



CROSSROADS OF A NEW ERA: CYPRUS'S ACCESSION TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

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About REWEU

The project (Re)uniting the East and West: Reflections on the 2004 EU enlargement (REWEU) is focused on the commemoration of the 2004 "big bang" EU enlargement on the occasion of its 20th anniversary in May 2024. Through the combination of local, national and international public events, collection of historical memories and narratives, studies on impacts of 2004 enlargement, costs of non-enlargement and role of women in the process, as well as exhibitions and media articles, the project contributes to wider contemporary efforts of EU memory politics. The project focuses on eight selected EU countries, four from the older EU Member States which were part of the Union's decision-making processes leading up to the big enlargement (Belgium, Finland, Greece and Italy) and four newly acceding countries (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Latvia and Poland). The project is funded by the European Union through the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV) under the European Remembrance strand.

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Introduction

Cyprus's accession to the European Union (EU) in 2004 marked a defining moment in the island state's complicated post-independence history. The pursuit of EU membership was framed by political elites not only as an economic, social, and political opportunity, but also as a key strategic move to improve Cyprus's complex security dynamics, secure its national identity, and respond to fluid regional geopolitics. Cyprus's EU accession, however, was not a straightforward process by any means, as there were multifaceted motivations behind its accession, as well as genuine concerns that rocked the process along the way.

Cyprus's EU accession was a series of negotiations, debates and decisions shaped by a variety of actors, interests and external pressures. The challenges posed by the decades-old division of the island and the unresolved Cyprus conflict (also known as the Cyprus Problem), along with the contentious relationship between Cyprus and Turkey, served as a backdrop for all aspects of the EU accession process, linking much of the process to resolving the Cyprus Problem.

While support for EU accession was generally the modus operandi for framing the Cyprus Problem, the accession process itself posed critical questions regarding the future of Cyprus's sovereignty, the potential impact on its fragmented national identity, and its role within Europe and the region

For Cyprus, EU membership meant political stability, economic prosperity and international legitimacy. Being geographically located in the Eastern Mediterranean, at the maritime crossroads of Europe, Asia and Africa, did not deter Cypriots from believing they were a natural candidate for integration into the EU considering their predominant European political orientation, their strong heritage forged from centuries of European interaction and their European-centred identity, culture and much of their history.

Since its independence from British colonial rule in 1960, Cyprus has aligned itself with European ideals and institutions, modernised and diversified its economy and developed an international personality.

To explore the layered journey of Cyprus's EU accession, one must examine the political, economic and social factors that influenced the decision to join the EU and to explore the various dimensions of the public debate surrounding the EU membership process, highlighting the complex and shifting public opinion regarding the benefits, costs and risks associated with EU membership.

The role of political elites, media and civil society in framing the narrative of EU accession is discussed, alongside the specific challenges of aligning with EU requirements, particularly in the context of the Cyprus Problem. Furthermore, the evolving relationship between Cyprus and Turkey and its key role in shaping both public and political attitudes toward EU integration is assessed.

EU Membership as a Strategic Goal for Cyprus

Framing by Political Elites: Strategic and Normative Drivers

Cypriot political elites, especially throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, presented EU membership as a strategic imperative, as a natural course of progression for the island. The government led by centre-right Democratic Rally's (DISY) President

As President Glafcos Clerides in 1998 stated, 'Europe is our destiny. We belong to Europe geographically, culturally and historically.'

Glafcos Clerides (1993–2003) emphasized a mix of economic, normative and security rationales. Clerides framed EU accession as a natural return to the European family, emphasizing Cyprus's historical and cultural ties to Europe

(Tocci, 2004). This framing resonated with a wider Greek Cypriot public discourse over Hellenic identity and European belonging (Christou, 2004).

Economic growth was constantly highlighted as an important factor, especially in a bid to create appeal for access to the single market and increased foreign investment. The overriding strategic rationale, however, centred on the unresolved Cyprus Problem.

Clerides argued that EU membership would strengthen the Greek Cypriot-controlled Republic of Cyprus's position in negotiations with Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots, as well as act as a natural catalyst towards reunification. Through EU membership and its associated structures, the Turkish Cypriots could integrate into the reunited Republic of Cyprus much more easily. He emphasised that Turkey's EU aspirations and progress in its own accession negotiations were tied to first resolving the Cyprus Problem (Demetriou, 2004).

With this, EU membership was portrayed to the Cypriot people (the Greek Cypriots in particular) as both a shield and a tool, cementing international legitimacy whilst encouraging conditions conducive to a settlement of the Cyprus Problem.

Centrist Democratic Party (DIKO) President Tassos Papadopoulos (2003–2008), supported by leftist (self-described as communist) Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL), took over the Presidency in 2003. There was a continuity in support for EU membership, but a noticeable shift in tone. Papadopoulos was more sceptical about linking EU accession with Cyprus's reunification.

AKEL and DIKO took a more sovereigntist perspective, and this was seen clearly in the lead up to the United Nations (UN) Annan Plan for reunification referendum on 24 April 2004 (on the very eve of EU accession on 1 May 2004), for which they guided the population to reject the reunification idea. The referendum sought approval for a plan to reunite Cyprus, so that the entire island with its two main Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities would accede together.

Previously, Papadopoulos had successfully sought to decouple EU membership from being conditional upon the reunification of Cyprus, which was perceived as an externally imposed solution, having emphasised the risks of an unsatisfactory settlement over the benefits of reunification (Ker-Lindsay, 2005). Despite rejecting the Annan Plan, Papadopoulos remained committed to EU membership, seeing it as a means to safeguard the Republic's sovereignty and enhance its diplomatic standing.

As Tassos Papadopoulos stated in 2003, 'The European Union will be our security shield in a turbulent region.'

Papadopoulos echoed former President Clerides' statements during the 16 April 2003 signing of the Accession Treaty, claiming it "constitutes a great and historic moment which seals indelibly Cyprus's future course. It constitutes at the same time the crowning achievement of a titanic effort by the Cypriot society and it is the landmark of its acceptance by a family to which it belongs geographically, historically, culturally, economically and politically."

He, however, added that "this historic achievement acquires even greater significance if seen in the light of the special conditions of Cyprus, the tragedy of the invasion and the continued Turkish occupation of part of our country and its grave consequences."

Overall, successive governments retained a pro-EU orientation and worked in earnest for the accession of Cyprus to the bloc, but there were important nuances in how they framed the strategic value of accession – from a tool for reunification under Clerides, to a defensive mechanism for sovereignty under Papadopoulos. As a senior Cypriot diplomat commented, "Europe was our shield, but also our ticket into the modern world." (Kyriakou, 2010)

Media Narratives: Alignment with Political Discourse and Selective Critique

The Cypriot media played a pivotal role in shaping public understanding of the accession process and what it would mean for them. Media coverage during the 1990s and early 2000s largely supported and echoed the political elite's narratives about the economic, political and cultural benefits of EU membership (Spyridou, 2005).

Mainstream newspapers (such as *Phileleftheros* and *Politis*) emphasised the Cyprus's European identity, the modernisation potential of EU regulations, the promise of economic prosperity and, importantly, the security it would offer the island by being part of the bloc. One dominant narrative, especially in mainstream media, was that Cyprus would be "returning to Europe," a symbolic restoration of its rightful place among European democracies (Christou, 2004).

Phileleftheros, on 28 October 2003, exclaimed "EU involved in solution!" and described how the EU would undertake a more active involvement in the search for a solution to the Cyprus Problem. With accession, the EU's South-East European Committee would guide the European Commission in this role, and this was seen as a very positive development (*Phileleftheros*, Greek language newspaper, 28 October 2003).

EU membership was portrayed as both a geopolitical achievement and a safeguard, especially against potential Turkish aggression, as well as a reinforcement of national sovereignty through European integration.

However, there were also setbacks, and the tone changed somewhat in early 2004. As the Annan Plan came to the forefront of public discussion, media narratives became quite fragmented. Although by this stage membership was secured

regardless of the results of the referendum, some media, primarily the centrist and leftist media (such as Haravgi and Simerini), sought to shift public perceptions against the perceived EU pressure on Cyprus to vote in favour of the Annan Plan, describing it as foreign influence and an imposition. Papadopoulos' televised rejection speech was widely disseminated and analysed by the media, reinforcing this scepticism toward externally driven conflict resolution (Ker-Lindsay, 2005).

While critical of the plan, the media did not attempt to turn against the EU itself. Rather, criticism focused on the content of the proposed reunification solution and its potential long-term implications for Greek Cypriots, and not the positive aspects of EU membership. Overall, the media remained broadly aligned with political rhetoric, yet offered moments of critical engagement, particularly when national security and identity were perceived to be at stake.

Political Consensus and Dissent: Broad Agreement with Points of Friction

Despite Cyprus's often fragmented political landscape, with opposition parties rarely cooperating on key matters, there was considerable consensus on the goal of EU accession. The major political parties supported EU membership. DISY, under Clerides, championed the EU as a strategic partner and a modernisation tool. AKEL, despite its ideological reservations, supported accession on pragmatic grounds, hoping to promote social justice and national sovereignty through European mechanisms (Sepos, 2008). As the two biggest parties, they led the public in favour of EU membership. The same can be said for DIKO, the third biggest party.

As AKEL's Party Manifesto of 2003 stated, 'EU membership will bring us prosperity, equality, and stability - values enshrined in the Union.'

Nonetheless, as mentioned earlier, significant frictions arose at the intersection of EU accession and the Cyprus Problem, with the primary point of contention being the Annan Plan for reunification. DISY endorsed the plan, viewing it as a pragmatic route to reunification ahead of EU membership, with the bloc offering the security and stability necessary to guarantee the post-reunification sustainability of Cyprus. In contrast, AKEL and DIKO fervently opposed the plan, viewing it as an unfair compromise that threatened the very sovereignty of the Republic of Cyprus (Tocci, 2004).

While no major party actively campaigned against EU membership itself, far-left and right-wing nationalist actors occasionally expressed scepticism, centred around fears of supranational control and erosion of sovereignty, identity and possible damaging compromises forced upon Cyprus in its negotiations and relations with Turkey. These views, however, remained quite peripheral and did not negatively drive public rhetoric against the EU. In 2002, the House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly in favour of accession, signalling broad institutional support (Christou, 2004).

In this context, the Cyprus case stands out for its relative unity on the strategic goal of accession, despite significant divisions over how it might affect national concerns, the biggest and most critical being the Cyprus Problem. The strong positive perception of a cost-benefit balance wavered at times, but overall stood firm, with the economic and social costs of necessary reforms concerning some, but not the majority. The costs were seen as less significant than the gains of membership, especially as a bulwark against Turkey regarding the Cyprus Problem. A future as part of a larger European community appealed strongly to the public.

The island, however, remained divided in 2024, 20 years after it joined the EU on 1 May 2004, with only the internationally recognised Greek Cypriot-controlled

Republic of Cyprus in the south being represented in the EU. The entire island is recognised as EU territory, nevertheless, with the Acquis Communautaire suspended in the north. Turkish Cypriots with Republic of Cyprus citizenship are also seen as citizens of the EU with all the benefits this entails.

Civil Society and NGOs: Limited but Growing Influence

Civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) played a relatively minor role in the EU accession process compared to political and media actors. Prior to EU membership, civil society and NGOs were quite infant and relatively amateur compared to their European counterparts. They developed rapidly after, and with, EU membership and support. The accession process was largely elite-driven, and most negotiations occurred within governmental and technocratic channels (Tocci, 2004; Demetriou, 2004). Nonetheless, several civil society actors sought to engage the public and influence the broader discourse, particularly on issues of peacebuilding and EU values.

Bicommunal NGOs and grassroots initiatives saw the EU as a framework through which reconciliation and cooperation could be enhanced across the Cyprus divide. Organizations such as the Cyprus NGO Network organized educational campaigns and workshops aimed at raising awareness about EU citizenship, human rights and participatory governance. Their efforts were particularly focused on fostering understanding and engagement among youth and marginalised communities (Spyridou, 2005).

However, these initiatives faced several critical structural challenges. They had very limited funding, weak institutional capacity and a lack of formal channels for influencing the accession process. There was little engagement with the stakeholders driving the accession process, and as the message of NGOs was

largely in line with that of the government and media, there was no point of difference demanding more intensive work in the process on their side.

Additionally, during the highly polarized atmosphere surrounding the Annan Plan, civil society voices were often overshadowed by more dominant political narratives. In some cases, civil society organizations were accused of being either too conciliatory or too political, which limited their reach (Demetriou, 2004).

Despite these limitations, the EU itself promoted civil society engagement through its pre-accession assistance programs, setting the stage for greater involvement in the post-accession period. In the years following accession, NGOs would play a more prominent role in monitoring EU compliance, especially in areas like gender equality, environmental protection and minority rights (Sepos, 2008).

In summary

Cyprus's decision to join the EU was framed by political elites as a multifaceted strategic opportunity – economically advantageous, culturally affirming and geopolitically necessary. While successive governments agreed on the strategic value of accession, there were variations in how they linked it to the Cyprus Problem, from Clerides tying it to reunification efforts and Papadopoulos taking a more defensive, sovereignty-based approach. Political consensus was strong across most of the spectrum, with major parties endorsing membership, although they were divided over the implications for the national question.

The media largely supported the accession process, echoing political narratives while criticizing developments linked to the Annan Plan. Meanwhile, civil society played a symbolic but growing role, leveraging EU frameworks to promote dialogue and civic engagement.

Ultimately, Cyprus's EU accession represented more than a policy goal. It was a strategic realignment that reshaped Cyprus's political and diplomatic identity, laying the groundwork for both opportunities and challenges in the post-accession era.

Benefits and Costs of EU Accession

Economic Benefits: Modernisation and Stability

The EU was seen by Cypriot political elites as a mechanism for economic modernisation, security and growth. The primary benefit promoted to the public was this, along with access to the lucrative European single market and substantial financial aid from the bloc. Cyprus's small market would grow exponentially once integrated into the larger European economy of over 450 million consumers (European Commission, 2002).

The modernisation of Cypriot infrastructure, especially in agriculture, industry and public services, would benefit from EU structural funds. This would largely offset a lot of the damage caused by, and the ongoing limitations due to, the economic challenges faced following the island's division in 1974. This promised significant financial support from the EU was certain to be a catalyst for job creation, increased exports and overall economic growth (European Court of Auditors, 2003).

Most importantly, EU membership promised economic stability. For many Cypriots, the EU symbolised economic security and integration into a larger, stable political-economic system. As a member of the EU, Cyprus would be better insulated from regional and global economic volatility, with EU regulations and monetary policy providing a framework for stability and predictability. This was particularly important after the 1974 division of the island which caused significant long-term disruptions to the Cypriot economy (Papadakis, 2006).

Political Legitimacy and European Identity

Beyond economic benefits, membership in the EU meant Cyprus would have a platform to secure political legitimacy on the international stage with the bloc's backing. The political elites emphasized the importance of solidifying the

Then President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, said, “in the EU, Cyprus found not just a market, but a voice on the global stage” (Ioannou, 2004)

alignment of Cyprus with European values and institutions. EU membership was promoted as a platform for Cyprus to reinforce its sovereignty and secure a permanent place in the European political community, distancing itself from past political isolation due to its division and the unresolved conflict with Turkey (Trimikliniotis, 2004).

Former Cypriot President George Vassiliou, who from 1998 was Chief Negotiator for the Accession of Cyprus to the EU and Coordinator of the Harmonization process, in 2004 said “the European Union is the future. The European Union is exactly what we want to achieve – forgetting about the past, forgetting about the wars and the suffering of the past and building together a future” (Voice of America, 2004).

Joining the EU was also seen as a crucial step in including Cyprus's position within the European security architecture. EU membership provided access to European institutions that could mediate and resolve disputes with neighbouring countries, in particular Turkey. The rhetoric surrounding accession was that the EU would offer a framework for peace, security and stability. This meant protection from external threats, particularly in the context of its longstanding tensions with Turkey (Frontex, 2004).

Concerns: Economic and Sovereignty Costs

It was not all optimistic narratives, though. Significant challenges and concerns were raised about the costs and risks associated with accession. The economic cost of necessary reforms was one of the primary concerns. Cyprus needed to align its economy with EU standards.

This involved substantial and difficult adjustments to its financial and legal systems, environmental policies, and other sectors. These adjustments involved compromise, paradigm shifts and painful economic reforms, such as the liberalisation of markets and the opening up of the economy to foreign competition. Opposition to accession cited that reforms would harm local industries, particularly in agriculture, a significant sector of the Cypriot economy (Papageorgiou, 2006).

The perceived loss of sovereignty was another major concern for some critics. Ceding some degree of political and economic control to the EU was deeply unsettling for some, as they feared the prospect of being forced to accept decisions made by European institutions that may not align with Cyprus's national interests.

Primarily, there was concern about the loss of control over areas such as immigration, trade and agriculture. As an isolated small island nation at the far end of the Eastern Mediterranean, Cyprus worried about its ability to influence EU decision-making compared to larger member states (Hadjipavlou, 2008).

Some critics raised cultural concerns about protecting Cypriot identity as a Mediterranean nation and a predominantly Greek Orthodox society. They worried about the threat of being diluted by the EU's broader political and social policies. The EU's emphasis on human rights, labour laws and multiculturalism was seen by conservative actors as a challenge to Cypriot traditions and values. There was

a fear that Cyprus would be forced to conform to EU norms that were perceived as foreign or incompatible with its cultural heritage (Kliem, 2005).

Regional Relations and Cyprus-Turkey Dynamics

Turkey's strong opposition to Cyprus's EU membership created a complex diplomatic challenge. Turkish officials argued that Cyprus's membership should be contingent on the resolution of the Cyprus Problem. Turkey's opposition added a layer of complexity to Cyprus's accession process, as the EU's decision to admit Cyprus despite these challenges risked worsening relations with Turkey (Emerson, 2006). Moreover, the Turkish Cypriot community, which was under Turkey's control in the north, was divided on the issue of EU membership, further complicating the political landscape (Bouris, 2008).

Geopolitical concerns were highlighted due to Cyprus's location in the Eastern Mediterranean. Particular focus was placed on the relationship of Cyprus with Turkey, especially in regard to the division of the island since 1974, the frozen conflict and ongoing negotiations for reunification between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities. Turkey is the only state to recognise the breakaway 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus' ('TRNC') in the island's northern third, a long-term point of contention between Cyprus and Turkey.

For the majority of Cypriots, and especially for the political elites, EU membership meant security and protection from Turkish pressure. With the Annan Plan for reunification being negotiated during the final years of EU accession negotiations, the EU was seen as a platform where Cyprus could gain international support for its positions and drive negotiations in a fairer direction. It also meant they could better seek support from the international community, especially the member-states of the bloc, towards the resolution of the Cyprus Problem.

However, this delivered a risky conundrum. The EU's willingness to admit Cyprus into membership while the island remained divided was seen by some as a double-edged sword. While it provided Cyprus with political legitimacy, it also exacerbated tensions with Turkey, which opposed the EU's inclusion of Cyprus. Many Greek Cypriot leaders believed Cyprus's EU membership could facilitate Turkey's accession negotiations and eventual accession to the bloc (Ker-Lindsay, 2005).

However, for Turkey, the EU's decision to admit Cyprus without addressing the island's division was seen as a betrayal. This complicated the dynamics of Cyprus's accession process, as political elites had to navigate the complex relationship between their aspirations for EU membership and the reality of strained relations with a powerful neighbouring country (Emerson, 2006).

Although the Cypriots have always tried to internationalise the Cyprus Problem, the EU's involvement in the reunification negotiations that led up to the Annan Plan and accession to the EU was unwelcome by many. They feared the EU's influence on the resolution of the conflict could be biased and the Greek Cypriots might be coerced into an unacceptable compromise.

The EU, however, did not put the condition of the island being reunited before accession. Nevertheless, this process highlighted the challenges of reconciling the interests of the Greek and Turkish communities, as well as the difficulties of achieving a lasting solution to the Cyprus Problem (Bouris, 2008).

As European Commission in 2002 stated, 'the Cyprus issue should not be allowed to block the country's European future.'

In summary

Cyprus's accession to the EU was a pivotal defining moment in its long and complicated history. The accession process consisted of a complex political discourse, economic considerations and implications for regional relations. The political elites in Cyprus in the years leading up to 2004 played a significant role in guiding and shaping the public's understanding of the benefits and risks of EU membership.

Political elites framed Cyprus's decision to join the EU as a means to secure economic growth, political legitimacy and regional stability. The benefits of EU membership, including access to the European single market, financial aid and political legitimacy, were emphasized as key drivers of the accession process. Their arguments always leaned on the economic advantages, the political legitimacy and the prospect of enhanced security that being an EU member would attract.

Additionally, Cyprus's unique geopolitical position in the Eastern Mediterranean, its complex regional relations, its relations with Turkey and what EU membership would mean for the Cyprus Problem played a key role in shaping the discourse surrounding EU membership.

Opposition, or more correctly, those with conservative reservations, raised concerns about the costs of EU accession, the required economic and social reforms, weakening of sovereignty and cultural implications.

While EU membership promised numerous advantages, it also presented challenges that required careful navigation by Cyprus's political elites. Ultimately, accession to the EU marked a positive and significant milestone in the island's history.

Public Support for EU Membership

Initial Support for EU Accession – Support, Change and Dividing Lines

The accession process, which required extensive reforms to meet membership requirements, was met with a complex and evolving public opinion landscape. Public support for EU membership was not uniform across the population, and it evolved over time due to various political, economic and social factors.

Right from the beginning of Cyprus's journey towards EU membership in the 1990s, the Cypriot political elites were building significant public enthusiasm for the EU, particularly the potential benefits of economic growth, increased security and political stability (Trimikliniotis, 2004). Public opinion remained mostly positive, with polls consistently showing the vast majority of Cypriots supported integration into the EU.

This support was driven by several factors, including a desire for economic modernisation, the opportunity to strengthen Cyprus's position in the international arena and the long-standing aspiration to reunify the island (Ker-Lindsay, 2005).

The pro-EU sentiment and the prospect of enjoying the potential benefits of membership were particularly strong among the Greek Cypriot community that controlled the Republic of Cyprus. The Turkish Cypriot community in the northern part of Cyprus, however, was mostly excluded from the accession process. This created a disparity in public opinion between the two main Cypriot communities.

With minimal participation in EU accession negotiations, the Turkish Cypriots were sceptical about the potential impact of EU membership on the island's political situation (Bouris, 2008). Unlike the Greek Cypriots, they voted in favour of the reunification of Cyprus in the Annan Plan referendum, hoping to join the EU with

their Greek Cypriot counterparts a short fortnight after the vote. They had hoped they too would reap the benefits of the accession of Cyprus.

Shifting Public Opinion: Factors of Change

Over time, enthusiastic public opinion in Cyprus shifted, influenced by several key factors. One of the most significant factors was the perception of economic costs associated with EU membership. The economic reforms required by the EU, such as the liberalisation of markets and the alignment of Cyprus's policies with European standards, raised concerns among certain communities. Farmers and sector stakeholders who were vulnerable to competition from other EU countries were particularly concerned. The fear of losing local jobs, especially in the agricultural sector, led some to question whether the benefits of EU membership would outweigh the potential economic challenges (Papageorgiou, 2006).

Another major factor that influenced public opinion was the unresolved Cyprus Problem. While EU accession could have been coupled with prospects for a sustainable reunification, the lack of progress in resolving the Cyprus Problem left some quarters disillusioned with the EU. The EU's decision to admit a divided Cyprus into the bloc was at least controversial. It left many Turkish Cypriots longing for access to the EU benefits, whilst many Greek Cypriots feared they would be forced to make political concessions to Turkey in exchange for the EU's support for reunification (Papadakis, 2006). The perceived failure of the EU to help tangibly solve the Cyprus Problem led to a slight decline in support for membership, but not enough to create momentum to topple the process.

Dividing Lines in Public Opinion

The most significant dividing line in public opinion was between pro-European and anti-European factions. The pro-European voices, led by political elites, advocated for EU membership as an essential step for Cyprus's modernisation, economic growth, international legitimacy, bolstered security and political stability (Trimikliniotis, 2004).

The Eurosceptics focused on more nationalistic elements of Cypriot society and were concerned about EU membership's political and economic costs. Of particular concern was the loss of sovereignty, the watering down of Cypriot traditional values and identity to meet certain EU regulations, and the possible repercussions of an eventual accession of Turkey to the EU (Bouris, 2008).

The Eurosceptics often coupled their concerns with the concerns raised at the Annan Plan for reunification. The public, however, in general kept the Cyprus Problem and EU accession separate.

Role of NGOs and Civil Society in the Information Campaign

In the lead up to the 1 May 2004 EU accession, public discourse was distracted and centred on the debate surrounding the 24 April 2004 Annan Plan for the reunification referendum. Throughout the referendum campaign, NGOs and civil society played a significant role in shaping public opinion and disseminating information about the EU accession process. Whilst the government and political parties led the official campaigns, NGOs, particularly those focused on human rights, peace-building and social development, played an important role in the broader discourse.

NGOs were instrumental in promoting awareness about the benefits of EU membership, particularly among younger Cypriots, who were seen as the most

open to the idea of a European future for Cyprus. They also worked to ensure that the public had access to accurate information about the implications of the Annan Plan and the EU accession process. The NGOs organised debates, discussions and educational campaigns to inform the public about the complexities of the referendum and the potential impact of Cyprus's EU membership on the island's future (Papageorgiou, 2006).

Whilst the EU accession was not contingent on the success of the referendum, both accession and the referendum were discussed in tandem and treated unofficially as one package. Eventually, although the referendum failed, it did not affect support for EU accession.

In summary

The public's support for Cyprus's EU membership and the accession process was shaped by a complex interplay of economic, political and social factors. Public opinion initially leaned towards favouring EU membership, but concerns over economic costs, sovereignty, and the unresolved Cyprus Problem raised concerns. Dividing lines in public opinion emerged, with the pro-European camp emphasizing the benefits of EU integration and the Eurosceptic camp focusing on the risks, particularly in relation to the Cyprus Problem and Turkish influence and threats. The referendum on the Annan Plan revealed these divisions, with Greek Cypriots overwhelmingly rejecting the plan while Turkish Cypriots supported it.

NGOs and civil society played a crucial role in the information campaign, working to inform the public and promote dialogue between communities. Ultimately, Cyprus's EU accession was a complex and contested process, marked by both optimism and scepticism about the island's future.

Conclusion

The accession of Cyprus to the EU was not merely a political milestone but a moment of deep reflection for the island. It prompted widespread debate and intense scrutiny of its future direction. It was a pivotal point in the island's long and ancient history and a key point in its post-independence development.

A complex interplay of public opinion, political rhetoric and regional dynamics characterized the process leading up to Cyprus's EU membership. While the political elites and pro-European factions framed the EU as a means of securing economic growth, stability and peace, the public's reception of these promises was far from unanimous. The division of the island, unresolved political issues and fears of economic and cultural erosion led to polarised public opinions, with distinct dividing lines emerging between those who viewed EU membership as an opportunity and those who saw it as a threat.

The process of preparing Cyprus for EU accession highlighted the contentious nature of the move, as the pro-European camp emphasized the benefits of integration, while the anti-European factions warned of the dangers of compromising Cyprus's sovereignty and identity.

Despite the government's efforts and the involvement of civil society organisations in informing the public, the concurrent Annan Plan for reunification referendum revealed the deep divisions within Cypriot society. The rejection of the Annan Plan by the Greek Cypriot community underscored the complexity of the island's political situation and the challenges of reconciling European aspirations with national realities.

Ultimately, Cyprus's EU membership has had a profound impact on the island, reshaping its economic, political and social landscape. While the initial years following accession were marked by optimism, the unresolved Cyprus Problem and the island's continued division present ongoing challenges.

Cyprus's journey into the EU has demonstrated the difficulty of integrating diverse political, cultural and national aspirations within a single framework, as well as the complex relationship between domestic and international concerns. As Cyprus continues to navigate its position within the EU, it remains to be seen how the country will balance its European identity with its long-standing regional challenges, particularly its relationship with Turkey.

The concerns raised in the lead up to EU accession are still as valid as ever, but have been compounded by recent local and global economic crises, shifting geopolitics in the region, continued and new threats, migration issues and awareness of deepening corruption. Would Cyprus be able to manage its various demanding issues without being a member of the EU? It is difficult to say, but the support it receives from the member states and the deterrent factor on security by being a member cannot be overlooked.

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