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## The European Union and the Local Freeze: the Cyprus Conflict

At the beginning of the 1990 we assisted at the disintegration of the communist bloc and of USSR. It is also at this moment that the Berlin wall fell and the reunification of East Germany with its Western half took place. And still, we cannot say that the bipolarity and the culture that characterized the Cold War ended everywhere.

The small island of Cyprus, placed in the Eastern Mediterranean, is still separated between the Greek Cypriot community in the South of the country and the Turkish Cypriot one in the North. An “iron curtain” still divides the center of capital Nicosia and suggests not only the physical separation between the two camps, but also an ethnical and cultural one.

After more than 2000 years of foreign domination, Cyprus won its independence in 1960. It has been, in turn, province in the Ptolemaic empire of Alexander the Great, of the Roman Empire, of the Byzantine Empire, English possession during Richard Lion Heart, French under the Lusignan dynasty, of the Ioannites knights, of the Venetians, of the Ottoman Turks and in the end British colony. Especially, the Ottoman and the British dominations had a great impact on the Cypriot population and on what was to become the Republic of Cyprus.

But, only three years after the independence, the tensions between the major communities of the island intensified and the *coup d'état* of the military junta from Athens in 1974 and the Turkish invasion that followed affected in an irreparable way the relationship between the Cypriots. The Cyprus conflict presents us “*a story of conflicting views and contradictory claims, of antagonisms, grievances and fears*” (Borowiec, 2000: ix) which have not been overcome as this article is being written, defying always the diplomatic efforts undertaken along the years.

First of all, the factor that determined us to choose this topic are that Cyprus, a member state of the European Union, has its territory divided from a physical, ethnic, social and cultural point of view. Secondly, it has also been a challenge for us to understand its dynamics over the decades it lasted (from the first intercommunal fights in 1963 until the present moment). Thirdly, the conflict is a very complex and intriguing one as it is characterized by five levels: the local one (referring to the relationship between the two Cypriot communities), the national one

(Cyprus as a whole), the subregional one (the triangle Greece – Cyprus – Turkey ), the regional one (the involvement of the European Union) and the international one (the United Nations Organization's efforts of reconciliation ).

In order to understand better the Cyprus conflict, its dynamics and the actors involved, the first section of the paper will be dedicated to a brief presentation of the conflict, the second will approach the main causes of the conflict, in the third one we will elaborate upon the international initiatives of the United Nations to bring the peace in Cyprus and the last one we will focus on the involvement of the European Union.

### **Historical background**

The Ottoman domination in Cyprus began in 1571 and lasted until 1878. The establishment of the Turkish troops and colonists from Asia Minor represented "*the first serious intervention in the demographic structure of the island*" (Hadjidemetriou, 2004: 182). The first measure that the Turks took after coming on the island was to forbid the catholic religion which the Venetians tried to impose upon the Cypriot population and to give privileges to the Orthodox Church. The Turks have been motivated by the aversion they felt towards the catholic religion and towards the Venetians and by the advantages that the Orthodox Church was providing as "*reliable control mechanism*"(Keefe, 1971: 23) for the Christian population and as an organizational structure that facilitated the collection of taxes. Beginning with the XIXth century, the involvement of the Church in the education of the Greek Cypriots contributed to an increase of their level of education, giving them "*superiority against the Turkish element*" (Hadjidemetriou, 2004: 217). Over the years, the Church became the "*symbol of the frustrated Greek nationalism*"(Keefe, 1971: 25) , its aim being to emphasize through its activities the Hellene character of the Cypriot culture.

Because of the often changes of the Turkish governors, of the corruption and of their greed, the Ottoman administration in Cyprus has been characterized by inefficiency and abuses on the local people and represented an obstacle against the economic progress of the island. Even if some rights are given to the Christians in 1856, their access to administrative positions is further limited, fact which determined them to reorient towards the economic sphere.

The Ottoman domination ends with the San Stefano Treaty in 1877, when the island was borrowed to Great Britain in exchange of the support given to the Sultan against Russia.

At the beginning, as we already said, the island has been only borrowed to the British, the Ottoman Empire retaining the sovereignty over its territory having still the right to receive the tribute. Cyprus has been officially annexed by Great Britain in 1914 as a reaction towards Turkey's decision of entering war on the side of the Central Powers and has been declared British colony in 1925.

The end of the Ottoman domination made believe the Greek Cypriots that the new masters of the island will support their *enosis* calls (union with Greece), an aim they were dreaming about even since the motherland had obtained its independence. But given the geographical position of the island on the route to India and in the neighborhood of the Suez Canal, the British were unwilling to give up the new strategic "acquisition".

Four years after the beginning of the British domination, it was adopted a Constitution that had the purpose of giving the appearance of a democratic functioning of the political system, allowing the participation of Greek Cypriots and also of Turkish Cypriots in a proportional way with the number of the population. In reality, "*during the whole period of the British domination, the English did not liked the Greeks and favored the Turks*" (Hadjidemetriou, 2004: 230), some of the Greeks protesting against "*the informal alliance between the British officials and the Turkish Cypriots which was blocking all their actions in favor of enosis*" (Borowiec, 2000: 250). A British captain even admits that "*this strategy keeps alive the racial animosity*" (Hadjidemetriou, 2004: 231), the division promoted during this period having dramatic consequences upon the future evolution of the Cypriot society.

The Church has continued to be "*the main factor in the development of the national feeling and to lead the fight for union with Greece*" (Hadjidemetriou, 2004: 237), despite the measures took by the British to diminish its privileges.

While their political liberty is being limited and their political initiatives blocked successively in the Legislative Council by the English and Turkish members, the Greek Cypriots demonstrate more and more aversion against the British domination and make more and more calls for union with Greece.

In 1955 began the EOKA (National Organization of Cypriot Fighters) fight against the British domination with the aim of accomplishing *enosis*. A very important character that distinguishes itself in these circumstances is the leader of EOKA, Georgios Grivas, an ex-

colonel in the Greek army and leader of a royalist organization in Athens at the end of World War II. The EOKA campaign lasted until 1959 and had success because “*the area provided an excellent shelter to the guerrilla forces, the majority of the population supported them, and the British did not use enough force against the movement*” (Keefe, 1971: 210).

The difficulty of dealing with the terrorist attacks of the EOKA forced Great Britain to declare emergency state and to organize a conference in London where Greece and Turkey were also invited to participate in order to find a solution to the conflict. On the one hand, Turkey claimed that the island should return under its control were Great Britain to give it up. On the other hand, Greece suggested the idea of organizing a referendum in order to give to the Cypriot people the opportunity of expressing itself about the future of the island. Great Britain considered that a system of constitutional self-government was the best solution, but in the end, none of the propositions was accepted.

After this conference, there have been two others, organized also by Great Britain: one in Zürich where the Prime Ministers Constantin Karamanlis of Greece and Adnan Menderes of Turkey were present and another one in London, in which the Archbishop Makarios III<sup>1</sup>, the representative of the Greek Cypriot side, and Fazil Küçük<sup>2</sup>, the representative of the Turkish Cypriot community, took part. The agreements which were signed here represented the foundation of the new Republic of Cyprus, having a presidential system of government, whose independence and territorial integrity were guaranteed by Great Britain, Greece and Turkey. Through these agreements, Great Britain had the right to keep two sovereign military bases on the island, while Greece could keep a military contingent of 950 troops and Turkey one of 650 troops. These treaties forbade also *enosis* and *taksim* (the partition of the island and the union with Turkey: this concept has been a reaction to *enosis*). According to the Constitution, the Greek Cypriots were entitled to 70% of the amount of jobs in the public administration and to 60% in the army. This distribution seemed unfair to the Greek Cypriots as it did not reflect the real percentage of the Turkish Cypriot population, 18 % of the total population of the island.

16<sup>th</sup> of August 1960 became the national day of the Republic of Cyprus. The flag of the new state represented the map of Cyprus colored in orange with two green olive branches under

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<sup>1</sup> Archbishop Makarios III has been the leader of the Greek Cypriot community during the fight for independence against the British domination. In 1960, he became the first President of the Republic of Cyprus and held this function until his death in 1977.

<sup>2</sup> Fazil Küçük has been the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community after the independence and also the first Vice-President of the Republic of Cyprus.

it on a white background. Even if it was the official symbol of Cyprus, none of the two communities felt a specific attachment towards it, the Greek Cypriots preferring the Greek white and blue flag and the Turkish Cypriots the red one, with a star and a crescent of Turkey. Concerning the national anthem, the Republic of Cyprus does not have one yet, because of the difficulty of choosing a language to sing it.

### **The new Republic and the causes of its division**

Referring to the Cypriot Constitution, James Stegenga characterized it as “*an awkward constitution which prohibited the amendments, granted blocking power in important governmental problems to the minority Turkish Cypriot community and virtually guaranteed the paralysis and the eventual breakdown*” (Stegenga, 1970:1) of the system. It had 199 articles and included paragraphs from the three treaties that had laid the foundations of the Republic: the Treaty of Establishment, the Treaty of Guarantee, and the Treaty of Alliance.

Because it has been perceived as imposed from outside (by the three guarantor powers), the Constitution represented one of the causes of the intensification of tensions between the two communities. The Greek Cypriots were against it and claimed that “*it did not reflect the principle of self-determination of the Cypriot people*” (Keefe, 1971: 123). This was the reason why the Greek Cypriots perceived it as temporary and tried to change it. On the other side there were the Turkish Cypriots which wanted that the Constitution remained unchanged in order to be able to preserve their rights against the Greek Cypriot majority.

Katia Hadjidemetriou claims that the fundamental law of the Republic had the disadvantage of promoting the different ethnic identities of the communities despite one national inclusive identity and supports the claim of the Greek Cypriots that, in fact, the Constitution was imposed on the Cypriots and “*reflected the negotiation power of the interested parties*”(Hadjidemetriou, 2004: 262), mainly of Turkey.

As we have mentioned before, the constitutional provisions stated that the members of the two communities should be represented in the political structures of the Republic according to a 70: 30 ratio, and in the army according to a 60: 40 ratio.

Concerning the House of Representatives, this had to be composed of 15 Turkish Cypriot members and 35 Greek Cypriot members, each of them to be elected separately in its own community. Furthermore, the president of the Republic was to be elected from the Greek

Cypriot community, and the Vice-President from the Turkish Cypriot community. The government was to be comprised from 11 ministries, out of which the Agriculture, the Defense and the Health were to be filled in by Turkish Cypriot ministers. To this institutional structure, there were two other separate Communal Chambers which were responsible for the educational, cultural and religious domains for each community.

The veto power of the President and of the Vice-President was also a disturbing matter for the Greek Cypriot side, while the Turkish Cypriots wanted to keep it unchanged.

The high percentage of the Turkish Cypriots in the army and the intentions of the Turkish Defense Minister to organize the military according to the ethnic principle further alimanted the tensions.

The unwillingness of the Turkish Cypriot community to give up the principle of the separate municipalities and of the local autonomy was contradictory to the Greek Cypriot position which perceived them as “*heralding taksim*” (Borowiec, 2000: 52) .

“*In the end, the issue narrowed down to money*”(Borowiec, 2000: 50). The Turkish Cypriot claim that they needed more money in order to diminish the economic, social and educational disparities was opposed by the Greek Cypriots who argued that the money from the government should be distributed according to the demographic structure.

To these main factors that precipitated the collapse of the Republic imagined by the Zürich and London agreements, the initiative of Makarios III of 1963 to amend the Constitution further damaged the situation. This was the year when the Turkish Cypriot representatives left their positions in the decision-making structures of the state and when the intercommunal conflict actually began.

Despite the incident that put the flame to the entire conflict (a collision between a Greek Cypriot police car and a Turkish Cypriot one), James Stegena claims that the real cause of the conflict has been “*the fading capacity of nationalism to contain the disintegrative tendencies. The negative, anti-colonial aspect of nationalism has everywhere begun to lose its binding force since independence has been won and the great unifying struggle (...) is past. But the positive, nationalistic dimension of nationalism has proved much weaker in many of these new states than the multitude of particularistic tendencies that have reemerged to obstruct consolidation of the victory*” (Stegenga, 1970: 12).

After the “Christmas crisis”, the fear of persecution and of discrimination forced the Turkish Cypriot population to move to enclaves, marking this way the beginning of the island’s division.

This was the first time when Turkey threatened with the invasion of Cyprus, but a conflict between the two NATO partners Greece and Turkey has been stopped following the USA intervention and the “Johnson letter”<sup>3</sup>. This situation repeated itself in 1967 when USA intervened again to prevent a crisis that could have led to a loss of cohesion of NATO. In this case, Greece, back then governed by a military regime, was the target of American pressures.

Nevertheless, Turkey invaded Cyprus in 1974 and occupied 37 % of its territory after the coup d’état organized by the Athens junta. Why did its actions succeed? The USA failed to intervene because, at that moment, it was dealing with its own internal problems concerning the Watergate scandal. Great Britain did not try to stop the Turkish invasion even if it had the right and the responsibility to do it as a guarantor power; it was not a great power anymore and could not afford taking actions without the US. Consequently, 1974 marks the beginning of the Turkish occupation of Northern Cyprus and of a *de facto* separation of the island between the Turkish Cypriot community in the North of the country and the Greek Cypriot one in the South.

### **International initiatives to bring the peace in Cyprus**

Given the complexity of the Cyprus conflict and the diversity of the involved actors, the international community has made little progress in finding a solution that could bring together the two communities. The official involvement of United Nations began in 1957, when the General Assembly included this problem on its agenda following the calls of Greece. But the direct and substantial involvement began in 1964, when through the Resolution 186 the Security Council of UN recommended “*the creation, with the consent of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus, of a United Nations Peace-keeping Force*”<sup>4</sup>. In 1968, began also the diplomatic

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<sup>3</sup> The “Johnson letter” refers to the warning that the American President Lyndon Johnson gave to Turkey, that if the Turkish troops will try to invade Cyprus and this will determine USSR to intervene, the USA will not necessarily defend Turkey.

<sup>4</sup> Resolution 186 din 1964, adopted by the Security Council at its 1102nd meeting, 4th of March 1964, paragraph 4, available on the site <http://www.un.int/cyprus/scr186.htm>, 25 May 2008.

initiatives of the Secretary-General to bring the reconciliation between the two Cypriot communities.

UNFICYP's mission was to preserve „*international peace and security, to use its best efforts to prevent a recurrence of fighting and, as necessary, to contribute to the maintenance and restoration of law and order and a return to normal conditions*”<sup>5</sup>. UNFICYP's mandate was set initially for three months but it has been periodically prolonged by the Security Council until the present days.

UNFICYP's role has been to establish a communication channel between the political leaders of the two conflicting communities, to facilitate the reintegration of the Turkish Cypriot representatives in the government, to help with the normalization of public services, to provide humanitarian assistance, to try to locate missing persons and to assure the security during the liberation of hostages and to help with the return to normal economic conditions.

“The peace soldiers” were seen by the Greek Cypriots as “*a shield in case of a Turkish invasion*”, while the Turkish Cypriots perceived them as “*a protection against the overwhelming number of better armed Greek Cypriots*” (Borowiec, 2000: 62). But in 1974, they proved incapable of stopping the Turkish invasion, given the fact that, as peace-keeping troops, they had only light munitions and had the right to use it only in self-defense, in the defense of the mandate or of the mission. Consequently, all they could do was “*to report violations of the ceasefire or of the territorial limits*” (Stegenga, 1970: 4).

The truth is that UNFICYP had some contradictory objectives because while it was supposed to act like a buffer which separated the two communities, it had also the aim of establishing a connection and to facilitate the communication between them. Looking back at its activity, we must say that UNFICYP failed in promoting the cooperation between the members of the two communities and it failed to stop the Turkish invasion and the occupation of 37% of the island's territory. Even if in the period after 1974 it managed to secure a cessation of the hostilities and this fact was seen as a success, there are still some critiques that suggest that “*by calming the tension and reducing the violence, UNFICYP has reduced the sense of urgency about seeking solutions that is necessary if solutions are to be found. UNFICYP has helped*

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, paragraph 5.

*pacify the island to the extent that no one is any longer terribly anxious to settle the basic problems”* (Stegenga, 1970: 11).

James Stegenga says that this kind of military interventions in an intra-state, ethnic dispute *“have limited capacity to mitigate conflicts, may get bogged down in long occupations (and they) are not a substitute for traditional bilateral diplomatic bargaining between the parties, they may even hinder these more important at political settlement”* (Stegenga, 1970: 11) of the conflict.

### **The involvement of the European Union**

The European Union became involved in solving the Cyprus conflict beginning with the 1990, when Cyprus submitted its member application. While Greece, a member of the EU since 1981, supported the Cypriot candidacy and warned that will use its veto power for any eventual enlargement if Cyprus will not be among the countries that will join the EU in 2004, certain member states, like France, Italy, Germany and the Netherlands, on one side, and Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots, on the other, protested against this initiative of the Cypriot and Greek Government.

Consequently, *“the EU’s internal difficulties simply meant that the EU itself became a larger arena within which the Cyprus conflict would now be played out”* (Michael, 2007: 599).

Referring to the debate around Cyprus becoming member of the EU as a divided state and with the Northern part of its territory under the occupation of a foreign army, it was decided that the European institutions will encourage the parties to find a solution, but this will not be an obstacle in the way of its integration. While Neophytos Loizides says that the precondition of solving the Cyprus conflict before the integration *“empowers the Turkish side with a veto right and makes the Greek Cypriot community pay the cost of possible Turkish intransigence”* (Loizides, 2002: 432), Rauf Denktash<sup>6</sup>, the leader of the Turkish Cypriots, interpreted this in a different way and says that *“the EU gave the Greek Cypriots the green light which left no motivation for settling the problem with us on the basis of power sharing between two equals”* (Borowiec, 2000: 160).

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<sup>6</sup> Rauf Denktash followed Fazil Küçük as leader of the Turkish Cypriot community.

The negotiations for admission with the Republic of Cyprus began in 1998 and the Cypriot President Glafkos Clerides made to Denktash the proposal of including some Turkish Cypriot representatives in the Cypriot delegation which participated in the negotiations. Nevertheless, he refused and the Turkish side chose to maintain “*a climate of tension and threats with the intention of stopping the admission of Cyprus in the EU*” (Hadjidemetriou, 2004: 278). As a reaction to the strong decision of the Greek Cypriots of not giving up the integration of Cyprus in the EU, Turkey and the Northern part of Cyprus have formed an area of economic union.

In order to understand better the evolution of the negotiations in this context, we will further analyze Kofi Annan’s initiative of reconciliation of the two communities.

The historical context in which the Annan Plan was proposed was a very special one, marked by the change of government in Turkey, by the presidential campaign in the Greek Cypriot community to choose the successor of Clerides in February 2003, by the recovery period of Rauf Denktash after a heart surgery and by the coming of the Copenhagen European Summit during which Cyprus’ adhesion would be finalized and Turkey candidacy would be taken into consideration. Referring to this new initiative of bringing the peace in Cyprus, the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, admitted that “*this plan is inevitably a compromise. It does not satisfy everyone’s demands. But I believe it meets the core interests, and addresses the key concerns, of people on both sides*”<sup>7</sup>.

The Plan has been first proposed in 2002 and has been revised five times. The last version has been submitted to a referendum, separately organized for the two communities. While 64, 6% of the Turkish Cypriots accepted the Annan Plan, 75, 8% of the Greek Cypriots has surprisingly chosen to reject it. The result shocked the entire international community, given the fact that, during all the diplomatic negotiations the Greek Cypriots were the ones who have proved more willingness and made more concessions to the Turkish Cypriots giving up the *enosis* claims and accepting one bicomunal federation, the Turkish Cypriots being famous as “the spoilers” (Steadman) of the peace process.

Which were the factors that determined the Greek Cypriots to reject the Annan Plan? Michalis Michael identified the elements that made the Greek Cypriots insensitive to the

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<sup>7</sup> „Remarks at the closing of the Cyprus Talks, By Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, Bürgenstock, Switzerland”, available on the site <http://www.un.org/apps/sg/sgstats.asp?nid=857>, accessed on 15 June 2008.

advantages of unification and little inclined to give up the monopoly over the state sovereignty as: *“growing prosperity, a successful international campaign, a resurgence of ethno-nationalism and the allure of EU membership”* (Michael, 2007: 591). Other facts that also contributed to the failure of the Annan Plan were the encouragement of Tassos Papadopoulos<sup>8</sup> for a negative vote and the absence of an information campaign that could have emphasized for the ordinary citizens the advantages of unification before the integration in the European structures. Another cause of the failure of Annan’s initiative was the setting of a fixed deadline for solving this decades-old conflict and also the flawed appraisal of the attitude of the Greek-Cypriot community towards reconciliation.

Consequently, the EU inherited the Cyprus conflict and *“finding a formula to be accepted by both communities, which could lead to the peaceful reunification of the island, remains a desideratum of the future”* (Hadjidemetriou, 2004: 281). Another observation that we can make following the rejection of the Annan Plan is that the European identity is not as powerful as we might think or as we would want it to be. At present it seems that the ethnic identities of the two communities matter more for them and, even more than that, they are unable to distinguish between ethnic identity and political citizenship, be that citizenship the Cypriot or the European one.

Which can be the consequences of the rejection of the Annan Plan for the future of the two communities and for all the interested actors? Clerides emphasized to the members of its community that the majority of the Greek Cypriots chose to *“ignore reality, that a de facto situation which remains for years leads unavoidably to international recognition and in the case of Cyprus to partition. Perhaps they prefer partition, but they don’t dare say it”*(Duner, 1999).

Despite the fact that it failed to bring the reconciliation between the two communities, the Annan Plan had some positive effects, such as the marginalization of Denktash (who rejected the Plan, was inflexible towards changes and was unwilling to break the dependency status of Turkish Cypriots on Turkey) , the possibility for the other side to see internal divisions within the other camp according to the attitudes towards the Annan Plan, the deconstruction of the preconceived opinion about the other community as a monolithic entity and the lifting of travel restrictions concerning the crossing of the Green Line.

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<sup>8</sup> Tassos Papadopoulos followed Glafkos Clerides as President of Cyprus.

The EU has chosen to adopt “*an equidistance policy*” (Aydin, Ifantis, 2004: 38) translated in the lack of political will to go beyond formal declarations that encourage and support the efforts of the two communities and of the UN to find a solution to the Cyprus problem. The EU tried to seem as neutral as possible towards the Greece-Turkey dispute, whether this refers to Cyprus or to the problems in the Aegean. Nevertheless, the EU can be accused of allowing Greece to abuse its status as a member state (Greece preferred to discuss its problems with Turkey within the EU where Turkey has not yet an equal position. Greece has also until recently used its veto power to block the European aid for Turkey and for the Turkish Cypriot community). On the other hand, Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots have accused the EU that „*the Greek Cypriot admission to EU (...) constituted enosis (union with Greece) under a new name*”(Aydin, Ifantis, 2004: 219). Furthermore, EU’s “*hands-off policy*” (Aydin, Ifantis, 2004: 37) provided no incentives for the parties to make concessions and to try to find a way towards reconciliation.

### Conclusion

The EU has failed to lift itself to the expectations of many citizens, politicians and theorists who believed that the EU could bring peace in Cyprus and between the two motherlands as it has done in the case of Germany and France after the World War II.

The truth is also that the EU has until now been incapable of harmonizing the conflicting positions of its members regarding the Cyprus conflict. Consequently, it has not yet made a sole proposition of its own to solve the Cyprus problem and “*confined its actions to occasionally expressing hope, satisfaction or dissatisfaction in the UN Secretary-General's efforts concerning these problems, and endorsing related UN resolutions*” (Aydin, Ifantis, 2004: 37).

Will the European Union be able in the future of finding a solution for the Cyprus question? Maybe. In my opinion, the EU should become more involved in this conflict that affects the relationship between two of its members and a potential future member. It should work more with the UN and try to adopt a more decided attitude towards a solution and to combine “sticks and carrots” in order to reach a satisfactory compromise for all the parties. It should not remain focused on the official level of the negotiations, but it should consider also the grass-root initiatives, as the conflict it not just inter-state, but also “*inter-societal*” (Kelman,

1996 ). The advantages of this method are that “*it opens new social spaces for the articulation and the promotion of citizens needs and preoccupations with the aim of linking the efforts undertaken at the macro level in such a way that the formulation of policies and solutions becomes more representative for the involved parties*” (Hadjipavlou, 2002: 4). This partnership and complementarity between the diplomatic efforts and the interactive workshops will help to enhance the communication and the trust between the parties. Independently what the solution will be, this has to come from the two communities! This is the only way that the needs and the fears of both communities will be taken into account and the only way to make sure that the peace will last!

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