

TRACK II DIPLOMACY

The Way Out In The
Eastern Mediterranean?

AHMET SÖZEN



Special Issue

 **EURO**Politika

Track II Diplomacy: The Way Out in the Eastern Mediterranean?

The Lead Guest Editor

Ahmet SÖZEN



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The Lead Guest Editor

Prof. Dr Ahmet SÖZEN

EUROPolitika Chief Editor

Yusuf ERTUĞRAL

EUROPolitika Academic Editor

Beril HAKVERİR KUTMAN

Last Reading

Recep ERDOĞDU

Layout

Musab DAUD

Ahmet SÖZEN is a professor of Political Science and International Relations at Eastern Mediterranean University, Famagusta, Northern Cyprus. Professor Sözen is currently a Guest Professor in the Unit for Peace and Conflict Studies at Innsbruck University, Austria.

Yusuf ERTUĞRAL is the founder and editor-in-chief of the academic journal EUROPolitika. As the coordinator of the Track II Diplomacy Research Laboratory established under the umbrella of EUROPolitika and based in TRNC-Girne, he conducts research in the fields of peace and conflict.

Beril HAKVERİR KUTMAN is PhD student in European Studies at the Dokuz Eylül University. Her research interest includes European politics, migration and populism. She is also academic editor of EUROPolitika.

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Notes on Contributors

Nikolaos STELGIAS was born in 1982 in Istanbul. From 2000 until 2011, Stelgias studied in Athens. In 2011 he completed his Ph.D. on Turkish political parties during 1918-1938. Since the end of his dissertation, Dr. Stelgias has focused on contemporary Türkiye, the Kurdish, and the Cyprus Question. Dr. Stelgias' books and studies have been published in Türkiye, Cyprus, and abroad. In 2021, Dr. Stelgias' new study entitled "The Ailing Turkish Democracy" was published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing. In addition to his scientific capacity, Dr. Stelgias is also involved in journalism.

Hesham YOUSSEF Ambassador (Retired), Senior Fellow, Middle East and North Africa Center, United States Institute of Peace. Hesham Youssef has been a Senior Fellow at the United States Institute of Peace since 2019. He was a career diplomat with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Egypt. From 2014 to 2019, he served as Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian, Cultural, and Social Affairs at the Organization of Islamic Cooperation focusing on the humanitarian situation in the Islamic world as well as advancing cultural and social cooperation. From 2001-2014, he served as the Official Spokesman and later the Chief of Staff to the Secretary-General of the Arab League and then as a Senior Advisor to the Secretary-General on crisis management and the reform of the Arab League. Mr. Youssef graduated with a bachelor's degree in physics from Cairo University in 1980. He taught at Cairo University, the American University in Cairo, and Lehigh University in Pennsylvania. He holds master's degrees in liberal arts from St. John's College (New

Mexico) and in economics from the American University in Cairo. He has multiple publications focusing particularly on conflict resolution in the Middle East.

Esra DİLEK is Assistant Professor at the Department of International Relations at Kadir Has University in Istanbul. She holds a PhD degree in Political Science from Bilkent University, Ankara. Dr. Dilek's research focuses on international norms, peace processes, negotiation processes, Track Two diplomacy, and foreign policy. During 2022, she was an IPC-Mercator Fellow at the Istanbul Policy Center at Sabancı University where she pursued research on the normative underpinnings of Türkiye's peacemaking approach in the Eastern Mediterranean. During 2021-2022, she was a Fulbright postdoctoral fellow at the School for Peace and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University, VA, USA. Her scientific publications have appeared in international academic journals such as Middle Eastern Studies, Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies, Peacebuilding, and International Negotiation.

Yusuf ERTUĞRAL completed his Master's degree in International Relations at Beykent University in 2013, with a thesis titled 'America's New Prudent Foreign Policy: The Pacific Vision of Smart Power'. Since 2016, he has been serving as the founder and editor-in-chief of EUROPolitika, a journal dedicated to providing in-depth academic and policy analysis on European affairs. His academic interests include peace and conflict studies, the domestic politics of the UK with a focus on ethnic issues such as the "IRA" in Northern Ireland and Scottish Nationalism,

German domestic and foreign policy, U.S. foreign policy, and Türkiye-EU relations. Ertuğral has authored various journal articles and book chapters on these subjects. He is also a member of the Journalists' Union of Türkiye and holds an International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) press card. As a freelance journalist, Yusuf Ertuğral continues to pursue extensive research and remains closely engaged with developments in his fields of expertise.

Nisa MAMMADOVA entered the Department of Political Science at Baku State University in 2010. In 2014 she successfully graduated from this department. In 2017, she was admitted to the International Relations Master's Programme at Istanbul Ticaret University with a full scholarship. In 2020, she graduated by defending her master's thesis entitled "Political Economy of Türkiye-Russia Relations in the Axis of Culture, Public Opinion and Foreign Policy". During her studies, Nisa Mammadova interned at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan and worked for 3 years as the Coordinator of the Volunteer Corps of the Young Diplomats Union of Azerbaijan. She also represented Uzbekistan and Indonesia in the simulation programme of the Youth Forum of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (now the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation) in 2011 and 2012. She has worked as a lecturer at Halic University and Nisantasi University. Nisa Mammadova speaks English and Turkish at advanced level and Russian at good level. She continues her academic activities in the field of International Relations. In addition, Mammadova has been working as a freelance editor at EUROPolitika magazine since 2022.

Devrim ŞAHİN is an Assistant Professor in the International Relations Department and Chair of Strategic Planning Department at the Cyprus Science University. He is also an expert of the Middle East Policy Council and the Eurasia Strategic Research Foundation (ASAM) and a research fellow of the Cyprus Policy Center. He has authored several volumes, chapters, and articles in peer reviewed international scientific journals. Additionally, he is part of the editorial board including the EUROPolitika and Migration and Diversity or external reviewers of peer reviewed international journals. His current research interests include efforts to bring together quantum philosophy and peace studies. He has also been associated with the UNDP-funded NGO activity in Cyprus that was awarded "The Marriage, Knowledge and Branding Award for Peace"; for the longest inter-communal partnership in peace-building efforts. His article entitled "Time for a Nahost-Politik" featured among the top 20 inspirational ideas cited at the 2016 McKinsey Awards.

Ahmet SÖZEN is professor of International Relations and founding Director of Cyprus Policy Center – a think tank at Eastern Mediterranean University. Sözen received his PhD in 1999 from University of Missouri-Columbia. During his PhD dissertation fieldwork – which was on the Cyprus inter-communal peace negotiations, Sözen was granted one of the fifty 1997 Paul Harris Ambassadorial Peace Scholarships on International Conflict Resolution given on a world-wide competition by International Rotary Foundation. Besides his university work Prof. Sözen was the founding Turkish Cypriot Co-Director of the UNDP funded program Cyprus 2015 which operated first under Interpeace

and later became the first inter-communal think-tank called SeeD – Center for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development. Sözen also served as the Research Director of SeeD. Sözen has been very active on the policy and advocacy fronts. His experience over the last thirty years in peace-building and democratization processes include participating into the first-track peace negotiations as a member of the official Turkish Cypriot negotiation team in the UN-led Cyprus peace negotiations; active involvement in second-track peace and democratization initiatives; providing training and education in the areas of conflict resolution, mediation and peace-building; designing policy recommendations based on objective participatory research with the societal stakeholders and polling.

Cihan DİZDAROĞLU is an associate professor in the Department of Political Science and International Relations at Başkent University and associate fellow at the Istanbul Political Research Institute. He previously worked as a Marie-Curie fellow (2018-2020)

at the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations (CTPSR) at Coventry University and as a lecturer (2018-2021) in the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at Kadir Has University. He also served as the Director (2017-2018) of the Center for Turkish Studies at Kadir Has University and as the Project Coordinator (2009-2018) of the International Relations Council of Türkiye. He still serves as the associate editor of the journal of *Uluslararası İlişkiler/International Relations*. Dr. Dizdaroğlu holds a PhD in International Relations from Kadir Has University. His academic interests include critical peace and conflict studies, youth and peacebuilding, critical security studies, Cyprus problem, Turkish foreign policy—particularly Turkish-EU relations and Turkish-Greek relations. He has published numerous journal articles, book chapters, policy briefs and op-eds on his subject and is the author of *Turkish-Greek Relations: Foreign Policy in a Securitisation Framework*, published by Edinburgh University Press (2023).

Prologue

Track II Diplomacy generally refers to initiatives assumed outside Track I - official diplomatic and decision-making channels. It is used as an instrument for fostering cooperation between and among adversarial groups and help resolving conflicts. Track II Diplomacy is usually employed when the conflicting sides do not “*recognize*” one another or when the parties to the conflict do not have direct communication or dialogue for a various different reason on Track I level. In such cases, Track II Diplomacy can play an important role where creative and novel ideas and solutions are produced and channeled to Track I. Hence, the official decision makers who do not have a direct communication and dialogue with their counterparts on the other side of the dispute, nonetheless, are presented with the Track II blueprints to solve their outstanding conflicts. In that sense, if Track I has the political will to solve their problems, they do not start from scratch; but possess the road map designed at Track II level by the technical experts of the issue at hand. Of course, Track II Diplomacy is neither a panacea nor a substitute of Track I diplomacy. However, if it is used wisely and crafted smartly, it can be a valuable supplementary tool for traditional - Track I - diplomacy.

Personally, I have been deeply involved in several Track II initiatives in the past two decades mostly connected to the Eastern Mediterranean region, either within the greater Mediterranean or in lieu to the Middle East,

Greek - Turkish relations or the Cyprus conflict, as well as the Caucasus region. I've been a member of the Cyprus Chapter within the Greek – Turkish Forum (GTF, est. 1997) (<http://greeturkishforum.com/>) since the opening of the Cyprus chapter in 2005; a member of Eastern Mediterranean Initiative (EMI, est. 2023) (<https://www.gcsp.ch/Eastern-Mediterranean-Initiative>) which started as a dialogue group in 2020 under the umbrella of Geneva Center for Security Policy); a member of the Council for Mediterranean Diplomacy (Diplomeds, est. 2023) (<https://diplomeds.org/>) which started in 2022 as a policy dialogue group bringing academics, retired diplomats and other conflict resolution practitioners together from the Mediterranean region: I have also been member of a few other regional Track II initiatives which are not publicly disclosed for their nature in order to protect their participants from public persecution. Hence, it was a real pleasure and honor for me to be invited as the lead guest editor of this volume in which we focused on the role of Track II Diplomacy as a potential tool to contribute to the resolution of conflicts in the Eastern Mediterranean region.

Eastern Mediterranean has been a region of tension regarding the exploration and exploitation of the hydrocarbon resources and overlapping Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) claims of Türkiye, Greece, the Greek-Cypriot dominated Republic of Cy-

prus (as well as the unrecognized Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus – TRNC), Egypt, and Libya. Furthermore, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Syrian conflict and the Israel-Lebanon conflict are also other acute disputes in the region. In this volume, several prominent experts from the region explore the potential of Track II Diplomacy in solving the conflicts in the Eastern Mediterranean region.

In chapter 1, Nikolaos Stelgias, a Greek descendant, Cyprus-based prominent Turkish journalist and academic, systematically describes the most important conflicts in the Eastern Mediterranean. He focuses on two streaks – (1) Middle East where he analyses the conflicts from the Israel-Palestinian issue to Lebanon and Syria; (2) Greece – Türkiye - Cyprus triangle. He lays down the contours of the existing geopolitical conflicts (challenge 1) and then depicts how the discovery of hydrocarbon resources made things more complicated in the region (challenge 2). Stelgias ends the chapter with the question: *“Can Track II Diplomacy tackle the twin challenges in the Eastern Mediterranean?”*

Retired Egyptian Diplomat, Ambassador Hesham Youssef explains brilliantly why traditional (Track I) diplomacy has failed to solve the conflicts in the Eastern Mediterranean region in chapter 2. He, then, focuses on Track II Diplomacy and enumerates both advantages and challenges in front of Track II Diplomacy. As someone who had decades-long invaluable experience in both Track I and Track II, Youssef presents lots of insights such as how Track II played an important role in paving the way to the Israeli-Palestinian Oslo Accords. He tiresomely

examines the Israeli-Palestinian, Israeli-Lebanese, Syrian, Turkish-Greek and the Cyprus conflicts through the lenses of Track II efforts so far and the prospects for the future. One prime policy recommendation that Youssef proposes at the end of the chapter is that Track II Diplomacy should not be limited to conflict resolution. Instead, other areas such as but not limited to irregular migration, confronting extremism and populism, climate change, food security and so forth can benefit from the services that Track II Diplomacy can provide.

In chapter 3, Esra Dilek, a rising young academic in the field of Conflict Resolution, analyzes the potential of Track II Diplomacy in the Eastern Mediterranean. At the opening of the chapter, Dilek provides an excellent literature review of Track II processes which can take place in different levels. After this brief overview she briefly assesses the applications of Track II initiatives in different cases across the world and across different levels. Finally, she ends the chapter by exploring potential applications of Track II Diplomacy to the Eastern Mediterranean region – a region with tensions associated with sovereignty disputes that have been attached to persistent issues, such as the Cyprus conflict, bilateral clashes between Greece in Türkiye, the conflicts in Libya and Syria, and more lately of course, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that rekindled since October 2023.

Aspiring young researchers, Yusuf Ertuğral and Nisa Mammadova, examine the Northern Ireland peace process in chapter 4 and provide us invaluable insights from that process that we can apply to the Cyprus conflict. They explore the links between the Cyprus

problem and lessons learnt from the Northern Ireland peace process. Furthermore, they investigate how Track II Diplomacy efforts made a significant contribution to the de-confliction and eventual peace in Northern Ireland and how this approach could be applied to resolving similar issues in Cyprus. By showing how civil society leaders and academics can support informal diplomacy and increase trust between various communities, the Northern Ireland experience encourages the development of a more genuine dialogue between the parties in Cyprus. In conclusion, the chapter reflects on how Track II Diplomacy can be effectively integrated in the Cyprus conflict and how lessons from Northern Ireland highlight the critical role that civil society leaders and experts can play in conflict resolution.

In chapter 5, prolific scholar Devrim Şahin and I analyze the mechanics of engagement of the European Union with the Turkish Cypriots in Cyprus through Protocol 10 to the Treaty of Accession. The authors argue that this is a very limited engagement in bringing the Turkish Cypriots closer to the Union, as it mostly focuses on the civil society organizations. Hence, Şahin and Sözen suggest that the EU adopts a policy similar to Germany's historic Ost-politik, which promoted then Germany's political relations with Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Accordingly, the authors suggest that the EU follow a two-layered approach in Cyprus: (1) enhancing the EU's engagement with Turkish Cypriot authorities – *“engagement without recognition”*; and (2) supporting Track II initiatives in Cy-

prus as a necessary space which can bridge the gap between the peace negotiations on Track I and the citizens.

Cihan Dizdaroğlu, prolific young rising academic, examines the role of youth in Track II initiatives in Cyprus as a focused case study in chapter 6. First, he provides a very good summary of the literature in the utilization of Track II processes with the youth. Next, Dizdaroğlu goes outside the box and analyzes the potential contribution of the youth in Cyprus in Track II initiatives, focusing on some examples of youth-led initiatives. He argues that inter-communal dialogue through Track II initiatives in divided societies such as Cyprus, especially in the absence of formal negotiations, is far more important to break down the barriers between the communities and to prepare the ground for any Track I initiatives in the future. This chapter provides a different perspective to the existing literature through an examination of the value and benefits of youth leadership in Cyprus.

I have no doubt that the readers will tremendously benefit from the invaluable analyses, policy insights and recommendations provided by the prominent experts in this book.

Ahmet SÖZEN
Innsbruck, Austria
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The Twin Challenges of the Eastern Mediterranean in the Age of Track II Diplomacy: Ongoing Conflicts, Energy, and Novel Forms of Problem-Solving Diplomacy

Nikolaos STELGIAS

Abstract

The Eastern Mediterranean region faces two challenges: ongoing conflicts such as the Palestinian and Cyprus issues, and new discoveries of energy resources that are reshaping geopolitical dynamics. This chapter examines the complex interplay between these challenges, delving into the region's historical context, recent developments and the intricate web of actors involved. It shows how traditional diplomacy has failed to resolve long-standing territorial disputes and foster regional cooperation. The chapter then explores the potential of Track II diplomacy, informal dialogues involving multiple stakeholders, to complement official efforts. By facilitating

open discussion, building mutual understanding, and exploring innovative solutions, Track II diplomacy could help reduce tensions, prevent conflict, and promote cooperative approaches to common challenges such as energy resource management and regional security. Ultimately, this unofficial diplomacy could pave the way for formal agreements and enhance stability in this strategic yet volatile region.

1. Introduction: The Persistent Fault Lines

The area surrounding the eastern sides of the Mediterranean Sea, frequently referred to as the “Eastern Mediterranean”, is a hub of intri-

cate geopolitical dynamics, defined by deep ties to the past in terms of history and culture and current conflicts and difficulties. Because of its geopolitical importance, abundant natural resources -including recently discovered gas fields - and essential marine connections, this region, a melting pot of civilizations, has garnered much scholarly attention. The interconnectedness of the countries in this region, particularly Türkiye, Greece, Cyprus, Israel, and countries with a majority of Arab speakers (Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Egypt), results in a complex geopolitical situation. The presence of other powers complicates these interactions. In this chapter, before delving into the absence of Track II diplomacy in the region, I will briefly analyze the twin challenges of the modern Eastern Mediterranean, namely the region's ongoing ethnocentric conflicts and the new energy paradigm.

1.1. Arab Nations and Israel in Turmoil

The Syrian civil war's evolution underscores the intersection of domestic uprisings, international interventions, geopolitical rivalries, and humanitarian crises. The Syrian civil war, which started in 2011 with anti-government protests against the Alevites-dominated regime, morphed into a multifaceted conflict, drawing international attention and involvement. The rise of ISIS in 2014 reframed U.S. priorities toward counterterrorism (Reilly, 2019, p. 176). Collaboration with Syrian Kurdish forces proved effective but incited Turkish anxieties regarding the Kurdish issue (Humud, 2018). The American promotion of Kurdish self-government in Iraq after the U.S. invasion spilled over into Syria's northeast, where Kurds were a substantial

part of the population, along with Assyrian Christians and Arab Muslims. In close collaboration with the USA, Kurds and their allies built a de facto autonomous entity in the northeastern territories of Syria (Reilly, 2019, pp. 183-184). Meanwhile, the Russian and Iranian support for the Bashar Al Asad regime (Rehman, 2015, pp. 35-36) underscored the geopolitical complexities, leading to a substantial regime territorial recovery by 2018.

As of 2022, a "stalemate" characterizes the conflict, with the U.S. focusing on counterterrorism and humanitarian access amidst continued geopolitical tensions (Lesch, 2019). Imposing the Caesar Act in 2019 exemplified the U.S.'s commitment to hold the Asad regime accountable through sanctions (Humud, 2018). Israel, meanwhile, executed targeted airstrikes against Iranian and Hezbollah positions within Syria, amplifying regional tensions and underscoring the conflict's multifaceted nature (Lesch, 2019). Meanwhile, a significant humanitarian crisis persists in Syria, marked by displacement, food insecurity, and an overwhelming reliance on international aid (*The Fallout of War: The Regional Consequences of the Conflict in Syria*, 2020). Deadly earthquakes in early 2023 have exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in northern parts of the country.

At the beginning of the Syrian civil war, Lebanon, traditionally immersed in internal strife, was unresponsive to the upheaval in the Arab world. Some local protests mirrored local uprisings, but they had little effect. The religious divisions in Lebanese society and the socio-political antagonism between Christians, Sunnis, and Shiites (Di Peri &

Meier, 2016) continued to affect the nation (Salloukh, Barakat, Al-Habbal, Khattab, & Mikaelian, 2015). In the same period, Lebanon, traditionally a weak state (Barak, 2017, p. 4), was hit by severe economic issues (Arsan, 2020) and the impact of the significant outburst on the country's largest port.

Meanwhile, international polarization undermined Lebanese stability and state structure during the country's internal socio-political unrest. Although regional and domestic factors play a role in Lebanon's instability, issues such as the repercussions of the ongoing Palestine issue on the country's southern border with Israel, Iran's meddling in internal affairs, and the stance of key players like the U.S. and the E.U. have a significant impact on structural changes within the nation (Bayeh, 2017).

The Palestinian Problem has a lengthy history and is still unresolved as the current Lebanese state faces additional difficulties. The fate of the Palestinians is still uncertain, almost 80 years after the establishment of the state of Israel. It is challenging and outside the purview of this study to summarize the Palestinian issue, whose roots are lost in the depths of previous centuries (Pappe, 2022). However, we highlight the events that have shaped the last decade in Israel and Palestine below.

Over the last decade, the Palestinian problem has been characterized by persistent challenges and internal and external pressures (Scott-Baumann, 2023). The divisive Palestinian politics between Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, and the Palestinian Authority, led by Fatah, in the West Bank, dominated the political landscape. The di-

vision has impeded the peace process and weakened the Palestinian stance internationally.

Israel's settlement expansion in the West Bank continues to be contentious, attracting international criticism but little substantive action (Levine, 2013). The settlements are a significant obstacle to the two-state solution, contributing to the fragmentation of the Palestinian territories. In recent years, violence and tensions have escalated periodically, with clashes between Israeli forces and Palestinian protesters, rocket attacks from Gaza, and retaliatory airstrikes by Israel.

2020 Washington presented the Middle East peace plan (Guzansky & Marshall, 2020; Singer, 2021). The Palestinian leadership and much of the international community rejected the plan (Lazin, 2023; Norlen & Sinai, 2020). Though hailed as a diplomatic success, the subsequent normalization accords between Israel and many Arab nations have come under fire for omitting the Palestinian problem.

On October 7, 2023, Hamas-led Palestinian militant organizations launched a massive attack against Israel from the Gaza Strip, breaching the Gaza-Israel border fence and invading neighboring Israeli settlements and military facilities. Hamas' "*Operation al-Aqsa Storm*", besides thousands of dead and wounded, resulted in Israel's harsh response in Gaza.

Economic and humanitarian conditions in the Palestinian territories, particularly in Gaza, have been dire (*Report on UNCTAD help to the Palestinian people: Developments in*

the economy of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, 2022). The blockade imposed by Israel and Egypt has resulted in significant hardships for the civilian population, including poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to essential services (“European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (Palestine),” 2023).

Towards the end of the 2010s, Palestine’s neighbor, Israel, suffered political instability. In 2022, a coalition government was established following several elections and with the participation of several conservative and nationalist parties (Analytica, 2023b). The alteration of the constitution was one of the new administration’s first moves, which incited opposition from liberal segments of society (Analytica, 2023a). The new government also faces the unsolved Palestinian problem, security challenges on the nation’s borders with Lebanon, and Iran’s rivalry on many fronts.

Egypt has experienced many political, social, and economic upheavals in the past decade, including the Arab Spring in 2011 (*Arab Spring: Uprisings, Powers, Interventions*, 2014; Dabashi, 2012), which led to the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak (Brown, Hatab, & Adly, 2021, pp. 204-221). In 2012, Egypt’s first free presidential elections saw Mohamed Morsi, an affiliated member of the Muslim Brotherhood, elected (Al-Anani, 2021; Brown et al., 2021, pp. 221-224). However, his presidency was marked by controversy, accusations of consolidating power, undermining judicial authorities, and failing to address economic challenges (Agrama, 2012; *Arab Spring: Uprisings, Powers, Interventions*, 2014).

In 2013, a military coup led by Defense Minister Abdel Fattah el-Sisi ousted Morsi, leading to a shift back to authoritarian rule (El-Dine, 2016). El-Sisi’s regime implemented economic reforms aided by a \$12 billion IMF loan (Tanchum, 2022). In September 2019, protests signaled discontent (“In rare protests, Egyptians demand President el-Sisi’s removal,” 2019), leading to the government enacting grandiose projects and playing a balancing act in foreign relations, nurturing ties with regional and international powers (Piazza, 2019).

Over the past decade, Egypt’s western neighbor Libya has experienced significant political, social, and military turmoil. The Arab Spring in 2011 marked the onset of a series of complex events. Sparked by widespread protests, the revolutionary wave led to the overthrow and subsequent death of Muammar Gaddafi, Libya’s long-standing dictator (Kawczynski, 2011; Prashad, 2012). The nation, rich in oil resources, then plunged into a chaotic state, creating a vacuum of power that has since proven challenging to fill.

Post-Gaddafi Libya encountered an immediate division, with multiple factions vying for control, leading to the emergence of two primary rival administrations - the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA), recognized by the United Nations (UN), and the Tobruk-based House of Representatives backed by the Libyan National Army (LNA), led by General Khalifa Haftar (Blanchard, 2020). The division escalated into a prolonged and devastating civil war, marked by international interventions and the involvement of foreign mercenaries.

Throughout the civil war, various international players, including Türkiye, Russia, and the United Arab Emirates, amongst others, provided support to opposing sides (Aude, 2020; Fajarini & Anam, 2022). This international involvement exacerbated the conflict, adding layers of complexity and turning the country into a proxy battleground. Efforts by the international community to broker peace and unify the warring factions faced many challenges. The scheduled elections for December 2021 were postponed, underscoring the continuing political instability and uncertainties about Libya's future.

Towards the end of 2023, all the above states faced significant challenges in their bilateral relations. Syria, amid civil conflict, is facing problems in its relations with Lebanon and Israel. With the latter, Damascus has no diplomatic relations. Although, as we will see below, Lebanon and Israel recently agreed on the delimitation of maritime economic zones, the two neighboring states do not have diplomatic relations. And Lebanon's Shiite community, which has close ties to Tehran and is dominated by the Hezbollah movement, is turning hostile with sentiments against Israel. Conflagrations on the Palestinian issue have intermittently overshadowed Israeli-Egyptian diplomatic relations. Egypt also faces problems in its relations with Libya's internationally recognized government.

1.2. Greece-Türkiye-Cyprus Triangle

Over the past decade, Greek-Turkish relations have been characterized by a complex mix of cooperation and confrontation, influenced by historical disputes, regional stability, and international alliances. The amalga-

mation of historical antagonisms, territorial conflicts, energy resources, migration flows, and geopolitical positioning continues to define the dynamics.

A central sticking point has been territorial and maritime disputes in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean Sea. Greece claims Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) often contested by Türkiye (Axt, 2021; Öztürk & Başeren, 2008; Papadakis, 2018; Strati, 2000). The discovery of significant hydrocarbon resources in the region has heightened the tension, with both nations aiming to secure these energy resources (Biresselioglu, 2019; Khadduri, 2012; Stocker, 2012; Yıldız, 2020). Their conflicting claims have led to military posturing and increased international concern.

The migration crisis, exacerbated by conflicts in Syria and other parts of the Middle East, has also strained relations. Türkiye, hosting millions of refugees, has been accused of weaponizing the crisis, occasionally allowing an influx of migrants into Greek territories (Eonomopoulou, Pavli, Stasinopoulou, Giannopoulos, & Tsiodras, 2017; Ioannis N. Grigoriadis, 2018).

In the meantime, there have been military engagements throughout the past ten years, including air and naval conflicts brought on by contested territory claims. Both countries' military activities have intensified, raising the possibility of unintentional escalation (Ioannis N Grigoriadis, 2023). The flight of Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) personnel to Greece following the failed coup attempt in 2016 heightened the animosity in the two countries' relations.

Positive indicators surfaced at the start of the 2020s, while diplomatic initiatives and international actors worked to de-escalate tensions between Greece and Türkiye. Greece's aid during the earthquakes in southeast Türkiye and Türkiye's friendly response have reshaped the dialogue on the Athens-Ankara axis twenty years after the initial attempt to escalate disaster diplomacy (Stelgias, 2023).

In the two adjacent countries' modern histories, the 2010s were a turbulent decade. Greece had to deal with the effects of the severe economic crisis. Türkiye faced a coup attempt, strayed from democratic norms, engaged in military operations, and pursued more assertive foreign policy. During the 2010s, the Cyprus issue remained a significant barrier to regional cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean throughout this volatile time.

In 2017, the most recent substantive talks to solve the Cyprus problem occurred in Crans-Montana, Switzerland. The basis for these talks was the bi-zonal, bi-communal federal formula. Facilitated by the UN, the negotiations involved Greek and Turkish Cypriot leadership and guarantor countries - Greece, Türkiye, and the United Kingdom. Despite optimism, the talks collapsed because of disagreements on security and guarantees (Faustmann & Sözen, 2019; Ioannis N Grigoriadis, 2017, 2018).

2. Navigating Eastern Mediterranean's Energy Renaissance

The Eastern Mediterranean region, characterized by its rich history, diverse cultures, and geopolitical complexities, underwent a

significant transformation in the energy sector during the 2010s and early 2020s. This period marked an era of profound changes in the energy landscape of the Eastern Mediterranean. Discoveries, technological advancements, and shifting geopolitical alignments redefined the energy paradigms of each country. While the abundant hydrocarbon reserves promised economic prosperity, they rekindled territorial disputes, echoing the region's complex historical and geopolitical tapestry.

Egypt experienced a renaissance in its energy sector by discovering the Zohr gas field in 2015 (Abbas, Assfour, Abdel Wahhab, & Ashour, 2020; Ghafar, 2016; Szymczak, 2021). The largest in the Mediterranean, Zohr's development facilitated Egypt's transition from a net importer to a net exporter of natural gas. The establishment of the East Mediterranean Gas Forum in 2019, headquartered in Cairo, also positioned Egypt as a pivotal actor in regional energy diplomacy, fostering collaborations and setting a framework for the regional energy market.

Israel's energy landscape witnessed a monumental shift with the discovery of the Tamar and Leviathan natural gas fields in 2009 and 2010, respectively (Beckwith, 2011; Dagoumas & Flouros, 2017; Ratner, 2016; Shaffer, 2018). The development of these fields in the Mediterranean Sea decimated Israel's reliance on energy imports. By 2023, Israel achieved energy self-sufficiency and emerged as a regional energy exporter, strengthening its economic and geopolitical stance. Collaborative energy ventures, particularly with Egypt and Jordan, underscored the country's shift from an energy-dependent state to a sig-

nificant player in the global energy markets. In Lebanon, the 2020s began with promising signs as drilling began (Nicolas, 2020; Salameh & Chedid, 2020). Although Lebanon and Israel have been in hostilities since 1948, untapped natural gas reserves beneath the contested maritime borders have opened avenues for cooperation. The disputed sea area between the two countries, covering approximately 860 square kilometers, is believed to contain significant volumes of natural gas. The United States and the UN have helped to mediate talks to resolve the maritime border dispute, unlocking energy exploration and extraction potential. In October 2020, the negotiations between Lebanon and Israel facilitated by the U.S. In the process, Lebanon submitted a new claim, which would directly cross Israel's Karish gas field (Nakhle, 2023). Finally, a deal was signed on October 27, 2022, stipulating Line 23 as the last line dividing the two EEZs. Israel received full rights to explore the Karish field, while Lebanon received full rights to the Qana prospect. One year later, Lebanon completed a regional gas deal with Syria and Egypt (Humud, 2018).

Meanwhile, Libya's energy sector remained hostage to ongoing conflicts and instabilities. Rich in oil reserves, the country struggled to maintain consistent production and export levels throughout the 2010s. Internal conflicts, political divisions, and foreign interventions severely affected the nation's oil industry, though hopes for stability and resurgence lingered with every attempt toward national reconciliation. In late 2019, Libya and Türkiye unveiled a landmark agreement that redrew their maritime boundaries in the energy-rich Eastern Mediterranean, invoking

a series of regional and international responses (Gunawan, Sastra, Prakosa, Ovitarsari, & Kurniasih, 2020; Tsitilakou, 2021; Yilmaz & Erturk, 2020). The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Tripoli-based GNA in Libya and Türkiye established an EEZ stretching from Türkiye's southern coast to Libya's northeast coast. This delineation effectively bisects the Eastern Mediterranean, intersecting the maritime zones of several other coastal states and affecting the planned EastMed gas pipeline, which should transport natural gas from the Eastern Mediterranean directly to Europe. Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, and other regional players have condemned the agreement, labeling it a violation of international law.

During the 2010s, Cyprus made significant strides with the discovery of the Aphrodite, Calypso, and Glafkos gas fields (Efthymiou & Efthymiou, 2019; Kacziba, 2021; Proedrou, 2021; Tziarras, 2019) which provide the Cyprus problem with a new angle and regional cooperation prospect (Harari & Sözen, 2023; Sözen, 2023). The 2010s marked a significant period for Cyprus in the energy sector, especially concerning the exploration and development of natural gas. Cyprus started comprehensive steps to assert its stake in the Eastern Mediterranean's burgeoning energy landscape. One of the pivotal moments came in 2011 when Noble Energy, an American company, discovered the Aphrodite gas field, which has estimated reserves of 4.5 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. Following this discovery, Cyprus embarked on several strategic initiatives to capitalize on its natural gas reserves. The government launched licensing rounds, attracting international energy companies to explore and

exploit its EEZ. Deals with Eni, Total, and ExxonMobil highlighted the global interest in Cyprus's energy prospects.

Regional collaborations also characterized Cyprus's steps in the energy field. The country sought to enhance its energy security and economic prospects through alliances with neighboring countries like Egypt, Israel, and Greece. However, the journey was challenging. Cyprus's actions in exploring and exploiting its natural gas resources sparked tensions with Türkiye (İşeri & Bartan, 2019). Ankara contested Nicosia's rights to use these resources, leading to geopolitical tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean. Türkiye's naval maneuvers and exploration activities in contested waters amplified the complexities of Cyprus's natural gas development initiatives.

Cyprus' close ally, Greece, is also interested in the Eastern Mediterranean energy potential. While not possessing significant hydrocarbon reserves, Greece focused on becoming a regional energy hub (Bruneton, Konofagos, & Foscolos, 2012a, 2012b; Ioannis N. Grigoriadis, 2018). The Greece-Cyprus-Israel trilateral partnership, focused on projects like the EastMed pipeline, attested to Greece's role in regional energy security and geopolitics. Greece's steps for exploiting natural gas reserves of the Eastern Mediterranean brought the country face to face with Türkiye. The contest for controlling maritime boundaries and rights to use abundant natural gas reserves intensified in 2020 (Ioannis N. Grigoriadis, 2022; Merz, 2020; Tziarras, 2023). In August 2020, Türkiye, having already developed its fleet for gas and oil exploration, dispatched a research vessel, escorted by naval ships, to conduct seismic

surveys in disputed waters claimed by Ankara and Athens. Greece perceived Türkiye's actions as directly violating its sovereign rights, inflaming tensions. The E.U., wary of the escalating confrontation between two NATO allies, assumed a mediating role.

Europe's interest in the energy resources of the Eastern Mediterranean is reinvigorating, driven by the significant natural gas discoveries in the region, geopolitical shifts, and the continent's quest for energy security and diversification. A 2020 report from the European Council highlights the complex geopolitics surrounding the region's energy resources (Aydıntaşbaş, Barnes-Dacey, Bianco, Lovatt, & Megerisi, 2020). It underscores the need for European involvement to foster regional cooperation and security and to secure diversified energy sources for the continent.

Europe is mainly focused on reducing its dependency on Russian gas. The development of the EastMed pipeline, which plans to transport gas from the Eastern Mediterranean to European markets via Greece and Italy, is a testament to this shift. This project was boosted in January 2020 when Cyprus, Greece, and Israel signed an agreement to construct the pipeline, showcasing a shared interest in delivering Eastern Mediterranean gas to European markets. In the shadow of the Ukraine conflict, Washington and Brussels focus on the role of Europe and the United States in fostering regional cooperation and the fair distribution of energy resources (Pyatt, 2023; Rau, Seufert, & Westphal, 2022).

3. Epilogue: Could the Track II Diplomacy Tackle the Eastern Mediterranean's Twin Challenges?

Upon cursory examination of the preceding pages, it becomes apparent that the Eastern Mediterranean region is confronted with a pair of interconnected issues as the twenty-first century begins. Persistent and complex challenges, namely the Palestinian and Cyprus conflicts, have origins in historical events and continue to endure. At the same time, the emergence of new energy resources in the waters of the Eastern Mediterranean presents a multifaceted situation. The energy sector plays a dual role in regional development and interstate relations, as in the case of Türkiye, Greece, and Cyprus.

To solve the perennial, “classical” problems, the peoples of the region have, to this day, employed classical diplomacy. Two examples of this practice are the Oslo Accords and the Annan Plan. In 1993, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) leader Yasser Arafat shook hands on the White House grounds under the watchful eye of U.S. President Bill Clinton because of this historic accord that was mediated in Oslo, Norway. The agreements made establishing the Palestinian Authority easier and gave it some self-governance over the West Bank and Gaza Strip. A few years later, in 2004, the Annan Plan, in honor of former U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, attempted to create the United Cyprus Republic, a federation of two republics that would reunite the island, which had been divided since 1974. The concept sought a medium path to appease both groups and addressed security, property rights, and gov-

ernance concerns. It was placed to a vote, and while the Greek Cypriots heavily rejected it, the Turkish Cypriots gave it firm support.

Even though a comprehensive investigation of the Oslo Accords and the Annan Plan's failure would exceed this chapter's scope, one point needs to be made. One of the most significant shortcomings of the region's problem-solving initiatives is how people outside the formal, official government interactions—citizens, scholars, influencers, and former officials—engage in the peace processes. The theory of Track II Diplomacy shows us that unofficial platforms facilitate open discussions aimed at fostering mutual understanding and confidence and de-escalating tensions among parties in conflict (Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009; Jones, 2015; Ricigliano, 2012; Zartman, 2007). Although the participants rarely represent their governments, their insights and proposals can inform and influence government policy and decision-making, often serving as catalysts for formal negotiations and peace-building efforts. This type of diplomacy is mainly instrumental in conflicts where political sensitivities and tensions hamper official diplomatic dialogues.

Track II Diplomacy could help ease tensions and foster cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean, which is characterized by complex geopolitical, energy, and security challenges. Through informal dialogues and engagements, Track II Diplomacy can facilitate conversations beyond official channels, allowing stakeholders to explore innovative solutions, build mutual understanding, and address sensitive issues without the constraints of formal diplomatic protocols. In energy exploration, territorial disputes, and regional

security in the Eastern Mediterranean, Track II Diplomacy can bring together experts, academics, and former officials from countries like Greece, Türkiye, and Cyprus, as well as other interested parties. These actors can collaboratively explore resource sharing, conflict prevention, and confidence-building mechanisms, focusing on shared interests and regional stability. Track II initiatives can complement official diplomatic efforts by providing insights, policy recommendations, and platforms for cooperation. These non-governmental engagements can foster a culture of dialogue, encourage collaborative approaches to shared challenges, and lay the groundwork for formal diplomatic and multilateral initiatives. Track II Diplomacy is crucial in bridging divides, enhancing regional cooperation, and contributing to peace and stability in the volatile and strategic Eastern Mediterranean region.

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Can Track II Diplomacy Contribute to Conflict Resolution in the Eastern Mediterranean?

Hesham YOUSSEF*

Abstract

Political settlement efforts have so far failed in resolving Eastern Mediterranean conflicts and most of them are not even on a path toward a political solution. This chapter will examine the role played by Track II diplomacy in the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian, Lebanese, Syrian, Greek-Turkish, and the Cyprus conflicts. It will start, however, by outlining the advantages and challenges facing Track II efforts, the reasons behind the failure in the political settlement of disputes, and whether the de-escalation in the relations among several Mediterranean countries as well as between them and countries beyond the basin may advance the prospects of conflict resolution. The chapter will conclude with recommendations for stakeholders associated with Track II efforts including on how to overcome the challenges facing Track II efforts since it re-

mains an important conflict resolution tool at a time when official tracks are not succeeding in advancing peace.

Keywords: *East Mediterranean conflicts and conflict resolution, Track II.*

Introduction

Situated between three continents, the Mediterranean has been a crucible for political, economic, and cultural interaction throughout history. It has also been a vortex of competition, and innumerable conflicts and disputes. Recent decades are no exception. Several conflicts in the Mediterranean have continued for many decades while others are more recent, and despite countless attempts, very little progress has been achieved in resolving these conflicts.

*Hesham Youssef is a Senior Fellow at the United States Institute of Peace. This chapter represents his personal views.

This chapter will address why diplomacy has so far failed in resolving Eastern Mediterranean conflicts and why most of them today are not even on a path toward a political solution. A detailed account of these conflicts is beyond the scope of this chapter; however, it will examine the role played by Track II diplomacy¹ in the resolution of several conflicts and the potential for additional efforts in this regard (Montville, 1991, pp.161-175). Although a Mediterranean doomsday scenario that was feared a decade or so ago did not materialize and several relations pivoted towards de-escalation, much more effort is needed to put conflicts on a path towards resolution.

At the same time, Track II diplomacy is facing huge systemic challenges that will be identified to examine whether they can be overcome in future efforts. The chapter will conclude with recommendations for stakeholders associated with Track II efforts since it remains an important conflict resolution tool at a time when official tracks are not succeeding in advancing peace.

1. Advantages and Challenges Facing Track II Diplomacy

Track II diplomacy has important characteristics. Its inherently flexible, adaptable, and broad approach is a huge advantage but equally a huge challenge.

1.1. Advantages of Track II Diplomacy

Advantages of Track II include: (1) when conflicts are too contentious or politically charged for governments to navigate, Track II allows for more candid discussions that can tackle sensitive or critical issues to attempt to avoid escalation or reduce tension. (2) those participating in this effort are aware of the interests and limitations of the parties, and may be associated with the conflict, but are eager to advance peace and are less constrained by official positions and calculus. (3) Track II can engage with extremist, armed, or even terrorist groups that governments are unwilling to engage. (4) it can complement Track I efforts in preparing the ground for official negotiations or facilitate in finding solutions simultaneously considered by Track I. (5) it is more capable of risk-taking as compared to the risk-averse and cautious Track I approach.

1.2. Challenges Facing Track II Diplomacy

Challenges facing Track II include: (1) it has little influence or leverage over conflicting parties and cannot offer political or financial incentives to conflicting parties to help advance peace. (2) significant influence on policy requires a long time while most Track II efforts are quite limited in their finance and time framework. (3) Track II efforts may be influenced by foreign policy priorities of donors supporting this effort and not based entirely on conflict dynamics. (4) the shifting political landscape and the evolving nature of conflicts, particularly protracted ones, may result in rendering those conducting Track II efforts much less influential or even irrelevant. (5) the vast majority of Track II

¹ Montville defines Track II Diplomacy as, "unofficial, informal interaction between members of adversary groups or nations that aim to develop strategies, to influence public opinion, organize human and material resources in ways that might help resolve their conflict" (Montville, 1992, p. 162).

efforts have confidentiality requirements and therefore documenting and learning lessons from previous successes and failures is quite difficult. (6) the criteria for evaluating what constitutes success and why is tricky, which naturally reduces donor interest (Allen and Sharp, 2016).² (7) difficulties in navigating the domestic political arena and Track II participants may be disconnected from grassroots groups or other broadly based societal movements.³ (8) in some cases, Track II participants develop more rather than less negative views of their adversary. (9) the very essence of official peace negotiations is by definition with little to no transparency, hence a continuous meaningful feeding of ideas by Track II becomes extremely difficult.

While the advantages and challenges facing Track II can be debated, successes cannot be ignored. The Israeli-Palestinian Oslo Accord for instance started as a confidential Track II effort that led to official negotiations reaching this accord. On the other hand, failures are countless, but this is not unusual in the conflict resolution arena. The situation in Syria remains dire despite countless Track II initiatives since the outbreak of the civil war (“The Pros and Cons of Track II Diplomacy in International Relations,” n.d.). However, the evaluation is

much more complicated as ideas emanating from Track II efforts can be applied years after they are initially introduced.

2. Why Has Diplomacy Failed in Resolving the Main Conflicts and Challenges in the Eastern Mediterranean?

The reasons behind the failure in resolving conflicts are always controversial, as they are used by conflicting parties in their blame game, and usually evolve to become an integral part of conflict narratives. Moreover, failure in prevention and conflict management usually leads to failure in conflict resolution as well.

There are many common reasons for this failure, these include: (1) the absence of political will and leadership. (2) the presence of a wide gap in the balance of power between the conflicting parties. (3) lack of ripeness as the conflicting parties may not have simultaneously reached a mutually hurting stalemate. (4) regional or international intervention and vested interests in a specific outcome or in the continuation of the conflict by some of these powers. (5) spoilers. (6) complexities as a result of the protracted nature of some conflicts. (7) failing direct negotiations or ineffective role by the UN Security Council or third-party mediation whether regional or international, ineffective incentives and disincentives by mediators or the international community, and hastily brokered agreements to halt violence that are expected to fail and make the situation much worse. (8) when the negotiations are not inclusive of all the key parties.

² There are nascent efforts to address claims by practitioners that Track II promotes peace but insist that its contributions are intangible and therefore difficult to assess empirically.

³ For example, the domestic political arena may be opposed to peace efforts and Track II efforts may be sensitive and participants may even be in danger if revealed. As for disconnection from grassroots groups reflects the necessity for organizers to be more mindful of including those connected with grassroots groups. Furthermore, participants may come from are closer to the left while society is moving to the right or vice versa.

Some reasons for failure are specific to certain conflicts and pertain to perceived irreconcilable factors whether they are ideological, territorial, or economic, amongst ethnic, sectarian, or religious groups, and irreconcilable aspirations of the conflicting parties.

This section will briefly examine the current state of affairs of several Eastern Mediterranean conflicts and disputes and whether they benefited or may benefit from further Track II efforts.

2.1. The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the world's most enduring conflicts. Its roots go back to Jewish claims to Palestinian land during the British Mandate and even before that during the Ottoman rule. In 1947, the UN adopted the Partition Plan which divided the British Mandate of Palestine into an Arab and a Jewish state ("United Nations Partition Plan of 1947 - Map - Question of Palestine," 2019). Israel was established in May 1948 igniting the first Arab-Israeli war that ended in Israel's victory. Since then, Israel has grown stronger, and the balance of power widened in its favor. More recently, particularly since the Madrid Peace Conference (1991) and in light of the Israeli-Palestinian Oslo Accords (1993) ("Milestones: 1993–2000 - Office of the Historian," n.d.), international consensus adopted an approach based on the two-state solution. This objective is more elusive today than it has ever been in decades. Furthermore, there are recurring military confrontations and intense tensions between Israelis and Palestinians, and deep polarization and divisions in both societies. The October 2023 war is just the latest and the deadliest

in a long list of these military confrontations.

Track II Efforts and Prospects

The recurrent military confrontations and cycles of violence in this conflict increased the stakes for Track II participants and made dialogue much more politically costly and even dangerous. The October 2023 war and previous wars exemplify the huge difficulties facing those who are ready to engage in Track II efforts. This raises the dilemma that unofficial channels may be most difficult to convene at the time when they are needed most. Furthermore, at one point, it was illegal for Israelis to meet anyone affiliated with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and in the period following the second Palestinian intifada (2000), many Israeli and Palestinian peace activists lost faith in the potential of Track II efforts. At other times, many Palestinians felt that Track II merely served to normalize the occupation and solidify the status quo. This is also the sentiment today as a result of the October 2023 war.

Still, those participating in Track II indicated that it helped in sending messages, advancing tactical interests, influencing third parties, and exchanging frank evaluations of possible pitfalls, misperceptions, and unintended consequences (Clawson, 2004). As mentioned, the Oslo Agreement began as a Track II dialogue (Jones, 2015). Another renowned effort was "The Geneva Initiative" which proposed a comprehensive model for a permanent status Israeli-Palestinian agreement addressing all issues vital to ensuring the end of the conflict (Geneva Initiative, n.d.). Another contribution was the effort aiming to advance peace prospects that

would become known as the “Beilin-Abu Mazen Understanding” (Caplan, 2015, pp. 308–10). Track II also provided ideas that influenced the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty (Kaye, 2007).

I was personally involved in numerous Track II efforts over the years with Israelis, Palestinians, and other Arab countries, in particular Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE where policy documents were collectively formulated to present ideas to decision-makers including on the operationalization of the Arab Peace Initiative, how to break the impasse pertaining to peace efforts, and more recently the day after the October 2023 war on Gaza.

Despite the despair of those who are expected to participate in Track II efforts as a result of successive wars including the October 2023 war, these efforts will still be needed to contribute to any future endeavors towards peace. Ideas for these efforts may include: (1) Extensive Track II projects addressing elements of the conflict like Jerusalem, refugees, borders, etc. that are known as “the Final Status” issues. These will require updating in light of evolving developments on the ground. (2) Examining how an Israeli and a Palestinian narrative can coexist will be necessary for any sustainable settlement and will be extremely difficult without extensive preparatory Track II efforts. (3) Track II can be useful in examining how the recent normalization agreements between Israel and several Arab countries can become a bridge to advance peace prospects and not a bypass that sidelines peace. (4) Track II will be necessary to advance people-to-people dialogue and to change public opinion to put pressure

on decision-makers to reach peace. (5) Both Palestinian and Israeli youth are frustrated with their respective leaders and are looking for change. Examining how youth can contribute to sustainable peace and their societies should be a priority. (6) There is also a need for reconciliation efforts within both societies and between them.

2.2. The Israeli-Lebanese Conflict

The Israeli-Lebanese conflict can be traced back to the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. Forces were separated through the armistice agreement signed in March 1949 along Lebanon’s borders with Palestine (United Nations Security Council, 1949),⁴ with Israel controlling territory far beyond that allocated to it under the UN Partition Plan. Lebanon did not take part in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war but absorbed a huge wave of Palestinian refugees as a result of the war. Since then, a series of wars and military clashes involving Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, and various militias have taken place and the two countries remain in a state of war. Two recent developments— one positive and one negative— are worth noting—a historic maritime delineation agreement (Blinken, 2022) and escalating and recurring tensions along the blue line (McKernan, 2023) which have deteriorated as a result of the October 2023 war on Gaza.

Track II Efforts and Prospects

The Israeli-Lebanese conflict is one of the most challenging for Track II efforts as the Lebanese laws forbid citizens from communicating with Israelis (Najib, 2015). Track II

⁴ This armistice agreement is not a peace treaty that ended the conflict or identified agreed final borders.

efforts have therefore been extremely limited and were sometimes conducted in separate tracks. Studies and reports are almost non-existent.⁵

One of these efforts, however, provided ideas on how to deal with borders and mutual Israeli-Lebanese security, including landmine and cluster bomb maps not given to Lebanon by Israel, Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, and natural gas reserves in the Mediterranean (much earlier than the agreement mediated by the U.S. in October 2022).

The current state of the conflict is a clear indication that Track II efforts have not made any significant breakthroughs. However, ideas for Track II efforts may include: (1) since both sides believe that war is inevitable (Exum, 2017), Track II effort is necessary to examine de-escalation possibilities including through ensuring the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701 (2006) (United Nations, 2006), (2) examining how Israel and Lebanon can agree on a final border. (3) how the international community can help Lebanon deal with the justified needs of Palestinian refugees more effectively. (4) examining how Palestinian factions in different refugee camps in Lebanon can achieve reconciliation among themselves and with the host community including through third-party mediation.

2.3. The Syrian Conflict

In the context of the Arab revolutions, the uprising against President Assad started in 2011 and escalated into a full-scale civil war between the Syrian government which was

supported by Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah on one hand, and the opposition and rebel groups that were backed by several regional and European powers as well as the U.S. on the other hand. The situation was further complicated by several factors: credible evidence that the regime used chemical weapons, the establishment of ISIS in Syria and Iraq, and the Turkish military operations in Syria. ISIS was decisively weakened but with the abovementioned support, the Syrian president regained control of vast territory from opposition and extremist forces.

Since the war started, more than 6 million people have been killed (SOHR, 2023) and more than 6.9 million are internally displaced and 5.4 million are refugees (UNHCR, 2023), 15.3 million Syrians- over 69 percent of the population- required humanitarian assistance in 2023 (Security Council Report, 2023), yet the regime was readmitted to the Arab League in its last summit that took place in Saudi Arabia in May 2023 (Khalifa and Hiltermann, 2023), in the context of a vague step-for-step formula while demonstrations against the regime reemerged (Ebrahim, 2023). Extensive UN efforts failed to reach a political transition, and there is no agreement on the substantial aspects or even where to resume the Constitutional Committee that is unlikely to resolve Syria's deep divisions. The Russian-backed Astana process, involving Türkiye and Iran held several rounds of negotiations, witnessed deep differences, and has not been able to halt violence.

The status quo in Syria is untenable. Hostilities are intensifying and there is an urgent need for de-escalation and to continue to confront terrorist groups there. Further-

⁵ Except for those sent to the donors regarding Track II projects.

more, the spillover of the October 2023 war on Gaza in Syria had already begun with devastating prospects for the Syrian people. The most likely outcome is a failed state that prolongs the suffering of the Syrian people for years, prevents resolving the refugee crisis, provides fertile ground for extremism, and further destabilizes the neighbors (The Carter Center, 2021), particularly Lebanon and perhaps Jordan.

Track II Efforts and Prospects

Huge efforts have been exerted by civil society and Track II efforts since the start of the conflict with very little progress. More recently, in June 2023, following two years of preparation, 180 Syrian civil society organizations gathered in a platform to seek a political role within formal processes deciding Syria's future. It needs, however, to agree on an approach that resonates with Syrians in a difficult conflict environment where the government still aims to achieve a military solution, as well as to link to formal politics, which is quite difficult especially since the Syrian opposition and civil society have drifted apart instead of joining forces throughout the conflict. With a declining UN role or an Arab effective approach, it remains to be seen whether it would be possible to present realistic proposals that would focus on gradual conflict management steps and reach a concrete framework for a negotiation process on identified milestones that the international community can support (Al-Abdeh and Hauch, 2023).

Ideas for Track II efforts may include: (1) Track II effort to map the interests, challenges, capabilities, and prospects for progress of

the different players is necessary. The objective should be to find ways to put pressure on the Syrian government to demonstrate commitment to achieve progress on the political track. (2) providing ideas for de-escalation including with neighbours. (3) examining how to ensure the continued flow of humanitarian aid to those in need particularly in north-west Syria. (4) ideas to address recent legislation and policy changes that raised concerns over refugees' ability to reclaim property if they voluntarily return. This is an essential requirement to encourage their return. Furthermore, estimates indicate that the Syrian government has detained approximately 130,000 Syrians since 2011 (The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2023). Addressing this issue is also essential for restoring stability and confidence.

2.4. The Conflict Between Greece and Türkiye

In a significant turn of events, Greece and Türkiye signed a friendship agreement and a dozen or more Memoranda of Understandings during President Erdoğan's historic visit to Athens in December 2023 who hailed a new era of friendship with Greece (Smith, 2023). Still, reconciling differences will not be easy. The conflict between the two countries - a frozen conflict with occasional eruptions - is mainly over maritime borders and whether the Greek islands in the Aegean Sea are entitled to an exclusive economic zone (EEZ), and the Cyprus question. Türkiye objects to the EEZ claims of both Greece and Cyprus, arguing that they are trying to exclude Türkiye and the Turkish Cypriots from reaping the benefits of their oil and gas resources, and argues that Greece is using its sovereignty over the islands located a few ki-

lometers south of the Turkish coast to claim huge areas of the Eastern Mediterranean within its EEZ and confine Türkiye to the Bay of Iskenderun (Çıraklı, 2022). Turkish Cypriots argue that they should have a say in managing the island's resources. The policies of the conflicting parties reflect maximalist positions and for years the relations fluctuated reaching a low point a few years ago over the apparent Greek militarization of islands close to Turkish shores (Aljazeera, 2022).

Between 2002 and 2016 Türkiye and Greece held about 60 rounds of exploratory talks to settle their disputes, including maritime borders (International Crisis Group, 2021). These talks were suspended in 2016 and resumed in 2021. The 2021 action-oriented dialogue was based on three pillars of the Greek-Turkish rapprochement: political dialogue, confidence-building measures, and a positive agenda (Dimou, 2023). There were no breakthroughs. However, the recent positive developments should pave the way for upcoming discussions and depart from long-standing tensions. Turkish Defense Minister indicated that Türkiye aims to resolve “problems in the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean in accordance with international law, good neighborly relations and the spirit of alliance (Hürriyet Daily News, 2023).”

Track II Efforts and Prospects

Huge Track II efforts were undertaken in addressing the conflict between Greece and Türkiye. It cannot be claimed that any breakthroughs have been achieved. The Geneva Center for Security Policy (GCSP), for example, has facilitated nine Track II meetings between Greek and Turkish experts since 2020

and reached a common statement urging continued Track I dialogue after openly discussing maritime differences in the Aegean Sea and the East Mediterranean. Swiss-sponsored Track II meetings have turned into an interactive conflict resolution process that developed concepts of sustained dialogue among experts during a period when tensions climaxed between the two countries (Dimou, 2023).

The recent steps from Greece and Türkiye represent a significant breakthrough and Track II can seize the opportunity to complement the anticipated revival of Track I efforts on differences in maritime boundaries, the Cyprus question, and other grievances that divided the two countries over the years.

2.5. The Cyprus Question

“The conflict began in the 1950s, erupted violently with bloodshed at the end of 1963, and culminated in 1974 with the intervention of Greece and later Türkiye that led to the island's current de facto division (Sözen, 1999).” The crisis led to the division of the island between the Greek and the Turkish Cypriots separated by a demilitarized zone supervised by the UN. Tireless efforts were exerted to resolve the conflict over the years. Relations fluctuated and came close to a military confrontation (Kokkinidis, 2022). Peace prospects remain at an impasse, and these prospects continue to be affected by disputes over hydrocarbon exploration and the conflict between Greece and Türkiye described above. Greece and the Greek Cypriot side back a UN reunification approach on the basis of a bi-zonal and bi-communal federation and Türkiye and Turkish Cypriots argue for a

two-state solution.⁶ However, reports indicated that the parties made headway in proposals for cooperation and trust-building (Milián et al., 2022).

Track II Efforts and Prospects

The majority of the pro-peace groups on both sides of the Cyprus question saw the opening of the checkpoints between them as an opportunity for the development of better bi-communal relations in the spirit of furthering trust. The dialogue was advanced, however, unfortunately, no breakthroughs were achieved.

An interesting paper evaluating Cypriot Track II conflict resolution efforts concluded that their approach was primarily supportive of Track I without particularly challenging the framework, content, or methodology of the negotiations, making it difficult to appeal to people who see things differently, and therefore their concerns were not taken into account. This by extension precluded their input. The paper also indicated that the success of some efforts has been limited in influencing those outside the pool of people who are already pro-peace. Finally, it argued that the lack of communication between Track II and Track I or the lack of responsiveness of the latter can be considered one of the most important obstacles facing Track II efforts (Tziarras, 2018).

Ideas for Track II efforts may include: (1) ideas to reach a compromise between an approach based on a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation and a two-state solution. (2) ideas to delink the maritime borders from the overall political settlement of the Cypriot question similar to the success of the Israel-Lebanon maritime border agreement. As far as exploration of hydrocarbons, Turkish Cypriots justifiably claim that the off-shore hydrocarbon resources belong to them as well and that they should be entitled to a fair revenue stream from the commercialization of these resources. The government of the Republic of Cyprus acknowledges this demand but maintains that the revenues allocated to Turkish Cypriots should be kept in an escrow account until a full political settlement. It may be possible to agree to address the maritime borders in the context of a political settlement but to also agree on fair revenue-sharing arrangements in a manner that would not entail a recognition of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus that is only recognized by Türkiye. (3) examining innovative ideas like the proposal to create a virtual trading hub for the East Mediterranean natural gas as well as the electricity generated from it which may encourage stakeholders to advance regional cooperation across the current lines of conflict and promote the shift to green energy through joint energy development and revenue-sharing mechanisms that encourage renewable energy (Tanchum, 2020).

⁶"Efforts to reinvigorate the political process have failed to find common ground for the resumption of talks. The recently elected Greek Cypriot leader Nikos Christodoulides is firmly committed to a settlement based on a bi-communal, bi-zonal federation (BBF) with political equality, as stipulated in previous Security Council resolutions, while Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar insists on a two-state solution based on sovereign equality." (Security Council Report.-Cyprus. Retrieved from: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2023-07/cyprus-12.php>.)

Conclusions and Recommendations

The state of affairs of the conflicts in the Eastern Mediterranean justifiably reflects that both Track I and Track II efforts have rarely led to dramatic policy shifts or the resolution of long-standing conflicts or aspects thereof, but they have played a significant role in shaping the views and attitudes of civilian and military leaders. However, at the same time, recent de-escalation between several Mediterranean countries, as well as between them and countries beyond the basin in addition to reaching the historic Israel-Lebanon maritime border agreement and the Greece Türkiye friendship agreement positively affect the prospects of efforts in both tracks.

At the same time, there is a need to set realistic expectations about what Track II can accomplish. It has to be stressed that Track II should not be expected to aim at resolving a conflict in a comprehensive manner. It can consider aspects of a conflict that can benefit from this approach, which may be limited to how to devise confidence-building measures or the necessary steps to break an impasse, focus on one element or another of the conflict, etc.

For the most part, detailed information about specific Track II initiatives is not publicly available. This includes efforts in which I participated as a result of confidentiality requirements. Except for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the literature about Track II efforts in other conflicts in the East Mediterranean is quite scarce and does not allow for an adequate evaluation of its role in advancing the prospects of peace.

Furthermore, evaluating the impact of Track II diplomacy on conflict resolution is complicated not least because it constitutes one part of a complex web of mediation processes and is impacted by domestic and geopolitical developments (Aboueldahab, 2022). It is equally important to note that Track II efforts can have an extended lifetime and their ideas can be picked up years after the project is terminated. This for example applies to the Geneva Initiative mentioned earlier, and the Jerusalem Old City Initiative which intensively studied the situation in Jerusalem and suggested a special regime for its governance (Bell et al., 2008). This reflects the fact that success in conflict resolution requires a combination of good ideas alongside a host of other aspects including conflict ripeness, party and leadership readiness, and timing. Certain Track II ideas may stand the test of time and can be picked up when the context becomes more conducive to resolution

It is also worth mentioning that not all aspects of the Eastern Mediterranean conflicts can be addressed through Track II diplomacy and there is a need to examine which ones would benefit from a Track II approach and why as well as why this may not be possible and what are the other tools that can be relied on. There are aspects of the situation in Libya, Tunisia, and other conflicts that can be addressed through a national dialogue or other tools and not necessarily through a Track II approach.

It has to be recognized that the relationship between Track II participants and their national leaderships is crucial for their success. Track II participants should recognize that one of their biggest challenges is to navigate

the constraints of the domestic political arena combining access and mutual trust while at the same time maintaining a healthy distance (Clawson, 2003). Furthermore, Track II participants should neither be disconnected from grassroots groups nor other broadly based societal movements and at the same time try to ensure effective relations with decision-makers.

Track II participants should recognize that faulty political and security advice, or suggesting ineffective mechanisms can result in the failure of peacemaking or transition towards peace.

Those organizing Track II efforts should ensure that participants are reflective of the prevailing political landscape since the evolving nature of conflicts, particularly protracted ones, may result in rendering those conducting Track II efforts at one point in time much less influential or even irrelevant at another juncture taking into consideration that interactions in Track II dialogues have, in some cases, led participants to develop views of their adversary that are more rather than less negative.

Donors of Track II efforts should be more attentive to what is suggested by those on the ground, do their utmost to ensure that their focus on their national interest should not be imposed on the path of the Track II efforts that they finance, and consider supporting longer-term projects as any significant influence or impact on policy from such efforts is likely to be in the medium and long-term. It is also important for projects to include publicly released information in order to inspire future Track II participants, researchers, and

academicians to evaluate the influence of Track II efforts on conflict resolution as well as lessons learned for future efforts.

The persisting crucial challenge for Track II and other peacemaking efforts remains the difficulty of mobilizing the greater public to put pressure on leaders to end conflicts. Nevertheless, the advantages of Track II should not be belittled. It remains an important tool that may even have benefits that may not be accounted for in advancing ideas and proposals that can be instrumental in advancing the prospects of peace, particularly at a time when there is a clear consensus that the performance of the official track leaves much to be desired.

Finally, Track II should not be limited to conflict resolution. Several thematic areas of interest to the Middle East, Europe, and the Mediterranean that suffer from polarized positions or a gap in mutual understanding or require a much more enhanced level of cooperation can benefit from Track II efforts including the challenges of irregular migration, confronting extremism and populism, regional security challenges in Europe, in the Middle East, and in the Mediterranean, climate change, energy transition, food security, and dealing with cultural divides.

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The Role of Track II Diplomacy in Conflict Resolution: Potential Applications to the Eastern Mediterranean

Esra DİLEK*

Abstract

Track II Diplomacy, widely referring to initiatives undertaken outside official channels such as official negotiations and official decision-making processes, has been applied as a valuable tool for resolving conflicts and promoting cooperation in different regions around the world. This chapter evaluates the role of Track II Diplomacy in conflict resolution and security cooperation by first assessing its main characteristics, varying structures and aims. The chapter then explores potential applications of Track II to the Eastern Mediterranean region. The Eastern Mediterranean has become a region of controversy in the recent years that have risen after the discovery of sizeable hydrocarbon resources. Tensions related

to the Cyprus issue and adjacent sovereignty claims between Greece and Türkiye in the Aegean Sea constitute perennial issues that underlie the recent tensions. Since 2018, developments in the region about the delimitation of maritime zones and adjacent sovereignty issues have complicated the relations among neighboring countries in the region.

Introduction

Track II Diplomacy, widely referring to initiatives undertaken outside official channels such as official negotiations and official decision-making processes, has been applied as a valuable tool for resolving conflicts and promoting cooperation in different regions

*Assistant Professor Dr. Department of International Relations Kadir Has University Cibali, Kadir Has Cad. 34083 Fatih/Istanbul

around the world. The structure of Track II initiatives varies greatly depending on the aims, context and the needs of such interventions. Track II initiatives may take the form of problem-solving workshops, training sessions, seminars, conferences, policy-oriented dialogue groups, and comparative consultation initiatives depending on their aims, that may vary from transforming relationships among adversaries to developing conflict resolution and policy ideas to be transferred to the official decision-making level. This variety notwithstanding, Track II initiatives are commonly based on the idea that unofficial channels provide valuable platforms for conflict resolution and enhancing cooperation among adversaries. They provide the platform for building networks among different actors/participants and capacity-building for enhancing peaceful cooperation.

Track II initiatives address conflicts at different levels, including the intrastate, the interstate, and the regional level. While intrastate initiatives aim at transforming inter-communal relations within a state, interstate and regional initiatives address inter-communal relations between states and among different states sharing the same region. Regional initiatives are also directed towards enhancing security and cooperation in order to support peace and stability in a region, without necessarily being directed towards an ongoing conflict. One such region that has become a locus of tension is the Eastern Mediterranean. Since 2018, developments in the Eastern Mediterranean about the delimitation of maritime zones and adjacent sovereignty claims have complicated the relations among neighboring countries, especially between Greece, Cyprus, and Türkiye, but also Egypt,

Israel, Lebanon, and Libya. In tandem with the ongoing Cyprus dispute, the Eastern Mediterranean has increasingly become a region that presents risks for open confrontation. Considering these developments, exploring different pathways for addressing potential and existing conflicts in the region is of primary importance. Accordingly, the chapter will assess how Track II Diplomacy may help address such tensions with a focus on the Greco-Turkish rivalries in the region.

The chapter proceeds in three parts. First, the chapter provides a brief overview of different types of Track II initiatives that have been developed in the last few decades. This overview helps assess the structure and aims of different types of second track initiatives and their strength and limitations as a tool for conflict resolution. The second part of the chapter provides a brief assessment of applications of Track II in different cases across the world and across different levels. In the third part, the chapter explores potential applications of Track II to Eastern Mediterranean, a region that has been marred by tensions related to sovereignty disputes that have been integrated to perennial issues, including the Cyprus conflict, bilateral disputes between Greece in Türkiye, the conflict situation in Libya and Syria, and more recently, the escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in 2023.

1. Track II Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution

In its broadest sense, Track II Diplomacy refers to interactions among individuals or groups that take place outside of an official negotiation process that aim at building relationships, changing perceptions and producing new ideas for conflict resolution. As

a term, Track II Diplomacy was first used in 1981 by Joseph Montville, an American foreign service officer. Montville defined Track II as *“unofficial, informal interaction between members of adversarial groups or nations with the goals of developing strategies, influencing public opinion, and organizing human and material resources in ways that might help resolve the conflict”* (cited in Jones 2015). Long before Montville’s use of the term, Track II initiatives were applied by scholars-practitioners during the 1960s and 1970s as unofficial initiatives for conflict resolution in different cases around the world, including the intercommunal dispute in Cyprus, border disputes between Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia, and regional conflicts such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, among others (Jones 2015).

There is a plethora of Track II intervention types reflected in the variety of the terms used. Some variations include controlled communication (Burton 1969), Interactive Conflict Resolution (ICR) (Fisher 2009), interactive problem-solving workshops (Kelman 2006), third-party consultation (Fisher and Keashly 1991), and informal mediation (Bercovitch 2011). Initiatives directed towards unofficial interactions have been formed based on various philosophical standpoints commonly focusing on how contact might have a positive impact on conflict resolution by transforming relationships and creating new ideas. These initiatives generally involve influential representatives from the conflict communities participating in workshops in unofficial capacity along with impartial third parties who provide guidance, professional skills and knowledge. Track II Diplomacy initiatives in the form of prob-

lem-solving workshops have been regarded as a valuable conflict resolution tool especially for conflicts that have proven hard to solve, namely identity-based intractable conflicts such as the conflict in Cyprus and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The variety in Track II Diplomacy is also reflected in the structure and aims of Track II initiatives. Regarding structure and participants, one main distinction is made between Track I-and-a-half, Track II and Track Three diplomacy. Track I-and-a-half diplomacy includes participants in unofficial capacity such as active and retired officials, who retain ties with the official level (Jones 2015). Such initiatives are regarded as being particularly important for transferring ideas developed outside of the official level to that level. This is achieved through the direct ties that participants retain with the official leadership. One type of Track I-and-a-half diplomacy is ‘comparative consultation’, that involves the facilitated, in-person communication of experiences in peacemaking by actors based in one conflict/peace arena to actors based in another through study trips (Mitchell 2021, Dilek 2021), frequently involving participants from the decision-making level in unofficial capacity. Track II Diplomacy involves middle-level participants such as civil society leaders, influential citizens, and conflict resolution experts. Middle-level participants retain ties both with the official decision-making level and the grassroots level and therefore, they are important for transferring ideas to both levels. Participants to Track Three diplomacy come from the grassroots level and include ‘people-to-people’ activities (Chigas 2007). Such activities aim at supporting wider societal change for conflict

resolution. With regards to aims, Agha et al. distinguish between 'soft' and 'hard' Track II initiatives. Soft Track II initiatives aim at improving relationships among participants while hard Track II initiatives seek to achieve a wider breakthrough in conflict resolution efforts (Agha et al. 2003).

Nadim Rouhana identifies three major components of ICR as a Track II Diplomacy tool (Rouhana 2000). The first component is about the activities *within* such workshops. Track II problem-solving workshops include a variety of activities such as training in conflict resolution and negotiation techniques, mutual examination of political needs, and brainstorming about new political ideas and new solutions (Rouhana 2000). The second component is about the *micro-objectives* of such workshops, referring to changes that are sought at the micro-level, i.e., at the level of workshop participants. Here some objectives include improving interpersonal relationships, changing the enemy image, reducing mutual stereotypes, reaching at mutual understanding of political ideas, and involving potential future leaders in ICR (Rouhana 2000). Finally, the workshops have certain *macro-objectives*, referring to impact at the macro level. Such objectives include changing societal beliefs about the adversary, creating increasing trust between parties and transforming their relationships, and disseminating new ideas to the public (Rouhana 2000). Macro objectives take a longer time to achieve and it is harder to discern the links between Track II initiatives and such macro-level change.

It should be underlined that Track II Diplomacy is not regarded as a substitute to

official negotiations (Montville 2006). As Rouhana notes, "*it is naïve and misleading to consider ICR as an alternative to the existing diplomatic and other means of conflict resolution*" (2000, 294). Track II interventions are best conceived as activities that can be used in support of and parallel to official diplomatic efforts. Such support can take the form of *outcome-focused* and *process-focused* initiatives (Çuhadar and Dayton 2012), that are part of micro and macro objectives of such interventions respectively. Outcome-focused initiatives aim at transferring their impact to the official decision-making and/or the public level. This impact is harder to achieve as it is highly dependent on the general conflict context. Process-focused initiatives, on the other hand, focus on transforming relationships among participants and, by extension, among groups in the society at large. As such, assessing the 'success' of Track II initiatives depends on whether we adopt a process-focused or an outcome-focused view and whether we focus at the micro or the macro levels.

2. Some Applications of Track II Conflict Resolution

Track II conflict resolution has been applied to conflict cases around the world at different levels and with varying purposes. One of the most well-known applications of Track II conflict resolution is the Israeli-Palestinian problem-solving workshops. Track II initiatives directed towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had been developed since 1980s, bringing together a large number of Israelis and Palestinians including civil society representatives, intellectuals, academics, and the youth (Kelman 1995). Such initiatives were regarded as being important in the process

leading to the start of the official peace negotiations during the early 1990s and also in the aftermath of the failure of the Oslo Peace Accords in 1993 (Çuhadar and Dayton 2012). Çuhadar and Dayton note that during the Oslo peace process more Track II initiatives were undertaken by elite/professional participants while after the failure of the official process more grassroots initiatives were organized, revealing the extent at which such initiatives are affected by the general context. The authors also find that most of the grassroots initiatives were relationship-focused while elite/professional initiatives were outcome-focused showing how the aims of such initiatives depend on their structure.

The Cyprus issue constitutes another conflict case where Track II initiatives have been applied extensively since the 1960s. Track II conflict resolution in Cyprus has mainly taken the form of ICR workshops bringing together representatives from the Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities with the aim of transforming relations and developing new ideas for conflict resolution. Such initiatives have been organized with varying durations since the conflict escalated in the 1960s. Fisher notes that at least twelve different unofficial interventions in the format of ICR workshops, training sessions, problem-solving workshops were organized from mid-1960s until 2000 (Fisher 2001). Some examples include Benjamin Broome's ICR workshops in 1994-1995 aiming at identifying and structuring obstacles to peacebuilding efforts in Cyprus, developing a vision statement for peacebuilding efforts, identifying and structuring options for peacebuilding activities (Broome 1997); John Fisher's conflict analysis workshops during 1990-91

that brought together influential Turkish and Greek Cypriots as a consultation project (Fisher 2001); Louise Diamond's trainings during 1991-1994 in the format of public lectures, short training sessions, and bicomunal training workshops as a forum for learning, capacity-building, dialogue, community-building, modeling of principles and practices taught, and for culture change (Diamond 1997). The two projects, Fisher's consultation and Diamond's training project, presented several interfaces: joint consultation and support, overlapping participants and activities, co-staffing, joint work in institutionalization (Diamond and Fisher 1995)

Besides being used as a tool for conflict resolution, Track II initiatives have also been applied for addressing security issues affecting a larger region (Kaye 2005) without necessarily addressing a conflict situation. Regional security-oriented Track II interventions share certain characteristics that are parallel to second track conflict resolution. Regional security-related dialogues are central in socialization of participating elites, filtering of externally-generated policy ideas to the local environment, and transmission to official policy (Kaye 2005). Such initiatives have also been at the forefront of developing and maintaining an 'epistemic community', referring to a community of scholars and officials having expertise over security-related issues and arms control concepts (Jones 2015). Such security-oriented regional Track II initiatives have a long history in the Middle East and South Asia. In the Middle East, besides Track II initiatives organized for addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, initiatives involving other regional actors such as Egypt and Jordan have also been the case (Kaye

2005). Regarding Southeast Asia, Track II has been actively applied to develop cooperative security practices supporting the work of the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) as a regional organization.

Track II dialogues at the regional level are amenable to problems that are common to different types of Track II initiatives (Kaye 2005). Regarding the participating elites, one problem is including the 'wrong' type of people as participants or including the 'right' type of people with little influence on the official process or lacking legitimacy in the domestic context. A second limit is related to the domestic context. In regions that have experienced conflict and violence over an extended period of time, cooperative security ideas are unlikely to be popular and therefore might be difficult to organize, especially with the knowledge of the public (Kaye 2005). This is why Track II initiatives are generally designed as private meetings. Public exposure is regarded as risky for the success of such initiatives. However, the risks related to publicity also affect such initiatives' impact at official processes and limit their influence on security policy. Thirdly, the larger regional environment may also limit the effectiveness of Track II initiatives. In regional environments marked by high tensions and violence, the transmission of cooperative security ideas would remain limited. Conversely, regional environments where official negotiations progress, Track II initiatives have greater positive impact in the development of cooperative security between conflicting parties.

3. Possible Applications of Track II Conflict Resolution in the Eastern Mediterranean

Over the past decade, the Eastern Mediterranean region has become an area of tension in relation to hydrocarbon resource search activities, which have accelerated since the mid-2010s. The discovery of large natural fields within the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of Israel, the RoC, and Egypt have revealed that these resources have the potential to fulfill European countries' energy security needs, which have become especially prominent since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. However, the overlapping EEZ claims of Türkiye, Greece, Republic of Cyprus (RoC), Egypt, and Libya have increased tensions with regard to sovereignty claims and sea borders. During this period, the link between resource exploration and the Cyprus conflict has become increasingly prevalent. As subsequent developments have revealed, the acceleration of hydrocarbon research activities and related EEZ disputes have contributed to the *regionalization* of the Cyprus conflict, meaning that the conflict has been integrated into countries' regional agendas, their competition for resources, and competitive alliance-building.

Overlapping claims over EEZ in the region date back to the early 2000s. After initial discoveries of hydrocarbon resources in the early 2000s, the RoC signed EEZ agreements with Egypt in 2003, Lebanon in 2007, and Israel in 2010. In response, Türkiye signed a delimitation agreement with Northern Cyprus (self-declared Turkish Republic of North Cyprus - TRNC) in 2011. Such disagreements resurfaced after the discovery of sizeable resources in the second half of

2010s. In 2019, the EastMed Gas Forum was established as a regional cooperation initiative involving Greece, RoC, Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Israel, France, and Italy, notably excluding Türkiye. As a response to this exclusive regional initiative, Türkiye signed EEZ delimitation treaties with the Government of National Accord (GNA) in Libya in 2019 and in 2022. In response, Greece signed a delimitation treaty with Egypt in 2020. This resulted in overlapping EEZ areas among those countries, along with the EEZ disputes between Türkiye and the RoC.

The tensions among Greece, Türkiye, the RoC and TRNC revolve around two main issues: competing EEZ delimitation agreements and the non-recognized status of the TRNC that complicates claims over sovereignty and energy wealth in the region. Türkiye maintains that Northern Cyprus has the right to take a share from the hydrocarbon wealth in the region and categorically rejects the RoC's drilling activities until a final agreement is reached regarding the Cyprus conflict. Türkiye further maintains that the TRNC holds collective and indivisible ownership of these resources, pointing to Turkish Cypriots' rights to receive their share of the riches around the island.

Since 2017, drilling activities in the region have been going on both in contested and non-contested areas. In contested areas, such activities bear the risk of escalating existing bilateral tensions. Tensions in the region peaked in August 2020 after a minor collision took place between a Turkish warship escorting the survey vessel and a Greek frigate. The collision led to the most severe crisis between Greece and Türkiye since the Kar-

dak/Imia crisis that took place in 1996 over sovereignty disputes in the Aegean Sea. The tension was controlled only after Germany's diplomatic intervention after which Türkiye and Greece decided to restart exploratory talks for their bilateral disputes that had been ceased since 2016.

Although Cyprus is not currently facing conflict escalation in terms of inter-communal tensions, the prospects for resolution remain very low. Multiple efforts for solving the conflict since the last several decades, including the Annan Peace Process (2002-2004) and the Geneva Peace Negotiations (2015-2017), failed due to disagreements over basic issues such as security guarantees and power-sharing arrangements between the two Cypriot communities. The failure of the Geneva negotiations in 2017 marked a turning point on conflict resolution efforts. Since then, Türkiye has expressed preference for a 'two state' solution to the conflict, rejecting UN-led negotiations for the establishment of a bi-zonal, bi-communal federal state. The current situation regarding the Cyprus conflict is not particularly encouraging for a negotiated solution and therefore, prospects for cooperation on conflict resolution remain low.

On the other hand, regional developments are also not particularly encouraging. The Syrian civil war that started in 2011 has not been resolved. The situation in Libya has not showed prospects for amelioration after the ceasefire agreement signed in 2020 and political stability remains volatile. Finally, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict escalation since October 2023 is expected to have regional repercussions, affecting Egypt and Jordan

among other states in the region. Considering the current context, the development of diplomatic dialogue processes for the management and eventual resolution of regional tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean seem imperative. Track II initiatives at the regional level are supportive of official dialogue and negotiations as they support the formation of a network of experts, policy-makers, and civil society actors, and the formation of innovative ideas for conflict resolution and enhancing dialogue and cooperation.

An example of such initiative, is the Eastern Mediterranean Initiative proposed by the Geneva Center for Security Policy in Switzerland. The initiative seeks to develop cooperation in the region not only in the field of energy but also in other fields including trade, tourism, agriculture, disaster relief, and defense (Eastern Mediterranean Initiative 2023). With the aim of overcoming the limitations of previous regional initiatives in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Eastern Mediterranean Initiative proposed the establishment of the Eastern Mediterranean Conference for Cooperation (EMCC) in 2023. The EMCC is planned as a multilateral platform that would provide a foundation for confidence-building to prevent, mitigate and hopefully resolve conflicts between participating states (Eastern Mediterranean Initiative 2023). The EMCC derives its foundational principles from the United Nations (UN) Charter, “*namely the peaceful resolution of disputes, respect for international law, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, non-interference in the domestic affairs of states, and common (indivisible) security and enhanced prosperity for all states*” (Eastern Mediterranean Initiative 2023, 10).

Another Track II initiative directed towards enhancing cooperation in the Mediterranean is Diplomeds- The Council for Mediterranean Diplomacy (Diplomeds 2024). Diplomeds is a policy group working to improve relations between countries in the Mediterranean region by promoting cooperation, conflict resolution, and peace. Diplomeds is currently working on several policy topics including leveraging the Israel-Lebanon maritime deal, supporting Egypt-Türkiye rapprochement, and launching Morocco-Algeria dialogue, among others. The initiative is supported by a network of experts from the fields of diplomacy, conflict resolution, civil society, and regional cooperation. As a Track II initiative, Diplomeds convenes and facilitates policy dialogues and back-channel talks, and offers consultancy and policy formulation support to governments and institutions working in the region (Diplomeds 2024).

Such regional cooperation initiatives that are open to the participation of all regional states are key for enhancing the prospects of cooperation. Periods of crises and escalation, such as the 2020 crisis between Greece and Türkiye, call for mechanisms outside of the official level to support de-escalation. For example, the August 2020 crisis between Greece and Türkiye, which was controlled after diplomatic intervention by Germany, the two countries decided to rely upon confidence building measures and the exploratory talks on bilateral issues that had been continuing since early 2000s. These talks offered the needed unofficial network and cooperation mechanism for easing the tension and continuing cooperation. The formation of such a mechanism at the regional level would

support de-escalation processes both at the regional and bilateral levels.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of Track II Diplomacy as a conflict resolution tool and assessed its applicability to the Eastern Mediterranean in view of recent geopolitical developments and competition over resources. Track II initiatives have long been applied in different conflict cases with the aim of supporting intercommunal dialogue and conflict resolution. Track II initiatives have also been used in regional security as a tool to enhance cooperation and community-building at the regional level. Track II diplomatic initiatives present a great variety in terms of structure, participants, and purpose. Taking place outside of the official level, Track II initiatives hold great potential for transforming relationships among adversaries and developing new ideas for conflict resolution, outside of the official positions of conflict parties. Also, Track II initiatives provide a platform for capacity building in the form of training and sharing of expertise and provide a space for building networks among different actors, including civil society, intellectuals, experts, policy-makers, academics, and community leaders. As such, Track II Diplomacy offers a variety of tools for conflict resolution and security cooperation at different levels.

For the Eastern Mediterranean, a Track II process at the regional level will be crucial for fostering trust and cooperation among countries. Regional cooperation that excludes main littoral states, such as the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) that excludes Türkiye and Libya, fall short of providing the needed platform for regional cooperation. A

broad platform involving all regional states is essential for developing regional security cooperation and deescalating tensions. Also, a broad platform that allowing for issue-based cooperation such as trade, tourism, energy, migration management, and disaster relief would be effective in fostering multilevel cooperation

Overall, Track II Diplomacy provides the general framework upon which different initiatives may be established depending on the needs and available context. As Kaye (2001) notes, distinguishing between process and outcome helps better understand the value of Track II. A focus on outcome places emphasis on the question of whether and to what extent such initiatives affect Track I processes. Such impact generally remains limited. The value of Track II is better placed if we focus on the process of second track diplomacy as a means for building cooperative relationships that support peacemaking efforts. Considering growing interlinkages between domestic, interstate, and regional levels, regional Track II Diplomacy is becoming all the more important for peace and stability.

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Track II Diplomacy and the Northern Ireland Peace Process: A Potential Model for the Cyprus Problem

Yusuf ERTUĞRAL* & Nisa MAMMADOVA**

Abstract

The Cyprus Problem involves a complex conflict arising from decades of ethnic and political divisions, emphasizing the need for regional stability. The search for different approaches and diplomatic models to resolve this conflict emphasizes the need for regional stability. This paper aims to explore how the Track II Diplomacy approach to the Cyprus Problem can be integrated with lessons learnt from the Northern Ireland Peace Process. Similar to the ethnic and political underpinnings of the Cyprus Conflict, the Northern Ireland Peace Process has emerged as a result of conflicts based on ethnic and religious differences throughout history. However, the Northern Ireland experience offers valuable

lessons on how Track II Diplomacy can be effective in conflict resolution. Track II Diplomacy efforts in Northern Ireland, involving civil society leaders, academics and experts, have contributed significantly to conflict reduction and ultimately peace. In this chapter, we discuss the key elements of the Track II Diplomacy approach to the Cyprus Problem and analyse how this approach has been applied in the Northern Ireland Peace Process. The influence of civil society leaders and experts in the Northern Ireland settlement process suggests that they can play a similar role in the resolution of the Cyprus Problem. An important lesson from Northern Ireland is how Track II Diplomacy can support official diplomacy. Civil society leaders and academics

*EUROPolitika Journal Editor, yusuf@europolitika.com

**EUROPolitika Journal Editor, nisa@europolitika.com

in Northern Ireland have sought a solution outside of formal negotiations and have built trust between the parties. This approach could encourage increased trust between communities in Cyprus and a franker dialogue between the parties involved. In conclusion, this paper explores how the Track II Diplomacy approach to the Cyprus Problem can be integrated with lessons learnt from the Northern Ireland Peace Process. The lessons from Northern Ireland underline the critical role that civil society leaders and experts can play in conflict resolution. Furthermore, we aim to show how valuable learning and experience sharing can be in resolving similar conflicts.

Introduction

Unlike many international disputes, the Cyprus Problem is particularly complex because of its ethnic and political origins. It is a deep-rooted dispute that has persisted for more than half a century and remains unresolved despite numerous diplomatic initiatives. The search for a solution is vital not only for the future of the island, but also for the overall stability of the Eastern Mediterranean. In this context, the example of the Northern Ireland Peace Process offers a promising model for ending another conflict characterised by similar ethnic and political divisions.

After many years of violent conflict that claimed many lives, Northern Ireland has embarked on a comprehensive process of dialogue and reconciliation involving different sectors of society. Track II Diplomacy is an often overlooked aspect of this process, but has played a critical role in building peace. Civil society leaders, academics and conflict resolution experts have contributed to building public trust and understanding outside

of formal negotiations. This was decisive in breaking down the walls of mistrust that existed between the conflicting parties and laying the foundations for a lasting peace.

In Cyprus, similar ethnic lines and political divisions complicate the search for a solution and present the challenges of building trust between the parties. However, the Northern Ireland experience has shown how Track II Diplomacy can complement and even strengthen formal negotiations through the potential impact of civil society on conflict resolution. In the Cyprus Conflict, this approach can increase trust between the parties and encourage a franker dialogue. Therefore, an in-depth examination of the lessons learnt from Northern Ireland and the applicability of Track II Diplomacy to reach a settlement in the Cyprus Conflict will be the main focus of this book chapter.

In this chapter we will provide an in-depth analysis of the Track II Diplomacy approach to resolving the Cyprus Conflict and draw parallels and lessons from the successful Northern Ireland Peace Process. The main objective of this analysis is to explore how the experiences and strategies used in Northern Ireland can be integrated into efforts to resolve the Cyprus conflict.

The first part of the analysis will provide a detailed historical overview, highlighting the ethnic and political origins of both conflicts. This section will provide readers with a comprehensive understanding of the complexities and similarities between these two protracted conflicts.

The second part will focus on Track II Diplo-

macy and examine the role and effectiveness of this approach in conflict resolution. The importance of this approach in the Northern Ireland Peace Process will be emphasised, with particular emphasis on the involvement of civil society leaders, academics and experts.

The third part will explore how Track II Diplomacy can be applied to the Cyprus Problem. Drawing lessons from Northern Ireland, it proposes strategies to promote confidence building between the different communities and create genuine dialogue between the conflicting parties.

The final section of the chapter discusses how Track II Diplomacy can complement official diplomatic efforts, as seen in the Northern Ireland experience. It is suggested how civil society leaders and academics in Cyprus can engage in the search for a settlement outside the official negotiations.

1. Origins and Complexities of Conflicts

1.1. A Brief Historical Overview of the Cyprus Problem

Cyprus has long been a region of strategic importance due to its rich underground resources and its location in the Eastern Mediterranean and has attracted international attention throughout its history (Arıcıoğlu, 2023, p. 107). Annexed by the Ottoman Empire in 1570, Cyprus came under British control in the late 19th century due to its proximity to the Suez Canal and became a Royal Colony in 1925 (Clark, 2020, p. 26- 29).

After the First World War, while the Greek Cypriot majority of the island pursued Enosis (union with Greece), the Turkish Cypriot minority's goal of Taksim (partition) clashed with the British administration (Özçelik, 2020, p. 26). This situation resulted in inter-communal violence in 1963 and a Greek-backed coup in 1974, followed by Türkiye's intervention and the division of the island (International Crisis Group, 2023).

Efforts to reconcile the two communities, including the 1977 and 1979 high-level agreements, were undermined by mutual mistrust and divergent objectives. The Greek Cypriot unwillingness to share power with Turkish Cypriots led to the Greek Cypriot side's unilateral declaration of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) in 1983, which was not recognised internationally except by Türkiye (Sözen, 2002, p. 8).

The 2004 Annan Plan, a (United Nations) UN-led initiative, proposed a bicomunal federation but was rejected by Greek Cypriots and accepted by Turkish Cypriots. In 2004, Greek Cypriots' accession to the EU increased Turkish Cypriots' sense of injustice (BBC, 2004; Sözen, 2007, p. 16).

During the 2015-2017 period, the negotiations in Crans Montana aimed at reconciling the Cyprus problem faced significant obstacles, particularly due to disagreements over power-sharing and security guarantees. In 2023, at the "*Track II Diplomacy*" panel organised in Kyrenia, TRNC (as part of a pilot project of the EUROPolitika academy magazine), Andreas Mavroyiannis, a key figure in the negotiations, emphasised the importance of avoiding the imposition of preconditions

for negotiations, as such practices only serve to impede progress. Mavroyiannis' experience shed light on the complexity of the Cyprus issue and underlined the need for a cooperative approach in the Eastern Mediterranean context to ensure regional stability.

“The Cyprus negotiations have been a long and complex process. Compared to past attempts, the UN has attempted to mould elements of a settlement, and Boutros-Ghali and the Annan Plan offered comprehensive approaches. However, these efforts have been criticised as outsider solutions. Recent efforts, based on the 2014 leaders' statement, have been characterised by free-flowing negotiations in which every issue is on the table. For the first time, issues such as land and property were addressed, and in 2017, security issues were discussed. All these issues were combined in a package, but a structure was created in which the whole package collapsed in case of failure. Since 2017, efforts to put the process back on track have been ongoing; the 2019 meeting in Berlin was an important step in this regard. With the elections postponed due to COVID and the election of Tatar, demands outside the UN parameters, such as a two-state solution, have come to the fore. However, the main problem is that such positions are presented as preconditions for starting negotiations. Real negotiation requires the parties to be able to put their positions on the table without prejudice. Our responsibilities in the Eastern Mediterranean and the overall approach to

be taken are also important. Cooperation is needed to achieve the desired results and it is unreasonable to expect results to be reached before we start cooperating (Mavroyiannis, 2023, as cited in Kutman and Ertuğral, 2023, pp. 14-15).”

2. The Peaceful Environment Created by the Agreement

There has been a significant reduction in violence in Northern Ireland since the signature of the Agreement. For example:

- Various paramilitary groups declared a ceasefire and entered a process of disarmament.
- The parliamentary structure in Northern Ireland is based on power-sharing between Catholics and Protestants.
- Various civil society initiatives for social reconciliation were supported.

In order to maintain this peace, co-operation between the UK and Ireland has increased and support from international actors such as the US has continued. However, the process is not without its challenges; physical separations such as peace walls and political polarisation are still persistent problems (Ertuğral, 2024a).

The Good Friday Agreement ended a dark period in Northern Ireland's history and opened the door to a new beginning, but sustaining this beginning requires a sustained effort (Ertuğral, 2024a).

3. Analysing Similarities and Differences

The conflicts in Northern Ireland and Cyprus share some similar dynamics, albeit stemming from different historical and geographical circumstances. At the same time, each conflict has its own characteristics and differences. This section attempts to clarify these commonalities and differences through a comparative analysis of the conflicts in the two regions so far and draws the following conclusions.

3.1. Common Challenges

The conflicts in Northern Ireland and Cyprus, though distinct in character, share several common challenges rooted in ethnic and nationalist strife. At the heart of the tensions in both regions lies the struggle for ethnic and national belonging — between Irish nationalists and pro-British Unionists in Northern Ireland, and between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots in Cyprus. These disputes are not recent; they are grounded in centuries of history that continue to influence the social fabric and identity of their societies.

In both regions, society is not only divided geographically but also socially, with stark lines drawn between communities holding fast to sectarian and ethnic identities. This division is compounded by political and diplomatic struggles that play out both within international arenas and within domestic politics, significantly shaping the course of these conflicts.

The intractable nature of these conflicts, coupled with the absence of a comprehensive resolution, has left a legacy of tension and

uncertainty that continues to affect the daily lives of people in both regions. Yet, while there are similarities, the differences are just as pronounced. In Northern Ireland, religious identities—Protestant and Catholic—take precedence in shaping the conflict, while in Cyprus, it is ethnic and national identities that are mainly at play.

The roles of external states also vary. Cyprus's conflict has been deeply influenced by the guarantor states—Greece, Türkiye, and the United Kingdom—while in Northern Ireland, the dynamics between the Republic of Ireland and the UK are more central. Moreover, the geopolitical importance of Cyprus in the Mediterranean contrasts with the more isolated position of Northern Ireland in the British Isles.

The paths following colonialism and the pursuit of independence further diverge. Cyprus, after gaining independence in the mid-20th century, was partitioned following the intervention in 1974. Northern Ireland, however, remained part of the UK following Irish independence, a decision that continues to resonate with ongoing tensions.

The expression of conflict through violence has varied between the two regions, with Northern Ireland witnessing terrorist acts and paramilitary violence, and Cyprus experiencing intermittent yet severe violence, including mass killings and ethnic cleansing.

Efforts to forge peace have also taken different trajectories. Northern Ireland saw the establishment of a formal peace process with the Belfast Agreement of 1998, commonly known as the Good Friday Agreement.

In Cyprus, despite various proposed peace plans, a lasting resolution for the reunification of the island remains elusive.

Understanding these factors is essential for grasping the specific dynamics of the conflicts in Northern Ireland and Cyprus, and such comparisons can illuminate the varied approaches and potential solutions to these complex problems.

4. Alternative Methods of Diplomacy: The Role of Track II in Conflict Resolution

The Track II Diplomacy model is based on the idea that sharing comparative and direct experiences can improve peacebuilding capabilities in other regions. This Track II Diplomacy model, known as comparative consultation, aims to bring successful outcomes into formal negotiation processes and create a wider sphere of influence for conflict resolution (Dilek, 2021, p. 294).

Track II Diplomacy is designed as informal interactions and aims to build relationships, change perceptions and generate new ideas for conflict resolution (Allen and Sharp, 2017). Track II Diplomacy, which was introduced by Montville (1981) and refers to dialogue processes that take place outside of formal negotiations in conflict resolution, emphasizes that contacts can have a positive impact on conflict resolution by transforming relationships and creating new ideas. This approach ranges from interactive conflict resolution (Fisher, 1997) to intermediate active problem-solving workshops (Azar, 1990; Kelman, 2006) and third-party counselling (Fisher and Keashly, 1991).

Track II Diplomacy complements formal diplomacy by providing opportunities for dialogue and understanding between actors with different views. According to Davies and Kaufman (2003), it can bring new insights and ideas to the official process, soften enemy perceptions and build public support and political will for peace. These initiatives differ from formal diplomacy in that they do not focus on a non-binding, negotiated settlement; instead, they focus on the participants' general relationships and experiences with the conflict (Saunders, 2000).

Participants are politically influential and are selected with both official influence and broader societal influence in mind (Pearson D'estrée, 2009). Track II initiatives are organised and facilitated by academic-practitioners knowledgeable about international conflict and regional dynamics (Kelman, 1996). NGOs are taking an increasingly active role in this process (Chigas, 2014).

The structures and objectives of Track II initiatives vary and there is a distinction between Track One-and-a-half, Track II and Track III diplomacy. While they differ in terms of the profile of participants and main objectives, Track One-and-a-half enables the involvement of formal political actors in an informal capacity and facilitates the transfer of results to formal negotiations (Nan, 2005).

Comparative consultation is a type of Track II intervention based on the sharing of expertise and comparative peacemaking experiences. This model, proposed by Mitchell (2020a), focuses on comparative analysis of peace process experiences and involves both international and local experts.

The impact of Track II initiatives is disseminated through a process called “*transfer*”; this transfer towards political decision-making, public opinion and actual negotiators (Fisher, 2005) aims to change confrontational perspectives and promote mutual understanding in political ideas (Rouhana, 2000).

Track II Diplomacy has played an important role in Northern Ireland as an effective means of conflict resolution through informal interactions. It is designed to foster communication and understanding between actors with different views and aims to add new insights and ideas in a complementary manner to formal diplomacy (Davies and Kaufman, 2003; Allen and Sharp, 2017). In Northern Ireland in particular, the inclusion of groups excluded from negotiations and debates on how and whether actors other than the primary parties to the conflict, such as civil society, could be engaged (Davidson and Montville, 1981), formed the basis of Track II initiatives.

These informal processes range from interactive conflict resolution (Fisher, 1997) to intermediate active problem-solving workshops (Azar, 1990; Kelman, 2006) and third-party counseling (Fisher and Keashly, 1991). Participants are often selected as politically influential individuals and these initiatives are organised by academic-practitioners experienced in international conflict and regional dynamics (Kelman, 1996).

In Northern Ireland, there is a common view that all major political factions in negotiations should be included, and this ensures that the concerns of all parties are addressed for a more inclusive and successful process (Blaydes and De Maio, 2010). Views that emphasise continuity in negotiations and resilience despite the

risks and uncertainties that may arise throughout the negotiation process are supported by examples from the peace negotiation processes in Northern Ireland and South Africa (Dilek, 2021).

In particular, the peace process in Northern Ireland is frequently referred to in the process of “*transfer*” to political decision-making mechanisms, the public and the actual negotiators (Fisher, 2005). This transfer process aims to change confrontational perspectives and promote mutual understanding in political ideas (Rouhana, 2000). The Northern Ireland case provides a guiding example for Track II initiatives in other conflict regions, and the lessons learnt from this process have contributed widely to conflict resolution work.

5. The Role of Track II Diplomacy in Northern Ireland

Track II Diplomacy in Northern Ireland played an important role in the peace process during the Troubles. It involved informal, informal channels of communication and negotiation between various parties, including government officials, community leaders and other stakeholders. This form of diplomacy helped facilitate dialogue, build trust and find common ground between the conflicting parties, ultimately contributing to the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.⁷

⁷ References to key academic papers on the Role of Track II Diplomacy and the impact of Civil Society Organisations in Northern Ireland: Arthur P. (1990). Negotiating the Northern Ireland Question: Track One or Track Two Diplomacy? *Government and Opposition*, 25(4), 403-418. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.1990.tb00393.x> Allen, N., & Sharp, T. (2017). The Peace Process: A New Evaluation Framework for Track II Diplomacy. *International Negotiation*, 22(1), 92-122. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718069-12341349> Thiessen, C., Byrne, S., Skarlato, O., & Tennent, P. (2010). Civil Society Leaders and Northern Ireland's Peace Process: Hopes and Fears for the Future. *Humanity & Society*, 34(1), 39-63. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016059761003400103>

Track II Diplomacy in Northern Ireland included initiatives such as peace conferences, workshops and back-channel negotiations, often led by civil society organisations and influential individuals. These efforts provided a platform for open and honest debate, allowing creative solutions to be explored and the relationships necessary for the peace process to be built (Thiessen et al., 2010).

5.1. The Importance of Civil Action in Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland has certainly witnessed this grassroots civil society movement (Byrne, 2001). Thousands of internationally funded civil society groups ensured that the peace process in Northern Ireland was not shaped solely by elite actors (Cochrane, 2006). Civil society groups such as NGOs have demonstrated their ability to influence the political climate in post-violence areas (Ahmed and Potter, 2006; Scholms, 2003).

The formation of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) in 1967 channelled and organised widespread Catholic Nationalist discontent with discriminatory housing and employment policy, Protestant paramilitary activity, the Special Powers Act and perceived gerrymandering in key constituencies. The Northern Ireland civil rights movement was inspired by similar movements in India and the USA under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, and was propagated in the 1960s (as a result of educational grants from the Lord Butler Education Act) by the Catholic Nationalist professional class who were not prepared to accept the status quo and pushed for radical change (Farrell, 1976).

The NICRA marches allowed Nationalist civil society to escalate the conflict and raise awareness of their plight on the world stage. For example, on 5 October 1968 the NICRA march was beaten and batoned by the RUC - several people were injured. Film footage of the beating of non-violent marchers caused international outrage and criticism. More significantly, on 30 January 1972, an anti-internationalist march organised by NICRA ended with thirteen unarmed, Catholic, male demonstrators shot dead by British Army paratroopers. These “*Bloody Sunday*” killings served to effectively bring NICRA’s activities to an end and helped to grow the ranks of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA), the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and the Ulster Defence Association (UDA), pushing the “*Troubles*” onto a significantly more violent course.

In the aftermath of the Good Friday Agreement, Northern Ireland has witnessed the re-emergence of an active, effective and courageous nonviolent civil society movement. As political parties continue to be perceived as deadlocked and ineffective in initiating peace processes, both Protestant Unionist and Catholic Nationalist citizens are increasingly turning to civil society organisations such as NGOs to contribute to social policy (Cochrane, 2006).

Many civil society organisations have positioned themselves as important actors in the current peace process. To give an idea of the size of the movement, it is estimated that in 2002 there were 5,000 NGOs in Northern Ireland serving 1.7 million people (Cochrane, 2006).

The historical journey of CSOs in Northern Ireland has not been without struggle. The development of civil society groups such as NGOs has differed between Unionist and Nationalist societies. As the Northern Ireland government has historically been dominated by Unionists, Unionist citizens have generally seen their government as initiating appropriate social programmes (Cochrane, 2006). Nationalists, on the other hand, have historically had minimal commitment to statutory institutions and processes and did not believe they could rely on the implementation of government-sponsored programmes. Therefore, Nationalists have established a well-developed system of social programme delivery at the community level (Cochrane, 2006).

As a result, Nationalist community development NGOs were viewed with scepticism within the Unionist population (O'Brien, 2007). Moreover, in response to the relentless political violence of the last four decades, a large number of NGOs focussing on peace-building and conflict resolution have emerged. Interestingly, these NGOs have been viewed with scepticism by both Nationalists and Unionists - perhaps because of their reluctance to accept government support (O'Brien, 2007). International economic assistance through the US-funded International Fund for Ireland (IFI) and the European Union's Special Support Fund for Peace and Reconciliation (EU Peace II) has served to challenge these perceptions by initiating significant growth in the NGO sector in Northern Ireland. For example, these funds have served to engage Unionist groups in the civil society movement for peace (Byrne et al., 2008). In addition, foreign eco-

nomic aid has enabled peacebuilding NGOs to establish cross-community contacts.

With the support of both Unionist and Nationalist communities, it has focussed on conflict resolution to engage with its own electorate. Nevertheless, significant amounts of international money have served to create a thriving NGO sector. The employment of thousands of staff has certainly stimulated local economies, but an eventual reduction or even cessation of international funding would perhaps be problematic.

International donors, such as the IFI and the EU Peace II fund, appear intent on giving NGOs and other civil society groups a significant voice in the current peace processes. The significant amount of aid flowing through NGOs is expected to both address economic deprivation and structural inequality (Byrne and Irvin, 2002) and improve relations between Northern Ireland's divided communities. Some NGOs have used aid money for intensive reconciliation and peace-building initiatives. For example, some civil society groups have recognised the destructive "*enemy*" images prevalent in local culture and have placed storytelling, dialogue groups and problem-solving workshops at the heart of conflict resolution processes (Senehi, 2000; Senehi 2002; Senehi, 2008). Other NGOs and civil society groups have also used their influence post-GFA to address sectarian killings and paramilitary activities. On several occasions, civil society groups organised rallies and demonstrations in the hope of persuading "*spoiler*" groups to end sectarian violence (MacGinty, 2006).

Civil society group leaders in Northern Ireland have a significant influence not only on their staff but also on their communities. The willingness of international donors to bypass traditional political structures and empower civil society groups gives these organisations significant political and social weight. Civil society leaders, as well as leaders within the funding bureaucracy, are emerging as powerful voices in the creation of social processes that address conflict-related tensions in Northern Ireland.

Before moving on to the participants' narratives, a note of caution and humility is perhaps necessary. Economically supported civil society peacebuilding work alone is not a panacea for transforming relationships and structures in IA. Civil society peacebuilding is more effective in transforming conflict when it is positioned as just one part of a multi-modelled and multi-level model of intervention involving multiple actors at the micro and macro levels (Diamond and McDonald, 1996; Byrne and Keashly, 2000)

Discussion and Suggestions

In this chapter, we examine the role of Track II Diplomacy and civil society in conflict resolution through the examples of Northern Ireland and Cyprus, emphasising the importance of alternative approaches alongside traditional diplomatic efforts. While the success story in Northern Ireland provides valuable insights into how similar strategies could be applied in Cyprus, both situations have their own unique challenges and dynamics.

The biggest challenges faced during the implementation of Track II Diplomacy are the deep mistrust between the parties, lack of resour-

es, lack of political will and cultural and language barriers. To overcome these challenges, strategies such as building trust by starting with small and concrete projects, fundraising through international funds and volunteer networks, building public support and pressure on political leaders, and overcoming communication barriers through multilingual education programmes are suggested.

Track II Diplomacy has an important place in the conflict resolution literature, but this study adds to the existing body of knowledge by providing a more in-depth analysis of its applicability, particularly in Cyprus. While the success of the Northern Ireland case provides a basis for the development of strategies that can be applied to similar conflict situations, it also serves as a reminder that the unique circumstances of each conflict must be taken into account.

Future research should examine the applicability of Track II Diplomacy in other conflict zones in a comparative approach and focus on the long-term effects of this process. Further research on how technology and digital platforms can be effectively utilised in conflict resolution processes is also important.

Instead of Conclusion: Can the Irish Peace Process be a Model for Cyprus?

The peace process in Northern Ireland, which involved Track II Diplomacy with contributions from both Protestant and Catholic communities, serves as an important case study for conflict resolution. Through informal dialogues, these discussions fostered trust and innovative solutions, leading to the success of the Good Friday Agreement.

During the research for this book chapter on behalf of EUROPolitika magazine, we conducted an interview with Fikri Toros, Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Republican Turkish Party (CTP), and Özdil Nami, former CTP MP, who was appointed as a minister in the cabinet and appointed as the Chief Negotiator in the Cyprus negotiations within the framework of “*The Impacts of the Northern Ireland Peace Process*” in November 2023 last year in order to get the answer to the question “*Can the Irish Peace Process be a Model for Cyprus?*”

Drawing parallels, Nami and Toros assess Cyprus’ missed opportunities and argue that lessons from the Northern Ireland process can revitalise stalled negotiations in Cyprus. They advocate an adapted approach that emphasises the need for political will and social participation, international support, proactive diplomacy and a clear timetable to achieve a sustainable settlement (Ertuğral, 2024b).

Comparing the peace process in Ireland with Cyprus, Nami pointed out that the process in Cyprus was generally detached from the people of both sides and said the following:

“In Cyprus, it was a process left almost exclusively to the leaders and conducted in secrecy. In Ireland, the table was opened to many different parties and was conducted in a much more transparent manner. It is clear that we will need more inclusive and transparent processes in Cyprus in the future. At the same time, it is important to establish and strongly fund organisational structures for both the preparation for

a settlement and the post-settlement period. The institutions created in Ireland to this end are still in place and continue to play important roles (Ertuğral, 2024b)”

Pointing to the UN and Track II Diplomacy as the only legitimate ground to overcome the deadlock in the process, Toros said:

“It is essential to return to the UN ground, which is the only legitimate ground, before it is too late. Negotiations under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General are the only realistic way to reach a political compromise. While it is the responsibility of the UN Secretary-General to facilitate this, it is imperative that powers such as the US, UK and EU prioritise the issue and take a proactive role to encourage the parties. I believe that Track II Diplomacy with the participation of civil society has played a complementary role in past negotiation processes, as well as encouraging political leaders, and it is imperative that it continues. The link and difference between political agreement and peace should be well understood and noted (Ertuğral, 2024b).”

The success of the peace process in Northern Ireland and the lessons it offers for overcoming the impasse in Cyprus provide a promising roadmap for Track II Diplomacy not only for these two communities but also for many other regions facing similar conflicts. The valuable insights and experiences of Özdil Nami and Fikri Toros emphasise the critical importance of social participation and political will in achieving peace and highlight the

role of the international community and civil society organisations.

Finally, given the complex ethnic and political nature of the Cyprus Problem, the importance of Track II Diplomacy cannot be overstated. Lessons learnt from Northern Ireland have shown how effective this alternative diplomacy approach can be in harnessing the power of civil society to promote reconciliation, build trust and achieve lasting peace between the parties. In Cyprus, the potential for this approach to complement formal negotiations and engage diverse social strata and voices to reach a settlement is high. On an island divided along ethnic lines, Track II Diplomacy offers the possibility of opening a new channel of negotiation and dialogue that goes beyond political leaders alone and can inclusively address the needs and concerns of both communities. Track II Diplomacy is therefore not only an option, but a necessity for Cyprus in its journey towards peace and reconciliation.

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Time for a New Ost-politik Targeting the EU's Engagement with the Turkish Cypriot Community

Devrim ŞAHİN* & Ahmet SÖZEN**

Abstract

This chapter advocates for a paradigm shift in the European Union's (EU) approach towards the Turkish Cypriot community through the adoption of a new Ost-politik. Drawing parallels with Germany's historic Ost-politik, which fostered diplomatic relations with Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the proposed approach should seek to enhance the EU's engagement with Turkish Cypriot authorities. The current EU strategy, governed by Protocol 10, has faced challenges, hindering the comprehensive devel-

opment of relations. Examining the context since the division of Cyprus in 1974, the article scrutinizes existing protocols, such as the Green Line Regulation and the Aid Programme, highlighting their successes and limitations. It argues that while these initiatives have supported economic development and confidence-building measures, the lack of direct engagement with Turkish Cypriot authorities hampers institution-building and sustainable development. Finally, the chapter recommends a more inclusive framework to adopt an Ost-politik-inspired doctrine that transcends the limitations of Protocol 10.

* Assist. Prof. Dr. Devrim Şahin is the Chair of the Strategic Development Department of the Cyprus Science University and a research expert at the Cyprus Policy Center, Middle East Policy Council and Avrasya Stratejik Araştırma Merkezi (Eurasia Strategic Investigation Centre) while consulting as an EU Expert. He is also a member of editorial boards of journals including "Migration and Diversity" and "EUROPolitika".

** Ahmet Sözen is professor of Political Science and International Relations, at Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU). Sözen is the founding Director of Cyprus Policy Center – a think tank within EMU.

Introduction

This article calls for the European Union (EU) to adopt a new doctrine similar to Ost-politik but this time targeting Turkish Cypriots that would create opportunities for Track II Diplomacy, which functions beyond the confines of formal diplomatic avenues (Sözen, Goren & Limon, 2023). The reference to *Ost-Politik* herein owes its origin to an opening in the foreign policy of the Federal Republic of Germany designed to normalize its relations with the German Democratic Republic and the Soviet Union (Banchoff, 1996).

Prior to Ost-politik, West Germany implemented the Hallstein Doctrine between 1955 and the end of the 1960s. This was the policy of not maintaining diplomatic relations with states that recognized East Germany. The unintended effect was to weaken West Germany's international cooperation efforts to a point where it found itself increasingly isolated from many of the countries of Eastern Europe and Arab states. This was why West Germany's foreign policy towards East Germany shifted from the Hallstein Doctrine to Willy Brandt's Ost-politik which was designed specifically to restore diplomatic relations with East Germany and the Soviet Union. Eventually, Ost-politik was to facilitate cooperation, understanding, increased personal dialogue, even contributing to a growing awareness about the prosperity gap between East and West that influenced events leading to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the EU's subsequent enlargement embracing Eastern Europe.

Just as the Ost-politik foreign policy approach opened the way for the Federal Re-

public of Germany to normalize its relations with both German Democratic Republic and the Soviet Union, so too; a more direct engagement with Turkish Cypriots would help the EU strengthen and increase awareness of their democratic social forces. Advocating this hypothesis, the article opens with a discussion of EU's engagement with the Turkish Cypriot community through the Protocol 10 as well as the Green Line and the Financial Aid regulations. Then, it examines the adoption of Ost-politik and how this approach facilitated cooperation with the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact Countries starting from the early 1970s. In so doing, it suggests the adoption of a similar approach by the EU to strengthen its engagement with Turkish Cypriots and concludes the need for a more comprehensive framework than the Protocol 10 that disregards the Turkish Cypriot authorities.

1. Background

Since 1974, the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities of Cyprus live separately in northern and southern regions of the island that are currently separated by the United Nations (UN) -controlled buffer zone. The Greek Cypriot community in the south exercises an internationally recognized authority over the representation of the Republic of Cyprus (RoC). The self-proclaimed "*Turkish Republic of North Cyprus*" (TRNC) of the Turkish Cypriot community in the northern region is not recognized by any country other than Türkiye.

The underlying reasons go back to the early 1960's when the Greek Cypriot leadership insisted on a series of amendments to rid the Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus

of such existing bi-communal provisions as the right to veto and separate majority rights. Turkish Cypriot authorities resisting these proposals were subject to acts of violence by the Greek Cypriots to the point where they left office. Since then, representation of the RoC has been singularly monopolized by the Greek Cypriot leadership, which branded the Turkish Cypriots as insurgents responsible for the abnormal situation that unfolded, while justifying the Greek Cypriot ongoing role as legitimate representatives of the whole island of Cyprus on the basis of the doctrine of necessity.

In 1974, an attempted coup d'état by the Greece military junta triggered a military intervention by Türkiye. Since then, the island has been divided physically into two regions. Bi-zonality added to the bi-communality as a parameter for UN-sponsored peace negotiations, which were based on the 1977 and 1979 High Level Agreements between the respective community leaders. Free movement between two regions was not allowed for decades. However, starting in April 2003, a number of crossing points were opened up between the north and the south. These include two crossing points located in the British Sovereign Base Area at Pergamos and Strovilia, three in Nicosia at Ayios Demetios/Metehan, Ledra Palace and Ledra Street and one west of Nicosia toward the Troodos Mountains, at Astromeritis/Zodhia, while at the western end of the island there is the Pyrgos Limnitis/Yesilirmak crossing. Two additional crossing points were opened on 12 November 2018, the first in eight years - the eastern Dherynia crossing point and the Lefka/Aplici crossing point.

Efforts to solve the Cyprus problem dating

back to 1964 when the UN Peacekeeping Forces were initially deployed to the island, reached a culmination of sorts with the UN-sponsored Annan Plan, which was put to simultaneous referendums -- north and south -- on 24 April, 2004. The response to what was then considered to be the most comprehensive settlement plan designed to reunify the island was yes and no: 65% of Turkish Cypriots voters expressed support for the plan, while 76% of Greek Cypriot voters rejected it. Despite the Greek Cypriot "No" vote that prevented the normalization of the situation in the island, the RoC joined the EU on 1 May 2004, along with nine other countries.

Because the entire island constituted the internationally recognised entity of the RoC which had now been accepted as an EU member state, all its citizens became EU citizens. However, given the *de facto* division of the island, the EU *acquis* remain suspended in areas outside the effective control of the government of the RoC, therefore excluding the Turkish Cypriots. Protocol 10 of the 2003 accession treaty (hereinafter referred to as Protocol 10) defines the whole of Cyprus as EU territory but suspends the application of EU legislation to the northern part of the island, since, as noted above, under the protocol, this constitutes an area where the government of the RoC does not exercise effective control.

Since the Turkish Cypriot community had expressed its clear desire for a future within the EU by voting "Yes" in the 2004 referendum, the EU decided to foster closer ties between the community and the union. To achieve this, the EU has sought to adapt the Green Line Regulation (Regulation EC No

866/2004) as well as the Direct Trade and Financial Aid Regulation. However, Greek Cypriot authorities have used their membership say in EU institutions to prevent adoption of the Direct Trade regulation, arguing that not to do so would mean recognition of the "TRNC".

Since the launch of the Aid Programme for the Turkish Cypriot community (hereafter referred to as the Aid Programme) within the framework of the Financial Aid Regulation, the EU has been providing financial assistance for economic development, social infrastructure, and environmental projects for the Turkish Cypriot community. The EU has also facilitated the opening of crossing points on the Green Line⁸ in order to improve the mobility of people and goods across the island. In addition, the EU has encouraged the two communities to engage in a dialogue and to work towards a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus situation. Despite these efforts, the situation of the Turkish Cypriot community remains complex, and there are still many challenges to the political division and context.

2. Protocol 10

As the inter-communal talks held since the 1968 failed to reach a final agreement by April 16, 2003, the RoC represented unilaterally by the Greek Cypriot leadership, signed the EU Accession Treaty. Considering the political problem on the island, a special Protocol (Protocol 10) was added to the EU Accession Treaty. This protocol forms the legal basis for the EU's relations with Northern Cyprus.

It worths to note that during the drafting of this important arrangement for the Turkish

Cypriot community, the EU did not consult or give the Turkish Cypriots the opportunity to negotiate the details of Protocol 10. In fact, the EU and the international community do not recognize the self-proclaimed TRNC. Protocol 10 that governs the EU's relations with the Turkish Cypriots contains no references to any authority in the TRNC. Instead, the TRNC is simply referred to as 'the territories', referring to those parts of the RoC over which its government does not exercise effective control.⁹ This EU approach to efforts to build links with the Turkish Cypriot community while not acknowledging the authorities there remains an obstacle that impedes the development of a fully viable relationship between the two. Nonetheless, this suspension will be lifted in the event of a compromise, according to the preamble to the Protocol.

While EU legislation has been suspended in the northern part of the island, certain EU regulations and directives can indirectly influence some areas. For instance, the Green Line Regulation that regulates the flow of goods and people applies to the whole island, the northern part included. Similarly, EU regulations on air, maritime and road transport can also affect the north, since they apply to the territory of Cyprus as a whole. This is also the case with regard to EU regulations on trade, investment and competition. In order to export products or services to EU markets in the context of the Green Line Regulation, Turkish Cypriot enterprises in effect must comply with EU rules. This amounts to the northern part of Cyprus being *de facto* constrained by specific elements of EU law.

Despite the suspension of the EU Acquis in

⁸ Green Line applies to Nicosia while buffer zone is the UN term for the island-wide dividing line.

⁹ "those areas of the Republic of Cyprus in which the Government of the Republic of Cyprus does not exercise effective control." – 21 words are used to refer to the TRNC in Protocol 10

northern part of Cyprus territory according to the 10th Protocol, Article 3 of the same Protocol enables economic relations between the EU and Northern Cyprus. Article 3 of the Protocol 10 states that “*Nothing in this Protocol shall preclude measures with a view to promoting the economic development of the areas referred to in Article 1*”. The Financial Assistance Regulation is the only regulation adopted by the Council for this purpose. As Northern Cyprus is not part of the EU’s customs and fiscal area, Turkish Cypriots do not benefit from the free movement of goods, services and capital.

3. Green Line Regulation

The EU’s Green Line Regulation was adopted in 2004 to regulate the movement of people, services and goods between the two communities. The aim of the regulation is to promote economic development and such confidence-building measures as the creation of crossing points by way of inducing an environment of increased contacts and cooperation between the two communities. It *sets out the terms under which persons and goods can cross the dividing line between the communities, which, in itself, is not an external border of the EU.*

The main practical effect is that while the northern areas per se remain outside EU customs and fiscal territory, this does not affect the personal rights of Turkish Cypriots as EU citizens. They are citizens of an EU country even if they live in a part of Cyprus that does not come under the control of RoC. The terms of the Green Line Regulation provide for EU citizens, as well as citizens of other countries with valid residence permits in Cyprus to cross the Green Line without the need for a visa or any other form of entry permit. The regulation also allows for the movement

of goods across the Green Line, subject to certain restrictions and customs procedures. Turkish Cypriot enterprises fulfilling the requirements of the EU are increasingly benefiting from this trade opportunity as can be seen from the featured table that shows the data for sales across the Green Line year by year (Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce, 2023).

Table 1. Green Line Regulation (Sales) Statistics

Source: Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce, 2023.

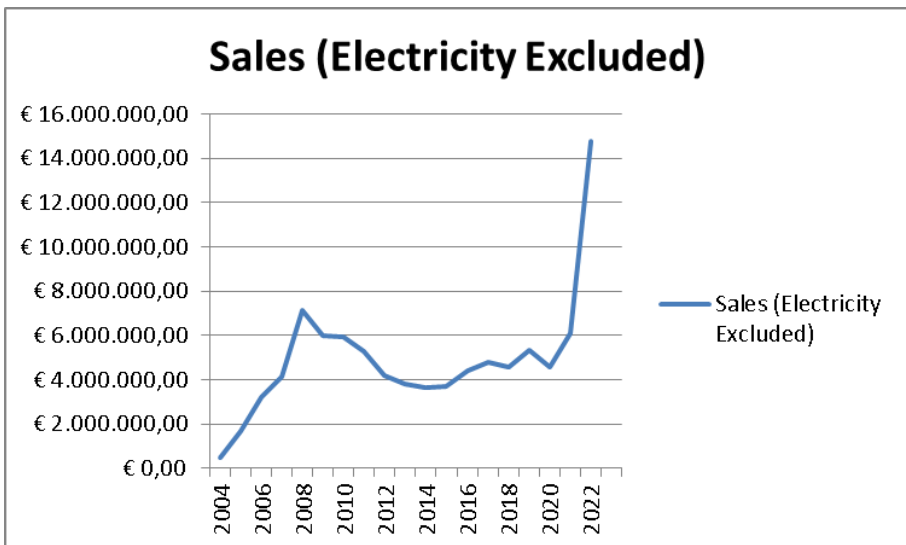
Year	Sales (Electricity Excluded)	Electricity Included Sales
2004	€ 470.821,11	€ 470.821,11
2005	€ 1.673.459,57	€ 1.673.459,57
2006	€ 3.228.342,97	€ 3.228.342,97
2007	€ 4.125.547,85	€ 4.125.547,85
2008	€ 7.172.115,72	€ 7.172.115,72
2009	€ 6.006.347,89	€ 6.006.347,89
2010	€ 5.923.967,46	€ 5.923.967,46
2011	€ 5.304.725,15	€ 29.396.435,08
2012	€ 4.195.321,18	€ 8.944.202,77
2013	€ 3.836.845,61	€ 3.836.845,61
2014	€ 3.648.206,71	€ 3.648.206,71
2015	€ 3.728.282,49	€ 3.728.282,49
2016	€ 4.434.097,18	€ 4.434.097,18
2017	€ 4.792.380,79	€ 4.792.380,79
2018	€ 4.582.402,09	€ 4.582.402,09
2019	€ 5.364.156,52	€ 5.364.156,52
2020	€ 4.603.640,18	€ 4.603.640,18
2021	€ 6.123.707,03	€ 6.123.707,03
2022	€ 14.765.462,59	€ 14.765.462,59
2023	€ 15.465.641,53	€ 15.465.641,53
Total	€ 109.445.471,62	€ 138.286.063,14

The anticipated level of Turkish Cypriot community access to EU market opportunities that was expected with the introduction of the Green Line Regulation in 2004 has not been fulfilled. However, the trend of Green Line trade shows a constant increase. While annual Green Line trade increased by 138% (from Euros 6,151,335 to Euros 14,647,241) from 2021 to 2022, total sales increased approximately 200-fold (from Euros 470,821,11 to Euros 93,979,830,09) from the time the regulation was introduced in 2004 up to 2022. The main items traded from the north via the Green Line Regulation are food products such as fish, vegetables and fruits, as well as construction materials and wood and plastic products. New products covered by the regulation, such as EPS Foam, steel profile, steel structure and aluminum profiles, have boosted the increase in sales from the northern part of the island to the southern part.

Non-tariff restrictions such as requirements about the size of commercial vehicles and phyto-sanitary standards continue to impede an even greater increase in trade-flows. In addition to citing how these impediments undermine efforts to increase trade, Turkish Cypriot business circles are advocating for more types of processed foods to be included within the context of the Green Line regulation. Fresh fish is one of the main products traded across the Green Line. Processed food items of non-animal origin, however, are largely restricted due to EU health and safety standards. Processed foods that can be traded include table olives, olive oil, jams, juices, halva and tahini. The first trade in Turkish Cypriot community-produced olive oil across the Green Line took place in 2022.

A significant development has been the official registration of Halloumi/Hellim (hereafter referred to as Hellim), a prime example of the type of added value product that can catalyze the future competitiveness of the Turkish Cypriot agriculture sector. As a distinctive brand-

Figure 1. Sales (Electricity Excluded)



ed, a protected designation of origin (PDO) Cypriot product, Hellim can be traded across the Green Line (subject to PDO standards). Straits Market Research (2021) demonstrates that the global market demand for the cheese is at present worth over USD 400m and projected to exceed USD 900m by 2030. Economic benefits and cooperation can be advanced throughout Cyprus to meet the high demand for Hellim. This kind of cooperation has been evidenced, for example, the when it comes to the creation and supply of traditional Lefkara lace. Greek Cypriot producers of Lefkara lace augment their own production by buying additional Lefkara lace products directly from Turkish Cypriots in the north so that they can meet the high demand for Lefkara's signature traditional lace.

All in all, the Green Line Regulation has been instrumental in promoting people-to-people contacts and economic cooperation between the Turkish Cypriot and the Greek Cypriot communities. Extending the types of processed foods covered by the Green Line Regulation – Hellim products being a case in point – , helps boost the volume of trade and cooperation between the two regions of Cyprus. It is worth noting that cooperation on halloumi is much more accessible than cooperation on energy since there are no controversial positions by the two Cypriot sides. It should also be noted that the regulation is not a substitute for a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem; nor does it address the underlying political issues that divide the island (to which it remains vulnerable). However, as a confidence building measure it can help lead to the resumption of the UN-led negotiations for a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem, which in turn could lead to the island's reunification.

4. Aid Programme for the Turkish Cypriot Community

The Aid Programme for the Turkish Cypriot community was adopted in 2006 by the European Commission (EC), as envisaged under the “Financial Aid Regulation”. The regulation lays down the rules and conditions for the granting of assistance to facilitate the reunification of Cyprus. In so doing, it sought to encourage the economic development of the Turkish Cypriot community with particular emphasis on the economic integration of the island and improving contact between the two communities and with the EU.

This Regulation was adopted in response to the outcome of the 24 April 2004 referendums on the UN's Annan Plan, which envisaged Cyprus' reunification. Respecting the decision of the Turkish Cypriot community for a future within the EU, the European Council recommended that the funds earmarked for the northern part of Cyprus in the event of a settlement should be used to end that community's isolation and to facilitate the reunification of Cyprus.

The Aid Programme is recognized as the EU's legislative instrument for the provision of financial assistance to the Turkish Cypriot community. The financial assistance provided to the Turkish Cypriot community embraces infrastructure and environment, socio-economic development, confidence-building measures, bringing the Turkish Cypriot community closer to the EU and preparation for the implementation of the acquis.

The general objective of the Aid Programme is defined in Article 1 of the Aid Regulation, as to: “provide assistance to facilitate the reuni-

fication of Cyprus by encouraging the economic development of the Turkish Cypriot community, with particular emphasis on the economic integration of the island, on improving contacts between the two communities and with the EU, and on preparation for the Acquis Communautaire". Added to its general objective, the Aid Programme pursues the following specific objectives:

- a. Objective 1: Developing and restructuring of infrastructure, in particular in the areas of energy and transport, environment, telecommunications and water supply;
- b. Objective 2: Promoting the social and economic development including restructuring, in particular concerning rural development, human resources development and regional development;
- c. Objective 3: Reconciling, building confidence, and supporting civil society;
- d. Objective 4: Bringing the Turkish Cypriot community closer to the Union;
- e. Objective 5 - 6: Preparing the Turkish Cypriot community to introduce and implement the EU acquis in view of the comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem.

The EU has contributed to reconciliation process in Cyprus by working closely with local shareholders to ensure Turkish Cypriot involvement and sensitivity to political context. The Aid Programme generally delivered most of the intended outputs and/or reached the intended beneficiaries, producing a substantial volume of assistance (Economisti

Associati, 2020). But extent of outcome achievement is very differentiated between objectives and interventions. In the context of the Turkish Cypriot community context, the Aid Programme is a highly relevant and relatively successful initiative. The EU has benefited from an efficient and generally coherent programme despite the delays. EU support is crucial for sustainability.

Objectives 1, 3 and 4 delivered univocally positive results (with some exceptions), but with major delays. Based on Eurobarometer reports, Turkish Cypriots have a better image of the EU (Şahin, 2023). In contrast, performance under Objectives 2, 5 and 6 is mixed, with some interventions proving successful, and others underperforming or experiencing delays. Infrastructural works, secondary procurement, and commitments by local authorities fall under this category. In terms of rural, SME, and community development, monitoring and evaluation show promising results. However, human resource development activities performed mixed.

In general, local conditions dampened interventions' effectiveness (Şahin, 2023). One primary preventative issue has been the non-recognition of Turkish Cypriot counterparts (scarce human/financial resources), fluctuating commitment and ownership, and frequent political changes (especially for construction projects). Without legal bindingness, EU actions are hindered by fluctuations in the Turkish Cypriot political system, affecting effectiveness, coherence, and sustainability. Herein, the building of local capacity gains importance. Strengthening the capacity of local 'institutions' and 'counterparts' is key to successful implementation

and sustainability of results. Within the Turkish Cypriot community, EU can support capacity building but not institution building.

A variety of interventions have been implemented with varying (partial) results. The public sector should be involved more, as well as the private sector. Private sector collaborations as well as broader social dialogues are deemed particularly useful, especially given the local context, to build ownership, raise awareness, guarantee commitment, and ensure sustainability. In some cases, a deeper investigation of stakeholders' ability and willingness to pay for certain services or infrastructures could have been further investigated at design stage. This was to identify and address long-term sustainability challenges.

Having a strategic plan and coordinating at a high level are essential to achieving desired results. However, long-term strategic planning and coordination are hindered by the absence of a horizontal contracting entity and frequent political changes. The Aid Programme thus has recently sought to promote strategic programming by emphasizing the importance of planning and sequencing activities. Another challenge is fluctuating commitments and limited resources of the local bodies. Aiding beneficiaries with stronger commitments and/or greater synergies has become a more significant focus of EU assistance. Funding for Turkish Cypriot enterprises, community groups, and civil society organizations is increasingly being managed indirectly, which can simplify rules and requirements in order to reach out to beneficiaries who are smaller and less structured.

5. A New Ost-Politik Towards Turkish Cypriot Authority

The Aid Programme and Green Line Arrangement have been successful initiatives for the Turkish Cypriot community, with the EU providing support for capacity building. However, the lack of support for institution-building limits the community's Europeanization in terms of bring them closer to the EU. It can be safely argued that Protocol 10, which governs EU relations with the Turkish Cypriots after Cyprus' EU membership, has not fostered a healthy relationship. The EU has predominantly engaged with civil society in Northern Cyprus, excluding state authorities. However, it is possible to engage with official authorities without recognizing the TRNC (Sözen, Goren & Limon, 2023).

When we examine Germany's Ostpolitik of détente with the Soviet bloc in the 1960s, we can see how such involvement in local authorities would be exactly the European approach to creating a zone of stability and security based on European values and philosophy. In this way, the EU may be able to play a decisive role in extending its internal peace beyond its borders. To achieve this, the EU must be willing to take a leading role in promoting a visionary and strategic approach to promote democracy and European citizenship within its neighboring regions. Turkish Cypriots are not only at the core of this region, but they also share significant interests with the EU.

Standing in the way and preventing such cooperation is the Turkish Cypriot authorities' uncompromising attitude. In order to break free of this vicious circle and exert a transformative and anchoring role, the EU

has to adapt a new strategic doctrine similar to Ost-Politik. Such a doctrine should mobilize mechanisms that would foster direct EU engagement with Turkish Cypriot authorities but not pursue granting recognition or assisting secession (Sözen & Haytayan, 2024). It needs to assist the Turkish Cypriot Community overcome the deficits within its democracy. European citizenship promotion would strengthen harmonization and cooperation between the EU and the Turkish Cypriot community. Once aware of European citizenship benefits, Turkish Cypriots would raise awareness of the EU. Increased EU influence would help resolve internal power struggles constructively within a consolidated liberal democracy. All of these opportunities and prospects for cooperation await a strategic, vision-based approach that treats Northern Cyprus equitably as a partner and not minimizes it into a piece of land as the Protocol 10 doing.

Such an EU approach should support creating opportunities for Track II dialogue and connecting political leaders with civil society. The EU has made a significant breakthrough in strengthening civil society and it is critical to sustain this momentum. To sustain the good work undertaken by the Financial Aid Programme since its inception in 2006, the EU needs to develop a framework in collaboration with Turkish Cypriot authorities that would focus on strategic support to the political process through Track II interventions engaged with Track I Diplomacy. The EU Aid Programme promotes strengthening civil society as a key element in fostering a culture of dialogue. However, these projects do not offer Track II Diplomacy that assists first-track diplomacy.

Track II Diplomacy functions independently of formal diplomatic channels aims to encourage collaboration and address disputes among opposing factions (Leguey-Feilleux, 2009). It comes into play when conflicting parties fail to recognize each other or face obstacles in direct dialogue, just as Turkish Cypriot authorities and Greek Cypriot authorities. Track II dialogue method cultivates innovative resolutions, which are subsequently shared with official decision-makers who may have limited interaction with their counterparts. While Track II Diplomacy doesn't replace formal diplomatic efforts, it can offer valuable additional resources if applied thoughtfully.

While the EU needs to ensure that ongoing capacity building interventions are implemented where significant investments have been made, it also needs to investigate the possibility of retaining this mandate. In the first instance, Track II should be given more support. Then, this unofficial track must be connected to Track I, for example, by transferring creative ideas to the official track.

In a similar way to the Ost-politik foreign policy approach that enabled the Federal Republic of Germany to normalize its relations with both the German Democratic Republic and the Soviet Union, increased EU engagement with Turkish Cypriot authorities would facilitate EU cooperation with the Turkish Cypriot community, as well as Türkiye. Engaging Turkish Cypriot authorities should mobilize mechanisms to use Track II when Track I does not exist. It is imperative that the EU engages with municipalities and local authorities within the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities. Through

this approach, civil society organizations will strengthen relationships and develop their ability to engage one another through advocacy activities.

There is still a need to bridge the gap between the peace negotiations process and the citizens and to provide support to two initiatives that will bring together political and civic leaders from both Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities to discuss international peacebuilding models and their relevance to Cyprus. There appears to be no official recognition of the need for a comprehensive reconciliation process on the island despite political leadership's focus on a negotiated resolution of the Cyprus problem. This is because there are a number of potentially divisive issues which exist on the island and will persist even after a settlement is reached.

All in all, the EU will need to continue to promote and drive its essential interventions and to maintain the goal of establishing a process that allows all segments of society to participate in. There is a need to continue working to broaden the political dialogue beyond the negotiators to address Track II dialogue adequately. It is important that the EU create processes through which Track II is able to engage in dialogue, particularly in the context of post-election opportunities for reopening negotiations on a political settlement.

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Thinking Outside the Box: The Role of Youth in Track II Initiatives

Cihan DİZDAROĞLU*

Abstract

Much effort and energy has been devoted over the years to find a comprehensive solution to the long-lasting division between Turkish and Greek Cypriots on the island of Cyprus. However, subsequent rounds of negotiations have so far failed to yield a result. The rationale for the peace process, which has mainly been based on negotiations between successive leaders and has neglected the needs/daily experiences of the societies, remains problematic. The general assumption that a peace treaty to be signed between the leaders will end the conflict and meet all the needs of the society will constitute a “virtual peace”. This chapter argues that the rationale for negotiations should be changed to reflect both Track I, which focuses mainly on the official intergovernmental diplomatic process, and Track II, which encompasses all unofficial efforts, to achieve a

sustainable and effective peace. As a generation that has not been part of the historical conflicts between the two communities, young people in Cyprus would have an influential role to play in building social trust and cohesion between the two communities. Accordingly, the chapter tries to think outside the box by looking specifically at whether there is a role for young people in Track II initiatives and provides some rare examples of youth-led Track II initiatives.

Introduction

The Cyprus problem is one of the long-lasting disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean. Since the first peace negotiations between the interlocutors of the two communities began in Beirut in 1968, much effort and energy has been devoted to finding a comprehensive solution to the division between Turkish and Greek Cypriots. However, subsequent

*Associate Professor, Department of Political Science and International Relations, Başkent University, Ankara, Türkiye. E-Mail: cihandizdaroglu@gmail.com, Orcid: 0000-0001-8613-8585.

rounds of negotiations have so far failed to yield a result. At the time of writing, there have been no formal negotiations between the parties since the last intense attempt collapsed in Crans Montana, Switzerland, in July 2017. As reflected in the United Nations (UN) Secretary General's reports on Cyprus (S/2022/533, 2022), all these failures have eroded trust between the parties over time, and the absence of formal negotiations between the parties has also eroded public confidence in the possibility of common ground on the way forward. A recent survey confirms this lack of confidence at the youth level, with Cypriot youth on both sides pessimistic about a solution (Dizdaroğlu, 2020). According to the results of the survey, more than half of the young people on both sides believe that the Cyprus problem will never be solved.

This pessimistic view –not only among the youth, but in both communities in general– can be considered as normal as the rationale for the peace process, which has mainly been based on negotiations between successive leaders and has neglected the needs/daily experiences of the societies, remains problematic. The general assumption that a peace treaty to be signed between the leaders will end the conflict and meet all the needs of the society will constitute a virtual peace, as Richmond (2006) puts it. This chapter argues that the rationale for negotiations should be changed to reflect both Track I, which focuses mainly on the official inter-governmental diplomatic process, and Track II, which encompasses all unofficial efforts, to achieve a sustainable and effective peace. As a generation that has not been part of the historical conflicts between the two commu-

nities, young people in Cyprus would have an influential role to play in building social trust and cohesion between the two communities. However, the lack of (or limited) direct involvement of societies, especially the ignorance of young people who have lived in an ethnically divided country since birth, has prevented the mass mobilization of Cypriot youth in their search for communication and interaction. Despite the challenges, there are some rare and limited youth-led Track II initiatives on both sides of the island, mainly with the support of the outsider third parties.

Accordingly, this chapter first focuses on the brief historical background of the Cyprus problem and then examines the potential role of youth in Track II Diplomacy, focusing on the landmark United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2250 (2015). The third part of the chapter tries to think outside the box by looking specifically at whether there is a role for young people in Track II initiatives and provides some rare examples of youth-led Track II initiatives. This will help to understand ways of involving young people effectively and widen the scope of Track II initiatives. This chapter argues that if initiatives at different levels can talk to each other, it would increase the prospects of community support for any future attempts.

1. The Cyprus Problem in a Nutshell

Soon after the declaration of independence of the Republic of Cyprus¹⁰ (RoC) in 1960,

¹⁰ The Republic of Cyprus (RoC) is internationally recognized as the political institution governing the whole island, all of Cyprus is deemed an EU member state. However, the *acquis communautaire* is suspended in Northern Cyprus pending a political settlement regarding the Cyprus problem. The Turkish Republic of North Cyprus

inter-ethnic conflicts between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities flared up again, paving the way for political partition. In addition to the two communities' continued "separate objectives" of union with Greece for Greek Cypriots and partition for Turkish Cypriots (Hatay & Papadakis, 2012), President Archbishop Makarios' calls for constitutional changes in late 1963 triggered the ethno-nationalist violence. The prolonged violence of the 1960s and the subsequent Turkish military operation five days after a coup by the Greek junta government against Archbishop Makarios in July 1974 added to the instability and completed the physical division of the island. Put another way, Greek and Turkish Cypriots have lived on an island divided politically for six decades and physically for five decades.

Since 1968, the island's two communities, the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots, have been negotiating a comprehensive settlement based on a bi-communal and bi-zonal federation, which became the main basis of negotiations following the 1977 Makarios-Denktaş and 1979 Denktaş-Kyprianou summit agreements (Sözen, 2017, p. 29). Despite the absence of formal negotiations at the time of writing, there have been two major attempts to resolve the problem in the last two decades: the Annan Plan and the Crans Montana talks. The first, the UN-sponsored comprehensive Annan plan, failed in the simultaneous referendum in April 2004, when three-quarters of Greek Cypriots rejected reunification while two-thirds of Turkish Cypriots supported it. The second attempt, known as the Crans Montana talks, was the

culmination of negotiations that began in 2015 but also failed in July 2017 due to disagreements between the parties over security and guarantees (Drousiotis, 2020a, 2020b, 2023).

Despite several initiatives by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, including the informal meeting between Greek Cypriot leader Nicos Anastasiades and Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akıncı in Berlin on 25 November 2019 and the informal meeting of the 5+UN (with the participation of Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar, Greek Cypriot leader Nicos Anastasiades and representatives of the guarantor countries Türkiye, Greece and the United Kingdom) in Geneva on 27-29 April 2021, the parties are still unable to find common ground to resume peace talks. Amid the deadlock, UN Secretary-General Guterres (S/2023/497, 2023) continued to call on both parties to engage in "meaningful", "result-oriented negotiations" that will lead to a "peaceful and shared future on the island". Although these calls often fall on deaf ears on the island, the parties finally agreed on the appointment of Maria Angela Holguin Cuellar as the new UN envoy to Cyprus, which has been vacant since the last envoy Jane Holl Lute (May 2018-August 2021) resigned in August 2021 (Kades, 2023). The appointment of Holguin, who has a profile that can bring related actors into the process, might push the parties towards official negotiations if they are able to find a common ground to start negotiations (Aşık Ülker, 2024). Holguin's new and inclusive approach of listening not only to traditional actors but to all relevant actors, including mayors, representatives of chambers of commerce, journalists, religious leaders, associations, think tanks and civil society representatives, has

(TRNC), in the north, is solely recognized by Türkiye, which refers to the government in the south as the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus rather than the RoC.

the potential to bring different voices into the peace process and to focus on different tracks.

2. Track II Diplomacy and Youth

Davidson and Montville (1981, p. 155) briefly identify the Track II Diplomacy as “*unofficial, non-structured interaction*” on the assumption that actual or potential conflicts can be resolved or eased by appealing to common human capabilities to respond to good will and reasonableness. In the words of Jones (2015), it is a “*method of bringing together influential people from different sides of a given conflict, on an unofficial basis, to talk about the issues and to jointly develop new ideas about how that conflict may be better managed or resolved.*” Track II is often seen as a complementary and supplementary method to Track I Diplomacy, which relies heavily on results-oriented formal diplomatic processes, especially in conflicts that are resistant to formal peacemaking efforts or in times of tensions (Davidson & Montville, 1981; Çuhadar & Dayton, 2012, p. 157). It refers to the sustained engagement of non-official people from the opposing groups, rather than officials representing their governments and states, to break down barriers where official diplomacy has failed.

While it is possible to expand the scope of the tracks by adding track three, which refers to “*dialogue initiatives undertaken by local grassroots organizations or international development agencies*” (Rieker, 2016), or track six, which “*engages in collaborative efforts*” at all levels (Pimond et al., 2019, p. 10), the point is to sustain dialogue to support the peace process and strengthen social cohesion. It is often difficult to make clear distinctions

between the different tracks, as they often overlap and interact. Whatever track is taken, these methods need to be adapted to the needs of the conflict, as there is no single formula that can be used as a panacea. However, as noted above, Track II initiatives, which are also diverse in structure and objectives, are useful in identifying common interests and addressing root causes, particularly during periods of deadlock at the other levels. In the words of Davies and Kaufman (2003, p. 2), Track II Diplomacy “*can inject new insights and ideas into the official process, help to humanize the “enemy,” reduce tensions and misunderstanding, build capacity in civil society, promote reconciliation [...] and build public support and political will for peacemaking.*”

As Çuhadar and Dayton (2012, p. 157) point out, Track II Diplomacy begins with the assumption that protracted social conflicts cannot be resolved without paying attention to the inter-societal dimensions. Particularly in the divided societies like Cyprus, paying attention to different groups’ expectations and needs would pave the way for a peace agreement which people are more willing to accept rather than a “*virtual*” ones (Loizides et al., 2022; Richmond, 2006). The persistence of the “*closed door*” and “*nothing is agreed until everything is agreed*” format of elite-level peace negotiations in Cyprus has already prevented the inclusion of both societies, especially youth and women, as well as diaspora groups, in the peace process (Demetriou & Hadjipavlou, 2018; Pimond et al., 2019; Dizdaroglu, 2023a, 2023b). Overlooking or underestimating the social dimension or societal needs can be detrimental to the prospects for sustainable peace. As has already begun to be discussed in the literature, the

“normative turn” argues that the combination of the first two tracks may not be sufficient for legitimate, sustainable and implementable outcomes (Palmiano Federer, 2021, p. 441). The role of Track II actor is also crucial, as there is a correlation between the *“durability of peace agreements to the greater inclusion of actors is often associated with Track II (e.g., civil society, including women’s organizations, youth, and religious actors)”* (Palmiano Federer, 2021, p. 442).

Accordingly, this chapter focuses on understanding the neglected role of young people in Track II initiatives in the case of Cyprus, borrowing from Siobhan McEvoy Levy’s (2001, p. 5) argument that *“a peace agreement’s endurance depends on whether the next generations accept or reject it, how they are socialized during the peace process, and their perceptions of what that peace process has achieved.”* Understanding and incorporating the ideas of young people in the efforts to solve the problem is important as it makes the peace process more inclusive, especially for those who would not be able to present themselves in the Track I initiatives. Despite the growing awareness of the often overlooked *“agency”* through the contributions of critical peace and conflict studies (Richmond, 2006; Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013; Mac Ginty, 2015; Berents & McEvoy-Levy, 2015) 2013; Mac Ginty, 2015; Berents & McEvoy-Levy, 2015, the voices and experiences of young people have only recently begun to be recognized (Altiok et al., 2020; Dizdaroğlu & Özerdem, 2023).

Recognition of the positive contributions of young people by well-established international institutions such as the United Na-

tions Development Programme (UNDP), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the UN Security Council has raised awareness toward young people. In particular, the adoption of the landmark UNSC Resolution 2250 (2015) on *“Youth, Peace and Security”* on 9 December 2015, and subsequent UNSC resolutions on the issue, including 2419 (2018) and 2535 (2020), are the culmination of all efforts to increase the focus on the essential role of young people in the prevention and resolution of conflicts. Under its five key pillars of *“participation”*, *“protection”*, *“prevention”*, *“partnerships”* and *“disengagement and reintegration”*, the UNSC resolution seeks to increase the voice of youth in decision-making at all levels and to establish the necessary mechanisms to enable youth to participate meaningfully in peace processes.

Of course, this does not always translate into a seat at the negotiating table. The active participation of young people in politics, decision-making and peace-building processes is still very rarely welcomed. However, as the work of Altiok and Grizelj’s (2019, pp. 7–16) points out, youth influence may be more powerful as outside activism than in negotiations during the peace process. The Track II activities of the youth-led organizations aim at ensuring dialogue that leads to positive outcomes in conflict settings, such as the reduction of prejudices of individuals, the building of mutual trust, increased willingness to coexist, and so on (Yücel & Psaltis, 2020). The literature suggests that Track II Diplomacy is considered a successful initiative if at least two out of four outcomes, namely *“idea generation”*, *“relationship building”*, *“effective facilitation”* and *“changing per-*

ceptions”, are achieved throughout the process (Allen & Sharp, 2017, pp. 108–109). In divided countries and societies like Cyprus, every initiative and outcome is important, given that the parties have been unable to reach a solution for decades. Therefore, the next section will focus on Track II initiatives by young Cypriots in order to make them visible, despite the fact that they are rare and limited in number.

3. Cypriot Youth Contributions to the Track II Initiatives

Young people aged between 14 to 35, according to the Cypriot Youth Strategy, constitute approximately 20-25 per cent of the total population.¹¹ This percentage represents the largest youth share among European Union (EU) member states (Eurostat, 2022). Although young people make up a significant share of the population and are affected by the dispute in their daily lives, they are often overlooked in politics and peace processes. For instance, the average age of MPs (after the last parliamentary elections on both sides) is 51.4 in the south and 52.7 in the north. Furthermore, the representation of MPs under the age of 35 is 3 per cent in the south, while in the north there are no MPs under that age. These figures confirm the under-representation of young people, as well as the dominance of older men in politics, as women have also not been able to find an equitable place in the parliaments on either

side (women’s representation is 14 and 22 per cent in the south and north respectively). Furthermore, apart from the youth wings of political parties, young people on both sides have no access to decision-making mechanisms. The existence of an advisory board, the Youth Board of Cyprus, which operates under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Culture in the south, does not make a difference as it is not inclusive of all Cypriot youth and focuses solely on Greek Cypriot youth rather than the Turkish Cypriots. In the midst of all this inadequate representation, it is possible to argue that young people find their own ways of dealing with the politics and everyday interactions mainly through Track II initiatives.

As already mentioned, Cypriot youth are pessimistic about a settlement on the island. Nevertheless, almost half of young people on both sides of the island (48.8 per cent of Turkish Cypriots and 54.4 per cent of Greek Cypriots) believe that young people have a responsibility to find a peaceful solution in Cyprus (Dizdaroğlu, 2020). Accordingly, through youth-led civil society organizations on both sides, young people have tried to come together in various Track II activities, mainly with the support of the outsider third parties (i.e. Cyprus Fulbright Commission, UNDP, USAID, EU and several foreign embassies) and the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP). The support of international third-party actors may be questionable on the ground, where international donors are often perceived as dictating certain norms and practices without focusing on local priorities/power dynamics, but it is crucial for the sustainability of such activities in the absence of government owner-

¹¹ The Republic of Cyprus (RoC) announces population results based on the Greek Cypriot government-controlled area. However, the population of the northern part has been a source of controversy. For a detailed account of the population issue, see Mete Hatay (2017), Population and Politics in North Cyprus: An Overview of the Ethno-demography of North Cyprus in the Light of the 2011 Census. PRIO Cyprus Centre and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

ship on both sides (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013) 2013. Financial support from the international third parties also creates mistrust and suspicion among ultra-nationalists on both sides. Although still rare and limited, Cypriot youth have taken individual and collective initiatives to build bridges between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities through events that can be considered as the part of Track II initiatives. The impact of youth-led Track II initiatives may be very limited, but given the limited interaction between young people, even such small steps have the potential to make a significant difference, particularly during periods of deadlock on Track I.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to cover every single youth-led attempt, but at least some of the most recent initiatives should be mentioned to show the eagerness of young people to build bridges between the two communities. For instance, the *“Bicommunal Network of Cypriot Youth”*,¹² which was initially set up by Greek and Turkish Cypriots studying in the UK to foster connections with each other off the island, but has since broadened its scope to include the island. This youth-led network aims to meet, work together, and promote a common identity, culture, and traditions among young Cypriots. For the past five years, it has been active in organizing online and face-to-face events to bring Greek and Turkish Cypriot young people together to discuss youth-related issues.

Another initiative launched by UNFICYP is called *“UN Youth Champions for Environment*

and Peace”,¹³ which aims to bring people together across divides to build trust and raise awareness to tackle key environmental issues such as climate change and environmental degradation. This peacebuilding initiative, which focuses on a very timely issue from a youth perspective, encourages interaction between the two communities to build a sustainable dialogue. Another similar initiative is the *“Heritage Youth Ambassadors”*, initiated by the Bi-Communal Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage with support from the UNDP, which aims to bring young people across the divide to work towards a common goal. These internationally supported initiatives may also have a limited impact, as only a small group of young people have been involved in these initiatives, but they all have the potential to raise awareness among young people, either to contact with members of other community or to work on important issues.

Although very limited in number, Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot youth organizations have organized some joint events, which can also be evaluated as part of Track II initiatives. For instance, youth organizations based in Famagusta, namely the *“Peace and Friendship Athletic and Cultural Youth Club”* (Αθλητικός - Πολιτιστικός Όμιλος Νεολαίας *“Ειρήνης και Φιλίας”*), *“Famagusta Avenue Garage”* and *“Famagusta Youth Union”* (Mağusa Gençlik Birliği), worked together under the project *“Empowering the Youth of Famagusta – Shaping Common Future”* to strengthen bi-communal dialogue and co-

¹² For more information, visit <https://www.bicom-cy.net> or the network's facebook page.

¹³ More information on the programme is available at <https://unficyp.unmissions.org/young-people-cyprus-join-3rd-edition-un-youth-champions-environment-and-peace>.

operation.¹⁴ Likewise, youth organizations based in Nicosia, namely “*Youth for Exchange and Understanding Cyprus*” (YEU Cyprus) and the “*Nicosia Youth Association*” (Lefkoşa Gençlik Derneği), worked together on an online project called “*Let’s Talk*”. This project aims to promote dialogue between young people in Cyprus in order to develop a better understanding of each other and to build trust between them through a series of online discussions on different topics.

After the EU declared 2022 the “*European Year of Youth*”, which aims to make the voice of young people heard in all EU countries through activities, conferences and initiatives planned for young people, youth-led or youth-oriented activities also increased on the island within this framework.¹⁵ Although most of these activities focus mainly on Greek Cypriot youth, some limited joint activities are organized with the support of youth-led organizations on both sides. Within this framework, the “*Cyprus Youth Council*”, an umbrella NGO established in the south in 1996, has on several occasions worked with Turkish Cypriot civil society organizations of the Nicosia Youth Association and the Famagusta Youth Union on dialogue and environmental events.

The above examples show the eagerness of young people, even if they are not the majority of Cypriot youth, to initiate and promote dialogue between the two communities

through Track II initiatives that will pave the way for breaking down barriers and making young people visible. It is important to increase the number of these efforts, to make them sustainable, to broaden their scope to different regions of the island, and to increase the ownership of each community/government to increase their impact. This will pave the way for preparing the ground to support any Track I initiatives in the future.

Conclusion

In divided societies such as Cyprus, inter-communal dialogue through Track II initiatives is much more essential to enhance the prospects for sustainable peace and to sustain dialogue. As noted above, overlooking or underestimating the social dimension and societal needs can be detrimental to peace processes and undermine people’s willingness to support Track I initiatives. Thus, greater inclusion of different actors, especially youth and women, as well as combination of different tracks of diplomacy in such long-lasting disputes have the potential to increase both possibility and durability of peace agreements. Amidst the pessimism of Cypriot youth about a possible settlement, as well as the under-representation of youth in the decision-making mechanism, Track II initiatives are quite useful in identifying common interests and addressing root causes of problems.

While there have been no formal Track I negotiations in Cyprus since late 2017, the youth-led Track II initiatives outlined in the previous section can be useful in breaking down barriers between Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot youth. The value and merit of youth leadership in taking responsibility

¹⁴ For more information, visit <https://eeagrants.org/archive/2014-2021/projects/CY-ACTIVECITI-ZENS-0007> or the youth organizations’ facebook pages.

¹⁵ It is possible to see all the events organized under this framework at https://youth.europa.eu/year-of-youth_en.

for such initiatives should be recognized, as Cypriot youth on both sides, albeit in limited numbers, continue to find ways to interact in the absence of the reluctance of their respective governments. The limited impact of youth-led initiatives can be increased with the support of government ownership on both sides, multiplying the number of initiatives and extending their reach to different regions of the island. As the Cyprus problem is one of the disputes “resistant to formal peace-making” (Çuhadar & Dayton, 2012, p. 157), Track II initiatives are therefore essential to maintain dialogue between the two communities, as dialogue leads to positive outcomes.

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