



## Cyprus Reunification Talks: Conclusions for the EU

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*Reunification of Cyprus is in EU countries' interests. It would contribute to reinforcing stability in the Eastern Mediterranean region, benefit EU energy security, and help shape a new model of EU-Turkey relations. Thus, the EU should consider increasing its engagement in the reunification talks. It could play the role of guarantor of an agreement, as well as diminish Cypriot fears about security. Poland's government could promote an intra-EU debate on that subject.*

On 11 April, Cyprus reunification talks resumed. It was possible thanks to mediation carried out by Espen Berth Eide, special adviser on Cyprus to the UN Secretary-General. Eide helped overcome the crisis in the negotiations that arose in February 2017 after the parliament of the Republic of Cyprus passed a new law calling for celebrating in schools of the 1950 referendum in which Greek Cypriots decided to incorporate the island into Greece (*enosis*). The parliament's decision raised objections from the leader of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) and the negotiations were suspended. The impasse happened a month after a conference on the reunification of Cyprus organized in Geneva under UN auspices.

The latest crisis in the negotiations and its likely path suggest that a change in the formula of the reunification talks may be necessary for them to succeed. Although Cypriot leaders have been meeting often since 2015, when the present negotiating round started, they still haven't agreed the most important issues. Among them are how to divide the territory between the two parts of the future federation, the power vested in the future federated state, security, and a so-called guarantee system. If the EU takes more active participation in the negotiation process, that might help overcome some of these problems. Furthermore, the EU may use selected instruments to address some of the Cypriots' concerns about the reunification process.

**Cyprus Reunification and EU Interests.** The reunification of Cyprus would reinforce security and stability in the Eastern Mediterranean region. It would diminish tensions between Greece and Turkey and normalise relations between Turkey and the Republic of Cyprus (Turkey is the only country that recognizes the TRNC instead of the Republic of Cyprus). The point is crucial in the face of Russia's growing presence in the region. Its interest in Cyprus has grown significantly because of the Syrian civil war and the gas fields discovered off the island's southern shores. An example of the effectiveness of Russian diplomacy is the February 2015 decision of the Republic of Cyprus to grant the Russian navy the right to use the island's ports. Settling relations between Turkey and the Republic of Cyprus may be useful in balancing Russia's growing influence in the region. In the longer perspective, it may open a way for the Republic of Cyprus to gain membership of NATO.

Reunification would also positively affect EU energy security. It would make exporting gas from the Cypriot "Aphrodite" and Israeli "Leviathan" and "Tamar" fields easier.<sup>1</sup> That could contribute to achieving EU diversification projects, strengthening competition on the European gas market, and curbing Russia's

<sup>1</sup> Z. Nowak, "Prospects for Gas Exports from Israel," *Bulletin PISM*, no. 15 (610), 4 February 2014.

position in the energy sector. Currently, the prospect of exploiting Cyprus' natural resources faces Turkish criticism. Turkey argues that the financial benefits from extraction should be distributed equally among both communities inhabiting the island. One cannot rule out that if the division of Cyprus becomes permanent, Turkey would take actions to hinder use of the island's resources by Greek Cypriots. Reunification, however, would enable export of the island's resources through Turkish territory. It would be a cheaper and technically more feasible solution than an Israel-Cyprus-Greece-Italy gas pipeline, on which initial agreement was signed on 3 April. Still, it would require consensus between Turkey and the EU that they would consider the energy security as a field for strategic cooperation.

Another appeal of Cyprus' reunification would be its potential influence in shaping the new model of EU-Turkey relations. This argument is particularly relevant given the social and political changes Turkey has been undergoing. They may lead to the end of Turkey's accession negotiations with the EU. If that happens, a reunified Cyprus could serve as a pillar of Turkish-European relations. That would be a far more stable foundation for the partnership than the mass-migration agreement of 2016, which is an example of transactional relations. Agreement on the Cyprus issue, in addition to carrying out the energy projects in the Eastern Mediterranean basin, would tie Turkey closer to the EU.

**EU's Role in the Negotiations.** Thus far, the EU's role in the reunification talks has been limited. More active engagement might help the Cypriots' leaders come to agreement on a number of problems.

One of the most serious obstacles in the negotiation process is the system of guarantees. It stems from conditions linked with the Republic of Cyprus' establishment. The Treaty of Guarantee of 1960 made Greece, Turkey and the UK guarantors of the islands' independence, territorial integrity, security and constitution's fulfilment. The treaty served as the legal basis for Turkey's intervention in 1974. Today, the negotiating sides have had difficulties in agreeing the future shape of the guarantee system. While the TRNC insists on retaining a special status for Turkey, the Republic of Cyprus is concerned by that proposal. A solution to this problem may be granting the EU the role of guarantor of any agreement. That could provide real balance for Turkey.

Another major point of controversy between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders is security. The Turkish Cypriots, who are a minority of the island's inhabitants, are afraid of Greek Cypriot domination. Therefore, they insist on allowing some Turkish troops to be on the island (currently in the north, a Turkish contingent of about 30,000 soldiers is deployed). This idea is difficult for Republic of Cyprus authorities to agree to, afraid as they are of Turkey's influence on a united country in the future. The EU might contribute to compromise in that area, for example, by establishing a special policing mission on the island. Hence, both the Turkish Cypriots' worries about their security and the Greek Cypriots' fears about the island's sovereignty would be diminished. Similar proposals reportedly have been discussed by the leaders of the Republic of Cyprus and TRPC. According to Cyprus media, they were dismissed by Mustafa Akıncı, the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community because the president of the Republic of Cyprus Nicos Anastasiades views them as a substitute—not a supplement— of the guarantee system.

**Conclusions and Prospects.** If the Cypriot factions' leaders are able to overcome the recent crisis in negotiations, that may symbolize their willingness to find a solution to the larger issue of reunification. However, scepticism about the success of the reunification talks increases as long as the politicians fail to find common ground on the thorniest issues. Reaching compromise will be even more difficult in the near future, since there will be presidential elections in 2018 in the Republic of Cyprus. The history of the negotiations shows that political campaigns do not serve well the reunification efforts.

Having a more actively engaged EU in the negotiation process will not be easy. Most of all, it requires agreement of the current guarantor status. That may be difficult on prestige considerations alone. Moreover, it would require compromise between the leaders of the Republic of Cyprus and TRPC leaders on both the EU's role and other areas of negotiations. The EU cannot help them on such issues as division of power and territory, which have to be taken care of single-handedly by the Cypriots communities' leaders.

The questions of the EU's energy security and competition on the European gas market are vital for Poland's interests. The EU's more vivid engagement in the Cyprus reunification talks might contribute to success in that area. At the same time, a lack of understanding on the island means solidifying its division. This, in turn, would complicate the implementation of European diversification projects as well as hinder EU Member States' interests in the Eastern Mediterranean region.