

Northern Cyprus as an “inner neighbour”: a critical analysis of European Union enlargement in Cyprus.

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Abstract

This article analyses the impact of Cyprus’s accession to the European Union on the northern part of the island, and tackles the political actorness of the EU with regard to the enduring Cypriot conflict. Much literature has critically analysed the EU enlargement process, underlining its imperialistic features and its problematic nature. At the same time, scholars have highlighted the EU’s difficulties in acting as a political actor and its impact on situations of ethnonational conflict. This article brings together these critical aspects by analysing them in the peculiar context of Cyprus.

It retraces the negotiation process and the Turkish Cypriots’ in/visibility throughout it, and presents research conducted following Cyprus’s accession in three different periods between 2008 and 2015 to show the evolution of Turkish Cypriot ideas and imaginaries related to membership and Europe.

We propose an interpretation of Northern Cyprus as an “inner neighbour” of the EU, because of its anomalous and liminal status, the suspended application of the *acquis communautaire*, the ambiguity of the border management of the Green Line, and the unresolved conflict. All these problematic features of Northern Cyprus’s situation are examined in detail to identify the unique position of this entity within the EU. In addition to this, and supporting the importance of a bottom-up understanding of the EU normative and symbolic projection, the article presents the opinions of Turkish Cypriot citizens about their expectations before and after 2004, and how their ideas and imaginaries interact with the process of Europeanisation.

Introduction

Cyprus's recent history has created an opportunity to see the EU at work as a political actor in a conflict scenario, in what has recently been defined as the Europeanisation of the Cypriot conflict (Ulusoy 2016: 393).

Through the process of candidacy and accession, the European Union not only modifies its relations with partner countries and redefines borders, it also changes, widens, or moves its sphere of influence by exerting its soft and normative power¹, which is characterised by a discursive construction. Unveiling the constructed character of the EU's power is not to underestimate it, but to recognise that this construction happens within and outside the EU (Diez 2005), both as a self-representation and a creation of imaginaries and expectations at the local level. A unilateral understanding of the EU enlargement process would not account for the different geopolitical imaginations developing around it and for the various, and often utilitarian, interpretations of EU's norms.

This article seeks to understand how EU accession affected Cyprus, which is both member and neighbour, characterised by an unresolved conflict, and divided by a contested border. In focusing on Northern Cyprus, we aim to reflect critically on EU enlargement, departing from a unidirectional logic of engagement, and examining the interaction of EU missions and aims with local interests. Moreover, we want to stress the dialogical nature of the Europeanisation process, by looking at Turkish Cypriots' interests and imaginaries interacting with it. Finally, this article contributes to the literature on the EU's inability to influence the Cypriot conflict (Diez and Pace 2011; Boedeltje et al 2006; Christou 2010; Eralp and Beriker 2005), by examining Turkish Cypriots' role and voice throughout the accession process and their increasing disillusionment and disappointment.

Scholars and the European institutions have described EU enlargement as an opportunity to unite Europe and overcome conflict (Brewin 2002; Christou 2010; Diez and Pace 2011; Diez et al. 2006; Eralp and Beriker 2005; Oğuzlu 2002; Rumelili 2007). In this respect the process of integration is strategic both in influencing political decision making and creating a set of norms, values, and a shared European identity. The process of enlargement implies a redefinition of EU external borders and, consequently, the neighbourhood's continuous reshaping (Casas Cortes et al. 2012), which is also affected by processes of integration/association, cross-border cooperation, and dedicated policies (Featherstone 2000; Featherstone and Kazamias 2000; Clark and Jones 2008; Scott and Liikanen 2010).

The concept of Europeanisation is also relevant to this introductory discussion, and we use it here to describe the impact of the political integration process as a global projection of European identities and as a process whereby the EU gains meaning, actorness, and presence (Jones 2006, Clark and

Jones 2008). One territorial explanation for Europeanisation concerns the “rescaling of national identities and interests ‘upwards’ from states to the supranational scale” (Clark and Jones 2008: 306) and involves an interpretation of the EU as a structure of opportunity for the projection of national interests. This frame is unfolded in the Cypriot case by observing how the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities’ interests have understood and continue to understand Europeanisation as an opportunity for pursuing different objectives.

Within this frame and in the context of our research the EU is not merely seen as a neutral actor involved in the Cypriot conflict; rather, its role can be understood as affecting the situation at the political and social level. It is a vehicle for diverse cross-cutting interests (Ibid), and it provides an opportunity to enable new and common forms of belonging and identity construction, negotiated at the local level.

The objective of this article, that is to critically analyse the impact of EU’s enlargement in Northern Cyprus, is achieved in a review of the literature of the period when Cyprus joined the EU and a reflection on the situation in more recent years. The analysis draws from different sources: first, from institutional and governmental materials related to the EU, which offer extremely valuable insights into political actors’ various perspectives; second, from wider public discourses available in the media; and third, from an examination of the views of both civil society representatives and informants in the ethnographic sense. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in three different fieldwork periods between 2008 and 2015, involving EU representatives, civil society actors directly working for or interacting with the EU, and Turkish Cypriot citizens².

The article opens with the reconstruction of the accession process, emphasising the Turkish Cypriots’ role and expectations throughout, as well as the importance of local interpretations of EU norms and power. It then continues by tackling the issue of border management and its anomalies, and finally reports on the evolving and contrasting Northern Cypriot imaginaries and ideas of Europe and EU identity. The paper continues by presenting the concept of “inner neighbourhood” and its use in the Cypriot case, which leads to the concluding remarks, which summarise results and answer our initial questions.

Turkish Cypriots’ marginal role in accession negotiations and the Green Line’s status

A critique of the events leading from candidacy to membership reveals important elements for an understanding of how EU accession meant different things to each side, and the various expectations involved. At the same time, this negotiation phase exposes the Turkish Cypriots’ marginal political

role concerning the EU. Finally, and as importantly, the changing requirements affecting Cyprus's candidacy and accession show the EU's disengagement from attempting to effect a solution of the Cyprus conflict and partition.

Local understanding of the Europe Union and membership is important in interpreting the outcomes of the enlargement process, the transformation of the EU's external borders, and the neighbourhood's redefinition, because it contributes to determining the outcomes of the bordering process resulting from enlargement (Browning and Christou 2010). Various interests can be identified and promoted through different interpretations of membership and potential local uses of EU power, as well as through different ideas and imaginaries concerning Europe (ibid: 110).

Immediately before Cyprus's EU accession there were many discourses about Europe in the political rhetoric on both sides of the island. They were generally positive and stemmed from different ideas of what EU membership would mean politically for both sides. The understanding of EU norms and the concept of their related justice and democracy seemed to Greek Cypriots a solution to partition and the end of the Turkish occupation of the island, while for Turkish Cypriots it promised an end to isolation and recognition of their rights as a minority (Demetriou 2005).

The idea of "*i megháli Evropaiíkí ikoghénia*" (a large European family) and the slogan "*Avrupa göründü*" (Europe is within sight) was a shared set of expectations with different meanings. Greek Cypriots considered the EU a weapon to use against Turkey in their struggle for justice. In the north, however, the perception of the EU as guarantor of democracy and progress pointed to expectations that it would have a more indirect impact on the problem, by enabling the minorities to gain a voice and eventually power (Ibid). Both sides' expectations were at least partly confounded during the accession process.

Full accession negotiations with Cyprus, with five central and eastern European countries, began in March 1998. The island had by then been divided for twenty-four years, and the political situation had not improved. In 1983 the Turkish Cypriots had unilaterally proclaimed the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) and only Turkey had recognised their status. The Republic of Cyprus (RoC) was therefore interacting with the EU on behalf of both political and ethnic communities, and this feature of the negotiations established the basis for the subordination and voicelessness of the Turkish Cypriots from the outset of the negotiations. However, during the candidacy period a political solution for the enduring conflict was a requirement for membership, and this led to UN-sponsored talks between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. The need for a settlement suggested a more central role for Northern Cyprus, because the talks between the two communities' representatives was fundamental

to the accession process. This, however, was not enough for TRNC politicians, who insisted on participating in the negotiations as a recognised political entity.

Despite this insistence, the RoC represented the whole island in the accession negotiations, as the Greek Cypriots had demanded. The Turkish Cypriots' room for manoeuvre in this process suggests that their only way to have a voice in the negotiations with the EU has always been to withdraw from the talks³, and this resulted in a zero-sum game in which Turkish Cypriots renounced a peaceful solution to the island's partition to gain visibility, and appeared less willing to resolve the conflict. This created a vicious circle, making it even less likely that the EU would involve a representative of the community in the negotiations⁴.

In 2003 the UN proposed a federal solution in the Annan Plan, which was supposed to be signed before Cyprus membership was finalised. The Greek Cypriots rejected the plan in the twin referenda in April 2004, while the Turkish Cypriots approved it (for an analysis of the results see Pericleous 2009). Turkish Cypriots saw the plan's approval and willingness to resolve the conflict as clearly related to the achievement of full membership, as some of those I interviewed during different fieldwork periods confirmed.

I disagreed with the Annan Plan, it wasn't something that safeguarded our rights as a minority community on the island. Once Turkey leaves us, the Greeks, they can do whatever they want, and you know they still want union with Greece [...]. Most Turkish Cypriots voted yes because they wanted to be Europeans (E.N., Turkish Cypriot citizen – interviewed in 2009)

We [*Turkish Cypriots*] have done everything we could, we agreed on the [*Annan*] Plan and opened the border, we wanted to be in the European Union like the south. (E.B., Turkish Cypriot citizen – interviewed in 2015)

However, while Cyprus in its entirety officially entered the European Union on 1st May 2004, the *de facto* EU limit to the application of its norms runs along the Green Line, the name given to the line of partition between the two sides of the island. “*The EU recognizes only one state and the whole island would accede to the EU, but the *acquis communautaire* would not apply to the TRNC until a solution had been found*” (Cyprus News Agency, 2003).

As with former Yugoslavia (Bialasiewicz et al. 2009: 81), Cyprus was to prove another example of the ineffectiveness of the EU's incentive-based approach. This missed opportunity has been seen as the EU's abdication from having a political role and furthering a solution (Boedeltje et al. 2006), and this is indeed felt by Northern Cypriots, as the next section shows.

Given the result of the twin referenda and the rejection of the Annan Plan by the Greek Cypriots, and following the border's opening by the Turkish Cypriot authorities⁵, various observers have suggested that the EU has decided to reward the Turkish Cypriots by fostering relations between their community and Europe and softening border regulations to facilitate trade and mobility. This exemplifies that negotiations concerning normative and cultural projections at the local level also

have consequences for the functioning of the border itself and its regulation and management regime: the recognition of the Turkish Cypriots' desire to reach a settlement and become EU members had very practical consequences for the regulation and crossing of the Green Line. However, this regulation had to be designed around the anomalous condition of Northern Cyprus and its status (Boedeltje et al. 2006, Casaglia 2010, Hatay et al. 2008).

Indeed, the line of division between the sides remains unclear: it has never been considered a border, but a ceasefire line, which reflects the fact that no peace treaty has ever been signed since the Turkish occupation of the north, and that it cannot currently be managed as an EU external border because the whole of Cyprus is *de jure* part of the Union. Indeed, the anomaly of Cypriot membership becomes evident when the Green Line is considered. This dividing line is also the place where hard expressions of European power apply in bordering practices and the right of entry (Bialasiewicz et al. 2009). Selective processes also operate there, creating a liminal jurisdictional space which functions partly as an EU external border, and defines the in-betweenness of the north with respect to membership. The regulations applied to the Green Line exemplify the attempt to normalise the border while securing it: the EU has sought to cope with this ambiguity through the adoption, on 29th April 2004, of the Green Line Regulation (GLR)⁶. Becoming fully operational in August of the same year, the GLR defines intra-island trade and how European law applies to this dividing line, thereby circumventing the legal problems between the sides. Two further EU draft regulations were proposed in July 2004: the Direct Trade Regulation and the Financial Aid Regulation⁷. These were directed at ending the Turkish Cypriot community's isolation, but they met some difficulties and the Greek Cypriot community's opposition, as stressed by an employee of the EU office in Northern Cyprus interviewed during my fieldwork.

The Turkish Cypriot community at that time wanted these two regulations to be adopted together, but the Republic of Cyprus objected, and their argument was that, if the direct trade had been adopted, that would have meant recognition of the illegitimate government of the country, the airport and seaports. So, they objected, and at that time they were an EU member state, on May 1st 2001 Cyprus became a member, so they had a say in the matter. But eventually in 2006 the Turkish Cypriots' community leader accepted to decouple these two regulations and the Financial Aid regulation was adopted in 2006 (M.M., EU office in Northern Cyprus – interviewed in 2015).

This reveals that the Turkish Cypriots, not having representatives to the EU Commission, could not influence decisions and depended on the veto of the Greek Cypriots, who were *de facto* members. This inability to express their voice in the political arena of the European Union while at the same time being considered members reproduces their status before accession was granted, and reveals the partial, ambiguous, and anomalous character of their membership.

Despite this lack of political participation after accession and the opening of crossing points along

the Green Line, some scholars have argued that in terms of imaginary and everyday experience “the buffer zone that was for a long time seen as a security necessity had become a line of opportunity” (Boedeltje et al. 2007: 19), because it was finally possible to redefine and re-signify the Green Line and, consequently, identity too. In a place where the physical configuration of space had such an impact on the perception of the conflict (Casaglia 2010), the opening of the border and its change of meaning indeed represented an unprecedented opportunity to modify narratives and discourses. The buffer zone, especially in Nicosia, which visibly maintained the conflict’s memory and its physical outcomes, was no longer a dead zone.

Before the opening nothing existed on the other side. We knew that there were people, we heard the muezzin and the children playing and shouting, but it was like something that didn’t exist in reality. (S.M., Greek Cypriot citizen – interviewed in 2008)

The opening of the checkpoints and the EU regulation of people’s and goods’ movement constituted a great opportunity to re-signify the border as a space for encounter where a shared identity could be developed. However, this proved only partly effective, because of the north’s incomplete membership and the failure to create a broad feeling of European identity, as we shall now analyse.

The EU presence in Northern Cyprus and locals’ imaginaries of Europe

The application of the *acquis communautaire* in the TRNC still depends on a process of “(norm)alisation” (Bialasiewicz et al. 2009: 80), which involves the adaptation of the local regulatory framework to EU directives. This is the role all EU offices and representatives have had in Northern Cyprus: from the opening of the first info point in 2002, to the establishment of the first EU taskforce in the north in 2006, and to the more recent arrival of special delegates responsible for preparing for “day one⁸”, EU efforts in Turkish Cyprus have always targeted the creation of the legal, economic, and normative membership conditions. Indeed, this is comparable with the normative power the EU exercises in the neighbourhood in return for the promise of membership, partnership, cooperation, or other relationships. An examination of procedural aspects reveals that until recently actions undertaken by the EU in Cyprus were regulated and financed under the umbrella of the EU enlargement programme, although they were formally directed at a member.

Up to January 2015 we were under the DG Enlargement, but you know with the Juncker commission DG Enlargement has moved to the DG NEAR and we moved to DG REGIO, which means regional policy, which in a way is a little more coherent because we were a neighbouring accessing country (C.G., EU office in Northern Cyprus – interviewed in 2015).

The EU sees Cyprus as one state and acts accordingly, in the hope that the improvement in economic and social interaction through the Green Line’s regulation will eventually lead to reconciliation.

However, we must detach ourselves from the EU's ideas and aims, and examine the local interpretation of the projection of European identities, and the meaning given locally to EU actorness and presence (Clark and Jones 2008), especially in a context characterised by ethno-nationalist conflict.

Constructivist theories invite us to consider identity as always situated in a relationship with the Other, since the agency of the Other contributes to shaping meanings (Morozov and Rumelili 2012). This can be applied to the EU process of identity construction and the role of generalised but also specific Others, especially those in conditions of liminality, in reinterpreting, re-enacting, and finally reshaping imaginaries of the EU through contestation and resistance but also, and more interestingly, through assimilation and Europeanisation. Turkish Cypriots' desire to recover their Cypriot, as opposed to their Turkish and orientalist, identity coincided with an emphasis on their European belonging, the traces of which are found in the island's history. Most scholars agree that a singular national identity concept has never emerged in Cyprus, while competing ethno-nationalist concepts were able to spread during the first half of the twentieth century (Papadakis 2008; Ramm 2007; Mavratsas 2010; Hatay 2008; Vural and Ozuyani 2008).

We were European, as Cypriots. We had the British here, and other European countries conquered Cyprus before. [...] But the British, more than others, they modernised the country and they imported European culture here. Before the division here it was really different, and that's why we have problems with Turkish settlers living here. They're different (E.U., Turkish Cypriot citizen – interviewed in 2009).

I think we have an inferiority complex, because we are Turkish but we want to be European (E.N., Turkish Cypriot citizen – interviewed in 2009).

In the north there were high expectations of EU accession, and the process of EU integration was seen positively because it not only represented an end to almost thirty years of isolation, but it could also indicate a way to re-elaborate and reintegrate the island's formerly European past and identity. Moreover, the EU was considered to be an actor capable of politically influencing the parties involved in the Cypriot problem:

I think that being part of the EU is the great possibility that we have for a settlement of the Cypriot conflict. They can make our politicians talk, they can also convince Turkey to step back from Cyprus (E.N., Turkish Cypriot citizen – interviewed in 2009).

Maybe this is finally the occasion for Cyprus, now that we have a common goal. Now we want to be European (Z.A., Turkish Cypriot citizen – interviewed in 2009).

In the north the EU presence after accession led to the opening of an information centre where individuals and companies could inform themselves about EU norms and laws and the requirements of the *acquis*. In 2008 the Turkish Cypriots also gained access to EU funding for the implementation of various projects, ranging from infrastructure development to civil society empowerment.

Right after the referendum the EU created a task force for Northern Cyprus and, in September 2006, the office opened through financial aid, for the implementation of the *acquis* when the conditions are met (M.M.,

EU office in Northern Cyprus – interviewed in 2015).

As earlier mentioned, the main aim of the EU's presence in the north is to ensure that all conditions are met for Turkish Cyprus effectively to become part of the Union: besides analysing this as a normalisation process implying conditionality – where the EU imposes its normative power in exchange for full membership – this also reveals the EU's missed opportunity to acquire a more important role in the everyday life of Turkish Cypriots.

The EU is not communicating very well with Turkish Cypriot citizens about the entrance and its benefits. People don't see it as a tangible opportunity (L.K., Greek Cypriot civil society, interviewed in 2015).

The EU info point... they have problems. They do events that are not related with local issues, like recently they organised an event about human trafficking, which is ok but unrelated to local issues and people don't get to be involved (M.H., Turkish Cypriot civil society – interviewed in 2015).

Gradually, increasingly negative ideas about what the EU represents have begun to be expressed in public discourse on both sides. Given the events in 2012 and 2013 which followed the financial crisis, negative perceptions of the EU have broadened and a general and popular anti-EU discourse has emerged. Interviews conducted by the author in April 2013 revealed a general resentment of European austerity measures and a recognition that the expectations attached to EU membership, both in terms of Cyprus's economic development and the resolution of the conflict, have been disappointed. In such circumstances the Union's incapacity to inspire affection challenged the overcoming of scepticism. Despite the opening of the border and the opportunity for encounter it created, the conflict continues to be part of the everyday life of most Cypriots (Til et al. 2013), and political and institutional attempts to create a shared sense of identity have failed to take root, while civil society organisations have been more successful in "creating neutral spaces of encounter [...] by using the gaps and inconsistencies of 'borders' for peaceful purposes" (ibid: 59). The role of civil society actors in fostering cross-border relations and reconciliation has recently been outlined in other cases and various contexts (Laine 2016), with the aim of highlighting the challenges the EU faces in supporting these initiatives beyond merely funding them.

The European stance with respect to the Cypriot economic crisis increased concern. The Turkish Cypriots now saw the risk of becoming another economically and politically weak state within the EU. Those interviewed in April 2013 underlined that EU candidacy had brought unnaturally rapid and uncontrolled economic and financial neoliberal development to Cyprus, which they recognised as one of the factors which had led to such a dramatic crisis.

What you've seen happening in Cyprus, with the crisis, and in Greece before ... you see the EU has done nothing, and for Turkish Cypriots it has done even less than that (A.Z., Turkish Cypriot citizen – interviewed in 2013).

It is not just about us, the EU doesn't care about countries like Greece or Cyprus [...] We followed their rules, we had to grow fast, and look now what we got (A.M., Turkish Cypriot citizen – interviewed in 2013).

I don't know, I don't understand much about politics, but what I see is that we are like Greece now, and I am afraid about the future (E.K., Turkish Cypriot citizen – interviewed in 2013).

Moreover, the failure of Cyprus to fully enter the EU and the failure of the EU to take substantial steps to address the problem of the Turkish Cypriots' isolation have resulted in general disillusion concerning the ability of the Union to make an effective and positive impact on the conflict. This is clear at the level of citizens' everyday lives and in their perception that they remain invisible outside the island. The feeling of isolation, which has always had geographical, historical, and political causes, has developed and grown because it has not been affected by the events of the last decade.

It's been a real disappointment for me to see that we are not getting any real benefit from voting yes and being part of the EU. Nothing has changed (E.B., Turkish Cypriot citizen – interviewed in 2015).

Do you ask if our lives have changes? We can go to the other side and we have Cypriot passports, yes. Then my life has not changed, I don't feel different and the border is still there. I don't know, when this was happening, back in 2003, I was happy and I wished that everything would change (H.T., Turkish Cypriot citizen – interviewed in 2015).

Furthermore, the invisibility of Turkish Cypriots is also connected with their relationship with Turkey, defined by one of the interviewees as “colonial”.

If the TRNC does different [*from what Turkey expects*], the Turkish government cuts the money for projects. Or cuts the water directly, as it has happened when they closed the water pipelines because Akinci⁹ made a statement saying that we are brothers with Turkey, rather than sons¹⁰ [...] Erdogan reacted badly (M.H., Turkish Cypriot civil society – interviewed in 2015).

The economic and political dependence of Turkish Cypriots on Turkey constitutes a problem which entry into the EU and access to markets, together with Turkey's own accession process and its change in policy towards Cyprus, were supposed to resolve. It is not this article's objective to offer an analysis of Turkey's interests in the Cypriot conflict: it is enough to observe here that Turkey's policy towards the island is again conditioned by geopolitical issues and the security concerns resulting from changes in the Eastern Mediterranean with the Arab Spring and the discovery of natural gas reserves in the region.¹¹

In 2015, when I conducted my final fieldwork, talks between the representatives of the two communities had still not arrived at a solution. The role of the EU had slowly but inevitably lost legitimacy and influence in the political and popular discourse in Cyprus, to the point that Turkish Cypriots were strikingly disillusioned about their potential to become effectively EU members and overcome their isolation.

You cannot rely on the EU, we still don't have a settlement and we are in the same situation, even if we wanted to be part of the EU (E.N.2, Turkish Cypriot citizen – interviewed in 2015).

In 2004 here they were all pro EU, they believed the promises. Now Turkish Cypriots have no representatives whatsoever in the EU, the EU did not act proactively, and Christofias's [*the former president of the Republic of Cyprus*] period as President of the EU¹² was the worst moment. Now the luck of trust towards the EU is high, the EU was a catalyst in 2004, now it is different (M.H., Turkish Cypriot civil society – interviewed in 2015).

Clark and Jones (2008) have argued for the separation of Europeanisation from European integration, and the need for “a more informed processual understanding of the geographical bases of Europeanisation” (Clark and Jones, 2008: 304). The initiatives undertaken by the EU in Northern Cyprus do not involve citizens directly, nor do they affect people’s perception of their isolation. This implies a detachment of the EU from local political and social issues, visible in the Turkish Cypriot citizens’ disappointment with their everyday experience, which still makes them feel they are “on the other side of the border”, as one of the interviewees described their condition.

This is worsened by the absence of the EU in local political and social debate. For example, in November 2015, on the anniversary of the proclamation of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, there was a racist incident in which a group of Greek Cypriot ultra-nationalists attacked vehicles belonging to Turkish Cypriots, injuring two people. On this occasion the EU took no position and there was no press release concerning it. Referring to this, the Turkish Cypriot project manager of a local NGO told me

The EU is not a political actor, you are just someone who finances projects. Actorship of the EU is not working in Cyprus. How people would take it as such? [...] The EU is a sugar daddy, that’s it (M.H., Turkish Cypriot civil society – interviewed in 2015).

“Inner neighbourhood” as a possible definition for Northern Cyprus

The previous sections examined Northern Cyprus’ anomalous, suspended, and liminal character, the status of the Green Line, imaginaries and identity connected with the EU, and the unresolved conflict, which we consider features of the “inner neighbourhood” condition of this part of the island.

Since membership was granted to Cyprus the northern part of the island has found itself in a limbo concerning its status: it is now *de jure* in the EU, but *de facto* it is somewhere in between a full member and a neighbour. This was supported in this article by outlining the anomalies concerning Northern Cypriot quasi-membership, which, we suggest, makes it definable as an “inner neighbour”. The concept of neighbourhood is not only related to the presence of borders, but to the different relations that the EU may have with other partners. Thus understood, neighbourhood consists of various levels of interaction, which in this case involve the diverse ways in which Turkish Cypriots and the unrecognised Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) relate to the EU. All these layers – economic, political, administrative, symbolic, and everyday experience – shape the Turkish Cypriot neighbourhood’s relations with the EU.

The definition of neighbourhood given by Scott and Liikanen (2010) as a space where the EU exerts transformative power has a clear implication in the Cypriot case, where Turkish Cypriots, like

candidate countries, must meet EU expectations if the *acquis communautaire* is to be applied to the territory north of the Green Line. It is also important to look at procedural aspects, and the financial and technical tools through which the EU interacts with Turkish Cypriots, which have been analysed in the previous sections.

Discussion on this topic is rare; the EU does not consider the Green Line a border (although EU membership has entrenched it as such), and certainly not an EU external border, and its status was not discussed in the accession negotiations (Boedeltje et al 2006). The anomalies in the present management of the Green Line, together with its effects on the everyday reality of the Cypriot people, demand a deeper understanding of the political and social dynamics which originated with Cyprus's accession to the EU.

Even if the Green Line is not considered an EU external border, we can still reflect on neighbourhood issues in Northern Cyprus. The application, or non-application, of the *acquis* and EU norms denotes a belonging to an idea of community related to a specific identity and constituted by a set of shared values. If we are to engage seriously with imaginaries and the experience of everyday practice (Dittmer and Grey, 2010), discussion and analysis of the concepts of members and neighbours can go beyond a mere territorial interpretation, instead combining it with relational, symbolic, and ideational aspects. This means engaging with the editors' invitation to avoid either a post-colonial European perspective or a perspective of the bordering practices of the EU itself, and instead considering external (or in this case partly internal) perceptions of Europe (Hobson 2007).

In the previous sections we have shown how the Turkish Cypriots' role and self-representation with regard to the EU during and after the accession negotiations implies issues of in/visibility and the limitation of their voice, and their perception as "non-EU" actors within the EU has contributed to how they have positioned themselves. This self-perception as outsiders is relevant if we want to understand the outcomes of the Europeanisation process for Turkish Cypriots.

The idea of Northern Cyprus as an "inner neighbour" also reflects the orientalism inherent in discourses on Turkish Cypriots, which themselves reflect EU-Turkey relations (Bilgin 2004). The significant presence of Turkey and its influence and leverage in the northern part of the island must be considered in any examination of the accession process and the potential for a peace deal with the Greek Cypriots. Simultaneously, Turkey's presence makes it more interesting to analyse the potential in Turkish Cypriots' self-definition and self-representation, given their association with Turkey at least since the island's military occupation in 1974, and their subsequent expectations of being able to identify themselves with Europe during the negotiation process and after accession.

Finally, the unresolved conflict and the EU's increasing detachment result in a condition of liminality

and suspension between longstanding division and the new – but already vanished – opportunities to become EU members.

In an attempt to understand the variations in the outcomes of the EU's involvement in conflict situations, various typologies of impact have been identified (Tocci 2004; Diez et al. 2006; Smith 2004; Rumelili 2007), which can be the direct or indirect results of the accession process. Critical analysis sees EU enlargement as a neo-imperial project (Zielonka 2006, 2011; Del Sarto 2010), using stick-and-carrot leverage to diffuse EU values and norms in exchange for membership, candidacy, association status, or other kinds of partnership. This "imperialistic rationality and logic" (Boedeltje et al 2006: 130) applied in the Cypriot case is considered the reason for its failure to find a political solution (ibid). The EU's initial request to both sides to find a solution as a fundamental requirement for joining the Union, which was clearly stick-and-carrot in nature, was withdrawn because of the breakdown in talks between them. This jeopardised and limited the potential impact of the membership process from the outset of the negotiations.

Conclusions

During the accession process there were high expectations and great optimism, both locally and at EU level, about Cyprus joining the European Union. Over time, however, the inertia of local politicians and the detachment of European actors have proved that this initial enthusiasm had no foundation. Notwithstanding that the opening of the border, which was connected with EU-entry, has ameliorated the Cypriot conflict and that people's ability to cross the border and finally meet the Other has created space for dialogue and the overcoming of prejudice, there has still been no impact on the overall political condition of the island.

The unresolved status of Turkish Cypriots and the existence of an unrecognised government (the TRNC) complicates the positioning of Northern Cyprus in any of the EU's various concentric circles. In aiming to overcome and transcend the traditional nation-state territorial distinction of inside and outside, the EU can be shown to have created a logic of concentric rings "encompassing traditional member states, new member states, prospective candidate states and neighbouring states for which membership is not an option" (Armstrong and Anderson 2007: 121). This characterisation, however richly elucidating it may be, only partly accounts for all the various and complex possible "spatialities of Europeanisation" in relation to territory, government, and power (Clark and Jones 2008). In the Cypriot case the frame of reference provided by Europe has presented an unattainable goal, because the construction and projection of Europeanisation have been unable to go beyond incomplete

integration. The final positioning of Northern Cyprus in relation to the EU remains ambiguous and dependent on where the emphasis lies: territorially, it is a member (*de jure*); politically, it is a prospective candidate (non-)state; and in terms of identity it is caught between projections and expectations from one side and an outsider neighbouring condition on the other.

We have answered our initial questions concerning the impact of Cyprus's membership on the unrecognised north and the results of the EU's political actorness on the island by examining the accession process and its outcomes, focusing on the in/visibility of Turkish Cypriots, their voice in the situation, their liminal condition of in-betweenness, the status of the Green Line and its effect on everyday life, the evolving imaginaries and expectations of Turkish Cypriots in their interaction with Europeanisation, and the unresolved situation of conflict.

This analysis of all these elements supports our idea of Northern Cyprus as an "inner neighbour" of the EU with certain obligations to meet if it is to achieve full membership and the application of the *acquis*. EU conditionality keeps the northern part of the island in an ambiguous position in which potential privileges related to accession depend on the capacity to meet these requirements.

My fieldwork material shows that the expectations of Turkish Cypriots of becoming members were high and perhaps even exaggerated, because they not only sought to end their isolation by overcoming their unrecognised status, but also invested symbolically in the opportunity offered by the EU to leave behind their past of conflict and dependence on Turkey. The attraction of full membership status might have signified considerably more than mere political achievement, providing a symbolic and meaningful space to elaborate a shared Cypriot identity in the European context. EU actorness was subject to scrutiny because of its inability to play the role of powerful peacemaker and encourage a solution to the enduring Cypriot conflict and partition.

As Dalhman notes in referring to the Yugoslav post-conflict situation, the EU, while having a major impact on the transition in Eastern and Central Europe, "has been notably less efficient at challenging ethnonationalism" (Bialasiewicz et al. 2009: 80). Although the promise of financial aid and trade opportunities may affect negotiations about a solution, this does not generally affect ethnopolitical divides. The political actorness of the EU and its geopolitical role and identity are thus challenged by these situations (Baracani 2016).

The EU's impact does not work in a vacuum and cannot succeed merely by imposing top-down solutions or processes. The lesson learnt in the Cypriot case, as this paper demonstrates, may serve as a useful reminder of the need for a deeper commitment to local issues and the wider involvement of civil society actors. This analysis of the evolution of Turkish Cypriots' ideas and imaginaries concerning Europe has shown that the detachment of European institutions and political objectives

and practices from the Cypriot problem has become an obstacle to the building of trust and a sense of community.

Cyprus's position at the edge of Europe and the Mediterranean EU region also makes it an emblematic case in any consideration of the EU's ability to develop forms of regional cooperation and identity. It exemplifies the contradictions inherent in Europeanising the Neighbourhood, as it is a microcosm of the socio-cultural and political contestations which have taken place in the Mediterranean and other contexts. In this moment of crisis for the EU project and the general disengagement from, if not scepticism of, the EU's process of construction and consolidation, we can find traces of missed opportunities to fully exploit the potential of Europe's attractiveness and overcome division.

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¹ For a review on the nature of EU power see: Bachmann and Sidaway, 2009; Bialasiewicz et al. 2009; Clark and Jones, 2008; Diez, 2005; Hettne and Soderbaum, 2005; Manners and Whitman, 2003; Sidaway, 2006; Scott and Liikanen 2010; Scott 2009.

² The article quotes specifically 12 (out of the 29 total) interviews conducted in Northern Cyprus and 2 (out of the 31) conducted in the south. A total of 14 interviews are used in the text (7 male and 7 female persons): 4 conducted in 2008 and 2009, 3 in 2013, and 7 in 2015. Extensive ethnographic research was undertaken in 2008 and 2009 in both sides of the island, during the author's PhD programme. Shorter fieldwork periods were conducted in April 2013 during the economic crisis and in November 2015, when expectations of a resolution of the Cyprus problem were briefly high and subsequently disappointed. Interviewed people include local politicians, EU representatives, civil society actors working in associations or NOGs (all selected and contacted directly), and citizens (contacted following a snowball sampling strategy).

³ This tool was also used to claim recognition and the suspension of the trade embargo on the TRNC (Eralp and Beriker 2005).

⁴ The EU therefore continued the process towards membership despite the suspension of the talks. *"If no settlement has been reached by the completion of the accession negotiations, the Council's decision on accession will be made without the above being a precondition"* (European Council, 1999). Talks about a settlement resumed after the EU granted candidacy to Turkey and promised incentives and financial aid to Turkish Cypriots (Eralp and Beriker 2005) in exchange for their commitment to the settlement of the conflict.

⁵ On 23rd April 2003, for the first time in 30 years, the Turkish Cypriot authorities opened checkpoints.

⁶ Besides resolving the border anomaly, the aim of this regulation appeared to be *"[...] to facilitate trade and other links between the abovementioned areas and those areas in which the Government of the Republic of Cyprus exercises effective control, whilst ensuring that appropriate standards of protection are maintained"* (Green Line regulation, Preamble, Paragraph 5).

⁷ The Direct Trade Regulation proposed the extension of the intra-island regulation to the whole EU, and the draft contained a direct reference to the Turkish Cypriot positive vote in the referendum for reunification (Hatay et al. 2008). The Financial Aid Regulation provided a *"financial support for encouraging the economic development of the Turkish Cypriot community"* (Brussels, 7.7.2004, COM(2004) 466 final, 2004/0148 (ACC)). The latter was approved in 2006 but its implementation was complicated before 2008 because of Greek Cypriot complaints, and it is through this provision that Turkish Cypriots had access to the fund of €259 million from the European Union Project Support Office, until now the only direct fund granted to the Turkish Cypriots by the EU.

⁸ "Day one" is how EU representatives describe the first day after a bicomunal/federal solution is reached. During my last fieldwork visit to Cyprus in November 2015 there was great optimism about the possibility of a solution by spring 2016, which is why there were two special EU commissioners responsible for its preparation.

⁹ Mustafa Akinci is currently the Representative of the Turkish Cypriot Community, which is the internationally accepted designation of the President of the TRNC.

¹⁰ The rhetorical representation of Turkey as "mother" is also well exemplified in the flag of the TRNC, which is the negative of the Turkish flag, with two stripes on the top and bottom symbolising the motherland, Turkey, and its child, Cyprus.

¹¹ For the role of Turkey in the Cypriot conflict and in relation to the EU, see Ulusoy 2016.

¹² This is a reference to Cyprus's Presidency of the European Union in 2012.

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