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Cyprus: Reunification Proving Elusive

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Summary

As 2017 began, Cyprus entered its 53rd year as a politically separated nation and its 43rd year as a physically divided country.

Long under the auspices of the United Nations, unification talks progressed from a period of stalemate, suspension, missed opportunities, and general pessimism beginning in 2012 to a period of new energy and an atmosphere of “high but cautious optimism” by the end of 2016. This optimism was due to the apparent personal relationship between Republic of Cyprus President Nicos Anastasiades and Mustafa Akinci, leader of the Turkish Cypriots, and their commitment to achieving a settlement.

A permanent solution to end the island’s division has remained elusive. However, a flurry of intense negotiations between December 2016 and January 2017, when Anastasiades and Akinci met first in Mont Pelerin and then Geneva, Switzerland, led many observers to note that the two Cypriot leaders appeared to have come closer to reaching a settlement than at any time since 2004, when the so-called Annan Plan for the unification of the island was voted on but rejected (by the Greek Cypriots).

The Mont Pelerin and Geneva meetings were critical to a settlement because for the first time formal discussions took place on the sensitive issues of territory, including the presentation of maps noting territorial adjustments, and security. The Geneva talks also were historic because on January 12, 2017, a five-party conference was convened with the participation of the guarantor powers, Great Britain, Greece, and Turkey. For the first time, Turkey engaged in a dialogue with representatives of the Republic of Cyprus (even though Turkey does not recognize the Republic of Cyprus). The European Union (EU) also participated in the meetings for the first time.

Cyprus negotiations, however, typically have been characterized as exhibiting periodic levels of optimism quickly tempered by the political reality that difficult times between Greek and Turkish Cypriots always lay ahead. True to form, the Geneva negotiations ended over a dispute on an extraneous issue and because neither side appeared ready to make necessary concessions on security. Some also believed that the breakdown was due to the fact that Ankara could not seriously negotiate on security guarantees and troop withdrawals until after a mid-April vote on a constitutional referendum in Turkey.

After Geneva, talks between Anastasiades and Akinci resumed but quickly broke down in February 2017, when the Greek Cypriot legislature passed a bill instructing schools to remember a 1950 Greek Cypriot-led referendum on *enosis* (the union of Cyprus with Greece). The Turkish Cypriots reacted with outrage, and Akinci refused to continue the talks unless the *enosis* legislation was reversed. In early April, the Greek Cypriot parliament partially reversed the *enosis* legislation, and on April 11, 2017, after eight weeks of suspended negotiations, both sides agreed to resume the talks and scheduled additional meetings into May.

With the referendum vote in Turkey concluded, time has again become an important factor in the negotiations. First, it is unclear where the Cyprus negotiations fall on Ankara’s priority list as the Turkish leadership begins to implement the provisions of the newly amended constitution. Some believe the positive outcome of the vote, which will strengthen the Turkish presidency, will harden Ankara’s positions on Cyprus. Others say the fact that the majority of Turkish voters in north Cyprus voted “no” to the changes may lessen Ankara’s interest in Cyprus for a while. Second, a proposed new round of hydrocarbon drilling approved by the republic could begin in July. This possibility has already provoked protests from Akinci and warnings from Ankara. Finally, the start of the upcoming presidential elections campaign in the republic for an early 2018

vote will soon be well under way, making any concessions by Anastasiades toward a settlement of the Cyprus issue more controversial.

The United States has long maintained interest in a resolution of the Cyprus issue. Internal developments in Turkey, the continued threat from the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, and the growing prospects that the Eastern Mediterranean, including Cyprus, can play an important role in regional energy development and supply have added to the urgency to achieve a solution. The Trump Administration has pledged continued support for the negotiations with the goal of a settlement. However, the level of active engagement by the United States in the early part of the new Administration has not yet been as high as the level of U.S. engagement in 2016.

This report provides a brief overview of the history of the negotiations and a description of some of the issues involved in those talks.

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Background¹

The island republic of Cyprus gained its independence from Great Britain in 1960. At the time, the population living on the island was approximately 77% of Greek ethnic origin and roughly 18% of Turkish ethnic origin. (This figure has changed over the years as an influx of mainland Turks have settled in the north.) Maronite Christians, Armenians, and others constitute the remainder. At independence, the republic's constitution defined elaborate power-sharing arrangements between the two main groups. It required a Greek Cypriot president and a Turkish Cypriot vice president, each elected by his own community. Simultaneously, a Treaty of Guarantee signed by Britain, Greece, and Turkey ensured the new republic's territorial integrity, and a Treaty of Alliance among the republic, Greece, and Turkey provided for Greek and Turkish soldiers to help defend the island. However, at that time, the two major communities aspired to different futures for Cyprus: Most Greek Cypriots favored union of the entire island with Greece (*enosis*), while Turkish Cypriots preferred to partition the island (*taksim*) and possibly unite the Turkish Cypriot zone with Turkey.

Cyprus's success as a stable, new republic lasted from 1960 to 1963. After President (and Greek Orthodox Archbishop) Makarios III proposed constitutional modifications that favored the majority Greek Cypriot community in 1963, relations between the two communities deteriorated, with Turkish Cypriots increasingly consolidating into enclaves in larger towns for safety. In 1964, Turkish Cypriots withdrew from most national institutions and began to administer their own affairs. Intercommunal violence occurred between 1963 and 1964 and again in 1967. On both occasions, outside mediation and pressure, including by the United States, appeared to prevent Turkey from intervening militarily on behalf of the Turkish Cypriots. On March 4, 1964, the United Nations authorized the establishment of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) to control the violence and act as a buffer between the two communities. It became operational on March 27, 1964, and still carries out its mission today.

In 1974, the military junta in Athens supported a coup against President Makarios, replacing him with a more hard-line supporter of *enosis*. In July 1974, Turkey, citing the 1960 Treaty of Guarantee as a legal basis for its move, deployed its military forces in two separate actions to the island and by August 25, 1974, had taken control of more than one-third of the island. This military intervention² had many ramifications. Foremost was the widespread dislocation of both the Greek and Turkish Cypriot population and related governance, refugee, and property problems.

After the conflict subsided and a fragile peace took root, Turkish Cypriots pursued a solution to the conflict that would keep the two communities separate in two sovereign states or two states in a loose confederation. In February 1975, the Turkish Cypriots declared their government the "Turkish Federated State of Cyprus" (TFSC). In 1983, Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktaş declared the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" (TRNC)—a move considered by some to be a unilateral declaration of independence. At the time, Denktaş argued that creation of an independent state was a necessary precondition for a federation with the Greek Cypriots.

¹ Parts of this report are drawn from a more comprehensive history of the Cyprus negotiations included in an archived CRS Report RL33497, *Cyprus: Status of U.N. Negotiations and Related Issues*, by [name redacted].

² Turkey officially refers to its action as a "peace operation." The Greek Cypriots and much of the international community refer to it as an "invasion." Unofficial estimates indicate that Turkish military forces currently deployed in northern Cyprus range from 20,000 to 30,000.

However, he ruled out a merger with Turkey and pledged cooperation with United Nations–brokered settlement efforts. Thirty-two years later, only Turkey has recognized the TRNC.

Between 1974 and 2002, there were numerous, unsuccessful rounds of U.N.-sponsored direct and indirect negotiations to achieve a settlement. Negotiations focused on reconciling the two sides’ interests and reestablishing a central government. They foundered on definitions of goals and ways to implement a federal solution. Turkish Cypriots emphasized bizonality and the political equality of the two communities, preferring two nearly autonomous societies with limited contact. Greek Cypriots emphasized the freedoms of movement, property, and settlement throughout the island. The two parties also differed on the means of achieving a federation: Greek Cypriots wanted their internationally recognized national government to devolve power to the Turkish Cypriots, who would then join a Cypriot republic. For the Turkish Cypriots, two entities would join, for the first time, in a new federation. These differences in views also affected the resolution of issues such as property claims, citizenship of mainland Turks who had settled on the island, and other legal issues. These differences in views continue to plague the negotiations even today.

Figure 1. Map of Cyprus



Source: Adapted by CRS.

Annan Plan

Negotiations for a final solution to the Cyprus issue appeared to take a dramatic and positive step forward when on November 11, 2002, then U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan presented a draft of “The Basis for Agreement on a Comprehensive Settlement of the Cyprus Problem,” commonly

referred to as the Annan Plan. The plan called for, among many provisions, a “common state” government with a single international legal personality that would participate in foreign and European Union relations. Two politically equal component states would address much of the daily responsibilities of government in their respective communities. The Annan Plan was a comprehensive approach and of necessity addressed highly controversial issues for both sides.

Over the course of the next 16 months, difficult negotiations ensued. Turkish Cypriot leader Denktash was replaced as chief negotiator by a more prosettlement figure, newly elected “prime minister” Mehmet Ali Talat. Republic of Cyprus President Glafkos Clerides was replaced through an election with, according to some observers, a more skeptical president, Tassos Papadopoulos. The Annan Plan itself was revised several times in an attempt to reach compromises demanded by both sides. Complicating the matter even more, on April 16, 2003, the Republic of Cyprus signed an accession treaty with the European Union (EU) to become a member of the EU on May 1, 2004, whether or not there was a settlement and a reunited Cyprus.

Finally, after numerous meetings and negotiations and despite a lack of a firm agreement, but sensing that further negotiations would produce little else, on March 29, 2004, Secretary-General Annan released his “final revised plan” and announced that the plan would be put to referenda simultaneously in both north and south Cyprus on April 24, 2004. The Turkish Cypriot leadership split, with Denktash urging rejection and Talat urging support. Greek Cypriot President Papadopoulos, to the dismay of the U.N., EU, and United States, but for reasons he argued were legitimate concerns of the Greek Cypriot community, urged the Greek Cypriots to reject the referenda. On April 24, what remaining hope existed for a solution to the crisis on Cyprus was dashed as 76% of Greek Cypriot voters rejected the plan, while 65% of Turkish Cypriot voters accepted it. In his May 28, 2004, report following the vote, Annan said that “the Greek Cypriots’ vote must be respected, but they need to demonstrate willingness to resolve the Cyprus problem through a bi-communal, bi-zonal federation and to articulate their concerns about security and implementation of the Plan with ‘clarity and finality.’”

The Christofias-Talat Negotiations: 2008-2010

As early as 2004, Talat, as Turkish Cypriot “prime minister,” was credited with helping convince the Turkish Cypriots to support the Annan Plan and had been seen as perhaps the one Turkish Cypriot leader who could move the Greek Cypriots toward a more acceptable solution for both sides. For his efforts at the time, Talat, on April 17, 2005, was elected “president” of the unrecognized TRNC over the National Unity Party’s (UBP’s) Dr. Dervis Eroglu, receiving 55.6% of the vote in a field of nine.

For roughly the next four years, to little avail, Cyprus muddled through a series of offers and counteroffers to restart serious negotiations even as the Greek Cypriots solidified their new status as a member of the EU, a status not extended to the Turkish Cypriots despite an EU pledge to try to help end the isolation of the north.

On February 24, 2008, 61-year-old Demetris Christofias of the Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL) was elected to a five-year term as president of the Republic of Cyprus. Christofias was educated in the Soviet Union and is a fluent Russian speaker. He joined the communist-rooted AKEL party at the age of 14 and rose through its ranks to become leader in 1988. Christofias was elected president of the Cypriot House of Representatives in 2001 and won reelection in 2006.

Christofias’s election had the backing of the Democratic (DIKO) Party and the Socialist (EDEK) Party. Christofias, in part, tailored his campaign to opposing what he believed was an uncompromising approach toward the Turkish Cypriots by his opponent, incumbent President

Papadopoulos, and the stagnation in the attempt to reach a just settlement of the Cyprus problem. Although serious differences existed between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot sides over a final settlement, Christofias took the outcome of the vote as a sign that Greek Cypriots wanted to try once again for an end to the division of the island. In his inaugural address, President Christofias expressed the hope of achieving a “just, viable, and functional solution” to the Cyprus problem. He said that he sought to restore the unity of the island as a federal, bizonal, bicomunal republic; to exclude any rights of military intervention; and to provide for the withdrawal of Turkish troops and, ultimately, the demilitarization of the island. Christofias also reaffirmed that the 2004 Annan Plan, which he himself opposed at the time, was null and void and could not be the basis for a future settlement.

After Christofias’s election, Turkish Cypriot leader Talat, a long-time acquaintance of Christofias, declared that “a solution in Cyprus is possible by the end of 2008.”³ He also declared that “the goal is to establish a new partnership state in Cyprus, based on the political equality of the two peoples and the equal status of two constituent states.”⁴ While the negotiations between Christofias and Talat appeared to get off to a fast start, the differences in positions quickly became apparent, and the talks, although held on a regular basis, soon began to bog down. Talat wanted to pursue negotiations on the basis of the provisions of the old Annan Plan, while Christofias, mindful of the Greek Cypriot rejection of that plan, was keen to avoid references to it. Old differences quickly resurfaced. As the negotiations dragged on well into 2009, it appeared that impatience, frustration, and uncertainty were beginning to mount against both Christofias in the south and Talat in the north.

By the end of 2009, perspectives on both sides of the island began to change. Some suggested that the Greek Cypriots sensed that the talks would not produce a desired outcome before the April 2010 elections in the north, in which Talat, running for reelection, was trailing in the polls to Eroglu. If Talat lost, it was argued, the negotiations were likely to have to begin anew with an entirely different Turkish Cypriot leadership. Under that scenario, many Greek Cypriots, including members within the political parties of the governing coalition, seemed leery of weakening their hand by offering further concessions. Some Turkish Cypriots, on the other hand, appeared to think that the Greek Cypriot side would not offer Talat a negotiated settlement, betting from the opinion polls in the north that Eroglu would win the April elections and would pull back from serious negotiations, at least for a while as he consolidated his new government and reordered Turkish Cypriot strategy. The Greek Cypriots could then blame the anticipated hard-liners in the north and their presumed patrons in Ankara if the talks collapsed.

As the negotiations entered 2010, it appeared that the window of opportunity to reach a final settlement, at least between Christofias and Talat, was closing fast. Despite the fact that the two sides had been in negotiations for almost 18 months and in close to 60 meetings, they appeared to have had very little to show for their efforts. In his New Year message to the Greek Cypriots, Christofias suggested that while some progress had been made in a few areas, the two sides were not close to a settlement. The intensive dialogue between Christofias and Talat resumed on January 11, 2010, but after three sessions the talks seemed to have reached a standstill, with the gap between the respective positions of President Christofias and Talat on many of the tougher issues seeming to be insurmountable.

³ *Anatolia*, “I Am Hopeful About a Solution, TRNC President Talat,” February 25, 2008, BBC Monitoring European, February 26, 2008.

⁴ Mehmet Ali Talat, letter to the editor, *Financial Times*, March 5, 2008.

The last formal negotiating session between Christofias and Talat concluded on March 30, 2010, with no new developments. In the run-up to the final session there was some speculation that both sides would issue a joint statement assessing the negotiations up to that point and perhaps even announcing some of the areas in which “convergences” between Christofias and Talat had been achieved. Speculation was that Talat had wanted something positive to take into the final days of the election campaign and had presented Christofias a report summarizing what the Turkish Cypriots understood to have been achieved. Christofias, however, was already under pressure from his coalition partner, DIKO, and former coalition partner, EDEK, not to issue such a statement, which could have been interpreted as an interim agreement.

On March 30, 2010, Christofias and Talat issued a short statement suggesting that they had indeed made some progress in governance and power sharing, EU matters, and the economy, but they did not go beyond that. On April 1, Talat, feeling he needed to say more to his Turkish Cypriot constituents about the negotiations, held a press conference at which he outlined his understandings of what he and Christofias had achieved to that point. Christofias would neither confirm nor deny what Talat had presented.

A New Era: Christofias and Eroglu

On April 18, 2010, Talat lost his reelection bid to his rival Dervis Eroglu of the UBP. Observers believe Talat’s defeat was due to a combination of his failure to secure a settlement of the Cyprus problem after almost two years and his inability to convince the EU and others to help end what the Turkish Cypriots believed was the economic isolation of the north. Some observers also noted that an overwhelming number of mainland Turks who had settled in the north and who continued to identify more with mainland Turkey had little interest in unification with Greek Cyprus and voted for Eroglu because they believed his views were consistent with theirs.

Eroglu, then a 72-year-old physician and long-time politician, won the election with just over 50% of the vote. Eroglu was seen as having a style and harder-line views similar to former Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktash, particularly in seeking more autonomy for each community. Eroglu also headed a party in which some of its followers had advocated a permanently divided island and international recognition for the TRNC. It was reported that during the campaign Eroglu may have suggested that perhaps Cyprus should consider a kind of “soft divorce” similar to what the Slovaks and Czechs did when they separated. During the campaign, Eroglu also criticized Talat for what he thought were too many concessions to the Greek Cypriot side, including the agreement that a reunited Cyprus would hold a single sovereignty through which both sides would reunite. Nevertheless, even while criticizing Talat’s positions, Eroglu insisted that negotiations would continue under his presidency. Upon assuming his new office, Eroglu wrote a letter to U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon expressing his willingness to resume the negotiations under the good offices of the U.N. and at the point where the negotiations between Talat and Christofias had left off. Despite Eroglu’s position regarding the resumption of talks, most political elements on the Greek Cypriot side saw Eroglu’s election as a negative development and expressed their skepticism as to what the future would hold.

On May 26, 2010, President Christofias and Turkish Cypriot leader Eroglu held their first formal negotiating session. The meeting was held under the auspices of the U.N. Secretary-General’s special adviser on Cyprus, Alexander Downer. Almost immediately, a controversy arose when it was reported that Downer read a statement from U.N. Secretary-General Ban congratulating the parties for starting the talks again from where they left off (including the confirmation of existing “convergences” agreed to by Christofias and Talat), for agreeing to abide by U.N. Security Council resolutions on Cyprus, and for suggesting that a final agreement could be reached in the coming months.

Downer's statement immediately drew criticism from several of the Greek Cypriot political parties that were concerned that the references to the "convergences" arrived at by Christofias and Talat were being considered as agreements by the U.N., a position not shared by the Greek Cypriots. On the other hand, apparently after the May 26 meeting, Eroglu made a statement that the Turkish Cypriots would not be bound by the statement of the U.N. Secretary-General, especially with regard to previous U.N. Security Council resolutions, some of which did include calls for Turkey to withdraw its troops from Cyprus. While Eroglu was trying to clarify that he accepted U.N. resolutions on the parameters of the negotiations, some in the Greek Cypriot leadership seem to question whether Eroglu was trying to redefine the basis under which he would proceed with the negotiations.

When the talks resumed in May 2010, Christofias and Eroglu, along with several technical committees and working groups with representatives from both sides, met regularly but made no apparent progress. In September, in an interview with Greek Cypriot press, Eroglu expressed his frustration with the process and accused the Greek Cypriots of treating Turkish Cypriot positions with contempt. He apparently suggested that Christofias needed to inform the Greek Cypriot people that any final solution would involve pain on both sides but also had to minimize social upheaval, especially among the Turkish Cypriot community. When asked what pain Eroglu was prepared to accept, however, he stated that it would not include giving up the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus or its flag or sending mainland Turks who settled in the north back to Turkey.⁵ In October 2010, Turkish press reported that Eroglu appeared so frustrated with the negotiations that he suggested that Turkish Cypriots had become fed up and no longer believed in the possibility of a mutually agreeable settlement. "As time passes," he said, "the willingness of the two communities to live together is diminishing."⁶ For his part, Christofias told the U.N. Secretary-General in September 2010 that both sides were not coming closer to a settlement and that Turkey, given its own domestic and regional problems, "was not ready to solve the Cyprus problem."⁷

Although assessments of the negotiations appeared to grow more pessimistic, additional sessions were held through the end of December. Talks were then suspended while Eroglu tended to medical problems. While both sides continued to talk and continued to pledge to seek a solution, neither side had indicated whether progress was being made or that any compromises were possible. On January 1, 2011, Christofias declared his disappointment over the passing of another year without a settlement and accused Turkey of not making any effort to promote a solution to the Cyprus issue.

In mid-April 2011, the Republic of Cyprus entered into a parliamentary election period that concluded on May 22. The outcome of the elections did not seem to suggest that the negotiating position of Christofias would require changes. Although opposition to what was perceived to be Christofias's concessions to the north was voiced during the campaign, none of the three parties with the most hard-line views—EDEK, the pro-Europe EVROKO party, and DIKO—increased its vote share. The impact of the elections would later prove problematic for the negotiations. Similarly, in national elections held in Turkey in June, Cyprus was barely an issue among the competing parties. After the election there was some speculation that Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, having won another five-year term, might have been prepared to inject some positive new energy into the Cyprus negotiations in order to help Turkey's flagging

⁵ *Cyprus Mail*, "Eroglu: 'Treated with Contempt,'" September 19, 2010.

⁶ *Hurriyet Daily News*, "Turkish Cypriot Leader Ready for Tripartite New York Meeting," October 22, 2010.

⁷ *Cyprus Mail*, "Christofias: Two Sides Not Getting Closer," September 12, 2010.

accession negotiations with the EU. Later this seemed to have been a misreading of the prime minister's intentions.

New Year, Continued Stalemate, End of the Talks

Throughout 2011, Christofias and Eroglu continued their futile negotiations, which also included two meetings with U.N. Secretary-General Ban in another attempt by the U.N. to boost momentum for the talks. Ban insisted that the negotiations be stepped up and that the three would meet on October 30 to assess what progress had been achieved. The U.N. would then be prepared to organize an international conference to discuss security-related issues as Turkey suggested. This would be followed by plans to hold referenda on a final solution in both the north and south by the spring of 2012. The hope among some was that by intensifying the negotiations and reaching a solution by the end of 2011, a potentially reunified Cyprus would be prepared to assume the rotating presidency of the EU on July 1, 2012. By the fall of 2011, both sides seemed to have lost a clear urgency to achieve a final solution. Trying to reach a negotiated settlement by the end of October became impractical.

As 2011 ended, pessimism abounded, with many feeling that what had not been accomplished in the previous two years could become very difficult to achieve in 2012 as the Republic of Cyprus entered into full preparation for its EU presidency. Many felt that unless there was a major breakthrough in the negotiations by early 2012, the talks would become even more stalemated and could culminate in a potential dramatic turn of events by the summer.

Doubts about the prospects of a solution acceptable to both sides were also raised with the release of a public opinion poll that apparently found a growing negative climate and public discontent on the island, an increased ambivalence on the part of Turkish Cypriots, and a possible shift toward a no vote for reunification among Greek Cypriots. The poll also found that society on both sides needed to begin a very public discussion of the parameters of the negotiations and that confidence-building measures were needed to be implemented to increase the levels of trust in the peace process.⁸

As 2012 began, both sides were again preparing to travel to New York for a fifth meeting with Ban to assess the progress of the negotiations. Ban had asked both Christofias and Eroglu to come to New York on January 22-24 with significant offers in the areas of governance, economy, and EU affairs so that the "Greentree 2" meeting could facilitate a final deal that would allow the U.N. to convene an international conference in the spring to resolve security-related issues and allow referenda on a final agreement in both the north and south by early summer of 2012.

It appeared, however, that even before arriving in New York, neither Christofias nor Eroglu was willing or able to make necessary concessions on the difficult issues of property rights, security, territory, mainland Turks who had "settled" in the north, or citizenship—areas where both sides had long-held and very different positions. The uncertainty of what could be achieved prompted Christofias to question whether the meeting should take place at all. The lack of any progress to that point led some in the Greek Cypriot opposition to suggest the meeting be cancelled and warned Christofias not to accept any deadlines or U.N. arbitration or agree to an international conference without explicit agreements on internal issues.

Nevertheless, Greentree 2 took place, and it was reported that both sides had submitted to Ban extensive proposals that each felt could provide the basis for a solution. The Greentree meetings concluded without any new agreement to end the stalemate and led an apparently frustrated Ban

⁸ Interpeace, "Latest Cyprus Poll Findings: Greek and Turkish Leadership Must Take Bold Action Now," July 5, 2011.

to say that he would wait until he received a progress report from his special adviser at the end of March 2012 before deciding whether to convene an international conference, despite Christofias's opposition to any such decision.

Christofias and Eroglu resumed their direct negotiations in mid-February, but it appeared unlikely that the stalemate could be broken at that point and that the potential for any agreement looked to be delayed—not only until after the EU presidency in the latter half of 2012, but also until after the February 2013 national elections in the republic. In early April, it was reported that the Turkish Cypriot side had suggested that the U.N.-sponsored talks be terminated once the republic assumed the EU presidency on July 1, 2012. This prompted President Christofias to respond that Turkish Cypriots were no longer interested in a solution, even though, as Christofias suggested, the talks could continue during the EU presidency, as the two issues were not related.⁹

In May 2012, and with the EU presidency fast approaching, Christofias understood that the talks could not have achieved anything positive, and although he insisted that the negotiations could have continued during the EU presidency, the U.N. did not. U.N. special envoy Alexander Downer then announced that Ban had decided not to call for an international conference on Cyprus due to the lack of agreement on core domestic issues and further stated that the U.N. would no longer host the leaders' "unproductive" talks. Downer said that the U.N. would reconvene the meetings "when there was a clear indication that both sides had something substantial to conclude."¹⁰

By mid-2012, the convergence of several factors led to the suspension of the talks. One factor was Christofias's intent to make the republic's presidency of the EU a success. Christofias clearly did not want a divisive debate over what would have probably been an unpopular agreement—even if he and Eroglu could have negotiated a settlement—to detract from or ultimately overshadow the Cyprus EU presidency. Eroglu's pronouncement that he would not meet directly with President Christofias during the six-month EU presidency, despite the fact that the settlement negotiations were not part of the presidency's mandate, was also a factor. The emergence of the fiscal and budget crisis in Cyprus brought on in the aftermath of the larger Eurozone crisis also contributed to the demise of the negotiations. Christofias realized that managing a serious fiscal crisis and the presidency of the EU simultaneously would leave, in reality, little time for him to continue any regular negotiations with Eroglu.

On May 14, 2012, recognizing his own internal political realities and reverting back to an earlier statement that he would not seek reelection if he was not able to resolve the Cyprus problem, President Christofias announced that he would not seek reelection in 2013, stating that "there are no reasonable hopes for a solution to the Cyprus problem or for substantial further progress in the remaining months of our presidency."¹¹

By the end of May 2012, the U.N.-sponsored talks, having essentially reached a stalemate, were formally suspended. Neither Christofias nor Eroglu strongly objected to the U.N. decision. While both sides blamed the other for a lack of progress on an agreement, the reaction to the downgrading of the talks appeared to be muted among both the political leaders and the general publics in both communities.

⁹ *Famagusta Gazette*, "Eroglu Seeks Termination of U.N. Talks on Cyprus, President Says," April 12, 2012.

¹⁰ *Cyprus Mail*, "U.N. Decides to Take a Back Seat," April 28, 2012.

¹¹ *Cyprus Mail*, "Christofias Bows Out," May 15, 2012.

In early June, Kudret Ozersay, then the chief adviser to Eroglu for the negotiations, resigned, further signaling that the talks, even at the technical level, would not continue at the same pace. However, Ozersay was soon replaced by Osman Ertuğ as chief negotiator.

Elections 2013: The Anastasiades Government and New Talks

In January 2013, the Republic of Cyprus entered a period of national elections. With Christofias out of the picture, Nicos Anastasiades of the center-right, democratic DISY party, with the backing of the conservative DIKO and EVROKO parties, emerged as the leader in early public opinion polls. DIKO had been part of the previous Christofias-led government but withdrew from the coalition in disagreement over some of the positions Christofias took in the negotiations with the Turkish Cypriots. Anastasiades's closest challenge came from the AKEL party itself, led by Stavros Malas. Although Anastasiades took the largest number of first round votes, he was forced into a runoff with Malas but eventually emerged victorious. During the campaign, neither candidate offered many concrete proposals regarding the negotiations with the Turkish Cypriots, as the fiscal and budget crisis took center stage.

Anastasiades, who had backed the 2004 Annan Plan for a Cyprus settlement, appeared cautious about his intentions other than calling for a settlement, perhaps not wanting to cause a public rift with his DIKO and EVROKO allies, who had opposed the Annan Plan. While foreclosing new discussions based on the old Annan Plan, Anastasiades had suggested that the basis of future talks would have to be broad understandings reached in 1977 and 1979 between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot leadership at the time as well as a 2006 set of principles agreed to by former Cypriot leaders. He also suggested that as president he would not be directly involved in the day-to-day negotiations but would, in time, appoint someone as his representative and principal negotiator.

Upon being sworn in as president, Anastasiades did reach out to the Turkish Cypriots, referring to them as citizens of Cyprus but not giving any clear signal as to his timetable for restarting the negotiations. On the other hand, Yiannakis Omirou, then-leader of the parliament, stated that a new national policy was necessary: "We need to denounce the Turkish stance to the international and European community and redefine the Cyprus problem as a problem of invasion, occupation and violation of international law." The new policy, Omirou went on, "must set out the framework for a Cyprus solution and use Cyprus's EU membership and Turkey's EU prospects to exert pressure on Ankara to terminate the island's occupation and accept a solution, in accordance with international and European law."¹²

Initially, the Turkish Cypriots appeared cautious about which negotiating partner they expected to see across the table if and when the talks resumed. Would it be Anastasiades, who earlier was sympathetic to many of the provisions of the Annan Plan, or a different negotiator, who was critical of the previous government's negotiating positions and had teamed with what the Turkish Cypriots believed to be hard-line partners who either withdrew from the previous government coalition in part because of the reported "concessions" being offered by Christofias or were consistently critical of the previous government's approach? The Turkish Cypriots had also seemed to set a new standard regarding their own status as a prelude for resuming the talks. Eroglu had stated that the talks could not resume automatically from where they left off and had begun referring to the two "states," a "new dynamic," a "new negotiating table," and a timetable for concluding whatever talks did resume.

¹² *Famagusta Gazette*, "House President: A New Policy on the Cyprus Problem Needed," March 2, 2013.

Even as Anastasiades was being inaugurated, he had to turn his attention to the serious domestic banking and fiscal crises facing the republic. At the same time, Turkish Cypriot and Turkish leadership began to publicly pressure Anastasiades to restart the settlement talks as soon as possible, although it appeared that the Turkish Cypriot side was not proposing any significant compromises or new ideas that would move the talks forward. This prompted Anastasiades to respond that he would not be forced to the bargaining table during this period of economic turmoil and was committed to first addressing the government's fiscal crisis.

In mid-May, Foreign Minister Ioannis Kasoulides traveled to New York and Washington to assure everyone that the leadership of the republic was indeed interested in resuming the negotiations but that they needed time to get a handle on the economic crisis on the island. He also made it clear that the Anastasiades Administration would not be bound by any previous "convergences" discussed between his predecessor Christofias and Eroglu and would not agree to any definitive timetable to conclude the talks. Kasoulides also floated the old idea, previously rejected by the Turkish Cypriots (and opposed by some Greek Cypriots who wanted a comprehensive agreement), that as a confidence-building measure on the part of Turkey, the abandoned town of Verosha should be returned to "its rightful owners." In exchange, the Turkish Cypriots could be permitted to use the port of Famagusta for direct trade with Europe under the supervision of the EU. Turkish Cypriots also traveled to Washington with a more upbeat message that 2014 would be a good year to reach an agreement.

The Turkish Cypriots, however, rejected the return of Verosha and began speaking more publicly and more often of "the realities on the island," referring to two separate coequal states as well as timetables for concluding the talks. Eroglu had stated that "while there is a Greek Cypriot administration in the South, there is the TRNC state in the North." Ankara, for its part, had already suggested that while it was ready to say "yes" to a negotiated solution, a two-state option was viable if talks could not restart and produce a solution in a timely fashion.

Eroglu stated in December 2012 that "the Cyprus problem cannot be solved under existing conditions" and that "a possible settlement of the Cyprus issue could be viable only if it is based on the existing realities on the island," which acknowledges that "there were two different people having two separate languages, religions, nationality and origin and two different states" and that "certainly it was possible to find a solution to make these two people live together, however people should bear in mind, it is [not] realistic to establish one state from two separate states."¹³

In late May 2013, Anastasiades and Eroglu finally met, and Anastasiades restated his support for the resumption of the talks but again indicated that the talks could not restart until perhaps October 2013. In July, the Greek Cypriot National Council took the day-to-day responsibility for the negotiations out of the hands of the president, as had been the practice since 2008, and appointed Ambassador Andreas Mavroyiannis of the Foreign Ministry as the Greek Cypriot negotiator. This action increased speculation that the Greek Cypriots were close to proposing that preliminary discussions begin with the goal of resuming the formal negotiations.

Throughout the remainder of 2013 and into the beginning of 2014, both sides repeatedly argued over how to restart the talks despite repeated assurances from both sides that they remained committed to restarting the negotiations. Through that period, neither side had been willing to reach agreement on the language of what the Greek Cypriots insisted should be a "joint statement" redefining a set of negotiating goals or outcomes that both sides would strive to achieve. The Turkish Cypriots initially rejected the idea that such an opening statement was

¹³ Statements made by Turkish Cypriot leader Eroglu on various occasions in December 2012 as provided to CRS by the Turkish Cypriots.

necessary but then decided to negotiate language they could be comfortable with. Negotiations between Mavroyiannis and Osman Ertuğ took almost six months to conclude.

On February 8, 2014, after what appeared to be a significant intervention by the United States, the Cyprus press reported that an agreement on the language of a “joint declaration” had been reached and that Anastasiades and Eroglu would meet right away to relaunch the negotiations. This was further confirmed when the “joint statement” was released to the public a few days later.¹⁴ The Declaration, which to some became the most comprehensive agreed document on the Cyprus question since the High Level Agreements of 1977 and 1979 or the Annan Plan of 2004, now serves the basis of the current negotiations.

The agreement on the language of the joint statement, however, did not come without a political price for Anastasiades. On February 27, the leader of the government’s coalition partner, DIKO, Nicolas Papadopoulos, announced that it was leaving the government in disagreement over the way President Anastasiades was handling the negotiations, much as they did when they quit the Christofias government.¹⁵ It appeared that Papadopoulos—whose father, former President Tassos Papadopoulos, had opposed the Annan Plan—was concerned that Anastasiades had tacitly accepted some of the past “convergences” that DIKO had opposed. The fact that the joint statement referred only to a “united” Cyprus and not the Republic of Cyprus may have again suggested to DIKO that Anastasiades had come too close to accepting an autonomous Turkish Cypriot state over which the Greek Cypriots would have little or no authority or jurisdiction.

Curiously, Ertuğ left his post as negotiator after the Declaration was announced but continued to serve as Eroglu’s spokesperson. The Turkish Cypriots then reappointed former negotiator Kudret Ozersay, one seen as more willing to seek accommodation, as their representative to the talks. Negotiations resumed between Mavroyiannis and Ozersay, with Anastasiades and Eroglu meeting periodically. It remained unclear exactly where the starting point for each of the “chapters” of issues to be negotiated had been set. Both sides had earlier insisted that they would not be bound by past “convergences” thought to have been achieved in previous negotiations. However, the February joint statement referred to the fact that only “unresolved” issues would be on the table, suggesting that perhaps some previous agreements had, in fact, been accepted.

Such a long disagreement first over the need for, and then the language of, the joint statement indicated to many observers that it would continue to be difficult to reach a final solution, particularly in 2014, which marked the 40th anniversary of the 1974 deployment of Turkish military forces to the island and the 10th anniversary of the Greek Cypriot vote against the Annan Plan, events that would be observed in very different ways on each side of the island. The pessimism surrounding the potential continuation of the stalemate prompted one well-respected Washington think tank to suggest that a permanent separation of the two sides might become inevitable and that serious consideration should be given to such a possible outcome.¹⁶

The talks did resume in 2014, with Anastasiades and Eroglu meeting several times. In early July, Eroglu was said to have submitted a “roadmap” toward a settlement, which included a national referendum to be held by the end of 2014. This was apparently rejected by Anastasiades. Later in July it was reported that the Greek Cypriots had tabled a 17-point plan addressing their positions on issues for a future agreement while the Turkish Cypriots submitted a 15-point counterproposal.

¹⁴ For text of the statement, see *Cyprus Mail*, “Joint Declaration Final Version as Agreed Between the Two Leaders,” February 11, 2014.

¹⁵ *Famagusta Gazette*, “DIKO Decides to Leave Cyprus Government Coalition,” February 27, 2014.

¹⁶ International Crisis Group, “Divided Cyprus: Coming to Terms on an Imperfect Reality,” Europe Report 229, March 2014.

Both proposals were apparently rejected. Not only was there disagreement on how to go forward, but there had been reports that both sides had actually backtracked on several issues (see below). These and other reported roadblocks to the negotiations prompted Greek Prime Minister Antonis Samaras to say in July that no “significant progress” had been made¹⁷ and the Turkish Cypriot official for foreign affairs, Ozdil Nami, to suggest “the peace talks were finished.”¹⁸

The last meeting between Anastasiades and Eroglu before a break for the summer was held on July 26 and was reportedly a somewhat tense session, with Anastasiades expressing his frustration with the Turkish Cypriot side. In late August, the United Nations named Norwegian diplomat Espen Barth Eide as the Secretary-General’s new special adviser on Cyprus. The talks, hosted by Eide, resumed in September, and when Anastasiades and Eroglu renewed their meetings on September 21, Turkish Cypriot negotiator Kudret Ozersay stated that he felt that “real negotiations are starting now.”¹⁹ Unfortunately, Ozersay’s optimism did not last very long. Near the end of September, Turkey, sensing an increased interaction among the Republic of Cyprus, Greece, Israel, and Egypt over energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean, decided, in what was seen as a provocative act, to move its own seismic exploration vessel into the Republic of Cyprus’s exclusive economic zone (EEZ) off the southern coast of the island. Turkey then issued what was referred to as a “navigational telex” (NAVTEX) stating that the seismic operations could last until April 2015 unless the Turkish Cypriots were given more of a role in decisions regarding the island’s natural resources, specifically energy. Reacting to Turkey’s decision to establish a presence in the Cypriot EEZ, President Anastasiades announced in October that he was withdrawing from the settlement negotiations and declared that the talks would not resume until the Turkish seismic vessel was withdrawn from Cyprus’s EEZ and the NAVTEX was rescinded. By March 2015, the seismic ship had moved to the port of Famagusta, but the NAVTEX had not been withdrawn.

Although the Greek Cypriots insisted that all of the island would eventually benefit from any resources exploited in the waters off the coast, they pointed out that energy, under the provisions of the joint statement agreed to earlier, would be considered a “federal-level” issue and would become part of the dialogue once an agreement was reached. The Turkish Cypriots, for their part, demanded that energy issues become part of the formal settlement negotiations once they resumed. In late October 2014, with the negotiations suspended, Turkish Cypriot negotiator Ozersay was replaced by Ergun Olgun. The suspension of the talks, precipitated for some by an unnecessary action and a possible overreaction, again raised serious doubts regarding the commitment of both sides to achieve a solution that left one former British foreign secretary stating that “the international community should accept the reality that there is division and that you have partition.”²⁰

Through the first four months of 2015, the talks remained in suspension with Anastasiades continuing to hold that Turkey would have to withdraw its seismic ship, rescind the NAVTEX issued in January, and stop threatening existing energy exploration activities off the southern coast of Cyprus. Some believed that political pressure from what would be his normal domestic political allies had forced Anastasiades into a corner, preventing him from backing down from this demand despite some domestic and international pressure to do so. Others believed he was

¹⁷ *Famagusta Gazette*, “No “Significant Progress” in Cyprus Talks—Greek PM,” July 28, 2014.

¹⁸ “Cyprus Peace Talks Are Finished, Claims Ozdil Nami,” Turkish Cypriot TV as reported in the *Famagusta Gazette*, July 18, 2014.

¹⁹ Interview with Kudret Ozersay on Ada TV, September 2014.

²⁰ “Straw Calls for Acceptance of Cyprus Division,” reported by the *Famagusta Gazette*, from an interview between former British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw and the Anadolu Agency, November 26, 2014.

under pressure to hold off on the talks until the national elections in the north, scheduled for April 19, were concluded.

By mid-April 2015, Turkey had removed its seismic vessel from Cyprus and did not renew the NAVTEX. However, the election campaign in the north had begun, and both sides accepted the fact that the negotiations would not resume until after the elections.

Elections 2015: Akinci and the Resumption of the Negotiations

On April 19, Turkish Cypriots went to the polls to elect a new “president.” Seven candidates were on the ballot. The incumbent, Dervis Eroglu, emerged with a thin margin of votes over the runner up, Mustafa Akinci, but did not win enough to avoid a second round of voting. On April 26, in the second round of voting, Mustafa Akinci of the small, center-left, Communal Democratic Party (TDA) won the election to become the new leader of the Turkish Cypriots, defeating Eroglu with 60% of the votes. Akinci, a three-time “mayor” of the Turkish Cypriot-administered half of Nicosia, immediately announced that the negotiations would resume as soon as possible in May and that it was his intention to conclude a settlement agreement by the end of 2015. In congratulating Akinci on his election, Anastasiades confirmed that he, too, looked forward to restarting the negotiations as soon as possible.

Akinci leads a small political party that played little, if any, role in previous governments or the past negotiation process. His candidacy initially was criticized by some who claimed he was inexperienced. For others, Akinci entered the negotiations unencumbered with any preconditions for the talks or for a settlement. However, while Akinci controlled the “presidency,” his party did not control the government. Akinci also did not initially meet with all of the other Turkish Cypriot political parties, and he seemed determined to rely on the business and nongovernmental organization (NGO) communities to help develop and articulate his negotiating positions.

It did not take long for the two sides to meet. On May 11, 2015, the U.N. Special Envoy hosted a dinner for the two leaders in what was described as a relaxed and positive setting. Akinci quickly named Ozdil Nami, the former “foreign minister” in the Eroglu government, as the new negotiator for the Turkish Cypriot side. On May 17, 2015, Anastasiades and Akinci held their first formal negotiating session. On May 23, the two leaders took the unprecedented step of walking together down Ledra Street, the symbolic dividing line of the island, in a show of solidarity and hope that this time things would be different. This was the first time that a president of the republic stepped onto territory normally referred to as “occupied” land. Since then, the two leaders have met regularly, including an intensified series of meetings in August and September 2016.

The reaction to Akinci among some, although not all, Greek Cypriots appeared to be positive but restrained, with a somewhat upbeat “wait-and-see” attitude prevailing. Many appeared to be relieved that Eroglu and his hard-line approach to the negotiations were gone. With little in the way of determined political opponents acting as a restraint on his negotiating strategy, some felt that Akinci would be more willing to compromise on some of the issues Eroglu would not budge on. On the other hand, not knowing where Akinci’s support for a final deal would actually come from, some were not sure exactly what Akinci could compromise on. In August 2015, Akinci held a round of visits and discussions with the political parties, NGOs, and the business community apparently to assess exactly how much leeway he had for compromise.

Turkey was another factor for Akinci. Akinci was not seen as a favorite of Ankara during the elections, and Ankara was likely surprised with the margin of his victory. The government in Ankara offered the obligatory congratulations to Akinci, and Turkey’s President Erdogan visited the island to meet with the new leader. In fact, it was reported in the Turkish press that Akinci and

Turkish President Erdogan had exchanged some unpleasant words immediately after the election. In his victory statement, Akinci reiterated his campaign position that the status of the relationship between Turkey and Turkish Cyprus should change. “It should be a relationship of brothers/sisters, not a relationship of a motherland and her child,” he had said.²¹ This provoked a somewhat angry response from Erdogan and led the Turkish press to question the future of Turkey’s support for the negotiations. In an editorial in the April 28, 2015, edition of the *Hurriyet Daily News*, the author suggested that

Akinci has been away from active politics for more than a decade. His team is mostly composed of young people unaware of the delicacies and history of the Cyprus problem. Anastasiades might try to score an easy victory. If the Cyprus talks between the “novice” Akinci team and a ravenous Anastasiades team somehow agree on a deal that favored the demands of the Greek Cypriots, Akinci could dangerously risk fundamental demands of the Turkish Cypriots, forcing the whole process to be derailed in a manner very difficult to revive with extreme effort.²²

In an August 2015 interview, Emine Colak, the former Turkish Cypriot “foreign minister,” indicated that Turkey was not trying to manipulate the peace talks and seemed, for the moment, content to let the Turkish Cypriots negotiate their own agreement.²³ Some observers attributed this “hands-off” approach by Turkey as a reason why a positive atmosphere had surrounded the talks and why some concrete progress seemed to have been made.

Over the summer and fall of 2015, as the negotiations continued on a regular pace, several new “confidence-building” measures were initiated. The two leaders agreed on the opening of a new border crossing at Deryneia, and for the first time in 40 years, electricity connections between the two sides were reestablished. Returning Verosha to the Greek Cypriots continued to be a confidence-building measure that Anastasiades endorsed, but that issue was mostly deferred by Akinci. Despite the positive atmosphere surrounding the talks, there were words of caution, particularly from Greek Cypriots, who reminded everyone that there was still a lot of ground to cover.²⁴

During 2016, the road to a settlement remained difficult and, beyond the negotiators themselves, became somewhat more complicated. Internally, in the north, disputes among the political parties in early 2016 forced the more “friendly-to-Akinci” government coalition to collapse. A new, more conservative Turkish Cypriot coalition government was formed that did not include representatives from Akinci’s party or parties from the previous coalition. The government is led by “Prime Minister” Huseyin Ozgurgun, whose support for the negotiations went from lukewarm to marked by serious doubts. Ozgurgun has become more critical of the talks and has spoken out forcefully in favor of retaining Turkish security guarantees. In an August 2016 interview, and again since then, Ozgurgun took the time to remind observers that Akinci’s negotiating team did not include any representatives from the government, suggesting that the government and the negotiators were “disconnected.”²⁵ The government also includes “Deputy Prime Minister” Serder Denktash, the son of the former icon of the Turkish Cypriots. Some believe that he retains his father’s hard-line skepticism of any deal and had suggested that if an agreement was not reached by the end of 2016, a referendum should be held in the north to determine whether the

²¹ “Erdogan Engages in War of Words with New Turkish Cypriot Leader,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, April 26, 2015.

²² “Akinci Won, Now What,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, April 28, 2015.

²³ “Turkey Not Manipulating Cyprus Peace Talks,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, August 2, 2015.

²⁴ “Euphoria over Cyprus talks not justified,” *Famagusta-Gazette*, October 17, 2015.

²⁵ “No government representative in Cyprus talks: Ozgurgun,” *North Cyprus News*, August 2, 2016.

Turkish Cypriots wanted the negotiations to continue in 2017. Such a referendum idea was dropped as the negotiations entered 2017. Recently, current “Foreign Minister” Tashin Ertugruloglu, who opposed the Annan Plan, also has become more public in expressing the view that no agreement could be achieved. These three influential figures could become a political problem down the road for Akinci should a tentative agreement be reached.

In the south, elections were held in spring 2016 for the Greek Cypriot House of Representatives. The two largest parties, the governing DISY party and the prosettlement AKEL, lost some ground, and for the first time a nationalist/populist party (ELAM) entered the House. This party is seen by some as an offshoot of the radical right Golden Dawn in Greece. Although small in number, like several of the other parties, ELAM is skeptical of any power-sharing arrangement with the Turkish Cypriots.

Despite the internal political developments, both sides proceeded with the negotiations through 2016. The mood appeared to be as positive and constructive as it had ever been, at least among the negotiators, with more frequent references to being farther along on the road to a settlement than in the past. There were also more positive stories in the international press and significant expressions of support for the negotiations from many world capitals, indicating perhaps that progress was actually being achieved.

Despite the level of optimism displayed by the leaders of the two sides, many recalled a similarly hopeful atmosphere in early 2008, after Christofias was elected president on a campaign filled with commitments of a quick conclusion to the negotiations. At that time, Turkish Cypriot leader Ali Talat declared that because he and Christofias shared the same vision of a future for Cyprus, the two could overcome years of disagreement and mistrust and that the negotiations could conclude within six months. Akinci’s declarations regarding a quick settlement by the end of 2015 raised expectations, but that deadline, never accepted by Anastasiades, was missed—as, subsequently, was the end of 2016 target.

To most observers, the two leaders seemed to have come closer to reaching a settlement than at any time since 2004, when the Annan Plan for a settlement and unification of the island was actually voted on (and ultimately rejected by the Greek Cypriots). However, the normal frustrations that inevitably appear in these negotiations again mounted over the two sides’ inability to establish an end point at which time an agreement—not perfect, but acceptable to both sides—would be reached. Some Turkish Cypriot leaders, including Akinci, had begun to suggest that this current round of talks could be the last if an agreement was not reached.

By the beginning of August 2016, with both sides insisting that significant “convergences” acceptable to both leaders had been reached on many issues, the leaders again raised the possibility of reaching an agreement by the end of 2016. Such a timetable would have allowed them to hold referenda in both communities by spring 2017, before the next presidential election cycle begins in the republic.

Having agreed to try to reach a settlement by the end of 2016, Anastasiades and Akinci accelerated their negotiations after a short early August recess. In late August and early September, eight intense sessions were held in advance of the U.N. General Assembly meeting in mid-September. The idea was to achieve enough progress by then on many of the basic issues that both sides would then ask the U.N. Secretary-General to convene a five-party conference (with the two Cypriot communities and the security guarantee countries, Greece, Turkey, and the UK) in December to discuss the issue of security guarantees and finalize an agreement.

Although no five-party conference was announced at the U.N. meeting, the two leaders returned to Cyprus and agreed to another series of accelerated sessions in October and November, to further address the issue of territory and to move to a multiparty conference on security

guarantees with the intention of finalizing an agreement. Despite the progress in areas such as economic affairs, EU affairs, citizenship, and governance and structures, serious differences on a rotational presidency, territory, and the sensitive chapter on security guarantees—the first time these issues had been formally discussed since the 2004 Annan Plan—remained wide enough to prevent an actual agreement from being achieved during those sessions.

Mont Pelerin

In November 2016, both sides agreed to travel to Mont Pelerin, Switzerland, to further address the more difficult issue of territory and to move to an agreement on holding a five-party conference on security guarantees. During the first week of the Mont Pelerin talks, which began on November 8, progress was reported on several issues and maps depicting what both sides thought should be the new boundaries of the new constituent states were discussed.

Disagreement over the amount of territory both sides would eventually claim and the number of displaced persons (mostly Greek Cypriots) who would be allowed to return to the new territories brought the talks to a standstill. The Greek Cypriots demanded that some 90,000 displaced Greek Cypriots be returned to new territory that would come under Greek Cypriot administration. The Turkish Cypriots insisted that the number be closer to 65,000. Faced with the loss of territory and a potential influx of Greek Cypriots into areas once controlled by the Turkish Cypriots, Akinci suggested that no deal on territorial adjustment could be made without a discussion and agreement on security guarantees.

President Anastasiades rejected the security-guarantee demand, noting that the Mont Pelerin sessions were only intended to reach an agreement on territorial adjustment and, if accomplished, a discussion of the security issues would be held. Amid this disagreement, the meetings were suspended for one week while both sides consulted with their advisers. Apparently, during this time, Ankara reiterated that the Turkish Cypriots should not agree to any territorial concessions without security guarantees, which could only be agreed to in a five-party or a multiparty conference to include Turkey. When the talks reconvened on November 20 and 21, 2016, no agreement could be reached, as the Turkish Cypriots insisted on a date for a five-party conference and maintained that both territory and security be included in those talks. The Greek Cypriots refused to agree to set a date for the five-party conference, and the talks ended.

Both sides returned to Cyprus to reflect on the negotiations and to decide how to proceed. The Greek Cypriots wanted the resumption of the talks to begin where the Mont Pelerin talks on territory ended, including the presentation of maps defining new territorial boundaries. The Turkish Cypriots insisted that the talks could only restart if the Greek Cypriots agreed to a formal date for a five-party conference on territory and guarantees.

Not wanting to lose the momentum achieved at that point or to have the talks end, Anastasiades and Akinci on December 1, 2016, after a dinner hosted by U.N. Special Adviser on Cyprus Espen Barth Eide, agreed to meet as necessary in December 2016 and early January 2017. The goal was to bridge the gaps and resolve the disagreements that existed on most issues. In agreeing to the additional meetings, both sides set a timetable that included the following:

- After the additional meetings, the leaders would meet in Geneva on January 9, 2017, to discuss and wrap up all pending issues, outside of territory and security.
- On January 11, 2017, the two sides would present their respective proposed maps for a territorial adjustment.

- A five-party conference with the participation of the guarantor powers would be convened on January 12, 2017, to discuss and settle both the territory issue and the future of security guarantees, paving the way for a final agreement.

These new developments again reinforced the observation that Anastasiades and Akinci still felt that a final agreement looked to be achievable. Both leaders subsequently instructed their negotiators to meet regularly and agreed to meet with each other as necessary until January 9, 2017, when the negotiations would reconvene in Geneva. For Anastasiades, the decision to resume the talks was not without additional controversy, as he came under criticism from his opponents for caving in to Akinci's demand for a five-party conference on security without having achieved any territorial adjustments.

Geneva Conference

On January 9, 2017, Anastasiades and Akinci, accompanied by their negotiating teams and leaders of the major political parties, along with EU representation, convened in Geneva, Switzerland, to begin what was hoped to be the final phase of the negotiations. The meeting also ushered in a new, historic element of the talks in that the guarantor nations, including Turkey, would be present at the negotiating table.

The Geneva meetings apparently began on a positive note with what was reported to be a "convergence" on the sticking point of a rotating presidency and even more public references to a "United Federal Cyprus." Nevertheless, on January 11, 2017, when both sides presented their proposed maps for territorial adjustment to the U.N., the negotiations appeared to veer off course. Although the differences in the amount of territory each side demanded came within approximately 1% of each other, the symbolism of the differences was notable. Each side found the other's demands to be unacceptable. For instance, the Greek Cypriot map included the return of Morphou, whereas the Turkish Cypriot map did not.

Failing to accept each other's territorial demands, the negotiations ran into additional problems on January 12, 2017, when the five-party negotiations convened. Ankara rejected the Greek Cypriot territorial demand and insisted that Turkey's security role in the north be preserved. Greece was equally insistent that Turkey's security role end. Other issues, including political equity concerns expressed by the Turkish Cypriots and Turkey's curious demand that the EU's four freedoms (movement of people, goods, services, and property rights), implied in any solution, also be applied to Turkish citizens living in the north became sticking points. Apparently realizing that the security-guarantee issue and the future role of Turkey in the north would not be resolved, and after Anastasiades's rejection of the introduction of the four freedoms proposal, Turkey's foreign minister, Mevlut Cavasoglu, departed Geneva. The conference ended, with some questioning why Turkey even attended the meeting, and both sides returned to Cyprus.

Although the Geneva talks came to a surprising and disappointing end, with both sides blaming the other, Anastasiades and Akinci would not let the failure to make any significant progress end the momentum they had been praised for earlier in the conference. The leaders agreed to establish a working group of technical experts to continue to iron out differences and prepare for new meetings later in January or February 2017. That working group returned to Mont Pelerin for two days of what were described by Mavroyiannis, the Greek Cypriot negotiator, as very positive discussions.²⁶

²⁶ Comments of Andreas Mavroyiannis at a discussion held at the Atlantic Council, March 8, 2017.

Once again, Anastasiades and Akinci were unable to overcome some of the barriers that have blocked their ability to secure a final agreement. In addition, the strong statements voiced by both Greece and Turkey regarding security guarantees raised concern among some that the negotiations had, in part, been taken out of the hands of the Cypriots and put into the Turkey-Greece relationship.

Equally important to the two sides' inability to overcome long-standing differences was the fact that public opposition to the two leaders' negotiating positions had begun to increase. Although opponents of the talks on both sides were invited to Geneva, four of the five major Greek Cypriot political parties took issue with President Anastasiades over his positions. Akinci fared no better, with leaders of the Turkish Cypriot government apparently objecting to the map he presented.

Talks Suspended

The two sides' inability to make any discernable progress toward a final solution at both Mont Pelerin and Geneva underscored the difficulties of reaching agreement on territorial adjustments and security guarantees. Turkey's injection of the four freedoms issue could have been a diversion by Ankara in an attempt to stall the negotiations until after the April referendum, whereas Akinci still wanted Anastasiades to step back from his reported comments that the Turkish Cypriots had to face the fact of a minority status on the island. Nevertheless, as was the case after the failure of Mont Pelerin, both sides anticipated that the good relationship between the two leaders would allow the negotiations to resume, at least between the Cypriots, after a short time of reflection. The talks resumed on January 27, 2017, and two additional sessions were held in the beginning of February. During that time, the discussions focused on the four freedoms issue and how and when a second Geneva conference could be convened. Anastasiades continued his refusal to discuss the four freedoms and called on the EU to support his position that only the EU could make that decision once an agreement was reached and the north entered the EU. Akinci, for his part, suggested that a new Geneva conference could be held by the end of March 2017, although many thought that unlikely given the mid-April referendum in Turkey.

On February 13, 2017, however, the negotiations hit a wall. That day, the Greek Cypriot parliament approved a proposal submitted by the right-wing ELAM political party to introduce an annual event in the form of a reading and discussion in public schools to mark the January 1950 referendum on *enosis* (the union of Cyprus with Greece). Nineteen members of parliament (MPs) from five parties voted in favor of the proposal, 16 AKEL MPs voted against, and the DISY MPs abstained. Akinci was livid that Anastasiades's party did not oppose the legislation and demanded that Anastasiades take action to retract the resolution. Akinci notified the Greek Cypriots that the meeting of the technical negotiators scheduled for the next day would be canceled.

When the two leaders met for their regularly scheduled meeting on February 16, 2017, Akinci insisted that Anastasiades reverse parliament's decision on the 1950 referendum, claiming the *enosis* issue underscored Turkish Cypriots' concerns for their safety and security after a settlement and reinforced the argument for why Turkish troops should remain in the north. When Anastasiades reacted by trying to downplay the significance of the legislation, a debate ensued. It was reported that Anastasiades left the room for a break but when he returned he found that Akinci had left the meeting. Both sides blamed each other for canceling the meeting.

Over the next eight weeks, no meetings were held between Anastasiades and Akinci despite efforts by U.N. Special Adviser Eide and others to resume the talks. Akinci stated that he would not return to the table until the *enosis* issue was retracted. In an interview with Anastasiades, the president said he hoped the Turkish Cypriot side and Turkey would reconsider the suspension and

return to the negotiating table, but he did not expect this to happen before the April referendum in Turkey.²⁷

During the period of the suspension of the talks, both sides continued to blame the other for ending the negotiations while claiming that each was ready to resume the discussions. Although Akinci and other Turkish Cypriot leaders were clearly angry over the *enosis* issue, some believe that Akinci also was stalling for time on behalf of Turkey, because Ankara could no longer negotiate on security guarantees and troop deployments until after the vote on the constitutional referendum in Turkey.

Eventually, the Greek Cypriot parliament partially reversed the *enosis* requirement by turning the decisions over how the historical event would be addressed by the Greek Cypriot school system to the Education Ministry. Although some in the north complained that this was not enough, and many in the south complained that the government had capitulated to the Turkish Cypriots, Akinci felt Anastasiades had made the effort to diffuse the tension and agreed to return to the talks.

On April 11, 2017, after eight weeks of suspended negotiations, both sides agreed to resume the talks and scheduled four additional meetings into May.

Issues

Throughout much of the recent history of the Cyprus negotiations, both sides have periodically reported that various levels of “convergences” had been reached, mostly on the issues of EU affairs, governance, economics, citizenship, and how to resolve and compensate for disputed property. The negotiations are conducted under the principle that “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed”; thus, the term *convergences* has been used to describe likely agreement without admitting that agreements have actually been reached until all issues have been resolved.

As intensely as the Cyprus negotiations have been followed in the press and by outside political observers, it has always been difficult to determine with any specificity exactly what either side means by the term “convergences” when referring to agreements on the issues under negotiation.

In his April 1, 2010, press conference, former Turkish Cypriot leader Talat stated that 31 “joint documents” had been prepared addressing a range of issues. Talat suggested that the new federal government would have powers over external relations, EU policies, citizenship, budget matters, and economic coordination. Within these, for instance, was apparently an understanding that one side would hold the portfolio of the foreign minister and the other side would hold the EU portfolio. Still another points had the equal constituent states covering most of the remainder of the governance issues. These “convergences” seemed to have been written into the later 2014 joint statement between Anastasiades and Akinci. Talat also suggested that the two sides had agreed on a Senate, equally represented, and a House proportionally represented based on population. There was also reportedly a “convergence” on a new judicial court that would have equal Turkish and Greek Cypriot representation and an agreement that Cyprus would be represented in the European Parliament by four Greek and two Turkish Cypriot members of parliament. A federal supreme court also was identified in the joint statement.

When former Presidents Christofias and Eroglu began their negotiations, neither side acknowledged the Christofias/Talat “convergences” as anything more than unofficial

²⁷ Interview with President Anastasiades, *Cyprus Weekly*, February 24, 2017.

understandings. What did appear clear, however, were the issues on which little agreement had been reached or those that had been the subject of some backtracking by both sides.

Both Anastasiades and Eroglu had indicated that neither would be bound by any of the past “convergences,” although some of the language in their February 2014 joint statement suggested that some past agreements had been accepted. Nevertheless, during the course of the negotiations over the summer of 2014, the status of these “convergences” seemed to become more uncertain, with both sides sending mixed signals over whether they had agreed to anything.

When Anastasiades and Akinci began their negotiations, it was not clear specifically what the starting point of the negotiations had been beyond the joint statement issued in 2014. Eroglu apparently drew some pretty strong red lines around some issues, and Akinci initially had not appeared, at least publically, to have adopted or refuted any particular positions advocated by Eroglu, although many expected that to happen on some issues. Although reports out of Cyprus by the end of 2016 suggested that more than 90% of the issues may have at least fallen under the term “convergences,” other reports indicated that many technical issues remained unresolved and, of course, security and territory issues had not progressed very far.

The next section, on the issues under negotiation, will look back at the positions taken by previous leaders and will refer to new developments between Anastasiades and Akinci.

One issue both sides continued to differ over was how a new, united Cyprus would be created. The Greek Cypriots assumed that the new unified state would evolve from the existing Republic of Cyprus. The Turkish Cypriots wanted the new state to be based on two equal “founding states.” Eroglu had reiterated that he was not prepared to give up the TRNC. The Turkish Cypriots also wanted the new entity referred to as something other than the “Republic of Cyprus.” The joint statement agreed to by Anastasiades and Eroglu in 2014 simply referred to a “united” Cyprus, not a united “Republic of Cyprus,” and seemed to suggest two relatively separate “constituent states” would be united under a federal government that would have limited authority relative to the power of the two states. The Anastasiades/Akinci talks initially seemed to suggest that the new entity could be referred to something such as the “Federal or United Republic of Cyprus,” but it was unclear how the two sides would get there. In mid-December 2015, Anastasiades stated that “no one was aiming to abolish the Republic of Cyprus,” rather “what we are pursuing is the evolution of the Republic of Cyprus into a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation.”²⁸

In public statements, including in Washington in summer 2016, Turkish Cypriot “foreign minister” Ertugruloglu and others suggested that no agreement could be signed between the leadership of a “Republic of Cyprus” and the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community. For Ertugruloglu, it appears that sovereign equality is not the same as political equality, suggesting that the Turkish Cypriots could not accept an agreement unless it was signed by two equal sovereign leaders, implying that recognition of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus was a requirement for a final agreement. In response, Greek Cypriot government spokesman Nicos Christodoulides said under no circumstances can the regime in the occupied areas be upgraded since it is the product of an illegal action.²⁹ In late 2016, as both sides talked about convening a five-party conference to settle the issue of security and to sign a new agreement, controversy erupted over whether the Greek Cypriots would be represented as the republic. Anastasiades stated that the Republic of Cyprus, as a signatory to the Treaty of Guarantee, had to be represented at the conference. During the Geneva talks in January 2017, the term “United Federal

²⁸ “President Anastasiades Hopes for Cyprus Solution in 2016,” *Famagusta-gazette.com*, December 15, 2015.

²⁹ Statement by Nicos Christodoulides at the World Energy Congress in Istanbul, October 2016.

Cyprus” appeared in numerous references to the federal entity that would be created by an agreement. In addition, the Turkish Cypriots apparently also raised the idea that political equality had to include equality for Turkish Cypriots in the new federal entity and that they could not accept a “minority” status or representation in any new federal entity.

On another sensitive issue, Christofias reportedly proposed the direct election of a *rotating* president and vice president for a six-year term on the same ticket with weighted cross-community voting. The president would be a Greek Cypriot for four years, and the vice president would be a Turkish Cypriot; they would then rotate offices, with the Turkish Cypriot becoming president for two years. Turkish Cypriots initially proposed that the executive have two alternating presidents elected by the Senate. Turkish Cypriots were opposed to a single list of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot candidates to be elected by all of the people of Cyprus principally because Greek Cypriots, by virtue of their majority, could in effect elect the Turkish Cypriot candidate of their preference. At some point, Talat seemed to have made a significant concession in agreeing to accept the Greek position for the election of a president and vice president even though he continued to have doubts about direct popular voting. Although the idea of a rotating presidency was not new, opposition to the proposal was, and continues to be, vocal on the Greek Cypriot side, as many Greek Cypriots apparently could not accept the idea of being governed by a representative of the Turkish Cypriot minority.³⁰ On the other hand, Eroglu seemed to want to pursue that option. It had been reported that in July 2014, Anastasiades retreated on the notion of a rotating presidency, proposing the old idea that future presidents be Greek Cypriots and future vice presidents be Turkish Cypriots elected directly by all voters. The Turkish Cypriots rejected the proposal. Akinci in early August 2016 apparently suggested that a rotating presidency elected with weighted voting was a must in order to have political equality.

Although a rotating presidency would apply only to the federal entity and would have limited authority over the daily lives of most citizens in either community, several Greek Cypriot political parties continued to oppose the concept. Recently, Greek Cypriot Archbishop Chrysostomos stated his opposition to a rotating presidency, saying that no population of only 18% should be permitted to elect the president.³¹

This concept appeared to have become a “convergence” for Anastasiades and Akinci, but the fine details apparently were still being worked out. In a December 5, 2016, editorial in the *Volkan* press, it was suggested that Anastasiades may have offered the rotating presidency to Akinci in return for the city of Morphou. That trade-off has since been dropped, and the idea of a rotating presidency still seems to have become a “convergence” despite strong opposition by many in the south. During the Geneva conference, it was reported that a five-year rotating presidency would be created with the Greek Cypriots holding the office for approximately a little over three years and a Turkish Cypriot for just under two years. However, other iterations of the “convergence” also have arisen.

The thorny and emotional issue of *property* had been the focus of a significant debate between Christofias and Eroglu and had been continually addressed by Anastasiades and Akinci. As a result of the ethnic strife of the 1960s and the deployment of Turkish military forces on the island in 1974, it was estimated that over 150,000 Greek Cypriots living in the north were forced south and close to 50,000 Turkish Cypriots living in the south fled to the north, with both communities leaving behind large amounts of vacated property, especially in the north. Greek Cypriots had

³⁰ According to a poll conducted by the EDEK party in the spring of 2010, over 70% of Greek Cypriots polled expressed opposition to a rotating presidency.

³¹ According to an op-ed by Rasih Resat in *KIBRISPOSTASI*, October 2016.

long insisted that the original and legal owners who lost properties in the north must have the right to decide how to deal with their property, whether through recovery, exchange, or compensation. Turkish Cypriots believe that the current inhabitant of a property must have priority and that the issue should be resolved through compensation, exchange of alternate property, or restitution. To try to help resolve some of the property issues, the Turkish Cypriots established the Immovable Property Commission (IPC) to hear cases related to Greek Cypriot property claims in the north. The Greek Cypriots initially rejected the IPC. Only a few private Greek property owners have filed claims for compensation with the IPC. Although the gap in the respective Cypriot positions on property has been wide, it appeared that positive movement had been achieved. In July 2015, Anastasiades and Akinci agreed to create a new, independent property commission, with both sides agreeing that former property owners would be offered various choices regarding their claims that would allow all involved to be fairly compensated. For the Turkish Cypriots, however, only a limited number of Greek Cypriots would be permitted to return to or take actual ownership of their properties. Recently, both sides seemed to indicate that a settlement might involve between €25 billion and €30 billion, a price tag the new “federal” entity might not be able to afford. Thus, where the money would come from—whether the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, EU, or the United States—is still under discussion. At Geneva, however, it appeared that the issue of whose right to a property takes priority might still be under discussion.

The question of overall *territory* that would come under the jurisdiction of the two equal states remains in dispute. The Turkish Cypriot side of the “green line” currently includes approximately 37% of the island and includes several areas that had been inhabited almost entirely by Greek Cypriots before the 1974 division, such as Varosha, Morphou, and Karpas. Greek Cypriots have long wanted all of that territory returned, which would leave the Turkish Cypriot side controlling about 28% of the territory. At the time, Christofias resurrected an older proposal that would have the Turkish side return the uninhabited city of Varosha to Greek Cyprus in exchange for opening the seaport of Famagusta for use by the Turkish Cypriots to conduct international trade. The port would be operated by the EU and a joint Greek/Turkish Cypriot administration, thus allowing direct trade between northern Cyprus and the EU. Eroglu, perhaps banking on a proposal at the time submitted by the EU Commission to the EU Parliament to open direct trade with the north, rejected the Varosha/Famagusta proposal, although some speculated that Ankara was opposed to such a deal because it then would have placed pressure on Turkey to comply with its obligations under the Ankara Protocol to open its ports to Cypriot commerce. The European Parliament declined to consider the commission’s initiative on technical grounds, but its 2011 report on Turkey’s EU accession progress (introduced in Parliament in 2012) called for that very trade-off Christofias offered.

After the 2013 Greek Cypriot elections, President Anastasiades resurrected the proposal in the form of a “confidence-building” measure to test the sincerity of the Turkish Cypriots and Turkey to move forward in the negotiations. Eroglu stated that territory was a key bargaining chip for the Turkish Cypriots, suggesting he would not accept any Greek Cypriot proposal on Varosha or other areas. In early August 2014, it was reported that Anastasiades had upped the ante by suggesting that no agreement could be reached unless the town of Morphou was also returned to the republic. The Turkish Cypriots quickly rejected the idea, saying the town would not be returned.³² After Turkish Cypriot leader Akinci took office, Anastasiades again included the Varosha/Famagusta option as a confidence-building measure. As in the past, the Turkish Cypriot

³² *Famagusta Gazette*, “No Solution to the Cyprus Problem Without Return of Morphou, President Says,” August 14, 2014.

side has not been willing to go much beyond inspecting the city to determine whether it actually could be reinhabited. At the same time, Akinci also rejected the return of Morphou as part of a final settlement. Understanding the sensitivity of this issue for both leaders, Akinci had suggested that the discussions of territorial adjustments be held off the island and away from potential leaks that could set off a firestorm of protests from either side.

At the November 2016 meetings at Mont Pelerin, Switzerland, the two sides agreed to discuss three issues regarding territory: percentage of land to be administered by each constituent state, the number of Greek Cypriots who would be allowed to return to the new territories given back to the Greek Cypriots, and the shoreline. Following Mont Pelerin, both sides, in agreeing to meet in Geneva in January 2017, agreed to present maps indicating their proposals for a territorial adjustment.

As noted, the Turkish Cypriots administer approximately 37% of the island. At Geneva, the Greek Cypriots proposed long-standing views that the boundaries be redrawn such that the Turkish Cypriots would control approximately 28.2% of the island and that some 90,000 displaced Greek Cypriots could return to those areas gained back by the Greek Cypriots. Some of the territory—such as the cities of Verosha, parts of Famagusta, and Morphou—would come under direct control of the Greek Cypriots whereas other areas that once had large Greek Cypriot populations would either come under control of the Greek Cypriots or become “enclaves” under the administration of the new federal government. The Greek Cypriots also wanted additional shoreline along the east coast of the island, including part of Karpas.

The Turkish Cypriots insisted on controlling at least 29.2% of the island, with as straight of a border between the two constituent states as possible; no enclaves; and only 65,000-72,000 returning Greek Cypriots. The Turkish Cypriots also expressed a willingness to meet the Greek Cypriot demand for more shoreline, but only if the new shoreline territory was made into state parks so that no new Greek Cypriot communities could settle in those areas.

On all three points, the leaders failed to reach an agreement at Mont Pelerin and again in Geneva in January 2017. In Geneva, the Turkish representatives not only rejected the return of Morphou but also insisted that additional territory, including the area of Kokkina, be added to Morphou and remain under Turkish Cypriot jurisdiction in exchange for Verosha and parts of Famagusta.

In July 2010, President Christofias, seeking to unlock the stalemate on territory, tabled a *citizenship* proposal that would have linked property, territory, and the number of citizens permitted to reside in the north into one agreement, which also included Christofias’s earlier offer to allow 50,000 mainland Turks who had settled in the north to remain in the north. Eroglu had indicated that any final solution could not result in significant social upheaval in north Cyprus, meaning that significant numbers of citizens of the north, whether from the mainland or not, could not be forced to leave, and only a small number of Greek Cypriots would be permitted to return to property in the north. Eroglu rejected the offer from Christofias, stating that “no one on Cyprus is any longer a refugee” and that sending mainland Turkish settlers back to Turkey was not something he could agree to. Eroglu had also reiterated in his talks with Anastasiades that the number of mainland Turks who had settled in the north and who would be allowed to remain on the island would have to be higher than previously discussed.³³

After the joint statement was agreed to in February 2014, Turkish Cypriot representatives were reported to have stated that no citizens of the north would be required to leave the country.³⁴ In a

³³ *Cyprus Mail*, “The Most Blatant Mockery of Negotiations,” July 27, 2014.

³⁴ *Famagusta Gazette*, “Jittery Turkish Settlers Seek Clarifications as Cyprus Talks Resume,” February 19, 2014.

talk given at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, DC, on February 28, 2014, the then-Cyprus ambassador to the United States speculated that a resolution of the Cyprus problem could conceivably allow for mainland Turks, who came to the island as long ago as 40 years and had established clear roots in the north, to remain on the island.

Akinci, perhaps not wishing to antagonize what had become a majority of the population in the north, initially stayed away from this issue. However, apparently through the negotiations he and Anastasiades may have agreed to at least set population sizes in both of the “constituent” states that would emerge as part of an agreement. The population for the Turkish Cypriots would be set at 220,000, although Akinci seemed to want another 50,000, while the Greek Cypriot population would be approximately 802,000.³⁵ This ratio, while including a sizable number of mainland Turks who have since become citizens in the north, would be close to the ratio of the island’s population in 1960. Nevertheless, several of the Greek Cypriot political parties appear to remain opposed to any agreement that would allow a large number of “settlers” to remain on the island. In the summer of 2016, there were reports that Ankara had wanted the Akinci government to speed up the process of “citizenship” for more of the people living in the north. In August, some news accounts in the media claimed that the Ozgurgun Turkish Cypriot government was trying to rush citizenship for around 26,000 additional mainland Turks before a final agreement was reached.³⁶ Greek Cypriot political parties jumped on the news and claimed Ozgurgun was trying to sabotage the negotiations.³⁷ In January 2017, it was reported that Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Tugrul Turkes stated that there were some 300,000 Turkish Cypriots in the north, so the population sizes of the two constituent states would have to be adjusted.³⁸

Next to the property and territory issues, the issue of *security guarantees* continues to be one of the most difficult bridges to cross, as again seen in Geneva in January 2017. The Greek Cypriots have long argued that all Turkish military forces would have to leave the island. They argue that the EU can offer security guarantees to all of its citizens in its member states. Therefore, once the entire island became part of the EU, they saw no reason for guarantees from third countries, such as Turkey, Greece, or the United Kingdom.³⁹ Turkish Cypriots and Turkey had long maintained that the 1960 Treaties of Guarantee and Alliance must be reaffirmed in any settlement, and Turkish security guarantees should not be lifted until Turkey joins the EU, because, without guarantees, the Turkish Cypriots would feel insecure based on their history with ethnic violence on the island in the 1960s. Eroglu had stated on several past occasions that “the security guarantees with Motherland Turkey could not be changed.”⁴⁰ After the February 2014 joint statement was agreed to, it was reported that Eroglu had again stated that Turkish troops would not leave the island.⁴¹

It remained unclear for a while whether Akinci held the traditional Turkish hard line. He clearly did not want to antagonize Ankara over this issue by going too far into the negotiating process without including Turkey, but he also appeared to have not gone out of his way to focus on the

³⁵ “Pressure on Akinci to Grant Citizenship to 26,000 Turks in Cyprus,” *Famagusta News*, December 7, 2015.

³⁶ “North issuing citizenship to 500 settlers a month,” *Cyprus Mail*, August 22, 2016.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Comments by Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Tugrul Turkes to an audience in Istanbul as reported by CYBC Radio, January 25, 2017.

³⁹ *Cyprus News Agency*, “Cypriot FM: No Derogations from Acquis During a Solution,” November 14, 2008, BBC Monitoring European, November 17, 2008.

⁴⁰ Comments from the speech of Turkish Cypriot leader Dervis Eroglu commemorating the Turkish intervention in Cyprus, July 20, 2011.

⁴¹ “AKEL: Pay No Heed to Eroglu’s Rhetoric,” *Cyprus Mail*, February 22, 2014.

issue. Some suggested that Akinci, while not wanting to abandon the Treaty of Guarantee altogether, may have been willing to adjust the provisions regarding when or under what pretext Turkey could intervene in Cyprus in the future and to include the gradual withdrawal of Turkish military forces. In one August 2016 news article, it was suggested that Anastasiades had put forward the option that an international police force, made up of EU personnel with some Turkish police, could be created to support the new federal entity. The Turkish Cypriots rejected the idea.

In the lead-up to the Mont Pelerin and Geneva conferences, most of the public demands for continued Turkish security guarantees and military presence in the north came from Ozgurgun and others who have stated that no agreement could be accepted without the guarantees. Ozgurgun reportedly has stated that in conversations with Akinci, he was assured that Turkey must continue to play a role in the security of the north.⁴² Nevertheless, as the negotiators opened the security guarantees “chapter,” the rhetoric increased. Greek Cypriots, and more recently Greece, continued to insist that no guarantees are necessary and, on their part, no agreement could be accepted that would allow Turkey to intervene on the island or to retain a military presence there. In April 2016, the Greek foreign minister reportedly suggested that no final agreement on Cyprus could be achieved until all Turkish military forces agreed to leave the island.

Once formal talks on security were begun in late fall 2016, both Cypriot sides appeared to soften their positions. In November 2016, Athens and Ankara agreed to begin bilateral discussions over the future of the guarantees in advance of a meeting between the respective prime ministers and any five-party conference on the issue. According to some sources, although Turkey appeared willing to discuss a revised agreement on security, Ankara initially did not want to discuss the abolition of the guarantees or the complete withdrawal of the Turkish troops from Cyprus. Ankara apparently raised the idea of the establishment of a military base in the north and suggested that the timetable for the reduction of the Turkish military on the island could be 10-15 years. The Greek Cypriots would not accept such provisions and may have proposed a shorter period for the withdrawal of Turkish forces. At Geneva, Turkey, clearly keeping the fate of the April constitutional reform referendum in mind, took a hard line on the issues of continued Turkish security guarantees and troops on the island. The Greek Cypriots and Greece took a similar hard line in opposition to Turkey’s continued presence. Apparently, at Geneva, Anastasiades reoffered his proposal for an international police force, this time, however, noting that Greek, Turkish, or UK forces could not be part of the multinational force. Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots rejected the idea again. Russia and others also suggested that the U.N. Security Council could serve as the initial guarantors of security, but that too was brushed aside. At Geneva, the EU was fully represented by the Commission President and the High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, with each offering assurances that any solution would be implemented adequately by the EU. Nevertheless, the EU was not able to convince either Ankara or the Turkish Cypriots that it could guarantee the security and fair treatment of the Turkish Cypriot community, even though the north would become fully integrated into the united Cyprus under EU law.

The lack of any appreciable progress on the security issue resulted in the January 12, 2017, session in Geneva being cut short without a resolution. During the suspension of the talks in 2017, U.N. Special Adviser Eide was reported to be working out the details of some kind of bridging compromise between the two positions on security as a way to move the talks forward until after a solution was agreed upon and implementation had begun.

The introduction of the issue of *energy resources*, as noted previously, resulted in yet another complication in the early round of talks and served to stall the negotiations between Anastasiades

⁴² “No Turkish guarantees—no deal: Ozgurgun,” *North Cyprus News*, March 17, 2016.

and Eroglu. This led to accusations, threats, and further distrust among the republic, the Turkish Cypriots, and Ankara. While some observers thought that the energy issue could have become a rallying point for stepped up and hopefully successful negotiations in which both sides would enjoy the economic benefits of the newly found resources, the atmosphere was quickly poisoned and had become, for some, another lost opportunity.

For Eroglu, the energy issue had to be a part of the negotiations. The Greek Cypriots rejected such a proposal, stating that energy issues would be dealt with under any new “federal” system agreed to in the negotiations. Akinci seemed reluctant to press this issue, apparently accepting Anastasiades’s promises that energy wealth would be shared by both sides and how that would be accomplished would be left to another time once a settlement was agreed. However, in July 2016, after the republic announced that it would proceed with the issuance of new licenses for additional gas exploration in the Cyprus EEZ, and in August when it was announced that the republic and Egypt would sign an agreement to ship Cypriot gas to Egypt in the future, both Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots raised objections, with some claiming these actions would harm the settlement negotiations. At Geneva, and despite the news that the Total energy corporation would begin additional exploration and that Cyprus, Greece, Israel, and Egypt would begin renewed discussions of a gas pipeline to Europe via Greece, the issue did not seem to impede discussions of the other, more immediate issues.

Recently, however, when energy ministers from the Republic of Cyprus, Israel, Greece, and Italy unveiled plans for an East Mediterranean pipeline running from Israel to the coast of Italy and when French energy company Total announced that it would start drilling during the first two weeks of July offshore of Cyprus in Block 11, a drill block off Cyprus’s shore, Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots reacted negatively, with Ankara threatening to take actions if the drilling commenced. Many now believe the energy issue will again come into play and could prove to be another obstacle to the talks. Furthermore, Akinci stated that the next two months would be crucial in part because of the expected launch of hydrocarbon exploration activities off the coast of south Cyprus.

Assessment

The election of Christofias in 2008 together with sitting Turkish Cypriot leader Talat ushered in a period of higher expectations for a settlement than at any time since 2004, when both Cypriot communities considered the Annan Plan. The personal relationship between Christofias and Talat and their public commitments to finding a solution to the Cyprus problem suggested that if these two leaders could not achieve a negotiated settlement, then it might take a long time before two like-minded leaders would again find themselves in a position to unify the people of Cyprus.

Despite the strong commitment, good intentions, and warm relations between Christofias and Talat, progress in the talks fell victim to the harsh realities of four decades of separation, mistrust, misunderstanding, and in some cases indifference to the need for a final settlement and unification of the island. Similarly, Christofias and Eroglu (and subsequently Eroglu and Anastasiades) were unable, for very different reasons, to find enough common ground or make critically necessary concessions to craft an acceptable accommodation despite regular leadership meetings, technical level discussions, and meetings with the U.N. Secretary-General.

With the agreement on the “joint statement” in early 2014, there appeared a glimmer of hope that the window of opportunity to reach an agreed solution had reopened even as opposition on the Greek Cypriot side began to emerge. Turkish Cypriot negotiator Ozersay’s comments after the September 21, 2014, meeting between Anastasiades and Eroglu that “real negotiations are starting now” left many wondering what Ozersay felt had taken place over the previous six years and

what had changed now, especially given the perception that Eroglu was not that committed to a settlement. The subsequent negotiations proved Ozersay's optimism was premature.

With the April 2015 election of Mustafa Akinci as leader of the Turkish Cypriots, many believed the window of opportunity for a permanent settlement of the Cyprus problem had been reopened. As "mayor" of the Turkish Cypriot portion of Nicosia, Akinci had been praised for working cooperatively with his Greek Cypriot counterparts on a number of infrastructure projects, leading some to hold a positive view of the possibilities of a settlement with Akinci.

While the political environment on both sides of the island immediately after the election of Akinci had taken on a positive air, with predictions that the negotiations could conclude quickly, the scene reminded Cyprus observers of the 2008 election of Christofias and the almost giddy atmosphere that arose over a possible quick solution to the division of the island. Akinci, much as Talat had with Christofias, declared that he and Anastasiades were of the same generation and could relate more easily to each other and better understand the measures that both sides would have to take to achieve a solution.

Negotiations between Anastasiades and Akinci, once begun, got off to a fast start, and the first 20 months of the Anastasiades/Akinci era had, for many, gone well. Both leaders seemed to enjoy meeting with each other and doing public events together in a show of solidarity. And, although the issues that have separated the two communities and prevented a solution for more than 43 years have long been clearly defined—these issues have not changed significantly since the Annan Plan in 2004—and although the positions and proposed solutions each side has taken on several of these issues have repeatedly been presented, debated, and rejected by each side, the chemistry between Anastasiades and Akinci seemed to allow the leaders to overcome some of the traditional barriers to a settlement more effectively than previous attempts by Cypriot leaders. The relationship between Anastasiades and Akinci proved to be an improvement over the relationship between Anastasiades and Eroglu.

The positive atmosphere of the negotiations raised hope among some that a settlement might be reached with these two leaders. Subsequently, however, as the talks progressed with more references to agreed "convergences," both Anastasiades and Akinci—just as those before them had experienced—began to hear public controversy and criticism of the negotiations emerge.⁴³ The rising opposition to the talks raised for some a feeling of déjà vu that good things were about to come to an end again. For some in the Greek Cypriot political opposition, the concern appeared to be that any potential settlement arrived at between Anastasiades and Akinci inevitably would enshrine the "two-state" concept, with Greek Cypriot influence over the northern part of the island forever limited to what weak governing powers an overlapping "federal" government structure would provide. In early September 2015 several Greek Cypriot political parties officially rejected the notion of a bizonal, bicomunal federation as a part of the solution to the Cyprus problem and criticized reported "convergences" on population size in the north, the rotating presidency, and particularly Turkey's security role. In September 2016, the DIKO and Green parties suggested that the parliament pass a resolution stating that no agreement could include "foreign guarantees" and "foreign troops." DIKO's chairman reportedly stated that there no longer was confidence in the president.⁴⁴

The concerns expressed by the Greek Cypriot opposition were not just reserved for Anastasiades. In late December 2015, Akinci, in an interview on Turkish television, seemed to outline some

⁴³ "EDEK Back Sizopoulos in Rejection of BBF," *Cyprus Mail*, June 15, 2015.

⁴⁴ "Green party wants binding House decision on Cyprus problem," *Cyprus Mail*, September 1, 2016.

very basic bottom lines, referred to as his “wish list,” on the issues under negotiation. The reaction to Akinci’s comments drew swift and negative reaction from several Greek Cypriot political leaders, suggesting that trouble for the talks was brewing just below the surface. Former House Speaker Yiannakis Omirou described Akinci’s remarks as “highly indicative of the Turkish side’s intentions,” and said “Turkey effectively seeks to legalize the results of its 1974 invasion. He [Akinci] continues to support the preservation of Turkey’s role as a guarantor, and insists on unacceptable views on political equality and rotating presidency.”⁴⁵ For some in the opposition, this was a warning to Anastasiades that he should seriously rethink his views if he had made any concessions on those issues.

As noted previously, Akinci may not have been seen as the preferred choice of Ankara, which may have been more comfortable with another five years of Eroglu. Nevertheless, Akinci took the opportunity to move quickly to test the waters of what the Greek Cypriots were willing to accept as part of the compromises necessary to reach a final solution. Akinci’s actions on property and territory raised concerns among many in the Turkish Cypriot political leadership, and criticisms of Akinci’s positions became more vocal and frequent. Even Akinci’s predecessor, Dervis Eroglu, criticized Akinci for building up the public’s hope despite being unable to point to any specific developments toward a solution that would be acceptable to Turkish Cypriot citizens.

However, despite a general feeling among the publics of Cyprus, as noted in some opinion polls, that a solution may not be that close at hand, the two leaders continued to talk, understanding the consequences for both communities if the talks collapsed. The intensity of the negotiations beginning in fall 2016 and continuing through Mont Pelerin and Geneva earned both leaders international praise for their commitment and persistence.

As Anastasiades and Akinci tried to wrap up an agreement by the end of February 2017, they realized that the perception in both communities was that the two leaders’ willingness and commitment to reach a solution may not be advantageous to either side and would inevitably generate opposition from some quarters, regardless of its content. Anastasiades and Akinci began to hear more vocal opposition from their political opponents. For instance, in early December 2016, when Anastasiades agreed to resume talks after the missed opportunity at Mont Pelerin, the leaders of DIKO, EDEK, the Citizens Alliance, and the Greens criticized Anastasiades’s decision to accept an international conference on guarantees before resolving all other issues, as he had promised. Anastasiades reportedly was accused of giving in to Turkish demands and following Akinci’s steps. The Citizens Alliance leader, Lillikas, supposedly asked for Anastasiades’s resignation.

Some in the opposition also feared that Anastasiades would come under pressure from the international community to accept only a reduced Turkish military presence in the north and some form of right of intervention. Some complained that U.N. Adviser Eide was favoring the Turkish Cypriot view of “reduce but not remove” Turkish troops or security guarantees. Even as the leaders negotiated in Geneva, the opposition forces were sufficiently at work that Anastasiades had to ask his detractors to calm down and Akinci asked his people to have patience.

Anastasiades also came under a good deal of pressure as the buildup to the 2018 presidential elections began. In a challenge to Anastasiades, several of the opposition political parties introduced the controversial proposal to recognize the 1950 *enosis* referendum. Anastasiades was put in a difficult situation; opposing the proposal to note a historical event would have been used against him by his opponents, but supporting it would have caused problems with the Turkish

⁴⁵ “Akinci’s Insistence on ‘Wish List’ Will Not Bring Desired Results, Spokesman Said,” *Cyprus Mail*, December 30, 2015.

Cypriots. In asking his political party's MPs in DISY to abstain from the vote, he lost on both counts and raised the issue of trust with Akinci and many in the north who once looked favorably on Anastasiades's efforts for a solution.

Another issue is Turkey. Throughout the negotiations, many assumed that Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots were on the same page but that Turkey, with its attention focused on events elsewhere, had given Akinci more room to negotiate a "Cypriot" solution, including agreeing to the accelerated negotiations and the opening of discussions on territory and security.

It was curious for some that Turkey even agreed to go to Geneva while Ankara worked through the controversial constitutional referendum at home. Ankara had to fear that any concessions on security in which it was required to withdraw its military forces or forego its right to defend northern Cyprus at the demand of the Greek Cypriots or Greece could have been interpreted as weakness, even as Ankara tries to negotiate with Moscow over Syria and with the United States over the Kurds and to keep Iran's influence at bay.

This led some to wonder if Ankara's presence at Geneva was intended simply to reinforce Akinci's earlier demands that Anastasiades agree to such a conference, to kill the talks outright, or to simply stall the negotiations. Turkey's curious demands at Geneva that certain freedoms that would come as part of any settlement also should be applied to Turkish citizens living in the north, and its apparent opposition to certain territorial concessions that may have been offered by Akinci, seemed to complicate the negotiations at a critical time. It is conceivable that Ankara's strategy at Geneva to inject new complications could have been Turkey's attempt to build international pressure on the Greek Cypriots to compromise, even on an interim basis, on Turkish troops and guarantees, which would allow Turkey's military a face-saving exit from Cyprus and would reassure the Turkish Cypriots that they would remain protected.

The short duration of the five-party conference clearly set back the negotiating process, slowed the momentum that Anastasiades and Akinci had achieved in 2016, and cast doubt on how the remaining issues can be resolved.

Finally, it has become difficult to gauge how strongly the issue of a settlement is supported among the general populations on the two sides of the island. Unlike what is being observed in parts of Europe and in the United States, where growing segments of the populations are agitating for "change," a similar movement for change from the status quo does not appear to be generating significant momentum on Cyprus, particularly among the middle-age and younger generations. Although there has been a recent flurry of public opinion polls regarding the negotiations, particularly in the south, the general consensus stills seems to be that a solution is not close at hand.

In a poll taken just before the spring 2016 parliamentary elections in Greek Cyprus, it was reported that the "Cyprus problem" fell to the fourth-most-important issue for Greek Cypriots.⁴⁶ Similarly, those in the north with closer ties to Ankara—some suggest mostly from within the community of Turks who have settled in the north who do not wish to be governed in any way by Greek Cypriots—are not demanding a change. They may not give Akinci much support if they sensed that he was making too many concessions to the Greek Cypriots and that the Turkish Cypriot political leadership would not support Akinci.

In November 2016, in a survey conducted by the University of Nicosia, 6 out of 10 of those Greek Cypriots asked believed that the negotiators were not near a solution, whereas 39% thought

⁴⁶ Pulse Market Research for Mega Channel public opinion poll, May 2016.

a solution was near. About 52% of those surveyed said that given what they had heard of the new plan, they believed it to be worse than the Annan plan; 43% said the new plan would be a better one.

By contrast, in a recent survey conducted by the Center for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development, only 16% of Turkish Cypriots and 23% of Greek Cypriots polled thought the negotiation process would not yield any results. Of those polled, 48% of Turkish Cypriots and 53% of Greek Cypriots wanted the process to end with success.⁴⁷

Some observers now suggest that with the progress reported in the Anastasiades-Akinci negotiations, the current generation of younger Cypriots may relish the opportunity to rid the island of much of the current-day tension and uncertainty. Some believe a solution would allow these younger generations to reintroduce themselves as one Cypriot community, enjoying the same benefits as members of the EU. Nevertheless, they are apparently taking a cautious approach to a settlement, because it is unclear what the relationship between the two constituent states would be under a solution. If, however, the federal layer of government that would be created as the unifying structure would make the separation of the two communities more pronounced, then neither side likely would support an agreement and may feel a permanent separation could make more sense.

As for the negotiators, it remains unclear exactly what compromises and concessions each side has already made and whether the so-called convergences referred to publicly by the negotiators have actually become agreements. It is also unclear exactly what the negotiating process will look like through 2017. At the moment, many Greek Cypriots appear to believe that a just solution cannot be achieved any time soon as long as Turkey insists on a military presence and guarantees. According to some, Turkey has demonstrated that it is interested not in the well-being of the Turkish Cypriots but instead in how to pursue its geostrategic interests and expand its influence over the entire island by pure demographic force.⁴⁸

In addition, the question of whether an agreement, if reached, can be accepted by political forces in both communities and the publics at large looms as a significant unknown. Some in the north already have suggested that, unlike in 2004, the current Turkish Cypriot political leadership, while opposing a flawed agreement, will not simply release the Turkish Cypriots to vote their conscience and that Akinci cannot guarantee the support of the general population for a solution.

Nevertheless, to most observers, Anastasiades and Akinci appear to have come closer to reaching a settlement than at any time since 2004. And although a solution was not achieved by the end of January 2017, the negotiators appear ready to move on to a new phase and are maintaining a level of optimism.

Time, however, has once again become an important factor in the negotiations. First, with the referendum vote in Turkey concluded, it is unclear where the Cyprus negotiations will fall on Ankara's priority list as the Turkish leadership begins to implement the provisions of the newly amended constitution. Some believe that the positive outcome of the referendum, which will significantly strengthen the Turkish presidency, will harden Ankara's positions on Cyprus. Others may feel the fact that the majority of Turkish voters in north Cyprus voted "no" to the changes may lessen Ankara's interest in Cyprus for a while, thus delaying Turkey's return to the discussions and dragging the talks out. Second, a proposed new round of hydrocarbon drilling approved by the republic could begin in the republic's offshore economic zone in July. This

⁴⁷ Comments on the survey as reported in the Yeniduzen and Volkan media outlets, January 12, 2017.

⁴⁸ Exchange of notes between CRS analyst and a Greek Cypriot citizen, January 2017.

possibility has already provoked protests from Akinci and warnings from Ankara that it will respond. The last time these events played out, Anastasiades walked away from the talks. Finally, the start of the upcoming presidential election campaign in the republic for an early 2018 vote will soon be well under way, making any concessions by Anastasiades toward a settlement of the Cyprus issue more controversial.

A highly political chess game involving the calendar is once again about to begin. If any of the above scenarios plays out too long through the summer, a solution may have to be postponed until after the republic's elections are concluded in 2018. If the Turkish Cypriots and Turkey sense that the opponents of the negotiations could gain momentum, or that they could influence Anastasiades's determination to reach a solution, Akinci's commitment to seeking a solution could be tempered and talk of a permanent separation may again emerge.

All of these questions, of course, could be answered by early summer 2017 if the negotiations prove successful. Otherwise, a final settlement of the Cyprus issue will remain elusive.

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