



Cultures of Governance
and Conflict Resolution
in Europe and India



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CORE Working Paper:

Preliminary field work report from Cyprus

By: Birte Vogel

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	Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)	PO Box 9229 Grønland NO-0134 Oslo, Norway	T: +47 22 54 77 00 F: +47 22 54 77 01	www.projectcore.eu
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Summary of preliminary fieldwork

The results based on data gathered via semi-structured interviews and some limited participant observation conducted in Cyprus in October/ November 2011 by mainly Birte Vogel and with Oliver Richmond (who has a long standing research interest in CR and Cyprus)

The aim of this preliminary field study was to identify and explore governance initiatives and their impact on the conflict resolution process in Cyprus. The study focused on inter-communal forums and other structural, ideational or political factors currently stifling North-South interactions and CR at the international, national and local level. It also tried to identify the main obstacles governance actors and target populations face in the implementation of those initiatives.

Governance approaches to Conflict Resolution in Cyprus

a) Conflict Resolution via political agreements (top-down)

International actors such as the UN and EU are currently promoting a high level peace agreement and expect it will result in a bi-communal, bi-federal solution.¹ Peace talks are mostly facilitated by the United Nations (UN); the engagement on part of the EU is seen to remain at fairly low-levels by other state actors.² The main obstacles to an agreement at the national level are currently issues of how governmental power will be shared between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot side. More specific, the essential questions of cross-voting and rotating presidency have not been solved yet.³ June 2012 is seen as a crucial date for reaching an agreement as it marks Cyprus' turn for the EU presidency. Turkey has already warned the EU that it will freeze EU relations if the Greek Cypriots assume the EU presidency before the Cyprus issue is settled.

A further issue dominating the public discourse is the question of how to deal with properties lost after the 1974 invasion. One mechanism to address this problem was the establishment of the Immoveable Properties Commission (established by the government of the unrecognised Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) in 2006). Its purpose is to create an effective domestic way for claims relating to abandoned properties in Northern Cyprus. Greek Cypriots applying might be entitled to compensations, land exchange or the return of their old properties. As of 16 November 2011, 2325 applications have been lodged with the Commission and 187 of them have been concluded through friendly settlements and 7 through formal hearing. The Commission has paid almost 63m GBP to applicants as compensation.⁴ However, all applications need to be made in the Turkish language setting a formal barrier for many Greek Cypriots. The commission will be closed at the end of the year.

From a legal side, the TRNC government has also attempted on its part to be prepared for a possible reunification and therefore possible EU membership by establishing the 'TRNC Prime Minister Office - European Union Coordination Center' in 2003. This Centre is intended to work as a bridge between the EU and the TRNC government and harmonizes

¹Confidential source, European Commission, Interview 8.11.2011

²Confidential source, Russian Embassy, Interview 8.11.2011

³Confidential source, TRNC Prime Minister Office - European Union Coordination Centre, Interview 9.11.2011

⁴Immoveable Properties Commission <http://www.northcyprusipc.org/>

national laws with European standards. For this purpose the EU has sent some experts consulting national authorities; however as a result of the non recognition of TRNC the relationship is not formalized. The official position towards the Turkish Cypriot population is, however, that the EU only assists in modernizing the administration.⁵

Official North-South relations

There are no official relations between the governments on both sides due to the non-recognition of the TRNC government. Thus, there are no common attempts of conflict resolution beside UN facilitated peace talks.

b) Conflict Resolution via dialogue (bottom-up)

The NGOs' dominant approach in Cyprus consists of attempts to bridge Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities via dialogue to start a bottom-up peace progress. Stereotyping, nationalism and prejudices are still dominant in most parts of society. Bi-communal projects are thus trying to bring people together and change their perception of the 'other side'. One of the main obstacles in doing so is that many Greek Cypriots refuse to cross the border to the TRNC. They feel that by showing passports at the checkpoints they by default recognise the TRNC government and grant it legitimacy. Therefore, most bi-communal activities take part in the Buffer Zone on neutral ground. These bi-communal activities are generally locally-led but sponsored by external actors such as UNDP-ACT, USAID and more recently the EU. Thus, local actors do have an international component, partly of dependency but there is also a lot of friction over what local actors believe is international insensitivity, and their 'pragmatic', results-oriented approach.

Funding Policies

The funding policies of international actors have been subject to major changes over the last few years. UNDP and USAID, as the most important donors in Cyprus, have moved away from funding civil society movements in general (which they did in the beginning). Instead international actors have shifted their focus to the leadership level of the peace process and as a result gradually pulled away from more general NGO support. Now they are exclusively sponsoring bi-communal activities which seem to have become an essential pre-condition for obtaining funding. Also the UNDP has developed a more strategic approach and at this time works exclusively with 'selected' partners who proved to be reliable and efficient (in their opinion). These are currently:

- Engage – Do your part for peace (<http://www.engage4peace.org/>)
- Cyprus 2015 (<http://www.cyprus2015.org/>)
- Cyprus Community Media Center (<http://www.cypruscommunitymedia.org/>)
- Home of Cooperation
- Interdependence (<http://www.ktto.net/interdependence/>)
- Cyprus Project for Youth Development
(<http://www.multiculturalcyprus.org/page.php?bid=16>)
- Partnership For the Future
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Similar patterns can be observed in the case of the European Union. Furthermore, recently donors are also moving away from using the term 'bi-communalism' and instead prefer the formulation 'multicultural activities', primarily because bi-communalism incorporates the

⁵Confidential source, TRNC Prime Minister Office - European Union Coordination Centre, Interview 9.11.2011

idea of differences between the two communities.⁶ Funding bi-communal activities are also viewed as an interim tool that will not be needed after a political settlement is achieved.⁷

Bi-communalism

Bi-communal activities are financially highly supported by international organisations. However, the recent change in funding policies of the donors listed above has led to a situation in which only a few key 'compliant' players obtain most of the funding available. These remaining NGOs further allocate small funds to other initiatives thus replicating the funding requirements they have to follow themselves (bi-communalism; public visibility; long-term effects). Bi-communal NGOs are also closely interlinked with each other but tend not to connect to large parts of the population on each side. Other NGOs may provide services that are more interesting for local communities, but fail to bridge the gap that exists between citizens. This can be seen in the example of an NGO called Peace Players International who offer free sports classes for children aged 11-16 years. Regular practise are scheduled in the children's hometowns and bi-communal events are held every other month to bring young Greek and Turkish Cypriots together. Those cross-ethnic practicing days are for various reasons attended by much less children than the training sessions held in the midst of their own communities.⁸

Bi-communal organisations do admit that their outreach beyond the buffer zone remains limited and more people need to get involved. For the Association for Historical Dialogue and Research and the Home for Cooperation these are goals planned for the future.⁹ The governments also play a role in further limiting these attempts at outreach by setting formal boundaries (such as the application for permits, etc. for advertising activities in schools and other public locations).

Civil Society Engagement

Both communities do have, according to EU and UNDP, only weak civil societies that are neither very active in advocating their rights nor participating in the conflict resolution process. There are only very few registered NGOs on both sides.¹⁰ Officials assume that the dominance of the 'Cyprus Issue' creates an environment in which any other topic is subordinated. The conflict functions as an excuse not to engage with other social problems (for both, the governments and civil society).¹¹ International actors hope that civil society will develop after a solution. They (specifically the EU Commission and UNDP) blame current governance approaches (such as the presence of deeply nationalist governments and political discourse) for disempowering civil society, despite EU accession. A further explanation for why civil society is not engaging more actively in the conflict resolution process is the idea of a missing hurting stalemate. Since the check points are open and travel is possible easily, the North is no longer viewed as isolated. Moreover, both sides feel generally safe (at least from the government's perspective); the South is internationally accepted and thus protected

⁶Peace Players International, Interview 9.11.2011

⁷Confidential Source, UNDP, Interview 8.11.2011

⁸Peace Players International, Interview 9.11.2011

⁹Costa Constanti, Member of the Board of Directors at Association for Historical Dialogue and Research, Interview 7.11.2011

¹⁰Confidential Source, USAID, Interview 8.11.2011

¹¹Confidential source, European Commission, Interview 8.11.2011

through mechanisms of the European Union. The North feels protected (militarily and financially) by Turkey.¹² The two societies need separate analysis as both sides face different political situations and cannot be seen as one Cypriot civil society.¹³ Both shall be reviewed briefly.

Turkish Cypriot Society

Society in the unrecognized Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is dominated by an internal conflict between Turkish Cypriots and Turkish immigrants who came to the area after the 1974 war. Ankara has encouraged large-scale settlement from Anatolia to Cyprus so much so that Turkish Cypriots are assumed to be a minority in TRNC now. The recent policy of giving Cypriot citizenship to mainland Turks is one of the few issues that have provoked a major reaction in Turkish Cypriot society. Turkey still wields a strong influence over the Turkish population living on the island and Turkish Cypriots fear that an increasing number of Turks with Cypriot passport – and thus the right to vote – will change power dynamics and eventually lead to pro-Turkish instead of pro-Cypriot politics in TRNC.¹⁴ A census to be held next month in TRNC might give more insights into the shifting power relations within Turkish Cypriot society.

Greek Cypriot Society

Greek Cypriots are still organized along their traditional political lines. The majority regards politics as a top-down business where social criticism is largely absent.¹⁵ However, deep dissatisfaction with the political elites was expressed after the recent explosion at a naval base (caused by a brush fire that then detonated unsafely stored gunpowder).

Other actors

Other influential actors that exert a strong hold on Cyprus' societies are the Orthodox Church in the South and the Turkish military in the North – both have a rather negative attitude towards the conflict resolution process. The church is the largest property owner in the South, owns big shares in banks and has several factories, and is thus an important employer.¹⁶

Analysis: Effectiveness and Perception

Most state actors and international organizations involved in the conflict resolution process believe that a solution to the Cyprus issue can only be found at the top level with questions of governance as the main obstacle. Over 40 years or more root causes, conflict dynamics, debates about territory, sovereignty and identity have maintained themselves despite international peacekeeping, mediation, EU governance reform, and civil society investment by many donors. The both elite and nationalist governance and the possibility of reconciliation and a solution have become mutually self-sustaining in a process which Richmond has described as 'devious objectives': the peace process allows local elites international access and resources such as legitimacy and alliances and so is valued for this

¹²Bülent Konoï. Head of The Management Center, Interview 3.11.2011

¹³Bülent Konoï. Head of The Management Center, Interview 3.11.2011

¹⁴Ahmet Sözen, Professor at Cyprus Policy Center, Interview 1.11.2011

¹⁵The Management Center (2011): Civil Society in Cyprus; pp 24 -29

¹⁶Ahmet Sözen, Professor at Cyprus Policy Center, Interview 1.11.2011

rather than for any possible compromise it may lead to. Local CR processes and donor support for civil society have tried persistently to break this deadlock.

Thus, IOs try to support the conflict resolution process by supporting bi-communal NGOs and fostering dialogue between the two communities. To get more people involved in the peace process, most organisations believe that a clear sign from both presidents is required that a solution is wanted and possible.^{17 18} Donors have adopted a rather negative view of the capacity of civil society, stereotyping it as ineffective, inefficient, and made up of the 'usual suspects'.^{19 20} International actors in Cyprus have little understanding of the structural, social, political, professional, and cultural constraints bi-communal NGOs and their activists are subject to. They have little understanding of the complex and subtle sanctions they face and so tend to regard donor manipulation of bi-communal funding as cost free. The internationals likewise are unwilling to consider the fact that they may have a limited understanding of the constraints NGOs are subject to by their own states, political, social, military or religious establishments, and their disengagement with funding civil society is at least in part a revival of more governance oriented perspectives- and also serves to disguise their own ineffectiveness in facilitating a civil space for reconciliation and peace work. As a result bi-communal NGOs are reduced to operating in a very small, self-enclosed space, which might be called the 'third space'.

Birte Vogel has developed the idea of the third space which encompasses the isolation of parts of civil society active in the peace process. This civil society operates in an internationally protected and financed space unable to connect to other parts of society but instead creating a community on its own. The boundaries of this space are set by two sides: from within and from the outside. On the one hand, bi-communalists design the third space in a way which is most pleasant for them. Other factors closing the space are language, activities and location. Thus, bi-communal organizations are separated and fail to connect to any of the other two communities as their actions do not connect to the everyday life of people. On the other hand, bi-communal activists are also threatened by repression of their fellow citizens. Their cooperation with Cypriots from the other side of the green line does not go conform to the social norms of non-interaction and non-recognition by nationalist, who still seem to represent the majority of Cypriots (especially on the Greek Cypriot side). This in turn creates boundaries for civil societies from the outside.

The changing funding policies in conflict governance, namely the concentration on only a few key actors, further limits the outreach of bi-communal activities and people involved in it. The location of Cyprus main centre for bi-communal activities (Home for Cooperation, Cyprus Media Center) in the UN Buffer Zone perhaps most accurately illustrates the idea of the third space territorially. However, the third space does not necessarily need a local territory but could also be understood as an intellectual or imagined space in conflict zones that exists without clear territorial boundaries. This inability of the connection between the various spaces (international, local and bi-communal as well as the third) might explain partly the ongoing failure of any progress in terms of conflict resolution in Cyprus during the last 47 years.

¹⁷Confidential Source Russian Embassy, Interview 8.11.2011

¹⁸Confidential Source , EC, Interview 8.11.2011

¹⁹Confidential Source, European Commission, Interview 8.11.2011

²⁰Confidential Source, UNDP, Interview 8.11.2011