

Attitudes to International Actors in the Cyprus Conflict

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1) Introduction

Cyprus is a divided island - it has had a UN peacekeeping presence since 1964 after intercommunal violence, and a Turkish intervention in 1974 partitioned the island along the lines shown below. The UK has also had a presence in the form of two Sovereign Base Areas since independence from Britain in 1960. Still divided, the Republic of Cyprus joined the EU in 2004 after a failed UN plan to reunify the island, but EU law is currently suspended in the Turkish-occupied north (Bryant, 2006). The complex international dimensions of the problem require further study, in conjunction with civil society, to establish whether top-down or bottom-up peacebuilding is more successful and desired by Cypriots.



Figure 1 - Map showing UN buffer zone & UK Sovereign Base Areas in Cyprus (Wikipedia)

2) Aims and Objectives

- To investigate how civil society actors in Cyprus view the EU, UN and UK involvement in Cyprus
- To determine whether the international actors are a positive or negative influence on the Cyprus Issue and whether civil society and NGOs offer a better form of peacebuilding

3) Methodology

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 12 Greek- and Turkish-Cypriot NGOs, civil society organisations and political representatives, with a focus on how the international actors are influencing the Cyprus Issue and civil society's role in the Issue. We also interviewed the SBA Administration and the UN representatives in Cyprus to find out their perspective on civil society and the Issue.






Figure 2 - A semi-structured interview being carried out with Mertkan Hamit of the Bicomunal Famagusta Initiative

5) Future directions

- Both civil society and international actors as a whole are seen by Cypriot civil society as necessary for the peace process to function, meaning a balance between top-down and bottom-up peacebuilding
- There was general enthusiasm for the EU and European integration, but the UN mission may be in danger given the ambivalence shown
- The British government agreed in 2004 to hand over 48% of the Sovereign Base Area, but Cypriot civil society would like to see the bases gone in their entirety - public opinion and political rhetoric in a future settlement scenario may be key to the future of the SBAs

4) Results and findings

International Actor	Findings
European Union 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU assistance with peacebuilding projects is appreciated, and many of the NGOs interviewed were EU-funded • Most NGOs viewed the EU as having little influence on the negotiations directly, though some Turkish Cypriots resented the offer of EU membership to the Republic of Cyprus regardless of the outcome of the 2004 Annan Plan referenda • Turkish Cypriot organisations viewed future EU membership positively, but Greek Cypriots were worried about asymmetric benefits of the EU to a united Cyprus due to the need for economic convergence between the poorer North and richer South
United Kingdom (Sovereign Base Areas) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The bases were viewed negatively by almost all organisations interviewed, with the danger to Cyprus from UK airstrikes in Syria raised repeatedly, and an anti-colonial resentment present • Some Greek Cypriot organisations mentioned a security benefit the bases provided against Turkey, likewise a Turkish Cypriot organisation interviewed viewed the Bases as a form of protection
United Nations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UN assistance for peacebuilding activities is appreciated, as is cultural regeneration in the North, like the city of Famagusta • The UN peacekeeping force was mostly seen as pointless and under financial threat by US aims to cut back on UN peacekeeping where results are not forthcoming • The UN facilitated talks were seen as not very productive, mainly due to lack of forceful arbitration from the UN such as in 2004

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