

# CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION IN THE ISLAND OF CYPRUS: FACILITATORS AND BARRIERS

*Yasin Temizkan, Jatswan S. Sidhu, and Sheila Devi Michael<sup>a</sup>*

## ABSTRACT

*This study examines cross-border cooperation (CBC) in the Island of Cyprus, which is marked by a protracted geopolitical dispute. It analyses the facilitators and barriers to CBC between the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities and their respective States within a qualitative research framework, utilising primary and secondary sources to provide a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between historical legacies, political dynamics, and societal interactions. Facilitators such as technical committees and third-party initiatives underscore the potential for constructive engagement. At the same time, persistent barriers like mutual distrust and Greek Cypriots' concerns over the recognition of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) reveal the underlying challenges. The findings highlight the significance of grassroots cooperation and international support in overcoming border-related obstacles, offering insights into how CBC can contribute to good neighbourly relations between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots. However, the findings also underscore that while CBC holds promise as a mechanism for fostering mutual understanding and reconciliation in the island of Cyprus, the barriers often overshadow the facilitators.*

**Keywords:** Cyprus, Turkish Cypriots, Greek Cypriots, Cross-border Cooperation, the United Nations, the European Union

## INTRODUCTION

National borders separate the jurisdictional authority of different nations and delineate where one State's sovereignty ends and another's begins. Border communities, those residing along national borders, often interact daily with the neighbouring community members on the other side. This proximity may encourage communities and their respective States to cooperate in cross-border (CBC). The island of Cyprus, hereafter referred to as Cyprus, presents a unique case for CBC. Located in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea, its geopolitical landscape covers an area of 9,251 square kilometres and is divided among four distinct entities. Measuring 240 kilometres in length and 100 kilometres at its widest point, understanding the territorial division of Cyprus is key to grasping the island's border-related dynamics. About 5,896 square kilometres, or 59.74

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<sup>a</sup> At the time of writing, Yasin Temizkan (yasintemizkan@yahoo.com) is a PhD candidate in the Department of International and Strategic Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Universiti Malaya. Yasin has since graduated and is now a PhD holder. Jatswan S. Sidhu (jatswan.singh@taylors.edu.my) is Professor of International Relations at the School of Liberal Arts & Sciences, Faculty of Social Sciences & Leisure Management, Taylor's University. Sheila Devi Michael (sheilamike@um.edu.my) is a senior lecturer and the Head of the Department of International and Strategic Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Universiti Malaya.

per cent of the total area, are controlled by the Republic of Cyprus (RoC). The RoC is recognised internationally, except for Türkiye. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), recognised solely by Türkiye, covers approximately 3,355 square kilometres, around 34.02 per cent of Cyprus's total land area. Another significant area is the United Nations Buffer Zone. This zone, established to separate the Turkish and Greek Cypriot regions, stretches across the island and occupies about 346 square kilometres, approximately 3.51 per cent of the total area. Finally, the Sovereign Base Areas of the United Kingdom (UK) in Akrotiri and Dhekelia encompass about 254 square kilometres. These regions, retained by the UK following the end of its rule over the island in 1960, constitute roughly 2.74 per cent of Cyprus's total area.

The main research objective driving this paper is to understand and explain how engaging in CBC in the contemporary context of Cyprus is possible, considering the deeply-rooted political dispute between the neighbouring Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot States. Analysing the current state of CBC in Cyprus, the study looks for answers to the following research questions: What are the key facilitators and barriers to CBC between the two States? In what ways has CBC been achieved or hindered in Cyprus?

The study utilises a qualitative approach to delve into CBC in Cyprus. Both primary sources, including official documents and secondary sources from scholarly works, were methodically gathered to deepen the study's insights. The evaluation thoroughly examined these official records, reports, and academic papers. This amalgamation of data sources offered a comprehensive perspective and enabled a detailed understanding of the effects of CBC efforts. The research framework was designed to provide a nuanced investigation of the subject matter. Emphasis was placed on the analysis and interpretation of the data collected to reveal significant perceptions of the societal interactions and mechanisms of CBC in Cyprus, considering historical, cultural, and contextual elements that affect the actions and choices of stakeholders.

The significance of this study lies in its comprehensive examination of CBC in Cyprus, an area of geopolitical importance. This research offers a nuanced understanding of the complexities governing these relationships by analysing the multifaceted interactions across various domains between the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot States. It addresses a gap in existing scholarship by identifying the facilitators and barriers to cooperation and examining the profound impact of the ongoing political dispute on these cross-border interactions. In doing so, the study aims to provide valuable recommendations for both local and international stakeholders in their efforts to foster cooperation on the island.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Conceptual Framework**

CBC constitutes the conceptual framework of this study. CBC between neighbouring States encompasses various areas to promote mutual benefits and resolve shared challenges. The main areas of such cooperation include trade and economic integration, environmental protection, infrastructure development, security and defence, immigration and border management, cultural and educational exchanges, emergency

response and disaster management, healthcare cooperation, water resources management and energy cooperation. CBC can manifest in various forms, from awareness-raising and mutual aid to functional cooperation and common management of public resources. These forms can coexist, evolve, and sometimes require formal institutionalisation. The official commitment level and interaction frequency further categorise CBC as formal or informal or either regular or irregular (Sousa, 2012, p. 6-7). The economic characteristics of border regions are crucial. Keating (1998) observes that CBC flourishes when neighbouring economies somewhat complement each other (p. 181). As noted by Sousa (2012), geography is another critical motivator for CBC, often leading to joint infrastructural projects like bridges or dams. Environmental and judicial issues also commonly draw neighbouring countries into CBC. Generally, the relative underdevelopment of border regions due to national borders encourages stakeholders to participate in CBC activities (p. 16).

The success of CBC heavily relies on the involvement and perception of regional and local actors, including politicians, chambers of commerce, and NGOs (The Association of European Border Regions, 2014, p. 8). Practical CBC projects, as highlighted by Heddebaut (2007), are typically based on regional needs and executed by local actors with support from central authorities (p. 82). Halás (2007) emphasises that other key factors influencing the effectiveness of CBC include political will, legal frameworks, administrative mechanisms, and funding (p. 24). CBC can go beyond simple neighbourly relations, transforming borders into mere administrative boundaries and facilitating smoother interactions for border communities. Nevertheless, not all border communities engage in CBC. Van der Velde & van Houtum (2004) argue that borders influence how people perceive themselves and their neighbours, with limited knowledge or negative experiences leading to indifference or mistrust (p. 51). While political and financial support can initiate CBC, its long-term sustainability hinges on mutual understanding and trust.

## **Literature Review**

The literature review indicates that ample studies have explored Cyprus in historical, political, security, economic, and cultural contexts, among others, and have included relevant arguments for this research. Reid (2021), for example, underlines that conflicting narratives of Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities about the past deepen distrust between the two communities (p. 148). Socratous & Uludağ (2021), Öznacar (2019), Papadakis (2008), and Zembylas & Karahasan (2017) discuss the same point by focusing on history teaching at local schools. Denктаş (2004), Atakol (2012), Aziz (2000), Reddaway (1990), Galatariotou (2012), and Psaltis & Cakal (2016) demonstrate how both Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots build their truths depicting the other negatively based on shared memories. Gökçebağ (2015) explains the difficulties encountered in teaching the Turkish language in South Cyprus. Skoutaris (2011) and Casaglia (2019) discuss the effectiveness of the EU regulations in Cyprus and suggest that better implementation of respective regulations, such as the Direct Trade Regulation, would have facilitated smoother interaction. On the other hand, there are also scholars, like de Waal (2018), who underline certain positive developments. Pointing out easier border crossing in Cyprus, he puts forward that the border “is now a fairly benign boundary that can be crossed in a couple of minutes.” (p. 52). Overall, it is a general understanding among scholars, such as Heraclides (2011) and Loizides

& Kutlay (2019), that the political divide between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots has deepened over the years.

A review of the relevant literature reveals a significant gap in studies addressing CBC in the island of Cyprus, which this research aims to help fill. Specifically, the existing literature has predominantly focused on the Cyprus issue's political, economic, and social dimensions while addressing individual aspects of CBC. On the other hand, this research offers a comprehensive analysis of border-related dynamics and the potential of CBC on the island within a historical context, discussing both facilitators and barriers. The primary academic work that specifically addresses CBC in the island of Cyprus and explicitly uses the term "CBC" is Reid's (2021) article titled "Heritage, Reconciliation and Cross-Border Cooperation in Cyprus." The research objective of this article is to explore the role of heritage in the reconciliation and cooperation processes within Cyprus. It focuses mainly on the Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage in Cyprus (TCCH), with a case study on restoring the Venetian walls in Nicosia. The article demonstrates that the TCCH's collaborative heritage restoration projects have restored vital cultural sites and facilitated the communities' dialogue, understanding, and cooperation. It concludes by emphasising shared cultural heritage's essential role in fostering collaboration in Cyprus, suggesting that such initiatives, transcending political and cultural divides, can inspire further collaborative efforts.

## **A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE CYPRUS ISSUE**

The "Republic of Cyprus" (RoC) was established in 1960 as a partnership State between the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities, based on the Treaties of Establishment, Alliance, and Guarantee. Marking the end of the UK's colonial rule on the island, this new State was unique, a *sui generis* arrangement, where the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities elected their leaders separately. The Greek Cypriot leader held the presidency, with the Turkish Cypriot leader serving as vice president. The cabinet consisted of 6 Greek Cypriots and 4 Turkish Cypriots, reflecting the community ratios in its 10-member composition. Similarly, the 80-seat parliament was divided between 56 seats for Greek Cypriots and 24 for Turkish Cypriots, with all State posts allocated according to the population ratios of the two communities. The Vice President was given veto power on matters significant to the Turkish Cypriot community, and cabinet decisions required the approval of at least one Turkish Cypriot Minister. Türkiye, Greece, and the UK were granted guarantor powers, endowed with the right to intervene to protect the constitutional order of the RoC.

Additionally, the UK retained sovereign military bases on the island (Republic of Cyprus, 1960). Many commentators of the time described this unique State as a "reluctant republic," a "quasi-state," and an "unwanted child." (Adamides, 2020, p. 30). The first President, also the Head of the Church of Cyprus, Archbishop Makarios, was a staunch supporter of *Enosis*, the movement for the union of Cyprus with Greece. Makarios had associations with the National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters (EOKA). Established in 1955 to end British rule and achieve *Enosis* through armed struggle, EOKA's campaign included acts of violence against British forces as well as both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots who opposed *Enosis*. In 1956, Makarios was arrested and exiled to the Seychelles Islands by Field Marshal Sir John Harding, the British Governor of Cyprus, who condemned Makarios's leadership of a political campaign reliant on "ruthless violence and terrorism." (Aziz, 2000, p. 67).

On 30 November 1963, Makarios proposed 13 significant constitutional amendments to shift the balance of power in favour of Greek Cypriots. Turkish Cypriot leadership categorically rejected this proposal, which triggered Greek Cypriots' attacks from Christmas Eve of 1963 onwards. In 1966, a Greek Cypriot newspaper revealed that Greek Cypriot leadership was acting on a top-secret strategy called the Akritas Plan, which aimed to facilitate *Enosis* by eliminating the Turkish Cypriots. Greek Cypriot authorities later confirmed the document's authenticity (Galatariotou, 2012, p. 249). Concerned about a potential intervention by Türkiye under the Treaty of Guarantee, Makarios sought assistance from the UK and later the UN. In response, British forces, led by General Young, established a ceasefire line on 30 December 1963 using a green marker to separate Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities in the capital, Nicosia. This demarcation, known as the Green Line, received written approval from both community leaders, Makarios and Dr. Küçük (then Vice President), effectively dividing the capital (Bryant & Papadakis, 2012, p. 5). The arrival of the first UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) troops in March 1964 marked the beginning of an ongoing mission to maintain peace. Despite this, under UN supervision, Greek Cypriots continued efforts to achieve *Enosis*, confining Turkish Cypriots to enclaves constituting only two to three per cent of the island's territory (Heraclides, 2011, p. 120). Between 1964 and 1968, these enclaves were likened to open prisons with severe restrictions on movement. George Ball, US Under-Secretary of State from 1961 to 1966, stated that "Makarios' central interest was to block off Turkish intervention so that his Greek Cypriots could go on happily massacring Turkish Cypriots" (Atakol, 2012, p. 4). The 1967 coup in Greece, which brought a military junta to power, led to a distancing of the Greek Cypriot administration from *Enosis* to preserve its independence and resulted in the division of EOKA. A more radical faction, EOKA B, aligned with the Greek military junta, orchestrated a coup on 15 July 1974 in Cyprus to accelerate *Enosis*. This prompted Türkiye to seek collaborative action with the UK, a request that was declined, leading to Türkiye's unilateral intervention on 20 July 1974. An agreement for a population exchange was concluded in 1975, placing Turkish Cypriots in the north and Greek Cypriots in the south of the island, separated by a buffer zone controlled by the UN. Despite the collapse of the RoC towards the end of 1963, the international community has continued to recognise the Greek Cypriot administration as the legitimate government of the RoC. In 1983, the TRNC was proclaimed. Following the UN Security Council's Resolution 541 (1983) urging States not to recognise any Cypriot State other than the RoC, TRNC was only recognised by Türkiye.

A significant moment in the history of Cyprus occurred with the application of the Greek Cypriot-led South Cyprus to the EU in 1990, leading to its acceptance into the Union on 1 May 2004 despite the unresolved conflict. The EU recognises the entire island as part of the EU, but EU law is suspended in the north until a resolution is achieved. Efforts by the UN to reunify the island have thus far been unsuccessful, including the comprehensive Annan Plan. This plan was rejected by 75 per cent of Greek Cypriots, while it was approved by 65 per cent of Turkish Cypriots in simultaneous referenda held on 24 April 2004. Losing faith in the long-pursued settlement based on a bi-communal, bizonal federation with political equality as Greek Cypriots refuse to treat the Turkish Cypriots as equal partners and encouraged by the UN Secretaries-General's calls on the two sides to think outside the box, the Turkish Cypriots currently advocate a Two-State Solution. Their vision emphasises establishing

the Turkish Cypriot people's sovereign equality and equal international status as the basis for formal negotiations. They seek UN Security Council support, followed by results-oriented talks under UN auspices, focusing on future relationships, property, security, border adjustments, and EU relations. They highlight the historical usurpation of partnership in the RoC by Greek Cypriots as the basis for their approach. Additionally, they express readiness for cooperation on mutual concerns such as hydrocarbons, renewable energy, demining, and irregular migration, believing such cooperation can build trust and facilitate a comprehensive agreement between the two existing States on the island (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the TRNC, 2022).

## **KEY CBC FACILITATORS IN CYPRUS**

### **Bilateral Mechanisms**

#### *Technical Committees*

Starting in 2008, the leaders of Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities have established several technical bi-communal committees under the auspices of the UN. The committees, formed as platforms of cooperation, were given mandate to deal with issues that affect the daily lives of both communities on the island. UNDP Cyprus (2019) defines the technical committees as “a mechanism to implement concrete confidence-building measures and provide technical input to the peace process and wider reconciliation efforts in the two communities.” The EU has been the primary financial contributor to the committees.

These committees cover a wide range of areas. There are technical committees on Telecommunications and Radio Frequency-Broadcasting, Culture, Humanitarian Affairs, Economic and Commercial Matters, Health Matters, Crime and Crime Related Matters, Cultural Heritage, Crossings, Environment, Education, Crisis Management, and Gender Equality. In several instances, they have proved to be practical platforms to deal with border-related challenges, even though the Greek Cypriot side does not appoint members with decision-making authority in the Technical Committees. For example, Turkish Cypriot Police cooperated with their Greek Cypriot counterparts through the Technical Committee on Crime and Crime-Related Matters on a murder case of a Greek Cypriot national committed in the TRNC in 2018 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the TRNC, 2018). In another criminal case in 2020, two murder suspects in South Cyprus crossed the border illegally to the TRNC and travelled to Türkiye. Upon the request of the Greek Cypriot authorities, which was communicated through the Technical Committee on Crime and Crime-Related Matters, Turkish Cypriot authorities acted, the suspects were detained in Türkiye and deported to the TRNC. They were charged with illegal entry into the country, and upon serving their sentence, they were handed over to Greek Cypriot authorities, with the mediation of the Committee (Andreou, 2020).

The first border gate in Cyprus was opened in 2003. This development was the most significant breakthrough in Cyprus as it facilitated cross-border movement on the island after almost three decades. Since then, eight other border gates have been opened in Cyprus. The Technical Committee on Crossings evaluates the possibility of opening

additional border gates. The Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage (TCCH) is another active technical committee. The TCCH has completed numerous renovation projects on the island, including mosques, churches, and other buildings with historical and cultural value. Over seven thousand Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots took part in these projects. As a result, the number of religious ceremonies organised on these sites increased. More people travelled to the other side, and inter-communal interaction grew. A survey conducted to reveal the two communities' perception regarding the TCCH's work indicated that 71 per cent of the participants believed that “cultural heritage monuments can help improve confidence and peacebuilding process between the two communities” (Cultural Heritage Technical Committee, 2018, p. 5). Turkish Cypriot representative Ali Tuncay and Greek Cypriot representative Takis Hadjidemetriou of the Committee were awarded the “European Parliament’s Citizen’s Prize” in 2015 for the work carried out by the Committee.

The Technical Committee on Health provided a functional platform for Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot authorities to coordinate measures they implemented throughout the COVID-19 pandemic between 2020 and 2022. Even though Turkish Cypriots were entitled to 30 per cent of the vaccines provided by the EU to the island, the delivery of vaccines to the north turned into a political dispute. Greek Cypriot authorities obstructed direct access by the EU to Turkish Cypriots. After deliberation, both sides agreed to involve the Technical Committee on Health to address the issue. The Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot co-chairs of the Committee facilitated communication regarding the allocation of doses for the Turkish Cypriot community and the administration program. In several rounds, the Greek Cypriot co-chairman of the committee handed over thousands of vaccine doses to his Turkish Cypriot counterpart at a border gate (Andreou, 2020).

### ***Committee on Missing Persons (CMP)***

The CMP is the oldest bi-communal committee in Cyprus and comprises three members. Each community's leader appoints one member, and the UN Secretary-General appoints the third. Established in 1981, the CMP only began its operations in 2004. It employs a bi-communal forensic team of nearly 60 archaeologists, anthropologists, and geneticists for its technical work. This team operates outside CMP's anthropological laboratory, within the UN-controlled buffer zone. The Committee's mission is to locate the remains of individuals reported missing between 1963 and 1974 without seeking to determine the causes of death or assigning blame. The EU is the principal financial supporter, and the UNDP oversees the administrative aspects of the project (Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus, 2024).

The issue of missing persons casts a long shadow, placing a significant psychological strain on the relatives of the disappeared and both communities at large. The uncertainty surrounding the fate of loved ones perpetuates blame and hinders trust-building between communities emerging from conflict. Scholars like Şahoğlu (2021) have argued that healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation are unattainable without the proper recovery and burial of the missing (p. 26). The CMP's efforts are thus seen as pivotal in fostering reconciliation and enhancing empathy between the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities at the grassroots level.

### **Third-Party Initiatives**

Specific international organisations and States, through their representations or embassies in Cyprus, have initiated, developed, organised, or financed numerous bi-communal projects with the participation of individuals or NGOs from both sides. CBC, after all, as Frątczak-Müller & Mielczarek-Żejmo (2020) suggest, is a grassroots cooperation to foster bonds between neighbouring border communities as well as public and private institutions in all dimensions of social life (p. 21). The UN carries out bi-communal projects through the UN Development Programme (UNDP) representation on the island. For instance, the Project on Economic Interdependence, which started in 2009 and continued until 2013, was realised with the partnership of the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which administers civilian foreign aid and development assistance, funded the project with about 1.5 million USD—the project aimed to familiarise the businesspeople from two communities with the benefits of working together. Within the framework of the project, a business directory, including 200 companies from both sides which would potentially do business together, was prepared; 26 companies were awarded market research grants to assist them in tapping into cross-border business opportunities; several seminars on the cross-border business procedures were organised; grants were given to encourage the establishment of bi-communal business partnerships; research was conducted to determine the level of economic interdependence, and a Joint Economic Development Strategy was proposed; media materials, such as Nine O'clock News were prepared to demonstrate to the public the expected benefits of cooperation in the island (United Nations Development Programme in Cyprus, 2019).

Similarly, the US Embassy in the Greek Cypriot-controlled South has been executing the Bi-communal Support Programme (BSP) since 2000. The Programme fosters inter-communal relations between Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities. Some BSP initiatives include the PeacePlayers International Cyprus (PPI-CY), the JazzFeatures, the Institute of Communication and Languages, and the Youth Leadership and Conflict Transformation Training Program. The PPI-CY is a basketball programme for children from Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities. It is based on the idea that children who play together can learn to live together. It was initiated in 2006 in cooperation with the UNDP. The PPI-CY has reached out to over 1,000 children. The JazzFeatures, on the other hand, aims to create links among the musicians from Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities. Starting in 2008, the JazzFeatures included training sessions and concerts across the island. The US Embassy asserts that the programme “was highly successful in building island-wide musical bridges between the communities: participants who knew little or nothing about the other community continue to work together and perform regularly, even though the program has officially ended” (US Embassy in the Greek Cypriot controlled South, 2020). The Institute of Communication and Languages is a language programme to improve the English competencies of the members of the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities. The programme intends to foster inter-communal links through a shared language of English. The Youth Leadership and Conflict Transformation Training Program works with teenagers from both communities on various issues to build trust, increase mutual understanding and enhance their leadership skills. Moreover, the Embassy organises summer camps in the US for the youth of two communities through the Cyprus America Scholarship Program (CAPS). The US Embassy maintains that “through various innovative programs and activities, BSP reached thousands of Cypriots island-wide and helped create an environment of

tolerance and mutual understanding” (US Embassy in the Greek Cypriot-controlled South, 2020).

German Embassy in the Greek Cypriot-controlled South has carried out a bi-communal project named “Imagine.” The project was conducted under the auspicious supervision of the Technical Committee on Education. The Association for Historical Dialogue and Research (AHDR) and the Home for Cooperation (H4C) carried out the project with the support of the Federal Foreign Office of Germany and the UNFICYP. Primary, secondary, and high school students from Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities can participate in the project. There are also programmes organised for the teachers. The project involves school visits across the border and mutual participation in training and sportive activities in the UN-controlled buffer zone. Over 2,000 students and 194 teachers have participated in events organised within the framework of the project, which aims to help eliminate “stereotypes, extremism and intolerance” among the students and teachers on the island (German Embassy in the Greek Cypriot Controlled South, 2018). The Turkish Cypriot leadership decided to suspend participation in the Imagine project in November 2022 due to concerns that the project promotes elements conflicting with their policy of sovereign equality. Specifically, the Turkish Cypriot authorities pointed out that some of the educational content of the project supported a unified Cyprus under a single government, ignoring the reality of two equal states on the island. (“Imagine Education Program was postponed by the Presidency,” 2022).

For the last 30 years, Turkish and Greek Cypriot political party representatives have held regular meetings as part of a bi-communal project initiated by the Slovak Embassy in the Greek Cypriot-controlled South. The sessions are usually held at Ledra Palace Hotel, located in the buffer zone in Nicosia. Each meeting is hosted by one political party, and the participants exchange views on a topic that the host party tables. Party representatives also regularly visit the graveyards of those who were declared missing, and later, their remains were found as a result of the efforts of the CMP. Slovak Embassy, in partnership with a bi-communal association for missing persons called ‘Together We Can’, organised a visit to a graveyard in December 2018. A joint communique agreed by the representatives of political parties from two communities and read by the Slovak Ambassador Skoda conveyed the shared feelings of grief for the missing persons and sympathy for the families on both sides of the Green Line. Representatives of political parties also urged the leaders of two communities to dedicate an ordinary commemoration day for missing persons and have one statue erected in their memory (Slovak Embassy, 2018). In January and February 2021, representatives of Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot political parties held online meetings due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In the communiqué adopted at the end of the meeting in January, parties commended the Bi-communal Technical Committee on Health for its mediation for the transfer of the COVID-19 vaccines to the Turkish Cypriot community. Regarding this cooperation, parties stressed in the communiqué the necessity to ensure that all bi-communal committees continue their work without interruption (“G/C and T/C parties urge leaders to show will for solution based on UNSC resolutions,” 2021).

Swedish Embassy in the Greek Cypriot-controlled South initiated a bi-communal project called Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process (RTCYPP) to bring together the representatives of religious leaders of the Turkish Cypriot and Greek

Cypriot communities to encourage them to work together for peaceful co-existence in the island. The initiative was announced in 2009. Two years later, an office was established in the buffer zone within the Home for Cooperation to serve as a secretariat. In 2012, heads of the smaller Maronite, Armenian Orthodox and Latin Catholic Churches were also included in the RTCYPP upon the invitation of the Muslim Mufti and Greek Orthodox Archbishop. RTCYPP claims to be based on the following four pillars: “to get to know and build trust among the religious leaders and respective faith communities; to promote confidence-building measures; to advocate for the right to free access and worship at churches, mosques and monasteries; to ensure the protection of all religious monuments in Cyprus” (The Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process, 2024). The Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus has always acted as the custodian of the island's Greek and Orthodox Christian identity, shaping public opinion among Greek Cypriots for generations. Accordingly, the Church has been politically active, strongly opposing any deal between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots that it perceives as compromising Greek Cypriot identity and ownership of the island. Head of Church Archbishop Chrysostomos’s following statement, issued on 29 April 2019 and read in all churches in South Cyprus, reflected the Church’s disapproving stance vis-à-vis CBC between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots.

... The country had survived many invasions and occupations because the promises of the conquerors did not seduce our ancestors or have been bent by their threats. Despite all the hardships, they remained committed to our faith and homeland's values. It is a fact that a section of the people today strayed from these values. This concerns those who exert pressure for just any form of solution to the Cyprus problem, who daily cross to the north, not to visit churches and the graves of their ancestors but to do transactions with the occupation, for fun, for the use of the illegal airport (Andreou, 2019).

Being aware of the extremist, maximalist, and intransigent position of the Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus, Turkish Cypriots remain cautious about the RTCYPP.

Launched in 2019, the Finnish Embassy’s Startups4Peace is another programme designed to bring Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities together to facilitate bi-communal business start-ups. The Finnish Embassy co-funded the programme, and the EU is the leading financial contributor. The Greek Cypriot Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce are the programme's partners. Young entrepreneurs are encouraged to team up, preferably with members of other communities, to put forward their business ideas. The winners fund the competition programme to realise their business projects (Startups4Peace, 2024). Similarly, the Dutch Embassy in the Greek Cypriot-controlled South initiated the Orange Tulip Fund in 2019 to “contribute towards building bridges and enhancing cooperation between communities” on the island. The Fund finances projects with a minimum of 500 Euros and a maximum of 10,000 Euros to encourage intercommunal cooperation (EU Information Centre in Northern Cyprus, 2024).

The Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) established a centre in the island in 2005 as a bi-communal research centre. Researchers from Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities and other country nationals offer their perspectives on the issues of common concern on the island. Research outcomes are generally presented in

Turkish, Greek, and English languages. It is located in South Nicosia, near the Green Line. It also has an office in the buffer zone. PRIO Cyprus Centre (PCC) aims to widen and reinforce bi-communal cooperation on the island. It provides the members of the two communities with the facilities to convene and think together on the issues affecting their lives (PRIO Cyprus Centre, 2024).

## **KEY CBC BARRIERS IN CYPRUS**

### **Distrust**

Trust involves taking a risk with the anticipation that the other party in a relationship will act appropriately (Vuorelma, 2018). Trust forms the basis for collaborative actions, with the willingness to trust influenced by how confident one is in assessing the other party's trustworthiness. Uncertainty can impede this willingness to engage in trusting or cooperative behaviours. Therefore, empirical investigation should investigate the level of trust, the confidence in this judgment, and whether subsequent behaviour aligns with it (Bauer, 2021). While trust can facilitate cooperation to a certain extent, distrust often prevents it, even when cooperation would benefit both parties (Haukkala & Saari, 2018).

Emerging from the challenging experiences outlined in the preceding section regarding the Cyprus Issue, Turkish Cypriots harbour deep distrust toward Greek Cypriots. This distrust has been consistently reinforced by various means employed by Greek Cypriots, including national celebrations, commemorations, portrayal of heroic figures and symbols, content in school history books, adopted policies, and the rhetoric used by authorities, among other channels. Öznacar (2019) points out that Greek Cypriot educational materials often emphasise Greek ownership of the island of Cyprus and promote Greek culture while portraying Turks on the Island of Cyprus in a negative light. Turkish individuals are depicted as enemies, murderers, torturers, occupiers, and barbaric, among other derogatory terms. Another observation by Öznacar is that Greek Cypriot literature typically excludes Turkish Cypriots when referring to Cypriots, suggesting that Cypriot identity is exclusively associated with Greek Cypriots. Turkish Cypriots are portrayed as minorities who were granted excessive rights in 1960 when the RoC was established. Additionally, Öznacar highlights the absence of any mention of the Turkish flag in Greek Cypriot history schoolbooks. Overall, he argues that history education in Greek Cypriot schools is designed to instil in the minds of new generations the idea that Cyprus has always been and will always be a Greek island while perpetuating negative stereotypes about Turks.

Despite the Council of Europe's recommendation for history teaching in twenty-first-century Europe to promote reconciliation, recognition, understanding, and mutual trust between peoples, Greek Cypriot leadership continues to utilise history schoolbooks as propaganda tools to fuel anti-Turkish sentiments. An incident in 2021, where the Greek Cypriot Ministry of Education swiftly acted to remove praise for Mustafa Kemal Atatürk from an English language school workbook, further exemplifies this trend ("Tatar condemns Greek side's demand to rip out pages with Atatürk," 2021). Mustafa Kemal Atatürk holds significant importance for Turkish Cypriots as a national hero and is an integral part of their identity.

The Church of Cyprus is considerably influential among Greek Cypriots. Archbishop Chrysostomos stated during Easter celebrations in 2019 that he condemned Turks and criticised Greek Cypriots engaging in cross-border interactions with Turkish Cypriots. In response, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the TRNC (2019) emphasised the importance of increasing relations and cooperation to build trust on the island, urging Greek Cypriot authorities to denounce the Archbishop's remarks, which were largely ignored.

### **Greek Cypriots' concerns relating to "recognition" of the TRNC**

Greek Cypriot authorities have been reluctant to fully embrace initiatives that promote CBC in Cyprus, fearing that such actions could lead to the recognition or upgrade of the TRNC. In other words, the Greek Cypriot leadership's suspicion of CBC schemes stems from concerns that they could bolster the Turkish Cypriot community economically and politically, potentially leading to international legitimisation or recognition of the TRNC. This reluctance can be observed in missed cooperation opportunities involving critical commodities such as water, emergencies like wildfires, and the functioning of agreed-upon mechanisms. Greek Cypriot authorities have continuously blocked Turkish Cypriots' engagements with other countries in all fields, forcing the Turkish Cypriots to live in isolation.

Türkiye has been supplying the TRNC with water since 2013. A project to carry a river's water from Türkiye to North Cyprus was implemented to secure a water supply that is enough for at least 50 years. In its first phase, the project covered water needed for home use, and later, water became available for agriculture. Turkish Cypriot authorities offered the Greek Cypriot leadership to share this water. Even though the Greek Cypriots needed water dreadfully, they rejected this offer for political reasons. Some Greek Cypriot politicians even publicly stated that they "would rather drink poison than Turkish water" ("Greek Cypriots don't intend to use Turkish water, Turkish Deputy Prime Minister says," 2017). For example, in the summer of 2018, the water shortage was so profound that Greek Cypriot authorities instructed farmers to refrain from planting certain products. A neighbourly gesture from Turkish Cypriots, which would benefit Greek Cypriots immensely, was turned down, even though no strings were attached. In another incident that took place in June 2016, a forest wildfire on a large scale started in South Cyprus, and Greek Cypriot authorities could not manage to get it under control. Then TRNC President Akıncı contacted his Greek Cypriot counterpart Anastasiades several times to offer help. Instead, South Cyprus approached Israel, Greece and the EU for help and did not accept the offer of its neighbour (Presidency of the TRNC, 2016).

The EU's Direct Trade Regulation, drafted in 2004 to facilitate direct commercial relations between Turkish Cypriots and the EU, has been blocked by the Greek Cypriot authorities because it could lead to the Taiwanization of the TRNC. Therefore, they vetoed its application when they assumed the membership powers (de Waal, 2018, p. 56). While the Direct Trade Regulation failed to launch initially, the EU's Financial Aid Regulation and Green Line Regulation were passed with significant limitations. Any financial aid programme within the EU's Financial Aid Regulation requires an agreement to be signed with the government of the receiving State to establish the legal ground for the transactions. Nevertheless, due to Greek Cypriots' objections, the EU refrains from signing an agreement with the Turkish Cypriot

authorities, which complicates the implementation of the regulation (“Turkish Cypriot MPs warn of Greek Cypriot bid to scrap EU direct trade pledge,” 2019).

Similarly, the Green Line Regulation, which lays out the rules and procedures for moving people, goods, and services across the border in Cyprus, fails to facilitate intended transactions. De Waal (2018) maintains that the Green Line Regulation facilitates individual shopping across the border. Still, trade at larger volumes is hardly possible due to licensing and insurance issues Greek Cypriot authorities have been creating for Turkish Cypriots (p. 57). Ersözer (2019) points out that anything directly related to the TRNC, such as institutions and paperwork, has no value in the South. This causes deadlocks, and even though some of them can be avoided, they require extra procedures that increase red tape, time, and cost.

Moreover, the Greek Cypriot authorities do not recognise the seaports and airports in the TRNC, declaring entries via these ports illegal. Ships that have docked at these ports and later dock at Greek Cypriot ports are subjected to punitive measures, and those who travel to the island through these ports are not allowed to cross the Green Line to the south. Should there be no such restriction, more people would pass the border, and therefore, the local economy would benefit from the purchases and spending of these consumers and tourists (p. 39).

The technical committees, which were discussed in the previous section, have also been negatively affected by the concerns of Greek Cypriot authorities regarding the recognition of the TRNC. Even though they proved to be beneficial in addressing and solving several border-related obstacles to make the lives of both Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots easier, soon after the last round of negotiations that failed in 2017, Greek Cypriot authorities started to question the necessity to keep these committees in the absence of the talks (de Waal, 2018, p. 58). Consequently, there has been a decline in the committee's activities, and several could not even hold regular meetings.

## **CONCLUSION**

The exploration of CBC in Cyprus unveils a multifaceted scene where the potential for CBC and the challenges therein are deeply intertwined with the island's political context. Despite the existence of significant facilitators such as technical committees and the impactful interventions of third-party initiatives, the persistent barriers rooted in distrust, political sensitivities, and the contentious issue of recognition loom large, casting a long shadow over cooperative endeavours between the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities.

The findings of this study illuminate the complex dynamics at play, underscoring that while CBC presents a viable pathway towards fostering mutual understanding and reconciliation, its success is contingent upon overcoming deeply ingrained prejudices and historical narratives. The technical committees, in particular, have showcased the tangible benefits of cooperation, offering a glimpse into a future where shared challenges can be addressed collaboratively for the benefit of both Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots. Yet, the sporadic nature of such successes and the overarching political discord highlight the precarious balance that CBC efforts must navigate.

The role of third-party initiatives in catalysing and sustaining CBC efforts, while seemingly significant at first glance, requires closer scrutiny regarding motivation. These interventions, often spearheaded by international organisations and foreign governments, have provided the necessary resources and offered neutral platforms for dialogue and interaction. Their contributions, however, are almost always made with the implicit or explicit understanding that they are paving the way for an eventual federal settlement, a settlement model from which the Turkish Cypriots have withdrawn their support after half a century of failed attempts. Despite these efforts, the barriers to CBC in Cyprus remain formidable, overshadowing the potential positive roles of facilitators. It is ultimately up to the Turkish and Greek Cypriots to forge a path toward lasting peace and cooperation.

This study's insights into the Cyprus context have broader implications for conflict-affected regions globally. They suggest that CBC while holding promise as a mechanism for sustainable cooperation, is fraught with significant challenges that can outweigh facilitators. It must, however, be kept in mind that in the specific case of Cyprus, the island has been conflict-free for five decades following Türkiye's intervention in 1974, and no common ground exists between the two sides regarding the way forward for an eventual settlement. This lack of consensus underscores the persistent barriers to CBC despite all efforts.

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