

Cyprus: The European Union's Role in the Conflict

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Abstract: This research examines how the European Union has approached the Cyprus conflict, focusing on why it has failed to assume a central role in conflict resolution. While EU accession initially reshaped the dynamics of the dispute, the Union has not succeeded in achieving meaningful progress toward a settlement. Instead, the EU evolved from a potential mediator into a structurally partial stakeholder in the conflict. Drawing on a constructivist framework, complemented by the concept of Normative Power Europe and an institutional perspective, the article analyzes how perceptions, norms, and institutional constraints have shaped the EU's role in Cyprus. The research adopts a qualitative, document-based case study approach, supported by interviews with experts and members of the Cypriot communities, providing insights into both institutional dynamics and lived experiences. The article concludes that Cyprus' accession has internalized the conflict within the European Union, reinforcing asymmetries between the two communities and limiting the Union's capacity to act impartially.

Keywords: Conflict resolution, Cyprus conflict, EU external action, European Union, Normative Power Europe, United Nations.

Introduction

The Cyprus conflict is an important topic in International Studies due to its complexity: it is not only the oldest protracted conflict in Europe but also one of the world's most enduring unresolved ethnic disputes. While the island's historical and ethnic past has shaped the conflict, the failure to resolve it now lies in the hands of major global actors such as the United Nations and the European Union—the latter facing the unique situation of hosting a conflict within its own territory.

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This article argues that Cyprus's accession to the EU in 2004 reshaped the social and political dynamics on the island without leading to a meaningful transformation toward resolution. Instead, membership turned the Union from a potential mediator into a structurally partial stakeholder. By internalizing the conflict, accession consolidated asymmetries of recognition and created institutional constraints that limited the Union's capacity to play an effective role in peace negotiations. At the same time, the EU's normative identity further restricted its actions, constraining its role as a peacemaker in Cyprus. The main research question guiding this article is: How has the European Union approached the resolution of the Cyprus conflict?

Theoretical Framework

The complex nature of the Cyprus problem, coupled with the unique role of the European Union on the international arena, requires a comprehensive theoretical framework to cover the various aspects of the analysis. This study adopts Constructivism as a theoretical lens of analysis in light of the conflict's deep roots in issues of identity, ethnic divisions, and divergent perceptions of historical events. The constructivist emphasis on social context, as outlined by Alexander Wendt (1992), is particularly relevant to this study, considering the emergence of different narratives and interpretations of the dispute among the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities over time.

The concept of Normative Power Europe (NPE), as developed by Ian Manners (2002), enriches and deepens the constructivist perspective by focusing on the EU's international role. This complementary approach provides a deeper understanding of the EU's unique form of power, examining how its actions, values, and influence are reflected in the norms it promotes throughout the Cyprus conflict.

In addition to the aforementioned theoretical perspectives, this article uses an institutional analytical approach to examine the institutional structure of the European Union. Its internal norms, decision-making mechanisms and strategic interests shape its identity as an international actor and influence its actions. This lens enables the research to explain how institutional constraints limit the Union's role as a neutral mediator in the conflict while its norms simultaneously influence the behavior of other actors.

Methodology

In order to answer the question, the article employs a qualitative methodology in the form of a document-based analytical case study, drawing on EU and UN official statements regarding the Cyprus conflict, as well as relevant academic literature. A small number of semi-structured interviews complement the analysis, providing illustrative insights from experts, stakeholders and representatives of the Cypriot communities. This combined approach allows for a thorough examination of the institutional and normative factors that

have constrained the EU's role as a mediator and limited its ability to act as a neutral actor in the conflict.

To ensure a wide variety of respondents, the interviews conducted included a Greek Cypriot (R1), an Armenian Cypriot (R2), a Turkish Cypriot (Professor Ahmet Sözen), and a British professor and researcher with expertise in conflict analysis (Professor James Ker-Lindsay). At their request, the two respondents from the Republic of Cyprus chose to remain anonymous and are therefore referred to by code.

As the study aims to present new information, particularly concerning the EU's role in the conflict, the analyzed period ranges from the rejection of the Annan Plan and Cyprus' accession to the European Union in 2004 to the present day.

1. The European Union and the Cyprus Conflict: Pre-accession Context

1.1. Historical overview of the conflict

Formally annexed by the United Kingdom in 1925, Cyprus has always been home to a diverse population, including Greeks and Turks. In 1955, the Greek Cypriot community launched an offensive campaign to end colonial rule on the island and achieve *enosis* — the political union of Cyprus with Greece. This marked the beginning of a guerrilla war that drew both Greece and Turkey into the conflict as the ‘motherlands’ of each side (Adamides & Constantinou, 2012; Dietzel & Makrides, 2009).

It was not until 1960 that Cyprus became an independent state and a member of the United Nations. The agreements and the Constitution sought a balance between the political and administrative rights of the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities, which were to share power equally (Müftüler-Bac & Güney, 2005). In addition, Greece, Turkey and the United Kingdom became “guarantor powers with the constitutional right to military intervene unilaterally in Cyprus should the need arise” and British military bases remained on the island (Adamides, 2012, p. 122).

Even with a unique regime in place, tensions escalated into a civil war in 1963 following a constitutional crisis. Despite the efforts of the guarantor powers and the intervention of the UN — which established the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) in 1964 —, the conflict between the two Cypriot communities continued, reaching its peak in July 1974. A *coup d'état* against President Makarios, carried out by Greek Cypriot forces and supported by the Greek military junta, led to Turkey's military intervention, resulting in the occupation of the northern part of the island and part of Nicosia (Müftüler-Bac & Güney, 2005; UN Department of Public Information, 1996).

After the ceasefire demanded by the UN, a neutral zone was created — the ‘Green Line’ — which turned out to be a geopolitical division of the island. The two communities were officially separated, resulting in the Republic of Cyprus — in the South of the island, ruled and inhabited by Greek Cypriots — and the unrecognized Turkish Republic of Northern

Cyprus (TRNC), inhabited by the Turkish Cypriot community (UN Department of Public Information, 1996).

1.2. The EU as an external actor in the conflict

The European Union's role in the Cyprus conflict has evolved from that of a mere observer to an indirectly involved actor, particularly since 1974. By supporting the work and decisions of the UN, the EU gradually became engaged in the conflict, though it did not remain neutral for long. Greece's accession in 1981 raised questions about the Union's neutrality in the Cyprus problem: a party to the conflict had become a Member State, thereby gaining rights that could influence EU actions towards Cyprus in its favor. This led Turkey to no longer perceive the EU as an "impartial mediator in the dispute over the division of the island" (Hutchence & Georgiades, 1999, p. 85), signaling the Union's gradual shift from potential mediator to structurally partial stakeholder.

Following a progressive enlargement period, the EU decided to 'open its doors' to countries from Central and Eastern Europe, as "an opportunity to unite Europe after generations of conflict" (Eralp & Beriker, 2005, p.178). Along with the wave of applications, Cyprus applied for full membership in 1990, despite the continued division on the island. The application was made by the Greek Cypriot authorities on behalf of the entire island — a controversial decision given that the northern part of the island was ruled by the Turkish Cypriot authorities. Yet the European Commission considered Cyprus eligible for membership, linking it to the resolution of the conflict as part of an attempt to influence the conflict's dynamics according to its norms and values. Many Member States were opposed to accepting Cyprus into the Union before a solution to the conflict had been found. However, Greece was open to accepting South Cyprus, as it would benefit its position in the conflict, and so used its veto power as a 'threat' for the upcoming enlargement — a decision that required unanimity (Eralp & Beriker, 2005; Sertoglu & Ozturk, 2003). This forced the EU to change its approach due to its internal power dynamics and consequently consolidated its partial role in the Cyprus problem, shaping the perceptions of neutrality and legitimacy among the conflicting parties and highlighting how the Union's normative identity constrains its involvement in Cyprus.

Shortly before the EU enlargement took place, the UN Secretary-General developed what many considered to be the best chance of resolving the Cyprus conflict: the 'Annan Plan'. Proposing the reunification of the island through the creation of a United Cyprus Republic consisting of two constituent states, the plan aimed to achieve a peaceful settlement and prevent Cyprus from joining the European Union as a divided state (Loizides & McGarry, 2019). The European Union endorsed the initiative and, in order to make it compatible with the EU's *Acquis Communautaire*, became the main mediator of the Annan Plan. However, by 2002 it was already established that, regardless of the outcome of the plan, the Republic of Cyprus would join the European Union in May 2004 (Axt, 2009).

The two Cypriot communities reacted differently to the Annan Plan due to diverging narratives on the conflict and perceptions about the EU's role. The Turkish Cypriots, having developed a kind of Euro-skepticism due to the Union's prior loss of neutrality, saw the benefits of European integration, political equality, and international recognition — reflecting the EU's normative framework — and accepted the Annan Plan. By contrast, the Greek Cypriots perceived it as unfair and identified several disadvantages for the community, which, together with the guaranteed EU membership, contributed to the rejection of the plan. The referendum outcome prevented the reunification of the island, and on 1 May 2004, Cyprus joined the European Union. Although the entire island became a *de jure* member, only the area administered by the Greek Cypriot authorities is a *de facto* member, meaning that the *Acquis Communautaire* does not apply to the Turkish North (Axt, 2009; Loizides & McGarry, 2019; Kyris, 2012). This demonstrates that the EU's normative power was insufficient to resolve the Cyprus conflict or influence the social context, resulting in the internalization of the unresolved conflict and the admission of a divided Member State.

2. The European Union's Approach to the Cyprus Conflict

2.1. The EU's involvement after Cyprus' accession

The accession of Cyprus to the European Union failed to resolve the conflict, contrary to widespread expectations that it would facilitate a settlement. Instead, it marked a shift in the Union's role: the EU has increased its involvement in the island's affairs and sought to engage with both communities, but this engagement takes place within an asymmetrical institutional framework, since EU law does not apply to the TRNC territory (Kyris, 2013).

The Union committed itself to helping the Turkish Cypriot community through a series of regulations aimed at reducing its international isolation. Framed as a 'reward' for the community's acceptance of the Annan Plan, this approach reflected the EU's normative logic of incentivizing alignment through the promise of integration. Furthermore, these measures were also intended to pave the way for the eventual implementation of the *Acquis Communautaire* once the dispute had been resolved. In this context, the European Union adopted the Green Line Regulation (GLR), designed to control intra-island trade and the flow of people across the UN buffer zone; and the Financial Aid Regulation (FAR), aimed at providing financial assistance to support the economic development of the Turkish Cypriot community and prepare it in the event of reunification (Kyris, 2012, 2013; Sotiropoulou, 2024). However, the Union's engagement remained structurally constrained: the Direct Trade Regulation (DTR), proposed to facilitate a trade agreement between Northern Cyprus and the European Union, remains blocked, reflecting the influence of Member States' positions within the Union.

Throughout the peace process developments of 2015–2017, the EU saw its role diminish once again. Its gradual shift from potential mediator to indirect participant during the

pre-accession period reduced the Union to the *status* of mere observer at the UN-led Crans Montana talks (International Crisis Group, 2023). Although indirectly involved through the Republic of Cyprus' membership, the EU did not actively intervene in the negotiations. The Union's role as a neutral actor was increasingly questioned and its ability to influence decisions remained limited.

Although it may not achieve transformative results through the use of soft power, the Union has remained actively engaged in the Cyprus problem, leveraging the normative tools at its disposal — primarily, discourses and diplomatic actions. On many occasions, the EU has reiterated its commitment to a bizonal, bicomunal federation on the island, as stated by Josep Borrell in a speech in Nicosia. After noting the fundamental role of UN peacekeeping operations, Borrell stressed that the Cyprus problem remains “one of the most difficult and longstanding conflicts in Europe” and the importance of achieving “a comprehensive settlement based on a bicomunal, bizonal federation with political equality” which should be in line with the EU *acquis* and European law (European External Action Service [EEAS], 2021). Ursula von der Leyen reinforced the EU's support for a settlement in a press statement alongside the President of the Republic of Cyprus, stating that it “should take place within the UN framework, on the basis of a bicomunal, bizonal federation with political equality”, and adding that the Union “also stand[s] ready to support all stages of the UN-led process, within appropriate means” (European Commission, 2024). These statements reflect a consistent position and demonstrate the EU's role as a normative actor: by publicly supporting UN-led initiatives and promoting a comprehensive resolution, the Union endorses its principles while keeping the Cyprus problem on the international agenda. At the same time, the EU recognizes the need for practical power, which it cannot fully exercise, thus remaining under the UN's umbrella.

Finally, a meaningful instrument of the Union's diplomatic action has been financial assistance, particularly through civil society and reconciliation initiatives in cooperation with the UN. The EU has been the main donor to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Cyprus, facilitating dialogue and cooperation between the two communities and contributing to the island's development across multiple dimensions. The Union has also been the principal financial donor of the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus (CMP), whose humanitarian work relies on the cooperation of the two Cypriot communities with the UN to recover and identify the remains of thousands of missing persons. This illustrates the EU's involvement in Cyprus through alternative means, while enabling the UN to implement practical activities crucial for the development of both communities.

Overall, the European Union has demonstrated consistent, albeit indirect, engagement with the Cyprus problem since its accession in 2004. Its involvement on the island has focused primarily on promoting a settlement through the UN framework and providing financial assistance, rather than engaging in direct mediation between the parties. This reflects that the Union's influence and actions remain limited, requiring a closer examination of the constraints shaping its role in Cyprus.

2.2. Barriers to a more effective role

The EU's approach to Cyprus has been shaped by the distinct nature of the conflict. While the Union's normative identity has contributed to a more moderate stance, over twenty years later it is possible to compare its role in Cyprus with its approach to other conflicts where its response has been more open and direct. The war in Ukraine illustrates a case in which the Union intervened immediately and took a strong position. Despite the differences between the Cyprus conflict and the war in Ukraine, the EU reacted firmly to the Russian attacks, condemning Russia and imposing sanctions, while providing humanitarian, military and financial aid to Ukraine. By contrast, in the case of Cyprus, the Union tolerated Turkey's actions and eventually condemned the 1974 invasion, although with a significantly softer approach (Kyris, 2018; Theophanous, 2023). This comparison exemplifies how the EU's approach to conflict resolution adapts in response to structural constraints and geopolitical interests.

The difference in the EU's approach can be explained by two key factors. Firstly, the Union's relationship with the parties involved: according to Andreas Theophanous (2023), while Russia is perceived by the Union as an enemy, Turkey is seen as a strategic partner with whom it would be inconvenient to create bad relationships or worsen the existing ones. In addition to its geopolitical relevance in the Mediterranean, Turkey is also a candidate country for EU accession. Therefore, the EU must adopt a more cautious approach since Turkey's involvement in the dispute carries significant strategic importance for the Union. The circumstances surrounding Cyprus' accession created structural constraints that have shaped the EU's role and limited its capacity to act independently, reinforcing its position as a partially engaged actor constrained by its own geopolitical interests. Secondly, and crucial in the context of the Cyprus problem, there is the question of recognition. The EU accepted Cyprus into the Union without resolving the conflict, and therefore without recognizing part of its territory. This created a unique geopolitical situation: the whole island is considered EU territory, but the north is ruled by a government that the Union does not recognize. Consequently, it cannot engage directly with the Turkish Cypriot authorities on the island, meaning normal procedures cannot be implemented and must be carried out by other means. The issue of recognition explains why the EU deals with non-state actors, such as NGOs and civil society initiatives, instead of official government contact with the north — not only is it structurally prevented from acting as an impartial mediator, but it must also adapt to the limitations of engaging with an internationally unrecognized entity in the context of an unresolved conflict.

These dynamics highlight two major obstacles preventing the European Union from acting more effectively: EU–Turkey relations, and the rights and powers of Greek Cypriot membership. The Union's relations with Turkey have been shaped by broader geopolitical tensions, within which the Cyprus conflict is embedded: the non-recognition of the TRNC by any state except Turkey, coupled with the EU's alignment with Greece in resolving the conflict, contributed to the increasing incompatibilities. Meanwhile,

Turkey's refusal to recognize the Republic of Cyprus has also created internal divisions within the EU, thereby complicating the development of a coherent approach. However, the Union's internal structure grants power to its members, and if in the past Greece had threatened to use its veto power to influence EU decisions, Greek Cypriot accession has "boosted the confidence" of the community through the power of membership. Using its membership rights, the Greek Cypriot government has exercised its veto power to prevent the EU from trading with the Turkish Cypriot community and to undermine the Turkish accession process (Eldani, 2022; Kyris, 2012, p. 92). This places the Union in the midst of the Cyprus conflict, reflecting its inability to address asymmetries effectively through normal engagement. The old divergences between the two Cypriot communities continue to hinder the EU's role, reinforce its lack of neutrality and affect matters relating to its role as an international actor. This illustrates how the Union's past decisions have shaped and constrained its present capacity to act.

A further challenge for the Union lies in the divergent perceptions of the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities on the historical and political foundations of the dispute. Conflicts of interest over property rights, political equality and power-sharing, as well as competing claims regarding the rights of both communities, limit the prospect of reunification (Yakinthou, 2009). These positions are deeply rooted in contrasting historical narratives, particularly those relating to events dating back to the 1960s and 1970s, which still shape how each community interprets the conflict. In such a context, the European Union is prevented from acting as an impartial external actor, as these socially constructed perceptions and identities cannot be influenced or transformed through normative or institutional mechanisms.

Lastly, the EU's normative identity and guiding principles may also limit its effectiveness in resolving the conflict. The soft power nature of the Union limits potential actions that could contribute to conflict resolution, given that its policy relies primarily on diplomatic and financial instruments (Yakinthou, 2009). Unlike NATO or the United Nations, the European Union lacks the capacity to implement hard power measures on the ground. While this can be an advantage, it also diminishes the EU's capacity to influence the conflict decisively.

3. The European Union as a Partial Stakeholder

3.1. Institutional constraints and structural partiality

The EU has played a decisive, albeit limited, role in the Cyprus conflict. As argued by Professor James Ker-Lindsay: "If you looked at the landscape of the 1990s in Cyprus, it was deadlocked. There was no progress at all. There hadn't been for a very long time". It was the prospect of EU membership that reshaped the dynamics of the conflict. While the earlier accession of Greece had already shaped perceptions, leading the Turkish Cypriot community to no longer consider the EU a neutral actor, the prospect of Cyprus joining

the European Union created new momentum. Yet, during the accession process and even after Cyprus joined the EU, it became evident that the Union's involvement ultimately did not facilitate the peace process or contribute to achieving a settlement.

Despite an evolving approach, the EU has remained fundamentally constrained in its ability to act independently. Though it initially aimed to promote reconciliation and demonstrate its power as an international actor, the Union's actions became increasingly shaped by the interests of its Member States — particularly Greece, whose historical ties to Cyprus and its role as a guarantor power significantly shaped EU action, as illustrated by Cyprus' accession. Another notable example of this influence is the EU's explicit non-recognition of the political identity of the TRNC due to Greek and Greek Cypriot pressure. As Professor Ahmet Sözen highlights, in Protocol 10 of the Accession Treaty of 2003 “the EU doesn't use the word TRNC with or without quotation marks. Not Cyprus, Northern Cyprus, nothing of that sort. Instead, the EU uses twenty-one words: ‘those areas of the Republic of Cyprus in which the government of the Republic of Cyprus does not exercise effective control’”. Such deliberate wording reflects the Union's avoidance of recognizing the identity of the self-proclaimed state. In addition, the suspension of the *acquis* means that Turkish Cypriots are effectively excluded from the Union's political and institutional framework despite efforts to reduce the international isolation of the community. As argued by Professor Ahmet Sözen, “this does not really bring Turkish Cypriots closer to the Union, which was the initial goal of the EU”. It reinforces existing asymmetries and highlights the EU's lack of neutrality and effectiveness.

Over the years, the Union has evolved into a partial stakeholder in the conflict, missing the opportunity to become a neutral mediator. The Crans Montana talks illustrate the Union's role as an indirect participant in the conflict during the post-accession period. While it was neither a mediator nor a negotiating party in the conflict, it had to “be in the room in any negotiation” as one side of the conflict is a Member State and, therefore, “anything that's done on settlement has got to be in accordance with the EU *acquis*”, as explained by Professor Ker-Lindsay: “It's got to, it can't contravene the *acquis*. So that necessarily means that when you start to get into the really thorny issues of what is required under a settlement, and there's huge areas that have got to be dealt with, the European Union needs to be in the room”. However, the Union's presence is merely symbolic, as its influence over the process remains highly constrained, despite the use of normative power.

The structural and political complexities inherent to the Cyprus conflict, combined with the EU's normative identity, have reduced the Union's potential to play a more significant role. The EU has been unable to meet the conditions necessary to influence conflict resolution, nor has it strengthened its position as a global actor. My Greek Cypriot interviewee (R1) argues that “the EU missed key strategic opportunities to actively shape the resolution of the Cyprus conflict” as “its actions have been too cautious, reactive, and deferential to Member States, limiting its effectiveness as a peacebuilding actor”. At the same time, the EU itself has been influenced by the interests and perceptions of Member

States. The pressure to include Cyprus in the 2004 enlargement placed the EU in a rather delicate position. As my Armenian Cypriot interviewee (R2) notes, “the EU is in a very difficult position, as it tries to maintain a balanced relationship with Turkey, which has its own strategic interests”. Taken together, these factors demonstrate that the European Union has consistently faced a challenging scenario amid this conflict. Balancing Member States’ interests with its normative ambitions has constrained the EU’s ability to act decisively in the international setting, a position with limited prospects for change. In such conditions, “the EU seems to have taken more of an observatory or passive stance rather than exerting a strong, assertive role in resolving the conflict”, as R2 describes.

3.2. Prospects and limits of EU engagement

The Cyprus conflict appears to have been largely overlooked by the European Union. Despite the island’s geopolitical relevance, there have been no significant developments for decades. Although some initiatives have been proposed and applied in Cypriot territory, they have not achieved transformative results. The barriers faced by the EU raise broader concerns about the risk of Cyprus setting a precedent for the Union’s approach to other protracted conflicts.

The current situation does not present an optimistic outlook for the EU, as its normative identity limits its capacity to implement stronger measures. In particular, the Union’s relationship with Turkey remains a significant challenge, as potential progress is closely tied to its ability to influence its stance. This is reflected in the differing perspectives of my interviewees. R1 suggests that the EU could “apply political and economic pressure towards Turkey, by linking EU-Turkey relations to constructive engagement”. By contrast, Professor Ker-Lindsay argues that “it’s very, very difficult to see what the EU can do to put pressure on Turkey on Cyprus settlement. Maybe it would have more room to put pressure on the Greek Cypriots”, despite asserting that the EU “doesn’t like to usually go against its own members”. Similarly, R2 emphasizes the importance of prioritizing Cyprus over the strategic partnership with Turkey: “the EU needs to stop trying to balance its relationship with Turkey while simultaneously claiming to support the resolution of the Cyprus Problem. Cyprus should be treated unequivocally as an EU Member State and should receive the political attention and support it deserves, regardless of Turkey’s reactions”. These divergent views highlight the Union’s structural need to prioritize the interests of Member States while balancing them with broader geopolitical considerations, stressing the complexity of envisaging its future role in Cyprus. In this context, Turkey’s role in the conflict not only shapes the EU’s range of possible initiatives but also constrains their implementation.

The issue of non-recognition is likely to remain a significant obstacle that the EU will struggle to overcome in the near future. The limited engagement between the EU and Northern Cyprus constrains opportunities for conflict resolution and for fostering the

integration of the Turkish Cypriot community. This reflects the Union's institutional structure, which limits its capacity to act in ways that contradict the position of its Member States, thereby reinforcing existing asymmetries. The question of recognition generates differing perspectives on how the EU might engage with the island. Professor Sözen suggests: "Engage with the authorities. Engagement without recognition. Bringing Turkish Cypriots closer together. Finding ways of including Turkish Cypriots into projects, programs like Erasmus, and finding ways of applying the *acquis* in the northern part of Cyprus, rather than treating the northern part as if it's a diseased area which needs to be sanitized". This view presents an approach that promotes integration without necessarily addressing the political concern of recognition. By contrast, my Greek Cypriot respondent (R1) outlines the need for the EU to adopt "a more strategic, visible, and coordinated approach not just as a passive supporter of the UN, but as an active political stakeholder", recommending "targeted initiatives towards both communities, such as infrastructure funds, green and digital transition" which may foster trust between the two communities. These diverging perspectives arise from two individuals experiencing different political and social realities within the same island: while one enjoys the benefits of EU citizenship, the other faces the effects of international isolation. This helps explain why Turkish Cypriots perspectives tend to prioritize engagement and practical inclusion, whereas Greek Cypriots place greater emphasis on institutional positioning and structured EU involvement. Moreover, it stresses the difficulty of formulating a coherent EU approach able to accommodate both communities' interests without compromising its normative identity and institutional constraints.

Finally, the willingness of both Cypriot governments to engage in negotiations remains crucial for any meaningful progress. However, the interest in resolving the conflict has fluctuated between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot sides, and the misalignment of recent years has further limited the prospects for a settlement. This highlights the impact of local political dynamics on the role of external actors, including the European Union. In the absence of a shared commitment to negotiations, external action remains significantly limited.

Conclusion

The European Union has played a significant yet structurally constrained role in the Cyprus conflict. Although the prospect of accession initially transformed the dynamics of the dispute, the Union's capacity to influence the conflict has remained limited. Rather than acting as a neutral mediator, the EU has become a partial stakeholder, shaped by the interests of its Member States and the normative constraints inherent to its institutional structure.

The findings of this research demonstrate how the Union's approach has been shaped by both internal divisions and external constraints. The need to align with Member States'

geopolitical interests, together with the sensitive nature of the Cyprus conflict and the role of external actors, has prevented the EU from playing an effective role in resolving the dispute. Despite its normative ambitions and attempts to adapt its approach, the EU has not succeeded in achieving a sustainable solution.

In this context, the Cyprus case illustrates the limitations of the European Union as an international actor in conflict resolution. By internalizing an unresolved conflict, the EU has placed itself in a difficult position, reinforcing asymmetries between the two Cypriot communities while limiting its own capacity to act impartially. More broadly, this case highlights the limitations of the Union's normative power, proving that the EU's ability to act effectively on the international stage is ultimately restricted not only by structural and political constraints, but also by the social and political realities in which it operates.

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