success, the European Union should assume a more direct and active role in the resolution of the Cyprus issue. The EU should further employ an integrated approach to motivate and provide further incentives to the Turkish and Greek Cypriots to reach a political solution to the Cyprus question. At the same time, the European Union should provide all the institutional and political support to contribute to a settlement on the island of Cyprus. A key assumption following the discussion on the two case studies is that there is a lot of room for the European Union to become more active in future negotiation processes that could pave the way for a long-lasting peaceful solution to the Cyprus question.

⁴ <https://www.protothema.gr/naked-city/genikes-eidiseis/article/25909/tis-sxeseis-me-ee-syzhthsan-xristofias-talat/>

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