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The European Union's Role in the Unresolved Cyprus Conflict

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Master in International Studies

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SOCIOLOGIA
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History Department

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To my grandmother,
forever in my heart

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To my beloved family, whose unconditional support has been invaluable throughout this process. To my parents, thank you for being there through all the highs and lows, and for encouraging me to follow my dreams and pursue my ambitions.

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Resumo

O problema de Chipre é o mais antigo conflito não resolvido na Europa, ocorrendo no território da União Europeia. No entanto, mais de cinquenta anos depois, a ilha continua dividida, com um mapa atravessado por diferentes tipos de fronteiras. Embora a República de Chipre se tenha tornado membro da União Europeia em 2004 – o que deveria ter tornado a UE um ator ainda mais poderoso na resolução do conflito – o problema de Chipre permanece sem solução há décadas. Assim, a afirmação da UE enquanto mediador eficaz em Chipre tem sido bastante contestada, uma vez que a União não conseguiu, até agora, assumir um papel central nas negociações de paz nem fornecer soluções viáveis para uma solução duradoura e para a construção de paz. Esta dissertação utiliza uma perspetiva construtivista para examinar de que forma a UE abordou o conflito ao longo do tempo. São analisadas as dificuldades enfrentadas pela União e a sua cooperação com outros intervenientes, tendo em conta o contexto histórico e sensível do conflito. Este estudo foca-se, também, na importância de a União adotar uma nova estratégia para a resolução do conflito de Chipre – não só devido à sua responsabilidade enquanto ator global, mas também pelo novo papel que a ilha adquiriu na dinâmica geopolítica regional.

Palavras-chave: Conflito de Chipre; Construtivismo; Instituições internacionais; Organização das Nações Unidas; Turquia; União Europeia.

Abstract

The Cyprus problem is the oldest unresolved conflict in Europe, taking place within the territory of the European Union. Nevertheless, more than fifty years on, the island remains divided, with a map traversed by different types of borders. Even though the Republic of Cyprus became a member of the European Union in 2004 – which should have made the EU an even more powerful actor in resolving the conflict – the Cyprus problem has remained unresolved for decades. Therefore, the EU's claim to be an efficient peacemaker in Cyprus has been highly contested, as the Union has so far failed short of taking a central role in the peace negotiations and in providing viable solutions for a sustainable resolution of the conflict and peacebuilding. This dissertation uses a constructivist lens to examine how the EU has approached the conflict over time. The difficulties experienced by the Union and its cooperation with other parties are analysed, bearing in mind the sensitive historical context of the dispute. This study also focuses on the importance for the Union to adopt a new strategy towards the resolution of the Cyprus conflict – not only because of its responsibility as a global actor, but also in light of the new role the island has gained in the regional geopolitical dynamics.

Key words: Cyprus conflict; Constructivism; European Union; International Institutions; Türkiye; United Nations.

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Glossary of Acronyms

CMP – Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus

EEZ – Exclusive Economic Zone

EOKA – Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston (in English: National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters)

EU – European Union

NPE – Normative Power Europe

TMT – Türk Mukavemet Teşkilatı (in English: Turkish Resistance Organisation)

TRNC – Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus

UN – United Nations

UNCLOS – United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

UNFICYP – United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus

Introduction

The Cyprus conflict is an important topic in International Studies due to its complexity – it is not only the oldest protracted conflict in Europe, but also one of the world's most enduring unresolved ethnic disputes. More than fifty years into the conflict, Cyprus is still a divided island, with a map marked by multiple types of borders: the Green Line, dividing the Republic of Cyprus and the unrecognised Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC); and the borders separating the two British Sovereign Base Areas. In addition, the Cypriot capital Nicosia is the last divided city in Europe.

While the historical and ethnic past of the island may have played a role in causing the conflict, the failure to resolve it now lies in the hands of global actors such as the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU) – the latter being in the situation of hosting a conflict taking place on its territory. The Republic of Cyprus joined the EU in 2004, which should have made the Union an even more powerful actor in resolving the conflict. However, the EU's ability to act as an efficient peacemaker in Cyprus has been widely questioned, given its failure to play a central role in peace negotiations and provide viable solutions for a sustainable resolution to the conflict. Furthermore, the lack of international recognition of one side of the island has significantly hindered the achievement of a solution.

Thus, despite decades of international engagement, Cyprus remains divided. This underlines the importance of understanding whether the role of these actors – in particular the European Union – has been sufficient and effective. With all the advantages that Cyprus' membership brings to the Union, such as its geopolitical and geoeconomic position, and its role as a close neighbour in the Middle East region, the current *status quo* poses challenges to the Union, especially at a time when violent conflicts are taking place close to the borders of the EU.

Therefore, the main research question for this dissertation is: How has the European Union approached the resolution of the Cyprus conflict? Other questions will also be answered in the course of this study: What mechanisms is the EU using to solve the conflict? Why did the EU not play a role in resolving the conflict before Cyprus joined the Union? How does the Cyprus conflict affect the security of the EU? The last question relates to the country's proximity to the Middle East, which might be a key factor in the Union's security given the escalating war in the region.

In this sense, this research not only addresses a gap in the existing literature on the subject but also consists of a unique example – a conflict within the European Union. Although the EU played a rather limited role prior to Cyprus' accession, conflict resolution measures and policies should have become more relevant since it joined, as should the Union's role in managing an internal, albeit protracted, conflict.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

In order to select the most appropriate theoretical framework, several theories and concepts were reviewed. Given the complex nature of the Cyprus conflict and the European Union's unique role in the international arena, multiple approaches could have been adopted to explore this subject.

This research takes a constructivist perspective to examine the role of the European Union in the Cyprus conflict. Based on the premise that reality is socially constructed, constructivism emphasises the ways in which beliefs, values, norms and identities shape the international system. This approach is particularly relevant to this issue, as it provides a better understanding of how the identities and perceptions of the parties involved – including both states and the EU – influence the dynamics of the conflict. In addition, the concept of Normative Power Europe (NPE) is considered a complementary framework that enriches and deepens the constructivist perspective by providing a focused analysis of the EU's role as an international actor in the conflict.

This combination offers a complex lens through which to address the subject of this dissertation.

Research Objectives and Methodology

The main objective of this research is to analyse the achievements and challenges faced by the European Union in dealing with a conflict within its borders. With more than fifty years of conflict and over twenty years of Cyprus EU membership behind it, it is important to understand how the EU has addressed this internalised conflict, and the challenges it has faced in doing so. Other objectives include examining how the EU's role and approach have evolved over time; assessing its cooperation with other regional and global actors; and understanding the impact of EU policies in Cyprus.

This dissertation adopts a qualitative methodology in the form of a single case-study – the Cyprus conflict – enabling an in-depth examination of this issue. Data collection techniques consist of document-based research of primary and secondary sources, as well as structured and semi-structured interviews. Primary sources for the document-based research focus on official EU statements and documents on the Cyprus problem, while secondary sources consist of academic articles and books that interpret these primary sources. With regard to the interviews, which provide for additional and deeper knowledge on the subject, this study sought to collect insights from individuals who may have a different perspective on the situation. The main goal was to interview experts, stakeholders and relevant representatives of the Cypriot communities to understand the perspectives of those who study and experience the conflict first-hand. To collect a wide variety of respondents, four interviews were conducted for this

research: one with a Greek Cypriot (R1); one with an Armenian Cypriot (R2); one with a Turkish Cypriot (Professor Ahmet Sözen); and one with a British professor and researcher with expertise in conflict analysis (Professor James Ker-Lindsay). At their request, the two respondents from the Republic of Cyprus chose to remain anonymous and are therefore referred to by code. Two interviews were semi-structured and conducted via Zoom, while the other two were structured interviews conducted via e-mail. Semi-structured interviews allowed for more spontaneous responses, provided additional insights and facilitated the interpretation of questions, whereas structured interviews provided clearer and more concise answers, which proved useful when participants were unable to engage in longer synchronous conversations.

During the process of writing this dissertation, I spent a week in Cyprus – my first visit to the island. I had the opportunity to present part of my research at the Border Regions in Transition (BRIT) Conference, whose theme was *Contested Borderlands as Spaces of Negotiation and Adaptation*. There, I met several researchers and scholars – some of them studying the Cyprus case – and I received valuable feedback on my own research. I also met experts who validated my work and broadened my knowledge of the subject. Therefore, this dissertation is enriched with personal insights regarding my experience there, which included two field trips: one to Nicosia and the other to Famagusta. Visiting the different territorial divisions on the island provided a deeper understanding of the conflict and offered the chance to witness the division firsthand – whether by crossing the Green Line or by noticing the stark contrasts between the two sides.

As this study seeks to present new information, particularly regarding the role of the EU in the conflict, the analysed period ranges from the rejection of the Annan Plan and Cyprus' accession to the European Union in 2004 to the present day. Data analysis relies on document and narrative analysis. The former involves analysing recent official statements, documents and news, as well as reviewing academic articles relevant to the focus of the present study. The latter considers the interviews and the participants' insights, thoughts and opinions, providing unique and valuable findings for the research. This methodology ensures that all research questions are addressed, either through document analysis or insights from respondents, providing a comprehensive analysis of the subject.

Chapter I – Theoretical Framework

This chapter briefly explores realism and liberal institutionalism as possible theoretical approaches to analysing the conflict in Cyprus, ultimately discarding them in favour of constructivism – the chosen framework for this study – for its enriched approach allowing to explore the role of EU in such a sensitive dispute. In contrast to the discarded rationalist theories, constructivism takes into consideration the historical, cultural and social roots of the Cyprus conflict. The constructivist focus on identities, perceptions and the idea of 'otherness' is crucial for understanding this particular dispute. Alongside this framework, the chapter considers the concept of Normative Power Europe as a complementary perspective within the theoretical lens, offering a detailed view of how the EU projects its values and norms externally in order to influence the international arena.

1.1. – Realism

As part of an effort to explore a wide range of possible theoretical frameworks, realism was initially considered as an approach to study the role of the European Union in the Cyprus conflict. However, it became evident throughout the literature review that a realist perspective would lead to very different outcomes than those expected.

Realism is one of the most prominent and enduring theories in the field of international relations, with roots in earlier political philosophy from Thucydides, Machiavelli and Hobbes. Formally developed in the twentieth century, it became the dominant theoretical approach after World War II, with Hans Morgenthau emerging as one of its leading figures in the 1950s (Donnelly, 1995; 2000).

One of realism's central assumptions is that the international system is characterised by anarchy. Due to the absence of a central authority capable of establishing order, the international environment is often depicted as a "brutal arena", an anarchic system in which no entity holds power above the state (Mearsheimer, 1994, p. 9). In such a context, states exist within a 'self-help' system, living in constant fear and competing for power while perceiving others as threats. Consequently, states' ultimate goal is to maintain their sovereignty and survive within this system – a reality that Morgenthau describes as "a multiplicity of nations living with each other, competing with each other for power, and trying to maintain their autonomy" (Morgenthau, 1958, p. 5). Given the uncertainty concerning the intentions of others, states maintain a constant posture of protection and defence to prepare for possible aggression. These circumstances accentuate the state-centric nature of realism, which considers the sovereign state the most powerful actor in the global arena. In this framework, international institutions are viewed as mere tools that states use to pursue their interests, rather than as independent actors (Donnelly, 1995; 2000; Mearsheimer, 1994).

A further core assumption of realism concerns the egoistic character of human nature. Realists depict individuals as inherently selfish, competitive and driven by the pursuit of power, often with a tendency towards immorality. These traits, while associated with human beings, are also reflected in the behaviour of states on the international stage. As Morgenthau argues, the struggle for power "is part and parcel of human nature itself … the aspirations for power are innate in human nature" (Donnelly 1995; 2000; Morgenthau 1958, p. 5). When combined with the anarchic structure of the international system, this understanding of human nature significantly constrains cooperation between states. The ambition for power leads states to avoid cooperating with others, fearing that they might cheat and gain an advantage at their expense. The lack of trust between states can be illustrated through the Prisoner's Dilemma, which describes a situation where states could benefit from cooperation but instead choose to compete and prioritise their own security due to the fear of defection. When considering cooperation, states must anticipate how they can benefit and ensure that the other party does not benefit more. In such cases, a common strategy used by states is to attempt to achieve a balance of power, in order to prevent one state from becoming more powerful than the others (Donnelly, 2000; Mearsheimer, 1994).

Realism would frame the Cyprus problem as a dispute between two communities seeking power, territorial possession and security, whose interests are ultimately self-centred and whose goal is to survive as sovereign states. Therefore, the division of the island would reflect the balance of power between the two Cypriot communities. Due to the anarchy inherent in the international system, the intervention of any other state as mediator would be disregarded, as none possesses superior authority. In this sense, the guarantor powers – Greece, Türkiye, and the United Kingdom – would be seen merely as other states with the same level of power as those directly involved in the conflict. Furthermore, cooperation between states would be disregarded because the risk of defection in such a sensitive issue would lead to substantial losses in terms of territorial sovereignty or identity. Thus, the Prisoner's Dilemma illustrates how the two communities could benefit from cooperation through reunification and its advantages – economic strength, increased security and regional strategic influence and EU membership – but avoid it due to fears of relative power loss and strategic disadvantage. Above all, realism would not consider the European Union to be a significant actor in the international context able to promote peace and play a role in the conflict; ultimately, not even the UN would be considered sufficiently relevant, despite its military presence on the island.

While this perspective may help to explain the regional power games and the persistence of conflict to some extent, it falls short in capturing the complex dynamics between the parties involved in the conflict and international institutions and supranational actors, such as the EU. Moreover, realism disregards the importance of cooperation – which has played a part in the process – and of non-material factors, such as perceptions, in the conflict resolution process.

For these reasons, and given the particular relevance of the involvement of an international institution in this conflict for the purposes of this research, the realist theory is discarded.

1.2. – Liberal Institutionalism

Liberalism remains a fundamental school of thought in the study of international relations. For the present study, one particular branch of this theory was considered as a potential framework: liberal institutionalism. This approach, which entered the field of international relations during the 1980s, emphasises the role of international institutions in facilitating cooperation between states – a topic particularly relevant to this research.

Building on the core values of early liberal theory, liberal institutionalism promotes an international order characterised by rules, peace and cooperation among states. Robert Keohane, considered one of the founding scholars of this theoretical approach, defines it as "the dominance of the view that cooperation in world politics can be enhanced through the construction and support of multilateral institutions based on liberal principles" (Keohane, 2012, p. 125). Liberal institutionalism views states as rational, self-interested actors who can benefit from cooperation despite the anarchy of the international system. Therefore, while maintaining some realist assumptions, this approach emphasises the significant role of international institutions as relevant actors (Johnson & Heiss, 2018).

One of the main premises of liberal institutionalism, as addressed by Keohane in his earlier writings, is that understanding the creation and operation of institutions is essential to comprehending the international environment necessary for cooperation to occur (Keohane, 1988). States might be rational and egoistic, but when common interests emerge, cooperation can be beneficial for those involved. In these circumstances, it is expected that intergovernmental institutions will be created to sustain cooperation among states and to bring advantages to the international community. Such institutions establish a set of rules to guide the behaviour of states and achieve the best possible outcomes. As a result, uncertainty about other states' intentions decreases, due to greater communication of interests; transaction costs are minimised; mechanisms for war and conflict prevention are developed. In this way, the construction of cooperative international institutions not only benefits all parties involved but also offers better conditions for the people who ultimately benefit from such improvements (Keohane & Martin, 1995; Keohane, 2012).

Liberal institutionalism has proven effective in improving trust and transparency within the international system through sustained cooperation and continued interaction among actors. Nevertheless, Keohane claims that all theories require empirical evidence of their application to be meaningful (Keohane & Martin, 1995). Following the Second World War, many institutions aimed at fostering international cooperation were established, including the United

Nations, the World Trade Organization and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation; on a more regional scale, notable examples include the European Union, the African Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Doyle & Recchia, 2011).

From a liberal institutionalist perspective, the conflict could have been prevented if an effective institution had intervened early on to encourage cooperation and communication between the two communities on the island. If the EU or the UN had acted before the escalation of violence in the 1960s, the division of the island might not have occurred, or its impact might have been mitigated, as such institutions would have promoted dialogue and built trust. As this context did not arise, the focus of liberal institutionalism in this case would be on the role of these two institutions as key players in the Cyprus conflict following the outbreak of violence. As an international institution with power and influence in regional politics, the EU would play a significant role in encouraging cooperation between the two Cypriot communities, as well as among the guarantor powers – not only because the United Kingdom was a member state when violence began, but particularly because Greece became an EU member during the escalation of tensions. The EU had the potential to address the root causes of the conflict through its membership incentives and political influence, which could be used to develop and reinforce shared norms, rules and strategies. The role of the United Nations in Cyprus and its attempts to establish peace and mediate the conflict would also be considered relevant. The UN's peacekeeping and mediation efforts demonstrate the importance of institutions as means of facilitating dialogue, promoting transparency, and reducing mistrust. Both the European Union and the United Nations provide examples of how international institutions can provide frameworks for sustained cooperation, essential for conflict resolution.

Although liberal institutionalism thoroughly addresses the potential role of the EU in the Cyprus conflict, including the actions taken by the UN, it fails to provide a sufficiently accurate approach for effective implementation on the ground. The deep social and ethnic roots of the dispute, closely linked to historical events, together with the political and national interests of other states influencing the Union's mediation and resolution efforts, present significant challenges. Thus, the Cyprus case requires an approach that considers the sensitive nature of the dispute, as not all institutional methods would be effective. The historical and social context in which it takes place directly influences how actions are implemented or rejected. This can be demonstrated by the role of the UN on the island, where it merely froze the conflict instead of resolving it. Despite providing useful perspectives on the role of institutions in conflict resolution, liberal institutionalism was ultimately discarded as the theoretical framework for this research, as it proves insufficient to fully address the complexity of the Cyprus conflict.

1.3. – Constructivism

To address the research questions and meet the proposed objectives, this study adopts a constructivist lens, primarily drawing on the insights of Alexander Wendt while also engaging with the work of other constructivist scholars. In contrast to other mainstream theories of International Relations (IR), constructivism considers the social dimension of international affairs – an essential aspect for understanding the most sensitive elements of the Cyprus conflict.

Often tied to the end of the Cold War – a turning point that most IR theories, such as realism and liberalism, failed to predict – constructivism emerged as a distinctive theoretical framework in the field, enriched with philosophical nuances and sociological insights (Ruggie, 1998; Theys, 2017). The term 'constructivism' was first introduced to the field of International Relations by Nicholas Onuf in 1989, with the author arguing that "people always construct, or constitute, social reality, even as their being, which can only be social, is constructed for them" (Onuf, 2013, p. 1). Constructivism was later developed as an approach to international politics by Alexander Wendt in his article: *Anarchy is what states make of it* (1992). In an attempt to establish a middle ground between neorealism and neoliberalism, Wendt proposed constructivism, emphasising the social aspects of international relations. Over time, constructivism has become a major theoretical perspective in international relations, with its central argument being that reality is socially constructed. This alternative lens provides a unique perspective on key concepts and ideas, from identities and interests to structures and agency, norms and institutions (Hopf, 1998; Wendt, 1992).

Constructivism views the international system as constructed through collective meanings, shared ideas and social interactions, prioritising these over the materialist approaches favoured by other IR theories. To support this argument, Wendt uses the concept of 'anarchy' to demonstrate that its meaning is not fixed but depends on how it is interpreted and the meanings attributed to it by actors: "anarchy is what states make of it" (Hurd, 2009; Wendt, 1992, p. 395). Likewise, identities and social structures are not fixed – they evolve and change over time through ongoing interpretation and shared understanding. Human agency is central to this process, as the social environment of world politics is built through constant interaction and the resulting shared meanings. Constructivism, therefore, establishes an interdependence between human agents and the social framework they shape, reflecting its role in defining "our identity as social beings" (Risse, 2018, p. 146; Theys, 2017). This focus on the social construction of reality is closely linked to the significance of social context. Without it, material structures would be meaningless, as "the building blocks of international reality are ideational as well as material" (Ruggie, 1998, p. 879). Furthermore, the behaviour and perceptions of

states and other actors are shaped by their understanding of the world and the beliefs, practices and identities they develop within that context (Hurd, 2009; Theys, 2017).

According to Wendt, identities and interests are formed through the continuous and mutual interaction between actors. These identities are enduring and grounded in shared ideas and collective meanings, reflecting the actor's sense of self, interests and expected role. In this sense, it is possible to anticipate and perform actions in accordance with that identity and its assigned meaning. The author argues that the way a person interacts with an object or engages with another actor depends on the meaning that object or actor has for them. This can be illustrated in international relations in a very practical way: "states act differently towards enemies than they do towards friends because enemies are threatening and friends are not" (Wendt, 1992, p. 397). Therefore, identities play a pivotal role in society – either domestic or international – as they assure stability and order through the predictability of actions. A state must act according to its identity, so other actors know what to expect and how to respond (Hopf, 1998; Theys, 2017). Without stable identities, social order would not exist and would be replaced by chaos and uncertainty. As Ted Hopf highlights: "identities perform three necessary functions in a society: they tell you and others who you are and they tell you who others are" (Hopf 1998, p. 175). However, many constructivists claim that states and other actors are not limited to a single identity; rather, their interactions with different actors can create multiple, context-dependent identities. For instance, the European Union can influence the identities and interests of its member states. A state may have a national identity and interests in an international context, as well as an identity as an EU member. This latter identity would have its own distinct interests and would shape how the member state is perceived by others, both within the context of Union affairs and in the broader global arena. Similar to individual identities, an EU identity is constructed within the social and political context in which it is attributed to the actor (Risse, 2018; Theys, 2017).

Considering the earlier discussions on social context and the role of human agency in its formation, as well as the creation of interests and identities, it is important to understand how constructivism perceives the relationship between structures and agency. Given the structurationist nature of Wendt's constructivism, both structures and human agency occupy a central role in shaping the international system, as they are mutually constitutive (Wendt, 1999). As explained by the author: "It is through reciprocal interaction … that we create and instantiate relatively enduring structures in terms of which we define our identities and interests" (Wendt, 1992, p. 406). The continuous interaction between actors and shared meanings highlights the dynamic interdependence between structures and agents. Hurd (2009) defines 'structures' as "the institutions and shared meanings" that build the international system, while 'agents' are "any entity that operates as an actor in that context" (Hurd 2009, p. 303). The insights provided by Theys add the "material and ideational elements" as part of

structures and define ‘agency’ as “the ability of someone to act” (Theys, 2017 p. 37). Both authors align with Wendt’s view of their mutual constitution, emphasising that shared meanings and ideas can transform actors, just as actors can alter the shared meanings that guide them. These social structures can evolve into institutions when able to impact actors’ behaviour and develop norms that establish authority based on the social meanings attributed to them. Once again, they cannot exist independently from the ideas that actors create about the social and international environment, thus being “fundamentally cognitive entities” (Hopf, 1998; Wendt, 1992, p. 399).

Wendt maintains that when an institution is formed, a process of internalisation takes place. This involves the emergence of new conceptions of ‘self’ and ‘other’, as well as the formation of new role identities, rather than simply imposing external norms on actors that are already fixed. Social norms – also fundamental to constructivist theory – are associated with the institutions whose authority is recognised by multiple actors, in order to establish credibility. Wendt illustrates this with the concept of ‘sovereignty’, claiming that it only exists as an institution due to the meanings and expectations associated with it, and because of the existence of an ‘other’ – namely, states and entities that recognise it as such (Wendt, 1992). When states or other actors acknowledge the authority of a certain institution, they are expected to follow its norms. In the international system, these institutions include international organisations, such as the EU and the UN, as well as socially constructed structures such as international law (Hurd, 2009; Theys, 2017). Regardless of their form, institutions can be either cooperative or conflictual. In both cases, the stability of their relationships with others relies on shared meanings and ideas, even when cooperation is impossible. For cooperation to be effective, the positive outcomes resulting from it must be benefits that could not be achieved through individual action. International institutions often provide the conditions needed for cooperation, as their norms are recognised by states and other institutions. By declaring their intentions and interests, institutions can develop mutual understanding, build perceptions of confidence and establish shared objectives, thereby fostering transparency within the system (Hopf, 1998; Wendt, 1992).

Constructivism was received with scepticism by IR scholars. Like all theories, it has been criticised, particularly for contradictions within its theoretical approaches and the differing positions constructivist scholars hold, which Ronen Palan describes as “incompatible or at least debatable” (Palan, 2000, p. 577). Another common critique concerns the lack of empirical evidence to demonstrate that ideas – rather than material factors – shape the international system. Notwithstanding, constructivism remains the most suitable theoretical approach for examining the role of the EU in the Cyprus conflict, precisely because of its emphasis on the social dimension and the role of ideas, meanings, actors and institutions in the international arena.

The Cyprus conflict has deep roots in issues of identity, ethnic divisions and divergent perceptions of historical events. The constructivist emphasis on social context is particularly relevant to this study, as different narratives and interpretations of the dispute have emerged among the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities over time. Each community has constructed its own reality based on collective memories, historical experiences and the meanings attributed to the events that took place. The causes of the conflict and the resulting division of the island are perceived differently by the two communities. The social context also shapes national identities and influences perceptions of the 'other'. The Cyprus conflict provides a perfect example of Wendt's argument that the actions of states depend on how they perceive the 'other'. Greek Cypriots interact differently with Greece, an ally compared with Turkish Cypriots and Türkiye. Meanwhile, Turkish Cypriots view Türkiye as a friend and Greece and the Greek Cypriots as enemies. The identities that both communities have constructed directly impact their actions within the international system, reflecting their interests and behaviour. These identities have evolved alongside the island's political developments, particularly the involvement of the European Union in the conflict and the Turkish Cypriot community's declaration of an independent state in the north – an act that both reshaped existing structures and created a new collective identity on the island.

The constructivist approach also provides a good explanation of the EU's role as a relevant non-state global actor: it is an institution whose norms and values shape a collective identity that is recognised externally, with states and other international actors formally acknowledging its existence and role in the global arena. Furthermore, the EU exercises authority over its member states, all of which have voluntarily joined and internalised its norms and principles. As well as being an institution, the Union also exists as a social structure. It has constructed its role within the international system, influencing the identities, interactions and interests of its member states – which, in turn, sometimes shape the EU's own interests and actions. By creating a collective identity, the EU influences how its members relate to others and how they perceive themselves within the international context. Therefore, when the Greek Cypriots in the south applied for EU membership a new identity emerged, changing the international and political context of the conflict. The peace process was influenced by the involvement of a new entity and the new interests that arose. This shift also impacted the interactions between all parties involved, with divergent perceptions of events and identities once again prevailing between the two Cypriot communities.

The Cyprus conflict is not primarily about power, but rather shaped by social and historical factors, ethnic issues, and disputes over territory and identity. The perceptions each community has formed of the other, along with their views on the events that led to the conflict, are especially important. This reinforces the need for a comprehensive approach to the subject, as its sensitive aspects cannot be addressed by any theory of international relations that

disregards its unique characteristics. In contrast to the rationalist theories discussed earlier, the ideational nature of constructivism addresses all the social, historical, and identity-related dimensions of the Cyprus conflict, making it the most appropriate theoretical framework for this research.

1.3.1. – Normative Power Europe

The study of norms in international relations has grown significantly with the emergence of constructivism. Ian Manners developed the concept of Normative Power Europe in his article *Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?* (2002) to provide a deeper understanding of the EU's international role. Rooted in constructivist thought, this approach "constructs a particular self of the EU" and examines how the Union promotes norms that influence the identities and behaviours of other actors (Manners & Diez, 2007, p. 174). This complements the constructivist framework of the dissertation by focusing specifically on the EU's normative international role.

In the 1970s, François Duchêne described the European Union as a civilian power, rather than a military one. Decades later, Ian Manners proposed shifting the focus from civilian and military power to cognitive and ideational elements, arguing that the most important aspect shaping the Union's role "is not what it does or what it says, but what it is" (Manners & Diez, 2007, p. 177). The author introduced the concept of Normative Power Europe to emphasise the unique form of power the EU exercises in contrast to other international actors. The concept is not only based on the assumption that the EU itself was normatively constructed but also on how its actions, values and influence are reflected in the norms it promotes in international politics. The values and normative principles shared by the EU are fundamental to its identity and are deeply rooted in its historical and social context. These are: peace, freedom, democracy, rule of law, human rights, social solidarity, equality, sustainable development, and good governance (Manners, 2002; 2008).

Building on these principles, the Union promotes its norms internationally through six different mechanisms of norm diffusion, highlighting its ability to adapt and apply them to multiple different realities (Manners, 2002; 2008). Contagion diffusion refers to the unintentional spread of ideas and practices, adopted by other actors if they are considered successful or worthy of imitation. Informational diffusion relies on official EU communications – such as speeches, statements and declarations – to deliberately promote norms. Procedural diffusion involves the institutionalisation of relationships with third parties, often through cooperation agreements, treaties or the EU enlargement process. Transference diffusion entails the delivery or exchange of resources – whether material, economic or humanitarian – with other actors. Overt diffusion encompasses direct diplomatic engagement, requiring the physical presence of EU representatives or institutions in third states, where norms and ideas

are shared. Finally, cultural filter denotes the process through which norms and ideas are interpreted, adapted and reshaped by other actors according to their identity and socio-political context (Manners, 2013).

The European Union's role in the Cyprus conflict can be effectively analysed through the lens of NPE, which highlights the promotion of core values and norms in its approach. As in constructivism, the EU is understood not only as an institutional actor but also as an ideational one, whose identity and values shape its role and influence perceptions. By fostering cooperation, peace and reconciliation between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities, the Union projects itself as a normative actor, reflecting and reinforcing its own identity and values while engaging in the conflict. The Union's normative power, therefore, complements the constructivist framework by offering a detailed understanding of how the EU's identity and norms are projected and shared with others.

In order to better understand and study the role of the EU in the Cyprus conflict, it is important to consider the historical background and social context of the conflict. Doing so provides a wider perspective of the EU as an actor in the dispute. Such a broader perspective can only be achieved through a constructivist theoretical framework, as this recognises significant aspects of the conflict that directly affect the Union's role in conflict mediation and resolution. Moreover, examining past actions can improve understanding of recent developments and possible future events. Constructivism takes into account not only the root causes of conflict, but also the ideational factors that influence the course of events, such as identities, collective memories, perceptions of the past and the importance of 'otherness'. These factors shape social reality, influencing the behaviour and expectations of those involved. Furthermore, constructivism recognises that the involvement of other actors, such as international institutions and organisations, is not fixed but rather depends on, and is shaped by, the social context in which these actors operate. This perspective is complemented by the Normative Power Europe approach, which illustrates how the EU presents itself as a normative actor in the international arena by promoting its values and norms in external relations. In the case of Cyprus, this approach highlights the EU's efforts to manage the conflict and influence behaviours within its distinctive social and political context. This framework, drawing on constructivist ideas of norms and identity, strengthens the constructivist perspective by allowing the analysis of EU norm diffusion practices in a specific context. In contrast, realism and liberal institutionalism are less suitable for this study, as their rationalist assumptions disregard these factors and the background of the conflict due to their rationalist basis.

Chapter II – Analysis: The European Union and the Cyprus Conflict

This chapter thoroughly analyses the role of the European Union in Cyprus. Starting with the historical context of the conflict, it outlines the causes and course of events from the late nineteenth century until the rejection of the Annan Plan in 2004. It then presents the EU's involvement in the conflict since 1974, describing the measures it has taken and its cooperation with the UN prior to Cyprus' accession. The chapter further examines the Union's approach to the conflict, providing a comprehensive analysis of the measures adopted since Cyprus joined the EU, and of the challenges encountered in addressing this complex issue. Lastly, it considers the strategic importance of Cyprus to EU security interests, given its location in the Eastern Mediterranean.

2.1. – A Historical Overview of the Conflict

Due to its geographical location, Cyprus has always had a great diversity of inhabitants, including Armenians, Latins, Maronites and Turks, with Greeks being the most prominent group. After centuries under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, during which all Cypriots lived in peace, Britain took over the provisional administration of the island in 1878 – the failure of the Ottoman Empire, which needed allies and military protection, coincided with the British need for greater control of the Suez Canal and the sea routes to India (Adamides, 2012). Later, in 1914, the United Kingdom formally annexed Cyprus, which became a Crown Colony in 1925. As an adversary in World War I, Türkiye recognised the annexation of the island by Britain and the Greek Cypriot community welcomed the British rule, which at the time was seen as a possible way to achieve *enosis* – the political union of Cyprus with Greece (Dietzel & Makrides, 2009). However, this union never became a reality and in 1955 the Greek Cypriot community launched an offensive campaign aiming to put an end to the British rule on the island and to achieve the union with Greece. This operation marked the beginning of a guerrilla war on the island: EOKA, a Greek Cypriot nationalist organisation, fought and murdered the British and the Cypriots – either Greek or Turkish – who disagreed with the idea of *enosis*. In response to the attacks, the Turkish Cypriots created the TMT, a Turkish Cypriot resistance organisation whose aim was not only to prevent EOKA from uniting Cyprus with Greece, but also to fight for *taksim* – the partition of the island – as an alternative. As a result, both Greece and Türkiye became involved in the conflict as the 'motherlands' of each side, providing arms and military support (Adamides & Constantinou, 2012).

It was not until 1960 that Cyprus became an independent state and a member of the United Nations, following the London-Zurich Agreements, which involved the governments of Greece, Türkiye, the United Kingdom and the Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders, and created the Republic of Cyprus. Given the island's ethnic diversity, the agreements and the Constitution

sought a balance between the political and administrative rights of the two communities, which were to share power equally (Müftüler-Bac & Güney, 2005). In addition, Greece, Türkiye and the United Kingdom became "guarantor powers with the constitutional right to military intervene unilaterally in Cyprus should the need arise" and British military bases remained on the island (Adamides, 2012, p. 122).

But even with a unique regime in place to maintain peace and guarantee equality of interests and rights for both communities, the island became a battleground for civil war. Greek Cypriot President Makarios' proposals for constitutional amendment were rejected by the Turkish Cypriots, leading to a political crisis just three years after Cyprus' independence. In 1963, massive violence broke out in Cyprus, resulting in the death, displacement and disappearance of civilians on both sides (Adamides, 2012). Despite the efforts of the Greek, Turkish and British governments, and the intervention of the United Nations – which established the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) in 1964 –, the conflict between the two Cypriot communities continued, reaching its peak in July 1974 (UN Department of Public Information,1996). Brutal massacres were still taking place on the island, while a military dictatorship was in power in Greece. In line with the Greek Cypriot nationalists, Greece supported the annexation of Cyprus, fulfilling the long-sought aspiration of *enosis*. But not all Greek Cypriots were in favour of the union, leading to enormous political tensions between those who supported the union and those who opposed to it. The result was a coup d'état against President Makarios, with Greek troops landing in Cyprus to support the Greek Cypriot forces. A few days later, in response to these actions, Türkiye invaded Cyprus and unilaterally launched a military operation in defence of the Turkish Cypriots (Müftüler-Bac & Güney, 2005). The Turkish occupation of the Northern part of the island, as well as other areas along the Cypriot coast and even Nicosia, led to days of extreme violence in which civilians from both communities were killed, displaced and forced to leave Cyprus. The increasing violence on the island required the intervention of the United Nations, which demanded an immediate ceasefire and an end to foreign support. Greece, Türkiye and the United Kingdom were called in to start negotiations to restore peace to the island and ensure the co-existence of both communities in Cyprus, under the close supervision of the UNFICYP (UN Department of Public Information,1996).

After the ceasefire, a neutral zone was created by the UN – the 'Green Line' – which turned out to be a geopolitical division of the island. The two communities were officially separated, resulting in the Republic of Cyprus – in the South of the island, ruled and inhabited by Greek Cypriots – and the unrecognised Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), inhabited by the Turkish Cypriot community (UN Department of Public Information,1996). Violence has since ceased, but the tensions between the two sides of the island remain, albeit protracted. The TRNC declared its independence in 1983, but it is still only recognised by Türkiye – the

only country that does not recognise the Republic of Cyprus (Adamides & Constantinou, 2012). The latter applied for EU membership in 1990 and soon became a major issue for the Union: while Cyprus' accession could be the key to the island's reunification, membership could have a negative impact on EU-Türkiye relations and the enlargement process, in which Türkiye has been stuck for several years. In 2002, the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan proposed a plan – the 'Annan Plan' – to bring an end to the Cyprus problem (Müftüler-Bac & Güney, 2005). The plan envisioned a united Cyprus, within which would exist the Greek Cypriot state and the Turkish Cypriot state. In 2004, a referendum on the Annan Plan was held on the island, resulting in its rejection by the Greek Cypriot community (76%), although the Turkish Cypriot community accepted it (65%). In the same year, the Republic of Cyprus then joined the European Union as a divided island (Adamides & Constantinou, 2012).

2.2. – The EU as an Actor in the Cyprus Conflict

The role of the European Union in the Cyprus conflict has evolved from that of a mere observer to an indirectly involved actor, especially since the events of 1974. By following the UN's lead and supporting its work and decisions, the EU became engaged in the conflict without doing much itself to resolve it. Through the use of soft power, the Union gradually became a more present actor, but did not remain neutral for long. In 1981, Greece joined the EU, thus raising questions about the EU's neutrality in the Cyprus problem. Greek membership led to several changes in the Union's approach to the conflict. Greece used its membership status to influence the Union's actions towards Cyprus in its favour, leading Türkiye to no longer see the European Union as an "impartial mediator in the dispute over the division of the island" (Hutchence & Georgiades, 1999, p. 85).

The following years were marked by the EU's idea of enlargement. After Greece, five more countries joined the European Union, but the biggest change was yet to come: the Union saw the enlargement as "an opportunity to unite Europe after generations of conflict" (Eralp & Beriker, 2005, p.178), and decided to 'open its doors' to countries from Central and Eastern Europe. And so, in July 1990, Cyprus submitted its application for full membership. Yet this application was made by the Greek Cypriot authorities on behalf of the whole island, a controversial decision for most of the parties involved in the Cyprus conflict – the Greek Cypriot government did not represent the Republic of Cyprus, as the Turkish Cypriot authorities ruled the North of the island; but, to submit an application on behalf of Southern Cyprus alone would be to accept the political division of the island (Sertoglu & Ozturk, 2003). Despite this, the European Commission considered Cyprus eligible for membership in 1993. At the time, membership was linked to resolving the conflict and opening a new chapter of peace on the island. Still, this was a unique case (Eralp & Beriker, 2005).

Cyprus' accession to the European Union was constrained by many factors. First, of all the candidate countries, it was the only one where the situation between the two sides of the island was likely to lead to war in the future. Moreover, although both sides wanted membership, their ambitions were different – while the Turkish Cypriots wanted to become a member state after a settlement had been reached, the Greek Cypriots did not consider the solution to be relevant and wanted to become part of the Union even without a settlement. Negotiations between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots have always been difficult and have lasted for many years. The ideal solution for reconciliation did not seem to exist, and neither side was willing to give up its demands. Even after the TRNC's declaration of independence, no agreement was reached. Proposals for the reunification of the island were rejected by the Greek Cypriots, who saw the solution in the European Union – once Southern Cyprus became a member state as the 'Republic of Cyprus', it would not only have international recognition and support, but also more power over the Turkish side of the island and over Türkiye itself. There were also EU member states that were opposed to accepting Cyprus into the Union before a solution had been found. Representatives of France, Italy, Germany and the Netherlands argued that bringing a divided country into the Union would create problems. Greece, on the other hand, was open to accepting South Cyprus into the Union without a solution (Sertoglu & Ozturk, 2003). As the only EU member state with this view, Greece used its veto power as a 'threat' on issues requiring unanimity, such as enlargement to the East, linking it to Cypriot membership (Eralp & Beriker, 2005). The European Union, therefore, had to change its approach. At the Corfu Summit in 1994 it was decided that Cyprus would be included in the further enlargement of the EU, and at the Luxembourg Summit in December 1997 the Union confirmed that accession negotiations with the countries envisaged for this enlargement would be opened by the end of March 1998. This was the first time that the EU considered starting the accession process of Cyprus without a solution to the conflict, by negotiating only with the Greek Cypriot government. Meanwhile, Türkiye – which had entered into a customs union with the EU in 1995 – was declared eligible for future membership. However, Türkiye only became a candidate country in 1999, a decision taken at the Helsinki European Council (Sertoglu & Ozturk, 2003).

The years that followed were marked by the most important milestone in the resolution of the Cyprus conflict – the 'Annan Plan'. Developed by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the plan proposed the reunification of the island through the creation of a United Cyprus Republic, consisting of two constituent states – the Greek Cypriot and the Turkish Cypriot. This was to take place before Cyprus joined the European Union as a divided state. It was seen by the international community as the best chance of resolving the conflict. The first of five versions of the plan was presented in November 2002, addressing issues of power-sharing, sovereignty, security and human rights, as well as questions of territorial concessions and displacement.

(Loizides & McGarry, 2019). The European Union endorsed the initiative and, in order to make it compatible with the EU's *Acquis Communautaire*, supported the UN by becoming the main mediator of the Annan Plan. Due to the importance and sensitivity of the plan, the UN and the EU joined forces to achieve a successful outcome, even though it was the Cypriot communities that would actually decide whether to accept or reject the proposal (Axt, 2009). However, by December 2002, it had already been decided that, regardless of the outcome of the plan, the Republic of Cyprus would join the European Union in May 2004. Both Greece and Southern Cyprus argued that linking Cyprus' accession to the EU with the Annan Plan would not only "amount to a double punishing of the innocent side" (Hutchence & Georgiades 1999, p. 89) but would also give a non-member state – Türkiye – veto power if the plan was rejected.

The two sides in the conflict reacted differently to the Annan Plan. Because of the Union's loss of neutrality in resolving the conflict in the past, the Turkish Cypriot community developed a kind of Euro-scepticism. Nevertheless, the benefits of European integration, political equality and other issues covered in the UN plan changed the community's perspective and led to the acceptance of the Annan Plan. The Turkish Cypriots were in favour of a reunited Cyprus that would soon join the European Union and put an end to the isolation of the TRNC people (Kyris, 2012). Moreover, the TRNC leader Rauf Denktaş had lost the community's support, as his stance in favour of a two-state solution did not align with the growing support for the Annan Plan and the high expectations of European integration. Denktaş was succeeded by Mehmet Talat, who was in favour of reuniting the island and resolving the conflict. The Turkish side was thus committed to a settlement of the Cyprus conflict (Axt, 2009).

The situation was quite different for the Greek Cypriot community. Initially, the plan was well received by the Greek community, but the 2003 elections in South Cyprus changed the framework, as the new Greek Cypriot leader, Tassos Papadopoulos, was "widely known for his inflexible positions on the Cyprus issue" (Kyris, 2012, p. 91) in contrast to Glafkos Klerides, who had always been a supporter of the Annan Plan. For Papadopoulos, a number of issues in the plan appeared to be in favour of the Turkish Cypriots and of Türkiye itself. First, the preservation of the Treaty of Guarantee – which allowed the guarantor powers to intervene in Cyprus – appeared to legitimise the Turkish 'invasion' of 1974, a violation of international law and human rights. In addition, the political equality proposed by the plan appeared to be unfair to the Greek Cypriot community, a large majority, by giving equal power to the Turkish minority (Loizides & McGarry, 2019). These disadvantages, together with the guarantee of EU membership despite the referendum result, were part of the background to Papadopoulos speech against the reunification of the island, in which he appealed directly to the Greek Cypriot community to reject the Annan Plan, arguing that it was possible to achieve a solution to the conflict in a way that better reflected their ideals (Axt, 2009).

In April 2004, the Annan Plan was rejected by the Greek Cypriots in a referendum held in both communities, preventing the island from being reunified. On 1 May, Cyprus joined the European Union, with the entire island becoming a *de jure* member of the Union, although only the area administered by the Greek Cypriots is a *de facto* member, meaning that the *Acquis Communautaire* does not apply to the Turkish North of the island (Loizides & McGarry, 2019).

2.3. – The Union's Approach to the Cyprus Conflict

2.3.1. – The EU's Involvement in Cyprus

The accession of Cyprus to the European Union failed to resolve the ongoing conflict in the region, contrary to widespread expectations that such a development would lead to a resolution of the conflict. However, since then, the EU has increased its involvement in the island's affairs, seeking to engage with both communities, despite the fact that EU law is not implemented in the TRNC territory (Kyris, 2013).

Although efforts to reach a settlement failed, the Union committed itself to helping the Turkish Cypriot community through a series of regulations aimed at ending its international isolation. This was a 'reward' for the Turkish Cypriot acceptance of the Annan Plan, which demonstrated the will to reunify the island and join the EU. Furthermore, these regulations would help to prepare the Community for the eventual implementation of the *Acquis Communautaire* once the dispute is resolved (Kyris, 2012). On 29 April 2004, the European Union adopted the Green Line Regulation (GLR), designed to control intra-island trade and the flow of people across the UN buffer zone – the border separating the communities – and to support the economic development of the Turkish Cypriot community. This regulation entered into force that year, unlike the other two regulations proposed by the European Commission to the European Council. The Financial Aid Regulation (FAR), which provides financial assistance to support the economic development and preparation of the Turkish Cypriot community for the implementation of EU law in the event of reunification, was only adopted in 2006 (Kyris, 2013; Sotiropoulou, 2024). It includes measures to support civil society affected by the lack of recognition, such as the EU Scholarship Programme for the Turkish Cypriot Community – an attempt to provide educational and professional opportunities, as TRNC universities cannot participate in exchange programmes such as Erasmus (Kyris, 2018). The Direct Trade Regulation (DTR) was proposed in 2004 but has not been implemented to date. This regulation provided for a trade agreement between the Turkish north of Cyprus and the European Union, but it is still pending due to Greek Cypriot opposition, according to which the agreement is tied to the recognition and legitimisation of the TRNC (Kyris, 2013; Sotiropoulou, 2024). This was seen as "the most ambitious initiative with regard to the Turkish Cypriots" since the Annan Plan (Kyris, 2018, p. 350) and implementing it would help integrate the Turkish Cypriot Community

into the international scenario. The current blockage of the regulation has contributed to the community's frustration with the European Union (Kyris, 2018). Nevertheless, the European Commission has been persistent in not withdrawing the DTR from the Council agenda, reaffirming its relevance and arguing that "trade does not mean political recognition" (Christou, 2012, p. 129).

With regard to the peace process, a new opportunity seemed to emerge between 2015 and 2017, when relations between representatives of the two Cypriot communities were promising. Nicos Anastasiades, President of the Republic of Cyprus, and Mustafa Akıncı, leader of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, met several times to discuss the division of the island and the possibility of negotiating a settlement. These meetings usually took place in the buffer zone, but the formal negotiations required an even more neutral venue. So, in November 2016, the two leaders and their respective negotiating teams met in Mont Pèlerin, Switzerland, to discuss issues related to a post-unification framework, such as governance, citizenship and territorial shares. This was the beginning of the so-called 'Crans Montana Summit'. Anastasiades and Akıncı met again in January 2017, this time in Geneva. Negotiations focused on governance, property, EU issues and the economy in order to produce a document with final results and, for the first time, their proposals for the division of the territory of the states according to the percentages previously discussed. On 12 January, the guarantor powers joined the meeting under the auspices of the UN. The then 'Conference on Cyprus' welcomed Greece, Türkiye and the UK, and together with the Cypriot leaders discussed security guarantees and how to move forward on the key issues. This is where the process began to break down: while Türkiye and the Turkish Cypriots were in favour of continuing the guarantor system, Greece and the Greek Cypriots wanted to end it (International Crisis Group, 2023).

It was not until June 2017 that the Cypriot leaders met again, in New York. After a six-month interruption, the UN Secretary-General proposed the resumption of negotiation talks with a second 'Conference on Cyprus' in Crans Montana. The meeting would be attended by Anastasiades and Akıncı, the foreign ministers of Türkiye and Greece, and high-level officials from the UN, the EU and the UK. But this second attempt to negotiate and resolve the situation on the island was no better, with both Cypriot leaders unwilling to make the necessary compromises. On the one hand, Anastasiades was up for re-election in less than six months and knew that the Greek Cypriot community would not accept the previously discussed ideas of power-sharing and a rotating presidency, as well as the continued presence of Turkish troops on the island with no date for their withdrawal. On the other hand, the Turkish Cypriot side sought a guarantee of their community's empowerment in terms of governance and decision-making on the island's affairs. In addition, Akıncı was losing the support of Türkiye, whose confidence in Anastasiades was waning – the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan warned

the Turkish Cypriot leader that the Crans Montana talks would be the last opportunity to negotiate with his support. After ten days of talks, the summit ended without a solution. Both sides maintained their positions and refused to adjust their demands in order to reach an agreement, leading to frustration within the international community as hopes for a solution to the conflict were high. Since then, no other Turkish Cypriot president has shown such a willingness to negotiate with the Greek Cypriot president, and the peace process between the two communities came to an end. During this period, the European Union, although indirectly involved, did not act as a mediator, but rather as an observer. Notwithstanding the hope for a possible reunification of Cyprus, it did not intervene in the negotiations (International Crisis Group, 2023).

While its soft power character may not achieve transformative results, the EU remains present in its approach to the Cyprus conflict, mainly through its discourse and diplomatic actions. In terms of its discursive capacity, the Union has proven on many occasions that it is committed to supporting a bizonal, bicommunal federation on the island. In a speech by Josep Borrell in March 2021, the former High Representative of the European Union stated that his visit to Nicosia was “to reiterate the EU’s strong support for the resumption of talks on a settlement of the Cyprus issue” (EEAS, 2021). After noting the fundamental role of UN peacekeeping operations, Borrell stressed that the Cyprus problem remains “one of the most difficult and longstanding conflicts in Europe” and the importance of achieving “a comprehensive settlement based on a bicommunal, bizonal federation with political equality” which should be in line with the EU *acquis* and European law (EEAS, 2021). Ursula von der Leyen’s press statement with Nikos Christodoulides, the current president of the Republic of Cyprus, on the occasion of the MED9 Summit in October 2024 also addressed the Cyprus problem. The President of the European Commission stated that “the European Union remains fully behind your efforts to resume peace talks for a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus issue. This should take place within the UN framework, on the basis of a bicommunal, bizonal federation with political equality” (European Commission, 2024). President von der Leyen also mentioned the need for it to be in line with EU principles, adding that the Union “also stand[s] ready to support all stages of the UN-led process, within appropriate means” (European Commission, 2024). Both speeches truly demonstrate the role that the EU has assumed over time: a supporter and follower of UN decisions and actions. The Union recognises the need for practical intervention, but its action is much more in words than in deeds – its official narrative is constantly linked to the UN, in such a way that it ‘hides’ behind its work rather than taking the lead, despite claiming to be a strong global peacemaker. In his speech, Borrell clearly asserts that “the EU supports fully the UN line” and that “the EU stands ready to provide whatever assistance both leaders and the UN would find most useful”, demonstrating its soft

power nature and confirming that the Union always seems to be under the UN umbrella (EEAS, 2021).

Another important instrument of the Union's diplomatic action is financial assistance and funding, in particular through civil society and reconciliation initiatives and programmes in cooperation with the UN, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus (CMP). The UNDP is "an independent partner in the area of peacebuilding" (UNDP, n.d.) and its focus in Cyprus is on promoting confidence-building measures, facilitating dialogue and cooperation between the two Cypriot communities, and contributing to the development of the island at many levels. The European Union has been the main donor to UNDP Cyprus since cooperation between the two organisations began in 2001. As well as contributing to the peace process on the island, the EU funds many projects run by the UN, such as the 'Local Infrastructure Facility', the 'Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage' and the 'Committee on Missing Persons' (UNDP, n.d.). The European Union is also the main financial backer of the latter, whose humanitarian work relies on the cooperation of the two Cypriot communities with the UN to recover and identify the remains of thousands of missing persons and return them to their families. From 2006 to 2025, the Union has donated €41 100 000 (CMP, n.d.). Through this financial support, the EU is enabling the UN to carry out practical activities in Cyprus that are crucial for the development of both communities.

2.3.2. – Barriers to a More Effective Role

The Cyprus problem is indeed a unique case in European history and has remained a challenge for the international actors involved in its resolution. Other conflicts concerning internal divisions, such as the cases of Germany and Northern Ireland, took place on European territory and eventually came to an end (Vassiliou, 2004). There are also cases with some similarities to the Cyprus dispute, but none of them involve exactly the same conditions. For example, Palestine and Kosovo: Kosovo is recognised by several UN members and Palestine is the most recognised of the unrecognised states. The European Union's approach to these two cases is much more open and direct than the situation in Northern Cyprus, where the Union appears to be avoiding recognition at all costs (Kyris, 2018). More recently, the war in Ukraine became a conflict in which the EU intervened immediately and took a strong position. This led Cypriots to question why the European Union had changed its approach to conflict resolution in other cases, leaving Cyprus aside. Despite the differences between the Cyprus conflict and the Russia-Ukraine war, in both cases international law was violated and one state invaded another. Nevertheless, the EU reacted firmly to the Russian attacks, condemning Russia and imposing sanctions, as well as providing humanitarian, military and financial aid to Ukraine; in the case of Türkiye, the Union tolerated its actions and eventually condemned the 1974 invasion, but with a much softer approach (Theophanous, 2023).

There are two factors to consider when comparing the EU's approach to other conflicts with that of Cyprus. First, the Union's relationship with the parties involved: according to Andreas Theophanous (2023), while Russia is perceived by the Union as an enemy, Türkiye is seen as a strategic partner with whom it is not so convenient to create bad relations or even to worsen existing ones. Moreover, Türkiye is a candidate country for accession to the European Union. Second, and very important in the context of the Cyprus conflict, is the question of recognition. The EU decided to accept Cyprus into the Union without a solution to the conflict and therefore without recognising part of its territory, creating a unique geopolitical situation: the whole island is considered EU territory, but the north is not ruled by the Greek Cypriot government recognised by the EU. As a result, the Union cannot engage directly with the TRNC, which means that normal procedures cannot take place or have to be implemented by other means. For instance, the European Commission deals with the Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce on issues related to the Green Line Regulation, rather than working with the Ministry of Trade, as a way of avoiding recognition of the Turkish Cypriot state by cooperating with its official authorities. Sometimes EU-related issues are also dealt with by NGOs, as the primary target group is non-state actors (Kyris, 2018).

This brings us back to the relations between the EU and Türkiye, and also to the rights and powers of Greek Cypriot membership – two major obstacles to more effective action by the European Union. The Cyprus conflict is just one of the many issues that constrain the Union's relations with Türkiye, albeit an important one – the non-recognition of the TRNC and the EU's decision to side with Greece in resolving the conflict have affected EU-Turkish relations. Furthermore, the country's path to membership is not going as expected. Türkiye applied in 1987 but was not granted candidate status until 1999. However, the accession process has been frozen for several years due to incompatibilities with the EU, notably the refusal to apply the Additional Protocol to the Ankara Agreement to Cyprus. Political, social and economic issues that are not in line with the Copenhagen Criteria, as well as democratic backsliding and human rights problems, remain major obstacles to Türkiye's membership (Eldani, 2022). Moreover, Türkiye's non-recognition of the Republic of Cyprus also undermines EU-Türkiye relations and leads to divergences within EU member states. If in the past Greece had threatened to use its veto power to influence EU decisions, Greek Cypriot accession has "boosted the confidence" of the community through the power of membership (Kyris, 2012, p. 92). The Greek Cypriot government has used their veto power to prevent the EU from trading with the Turkish Cypriots or to undermine the Turkish accession process (Kyris, 2012). The Union is thereby in the midst of a dispute between the two sides involved in the Cyprus conflict and must step up its efforts to engage with both in a normal and constructive manner. Notwithstanding the incompatibilities with Türkiye, the EU continues to work with the country as a key Mediterranean partner on issues such as migration and security (Eldani, 2022).

The Greek and Turkish Cypriot positions are a further obstacle to the Union's role. The conflict of interests over property rights, political equality and power-sharing in the governance of the island and the rights of both communities do not contribute to a possible reunification (Yakinthou, 2009). In addition, historical perceptions of the events of the 1960s and 1970s do not favour the situation. The role of the EU is thus conditioned by the Cypriots' own perceptions of political and geographical circumstances. In his article *Cyprus: Conflict Resolution through Europeanisation? Most Recent Experiences and Perspectives*, Heinz-Jürgen Axt (2009, p. 72) presents the 'ideal' perspectives of the Greek and Turkish Cypriots on conflict resolution:

> "For the Greek Cypriots the following are essential: a return to the pre-1974 status quo though modified into a (bi-zonal and bi-communal) federal state with strong powers, consideration for the numerical disparity between the Greek Cypriot majority and the Turkish Cypriot, transferral of the *Acquis* Communautaire (personal freedom of settlement, right of establishment, and acquisition of property), returning of property instead of compensation, complete retraction of the Turkish troops' comprehensive return of the settlers to Anatolia and an end or at least modification of the Treaty of Guarantee. For the Turkish Cypriots the following are particularly important: equal political rights of both ethnic groups, a strong position of the 'constituent states', recognition of two separate peoples with different cultures, religions and languages, restrictive handling of personal freedom of settlement, right of establishment and acquisition of property, compensation for property instead of return, as well as maintenance of the Turkish troops and a Turkish right to intervene as a guarantee of safety."

Finally, the EU's own principles can also be seen as an obstacle to a more active role in the conflict. The soft power nature of the Union limits some possible actions that could contribute to conflict resolution, as its policy relies more on diplomatic and financial actions (Yakinthou, 2009). Unlike NATO or the United Nations, the European Union does not have the practical power to act and implement more 'hard power' oriented measures on the ground. While this can be seen as an advantage, it can also undermine more effective action that might actually change the course of events. All the above-mentioned elements represent challenges for the EU to be a successful actor in the resolution of the Cyprus conflict.

2.3.3. – Geopolitical Stakes in the Eastern Mediterranean

The geographical location of Cyprus in the Eastern Mediterranean is of strategic importance to the security and interests of the Union: on the one hand, the Republic of Cyprus is the closest EU member state to the Middle East region and thus to the current Israel-Gaza conflict; on the other hand, gas discoveries in recent years have attracted the Union's attention and further altered tensions between Türkiye and Cyprus. The role of Cyprus in gas exploitation and in the war in the Middle East are two important issues for the European Union, but they are also issues where the Cyprus problem reveals its limitations and complexities.

In 2011, Cyprus discovered significant offshore natural gas reserves in its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) at the Aphrodite field, making it a major player in the Eastern Mediterranean energy sector alongside Egypt and Israel. This milestone brought hope not only to Cyprus, which saw new economic opportunities and the possibility of national energy independence, but also to the European Union, whose Russian supplies are due to end in the near future. Having a member state that could be a potential new source of energy for Europe is therefore a major asset for the Union. However, the gas discoveries in Cyprus also exacerbated the already tense relations with Türkiye due to the division of the island and mutual non-recognition by both sides. In this sense, the Cyprus problem hinders the exploitation of gas, as Türkiye and the TRNC argue that the whole Cypriot island should benefit from the discoveries, even though most of the deposits are closer to the Southern part of Cyprus and even to Israel. Türkiye's position has delayed efforts to exploit natural gas deposits and, consequently, any plan to distribute the energy to other countries, such as the EastMed Gas Pipeline – a proposed project to transport gas from Cyprus through Greece and eventually Italy, providing an alternative to Russian energy supplies on which Europe is heavily dependent (DEPA, n.d.; Godwin, 2025; Manison, 2024).

In addition, Türkiye does not recognise the maritime delimitation agreements signed by other Eastern Mediterranean states under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), as it is not a signatory to the convention and therefore does not recognise other countries' EEZs. This has strained relations with other countries, such as Egypt – which has signed agreements with the Republic of Cyprus and Greece to define its maritime boundaries on the basis of the median line. While these countries have grown closer in the area of energy and gas exploitation, Turkish relations with Israel have also deteriorated, leading the latter to join the other three countries and leave Türkiye alone (Sukkarieh, 2025). However, this did not prevent Türkiye from starting to drill in other countries' maritime areas, with Turkish military vessels being sent to the Cypriot coast. In 2019, the Council of the European Union addressed the "illegal activities" and outlined the negative impact such actions would have on EU-Türkiye relations. Despite the sanctions imposed, Türkiye has recently announced that it will soon resume drilling in the Mediterranean (Cleaver, 2025; Council of the EU, 2019). According to energy expert Charles Ellinas, the challenges of gas and offshore exploration along the Cypriot coast can be met if relations with Türkiye improve, particularly through a solution to the Cyprus problem (Manison, 2024).

With regard to the Israel-Gaza conflict in the Middle East, Cyprus has assumed a role in humanitarian assistance, diplomatic mediation and regional stability. Immediately after the conflict began, the Republic of Cyprus proposed a maritime corridor to deliver assistance to Gaza – the Amalthea Initiative – announced by the European Commission in March 2024. The plan, supported by some EU member states, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom

and the United States, aimed to “deliver much-needed additional amounts of humanitarian assistance by sea” (Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, 2024), with the first shipment containing the equivalent of around 500 000 meals. Yet, humanitarian deliveries soon had to be suspended when Israeli forces killed members of an American NGO while delivering supplies in Gaza. Nonetheless, Cyprus remained a safe asylum for thousands of refugees fleeing the conflict. The island’s proximity to Gaza also enabled the establishment of an EU logistics platform for delivering aid to the region (Ebrahim, 2024; IISS, 2024).

Despite Cyprus’ neutrality in the conflict, its good relations with its neighbours have placed it in a rather complex position. The leader of Hezbollah has warned Cyprus against allowing Israel to use its territory – namely airports and British bases – for military action, and has even threatened retaliation if Cyprus gets involved. The Greek Cypriot President denied any involvement in the conflict and reaffirmed the country’s neutrality, and the European Union came to the defence of its member state. Later, the Lebanese Foreign Minister reiterated that Cyprus was still perceived as a promoter of stability in the region. With regard to Israel, despite strong and positive relations, Cyprus has not refrained from criticising Israel’s attacks on Gaza, especially those affecting civilians and volunteers (Ebrahim, 2024). Cyprus’ geographical location has both advantages and consequences: while it has allowed the Republic of Cyprus to enhance its diplomatic reputation by playing a major role in the conflict as a neutral EU member state, its proximity to such a troubled area also puts it at risk of becoming the first EU nation to enter a war, thereby compromising the Union’s security.

The decision to admit Cyprus to the Union without a further strategy for resolving the conflict was probably not the best decision – as many member states argued – and put the EU in the position of hosting a conflict which, although low in intensity, requires constant high sensitivity control. If it could not mediate effectively when Cyprus was outside the Union, the task becomes even more difficult when part of the island is inhabited by Cypriots from an unrecognised state related to an EU candidate country. By internalising the conflict through the membership of the Republic of Cyprus, the European Union has not succeeded in being an efficient mediator in the conflict and has seen its role downgraded over time. Besides, the perceived lack of neutrality by linking Turkish and Turkish Cypriot accession to the conflict, while the same was not a pre-condition for the Greek Cypriot membership, reduced the EU’s credibility as an impartial actor in the conflict. This also left the Greek Cypriot community with no reason to pursue a solution to the dispute, as membership was guaranteed with or without a settlement.

However, Cyprus is not a case to be forgotten – its location in the Mediterranean and proximity to Türkiye and the Middle East are already relevant, not only because of migration

issues, but also because of the discovery of natural gas deposits near the island. Moreover, the presence of two British military bases on the island and Cypriot participation in EU-led security operations may increase the island's strategic importance for the Union's security. The current situation in Europe also highlights the timelessness of the Cyprus case. The 2004 EU enlargement included Cyprus despite the island's unresolved division, setting a remarkable precedent for Ukraine's potential accession. In the same way that the EU accepted Cyprus while the Northern part remained under Turkish occupation, it is possible that Ukraine could join the Union even without immediate control over Russian-occupied territories. This approach would reaffirm Ukraine's European future, while allowing the unresolved territorial conflict to remain a separate issue – as was the case with Cyprus.

Chapter III – Discussion: The EU Approach to the Conflict and Future Prospects

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Cyprus conflict is a unique case. Its historical root causes have influenced the entire peace process and continue to hinder the achievement of a solution that is acceptable to both communities. Furthermore, the actions and measures taken by the EU have proven to be insufficient, as the conflict remains unresolved. This chapter will answer the research questions that have guided this dissertation by applying the chosen theoretical lens of analysis, highlighting the areas where identities, perceptions and the social context have significantly challenged conflict resolution. Questions that arose throughout the process will also be addressed. This analysis will be complemented by insights from interview respondents offering different perspectives on the subject, as well as my own field observations.

3.1. – How has the European Union approached the resolution of the Cyprus conflict?

The EU has been involved in Cyprus for decades. Although its efforts have not been successful in resolving the conflict, its intervention has been "decisive", as argued by Professor James Ker-Lindsay[1]: "If you looked at the landscape of the 1990s in Cyprus, it was deadlocked. There was no progress at all. There hadn't been for a very long time". It was the prospect of EU membership that brought about significant changes to the conflict. While the earlier accession of Greece had already shaped perceptions, leading the Turkish Cypriot community to no longer consider the EU a neutral actor, the prospect of Cyprus joining the Union created new momentum in the dynamics of the conflict. Yet, as became evident throughout the accession process in the 1990s and even after Cyprus joined the EU in 2004, the Union's involvement did not necessarily facilitate the peace process or contribute to achieving a settlement of the Cyprus problem.

The European Union's approach has evolved over time in response to changing circumstances. Though initially focused on promoting reconciliation and demonstrating its power as an international actor in external conflicts, the Union found its objectives being influenced by the interests of its member states – particularly Greece, whose historical ties to Cyprus and its role as a guarantor power significantly shaped EU action. Cyprus was included in the EU enlargement process due to Greece's influence, which threatened to block the accession of the other nine candidate countries. A notable example of this influence is the EU's explicit non-recognition of the TRNC. The European Union does not acknowledge it as a

[1] Visiting Professor at University of Kent. Interview conducted via Zoom on 2 July 2025.

political identity, not only because none of its member states recognises it as a sovereign state, but primarily due to Greek – and later Greek Cypriot – pressure. As Professor Ahmet Sözen[2] highlights, in Protocol 10 of the Accession Treaty of 2003 "the EU doesn't use the word TRNC with or without quotation marks. Not Cyprus, Northern Cyprus, nothing of that sort. Instead, the EU uses twenty-one words: 'those areas of the Republic of Cyprus in which the government of the Republic of Cyprus does not exercise effective control'". By choosing such an elaborate phrasing rather than naming the entity, the Union demonstrates a deliberate avoidance of recognising the identity of the self-proclaimed state.

The non-recognition of the Turkish part of the island constrains the EU's ability to address the Cyprus issue, as it cannot formally engage with Turkish Cypriot authorities without implicitly acknowledging its statehood. Consequently, the perception of the Union within the Turkish Cypriot community has been shaped by its lack of action and commitment, even with regard to initiatives designed to reward the community for approving the Annan Plan. Instead, the EU engages with civil society structures, emphasising its different approach to the TRNC. However, despite the territory being a *de jure* part of the EU, the suspension of the *acquis* means that Turkish Cypriots are effectively excluded from the Union's political and institutional framework. This distinct position not only limits engagement but also shapes the identities of those involved in the conflict, creating an unequal dynamic between European Union members, who enjoy rights and international recognition, and the Turkish Cypriot community, which remains unrecognised and lacks the same rights and opportunities. According to Professor Ahmet Sözen, "this does not really bring Turkish Cypriots closer to the Union, which was the initial goal of the EU".

Throughout the years, the Union has maintained this stance, shaping a reality that aligns with the interests of its member states, particularly the Republic of Cyprus – a participant in the conflict. This membership, together with the social perceptions developed over time, has complicated the Union's role in the peace process, especially when it re-engaged in negotiations at Crans Montana. Although the EU is neither a mediator nor a negotiating party in the conflict, it must "be in the room in any negotiation" as one side of the conflict is a member state and, therefore, "anything that's done on settlement has got to be in accordance with the EU *acquis*", as explained by Professor Ker-Lindsay: "It's got to, it can't contravene the *acquis*. So that necessarily means that when you start to get into the really thorny issues of what is required under a settlement, and there's huge areas that have got to be dealt with, the European Union needs to be in the room". In this context, the role of the EU in the peace talks is once again constrained by the non-recognition of the TRNC. While its presence is required, it is confined to the role of observer in negotiations between one of its member states and a

[2] Professor at Eastern Mediterranean University. Interview conducted via Zoom on 30 June 2025.

state that it does not formally recognise. Therefore, any influence the EU could have on the outcome of these negotiations is very limited.

Overall, the European Union has shaped its approach to the Cyprus conflict in accordance with the historical and social context. The complexities and events that characterised the process have reduced the EU's potential to play a more influential role. While its role has evolved over time, the Union did not meet the conditions needed to succeed in influencing conflict resolution. My Greek Cypriot interviewee (R1)[3] argues that "the EU missed key strategic opportunities to actively shape the resolution of the Cyprus conflict" as "its actions have been too cautious, reactive, and deferential to member states, limiting its effectiveness as a peacebuilding actor". At the same time, the EU's approach has been shaped by other conflict parties, whose actions have guided it to its current position. The pressure to include Cyprus in the 2004 enlargement, as well as the interests and perceptions of Greece and the Republic of Cyprus, have influenced the Union's decisions and affected its relationships with the TRNC and Türkiye. This not only reveals how the past continues to shape this protracted conflict but also places the European Union in a rather delicate situation. As my Armenian Cypriot interviewee (R2)[4] notes, "the EU is in a very difficult position, as it tries to maintain a balanced relationship with Türkiye, which has its own strategic interests". When considered as a whole, it becomes clear that the European Union has always found itself in a challenging scenario amid this conflict. Balancing member states' interests with the promotion of its own norms and values in an international setting has created a complex situation with little prospect of change. In such conditions, "the EU seems to have taken more of an observatory or passive stance rather than exerting a strong, assertive role in resolving the conflict", as R2 describes.

3.2. – What mechanisms is the EU using to solve the conflict?

As an international institution with normative power, the EU has used various mechanisms to address the Cyprus conflict. Initially, the aim was to foster a resolution, but after reunification failed, the focus shifted towards promoting peace and cooperation between the two communities, thereby maintaining the EU's involvement in the conflict. While the Union's reliance on soft power has limited its influence during decisive moments, the norms it promotes have remained relevant both before and after Cyprus' accession. The actions in Cyprus can be analysed using the norm diffusion mechanisms described in the Normative Power Europe framework, demonstrating how the Union promotes its norms and spreads the principles central to its identity.

[3] Interview conducted via email; the answers were provided on 8 July 2025.

[4] Interview conducted via email; the answers were provided on 8 July 2025.

At first glance, the Union's mechanisms are the actions and measures implemented on the ground, such as regulations and projects carried out in cooperation with the UN. However, from a normative perspective, these mechanisms extend beyond the EU's direct actions. For instance, the contagion diffusion mechanism is evident in the Republic of Cyprus' decision to adopt EU norms and values even before accession, in order to facilitate the process. The Greek Cypriot community voluntarily adopted EU practices and principles, which were spread indirectly – as later exemplified by the adoption of the Euro in 2008. Other diffusion mechanisms are more explicit, such as informational diffusion: the speeches by Josep Borrell and Ursula von der Leyen, discussed in the previous chapter, exemplify EU official communication. Procedural diffusion is illustrated by many examples, starting with the 2004 enlargement itself, which formalised the relationship between the Union and Cyprus. The Green Line Regulation and the Direct Trade Regulation also exemplify this mechanism, even though the latter has not been implemented to date. Furthermore, the projects in which the EU is involved in cooperation with the United Nations can be included in this mechanism of norm diffusion, which involves not only implementing rules but also institutionalising EU norms and practices in local governance. Although the Union's primary role is to provide financial support for these initiatives, it does so to ensure that EU norms and values – such as peace, sustainable development, good governance, human rights and social solidarity – are embedded in local procedures. Regarding transference diffusion, the clearest example is the Financial Aid Regulation. In this case, the EU provides the Turkish Cypriot community with direct financial support for several aspects of civil society, with the aim of fostering its development and promoting the implementation of EU values, even in the context of division and non-recognition. Another mechanism is overt diffusion, which refers to the presence of the EU in Cyprus, either through institutions – such as the European Commission Representation in Cyprus – or through official visits of EU representatives, during which EU norms and values are spread both directly and indirectly – as exemplified by the visit of the President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola, to the Republic of Cyprus in May.

Finally, the last mechanism of norm diffusion is the cultural filter, which is particularly significant in the case of Cyprus. The cultural filter demonstrates how the same action or initiative can be interpreted differently by the two Cypriot communities, depending on their respective perceptions and narratives concerning the European Union. Several situations illustrate this mechanism. For instance, there were different perceptions regarding EU membership: for the Greek Cypriot community, it was linked to international recognition and legitimacy within the context of the conflict, while for the Turkish Cypriot community it represented the intensification of exclusion from both the European Union and the international community, as the TRNC was isolated due to its non-recognition by all states except Türkiye. The regulations proposed by the EU were interpreted differently as well. The DTR, for example:

the Greek Cypriots – supported by Greece – blocked this regulation due to fears that trade between the TRNC and EU member states could be perceived as implicit recognition of the Turkish Cypriot state.

Building on the previous mechanism, which reflects key principles of constructivism, it becomes evident that the EU's attempts to solve – or even contain – the Cyprus conflict have fallen short of expectations, particularly among Turkish Cypriots. Professor James Ker-Lindsay observes that "the Green Line Regulation was meant to be a reward for the Turkish Cypriots for voting in favour of the plan, but it was watered down by the Greek Cypriots because it needed to be implemented. And so, I think the Turkish Cypriots have always felt they weren't given the promises that they were made by the European Union". Regarding the Direct Trade Regulation, Professor Ahmet Sözen notes: "it's blocked by the Republic of Cyprus, the Greek Cypriot side, because it needed unanimity vote. So, since 2004, it's been twenty-one years and that regulation never came into life, which the EU itself proposed and promised". The EU is perceived by the Turkish Cypriots as an ineffective actor, unable to fulfil the commitments and promises made, including those aimed at preventing the isolation of the TRNC, which ultimately proved inevitable. Even the Financial Aid Regulation, designed for the Turkish Cypriot community, fell short of expectations. "Some of the project money went to some infrastructures, like building a waste product plant or helping some of the municipalities, restoring some of the historical sites. So, in that sense, it has contributed to the betterment of some of the Turkish Cypriot standards. But, how effective and efficient it was, not much", Professor Sözen explains. The EU tried various mechanisms to resolve the conflict, but these were largely considered to be unsuccessful. As Professor Ker-Lindsay concludes, "it has opened the way for some trades, but it's certainly not on a level that I think people would have hoped for".

3.3. – Why did the EU not play a role in resolving the conflict before Cyprus joined the Union?

Whether or not the European Union could have acted effectively during the pre-accession period is a fundamental question in the study of the Cyprus conflict. Despite the absence of violence at the time, the Union accepted a member state that was geopolitically divided and experiencing ethnic conflict. To understand this unique case, it is necessary to consider the role of other actors – not only Greece and Türkiye, but also the United Nations – as well as the internal and external challenges that shaped the EU's ability to become involved and play a relevant role. Moreover, it is important to note that the Union was not the main external international actor in the conflict – it became indirectly involved when Greece, a party to the dispute, joined the Union. At the time, the United Nations was already involved in Cyprus,

having established the UNFICYP, and was recognised as a legitimate mediator able to act on the ground and impose its measures. The UN also had the power and resources that the EU lacked, enabling it to act in ways that were impossible for the EU. Consequently, the Union became a strong supporter of UN-led actions and decisions, playing a more limited role in line with its capabilities.

While the United Nations' central role did influence EU involvement, it was not the primary factor limiting the Union's engagement in Cyprus prior to accession. Since Greece became a member state, the Union's actions were constrained – both because it was instantly seen as a biased party by Türkiye and the Turkish Cypriot community and because of the EU's institutional structure, which allowed a single member state to influence major decisions. The Greek veto threat to the enlargement is the most evident example of how one member state can shape EU actions to serve its own interests: "there was no way to stop the process for Cyprus without stopping it for everyone because they were all tied in into one treaty", as Professor James Ker-Lindsay explains. Thus, if the EU had not included Cyprus in the enlargement, none of the other candidate countries would have joined, and the entire enlargement could have been blocked. Greece continued to influence and pressure the Union's actions in areas requiring unanimity, particularly regarding Türkiye's path toward EU membership. This accession process became closely linked to the Cyprus problem, as the recognition of the Republic of Cyprus was a sensitive issue that needed to be resolved before accession negotiations could advance. As a result, the perception of the Union as a non-neutral actor was reinforced, prioritising the interests of its member states and further straining relations with the Turkish Cypriots and Türkiye.

The diverging interests and narratives of the two Cypriot communities regarding reconciliation and conflict resolution also posed a challenge for the EU. Their differing positions on issues such as recognition, property, sovereignty and equality were often incompatible, complicating any attempt to mediate or manage the conflict, since the ultimate decision rested with the Cypriots themselves. The way in which each community perceives the historical roots of the conflict is reflected in their respective ambitions. In these circumstances, the limited role of the European Union is especially evident: its tools for influencing and shaping perspectives, such as norms and monetary incentives, are only effective when the parties involved are willing to commit to finding a solution. However, given that the two communities are so opposed to each other, such commitment is impossible, preventing the Union from having any meaningful influence.

The barriers the EU faced during the pre-accession period help explain why the Union did not act more effectively at that time. Its limited role was shaped by both internal constraints, such as the influence of member states over its decisions and actions; and external constraints, including the deeply opposing positions of the two Cypriot communities, which hindered any

potential steps toward conflict resolution. The consequences of these challenges were later reflected in the outcome of the Annan Plan, a further attempt to achieve a settlement in which the Union's role remained limited. Nevertheless, it is worth considering whether the EU could have still acted despite the structural constraints outlined above.

My Greek Cypriot interviewee (R1) argues that "the EU could have played a stronger and more strategic role in the Cyprus conflict before Cyprus' accession in 2004", while also acknowledging that "it was constrained by several factors". R1 suggests that "the EU could have insisted to have a resolution/settlement by giving more incentives to both communities prior to having the Republic [of Cyprus] as a full member" and that "people from the Turkish community could have been more actively involved during the accession process, in order for them to understand the benefits and advantages of joining EU as a unified country". R1 also notes that "more pressure should have been imposed to Türkiye as per its EU accession process, to solve the Cyprus issue". This view contrasts with that of the other respondents, who largely argued that the Union had little scope for different action during that period. For instance, my Armenian Cypriot interviewee (R2) asserts that "the EU could not have meaningfully helped Cyprus before it joined, as it lacked the necessary leverage and institutional mechanisms to intervene effectively". Adding a further critical perspective, Professor Ahmet Sözen points out that the EU acted against its own criteria: "For the membership of any country, the EU itself clearly states that the candidate country, to be a member, should not have any border issues, any border conflicts. And here you are, a border which is the Green Line that passes through the whole of the island, 180 kilometres long border conflict. And the EU imported Cyprus with its division. It was against its own criteria, its own policies".

Ultimately, a number of factors hindered the European Union's involvement in Cyprus prior to its accession, preventing the Union from playing a more decisive role. Even though the Union had useful mechanisms, its internal rules and the conflicting positions of the parties involved limited their effectiveness. Furthermore, the presence of Greece within the EU complicated matters by conditioning the Union's approach before the conflict was internalised. While it may be argued that the EU could have adopted a more influential or strategic stance, the combination of these constraints explains why it remained a limited actor with little impact during the pre-accession period.

3.4. – How does the Cyprus conflict affect the security of the EU?

While Cyprus' location in the Eastern Mediterranean offers strategic opportunities for the Union, its proximity to a turbulent neighbourhood – including Türkiye, Lebanon, Syria, and Israel – also raises concerns about security and stability. The ongoing tensions in the region

highlight the importance of resolving the Cyprus conflict, given that the island is the EU member state closest to the Middle East and is therefore particularly vulnerable to issues that indirectly affect the Union.

Although the Cyprus conflict is not violent, it remains a sensitive issue. The protracted dispute has directly shaped EU policies and strategies in the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as relations with Türkiye, which does not recognise the Republic of Cyprus as a sovereign state. In addition to influencing the Turkish path towards EU membership, the refusal to recognise an EU member state hinders cooperation with the Union on migration and security matters. At the same time, the membership of the Republic of Cyprus influences EU decisions, as its national interests can shape Union actions through the use of veto. The non-recognition problem consistently motivates Greek Cypriot vetoes on EU matters involving Türkiye, thereby affecting EU security and foreign policies. These tensions affect not only EU-level dynamics, but also broader multilateral security, particularly EU-NATO cooperation. Türkiye, a member whose location is central to the Alliance's security interests, blocks any formal engagement between NATO and the Republic of Cyprus, even though its strategic location could benefit NATO operations in the Eastern Mediterranean. Conversely, the Republic of Cyprus limits the Alliance's involvement in EU security affairs in response to Türkiye's stance. Together, these factors constrain the Union's ability to cooperate effectively with NATO, limiting its capacity to address shared security challenges in the region. These dynamics also illustrate how socially constructed barriers resulting from the conflict hinder trust and cooperation within the international system, ultimately affecting the Union's ability to respond effectively to regional security challenges.

The energy sector has also been affected by the unresolved dispute in Cyprus. As discussed in the previous chapter, recent gas discoveries have intensified tensions between the European Union and Türkiye due to the differing perceptions of both Cypriot states and their conflicting claims over the rights to the resources. Despite most deposits being closer to the coast of the Republic of Cyprus – thus lying within its EEZ – both the TRNC and Türkiye argue that the resources should be shared. This disagreement arises not only from the non-recognition of the Greek Cypriot state, but also from Türkiye's refusal to sign UNCLOS and therefore not recognising the established maritime delimitations. These discoveries would provide the Union with an alternative source of natural gas from a member state and reduce its reliance on Russian energy supplies, which was a significant goal for the Union's energy security strategy. The proposed EastMed Gas Pipeline, which would transport natural gas from Israel, through Cyprus and further to Greece and Italy, exemplifies an economic and strategic opportunity constrained by the Cyprus conflict, particularly due to Türkiye's actions. Even though the Union has imposed sanctions on Türkiye, tensions over offshore exploitation are expected to continue, along with continued Turkish drilling in EU maritime territory, leading to

a decrease in the Union's security confidence. These divergent perceptions contribute both to the straining of EU-Türkiye relations, as it involves a member state, and to regional tensions, since Türkiye has conducted drilling in disputed waters and risks similar actions in the Exclusive Economic Zones of other countries, such as Egypt and Israel. In line with the Republic of Cyprus, the countries have been cooperating within the energy field, gradually leaving Türkiye isolated in the regional energy landscape.

The current war in the Middle East poses a significant threat to the security and stability of the European Union. While maintaining its neutrality in the conflict, the Republic of Cyprus has provided Gaza with humanitarian assistance, food and medical supplies by sea as part of the Amalthea Initiative. Moreover, it has offered temporary shelter and support to refugees from the war. As many EU member states, the Republic of Cyprus recognises and supports the Palestinian state. However, due to its geopolitical location, its neutral stance towards the conflict means that relations with Israel remain untouched, even as it openly condemns the attacks on Gaza. Thus, the Republic of Cyprus maintains good relations with Israel in terms of energy cooperation and regional security. Such a delicate balance between strategic cooperation with Israel and diplomatic support for Palestine has raised concerns within the Union, as tensions may escalate and affect an EU member state, putting its security at risk. Furthermore, the division of the island exacerbates these concerns, as the TRNC is not involved in the conflict due to its lack of international recognition, and Turkish relations with Israel have decreased over time.

The ethnic dimension of the war in the Middle East may influence how Cypriots perceive the conflict, given the background of the island. As my Armenian Cypriot interviewee (R2) notes: "With the Gaza war, for example, Türkiye has taken a strong stance in support of Gaza, while Cyprus appears misaligned, especially regarding Israel". This perspective, from someone belonging to a minority group, offers an alternative interpretation of the geopolitical stance adopted by the Republic of Cyprus. Despite its neutrality, the Greek Cypriot state might be expected to express greater support for Palestine, given its own historical experience of occupation. Consequently, a neutral position could be perceived as a sign of hesitation, even though maintaining normal relations with Israel primarily serves strategic interests related to EU's security role in the Eastern Mediterranean.

On the whole, the Cyprus conflict has an impact on the Union's security in multiple ways, shaping security policies, energy cooperation and regional diplomacy. Persistent tensions between the two Cypriot states affect relations with Türkiye, a key partner in security issues and in the Eastern Mediterranean region. Furthermore, the war between Israel and Gaza has raised multiple concerns within the European Union, not only because of Cyprus' geographical proximity to the region, but also due to the potential migration flows, complicated by the division of the island.

3.5. – Normative Power in Reality and the Role of Otherness

The context surrounding the Cyprus conflict has been shaped by historical twists, political interests and differing perceptions of the 'other'. As a result, the intervention of any external actor – whether the guarantor powers or institutions such as the EU and the UN – has inevitably been influenced by these factors. The enduring sensitivity of the issue demonstrates the need for an approach that emphasises the role of identities and perceptions. Though not the most influential or successful actor, the European Union has sought to engage with the conflict by balancing its relations with the two communities on the island, as well as with Greece, Türkiye and other parties involved. However, its effectiveness is limited by the fact that its normative tools do not always apply to all cases and by the significant influence of 'otherness' on interactions between the various parties.

Although the Union's normative power offers a distinctive and meaningful approach involving political leverage and incentives, this is not necessarily the most appropriate method in every situation. Initially, it proved useful as membership was linked to finding a solution to the Cyprus problem. As Professor James Ker-Lindsay recalls, "back twenty years ago, we were talking about [how] the most effective way was to continue with Türkiye's EU accession process. That was the way that we all felt that Cyprus was [going to] be solved." Nevertheless, prospects for such a resolution changed when the Annan Plan was rejected, reducing the EU's influence. Therefore, the Union had to search for new mechanisms to address the conflict, but despite its efforts to act consistently with its normative identity, the Union's approach was insufficient. The conflict has deep roots in historical, social and ideational factors, with memory, identity and perceptions playing a decisive role. Addressing such a sensitive issue requires a personalised approach that considers the historical background of the dispute, the mutual perceptions of the two Cypriot communities and the interests of the actors involved. The need for a unique approach meant that the normative mechanisms employed by the EU – including those associated with UN initiatives – ultimately failed to reach a solution.

One of the main factors shaping the distinct nature of the conflict is the importance of 'otherness'. The division of the island goes beyond territorial matters; it is deeply tied to the identities of both communities and rooted in their respective narratives of past events. Thus, the identity of the 'self' is formed through the social construction of reality, its relationship with the 'other' and the perceptions that emerge in this process. In the Cypriot case, the 'other' is not only perceived as different, but also as an enemy and a threat to the 'self'. These perceptions, developed throughout the history of the dispute, constantly shape the actions of those involved – how the Greek Cypriot community perceives the Turkish Cypriot community, and vice versa, impacts any potential developments. The same applies to perceptions of other actors, including Greece, Türkiye, the EU or the UN. These perceptions, encompassing both

how an actor views the other and their expectations of them, influence progress towards conflict resolution, peacebuilding, trust and cooperation. Without addressing these elements, perceptions are unlikely to change. This is why external intervention, shaped by such perceptions – as seen in how Turkish Cypriots perceive the European Union – must take into account identity dynamics and historical narratives. Therefore, understanding how perceptions shape behaviours and developments is key for evaluating the potential role of external actors, such as the EU and the UN, in addressing the conflict.

This analysis raises new questions:

3.5.1. – Is the cooperation between the EU and the UN efficient?

As discussed earlier, the United Nations is seen as the central external actor involved in the Cyprus conflict, rather than the European Union. Nonetheless, the EU has consistently supported UN decisions and measures related to conflict mediation and resolution and provided the majority of funding for local UN-led projects and initiatives. Furthermore, the Union was present at both the Annan Plan negotiations and the Crans Montana peace talks. While this suggests some level of cooperation, the UN continues to play a more active role in Cyprus, as it is recognised as a neutral mediator with the resources and capacity to implement changes on the ground. Consequently, the perception of the EU as a mere diplomatic supporter challenges the notion of effective collaboration, particularly since the Republic of Cyprus joined the European Union in 2004 – a development that has largely reinforced the Union's role as an observer in the process.

The different mandates of the two institutions in Cyprus shape how they act towards conflict resolution. As my Greek Cypriot interviewee (R1) points out, "the EU operates on a legal/political framework, while the UN is focused on peacekeeping and negotiation processes". As a result, each institution has adopted a different approach to the Cyprus conflict. Although the EU engages in initiatives related to the conflict, its role is limited, particularly in negotiation processes. As R1 notes, "the EU is not – at least up to now – a formal party in the UN-led negotiations, with a very limited role". Similarly, Professor James Ker-Lindsay underlines that "the UN is responsible for the talks. The EU isn't responsible for the talks. It has no official place in the talks. They were at Crans Montana, but it was as officially as an observer. It wasn't as a negotiating party". These perspectives reinforce the Union's limited mandate, which reflects the idea of its lack of neutrality, given that the Republic of Cyprus is a member state that influences the EU's role. Professor Ahmet Sözen reinforces this perception: "in fact, only the UN has a mandate in Cyprus, in resolving the Cyprus problem. The EU is not a third party. It is not a neutral actor, because the EU itself has in it the Greek Cypriot side as a member state, plus Greece, which is a natural unconditional supporter of the Greek Cypriot side, or the Greek Cypriot-dominated Republic of Cyprus. So, the EU doesn't

have any mandate in solving the Cyprus problem". Professor Ker-Lindsay observes that this perception is shared by external parties, who stress the limited role of the European Union in the negotiations: "Türkiye is absolutely adamant that the EU cannot be a negotiating partner. And Türkiye feels very, very strongly about this. So, the EU cannot perform any sort of mediating, negotiating role in Cyprus. That's just absolutely impossible".

As noted by my interviewees' insights, different mandates lead to different performances, initiatives and levels of participation. Meanwhile, perceptions of legitimacy and neutrality, particularly in relation to the European Union, call into question the effectiveness of its cooperation with the UN. There are areas in which the two institutions can operate simultaneously through different actions, as R1 demonstrates: "For example, the EU and UN complement each other in the sense that UN lead the peace process by maintaining UNFICYP, while the EU offers economic, political, legal support for a solution". However, all the interviewees agree when it comes to assessing the effectiveness of such cooperation: despite the example given, R1 considers the cooperation between the EU and the UN "necessary but limited in effectiveness", adding that "while is very helpful, is not organised enough to be optimal". Professor Sözen agrees, saying that the two institutions cooperate "but in a very limited way", as well as Professor Ker-Lindsay, who highlights the "complex relationship between the EU and the UN" and sustains that "they talk to each other, but it's not a really tight relationship. And frankly, I think by and large, the EU understands that and doesn't try and get too involved". R2 has a more pessimistic perspective, arguing that "there is no substantial cooperation between the EU and the UN on this issue. Both appear to be observing the situation rather than actively driving change. Neither body seems to have the authority or the political will to implement decisive measures".

3.5.2. – What should the EU do from now on to play a more constructive role in resolving the conflict?

The Cyprus conflict appears to have been largely overlooked by the European Union, with no significant developments for decades. While the Union's ability to act was limited by various obstacles before Cyprus joined in 2004, it is still important to consider how its role could be strengthened in the future. Numerous obstacles to EU involvement have been analysed; nevertheless, it is worth exploring ways to address the Cyprus conflict in order to avoid setting a precedent for other protracted cases. The EU has long faced a difficult position, but prolonging or abandoning the situation should not be an option.

The current scenario does not portray a very optimistic vision for the European Union, as its normative power limits its capacity to implement stronger measures. Some initiatives have already been proposed and applied in Cypriot territory. Other ways of improving the situation

would involve Türkiye's accession to the Union, which could facilitate the current state of affairs regarding conflict resolution. However, its path towards membership is no longer constrained purely by the Cyprus problem – internal issues are also preventing accession negotiations from proceeding. The potential next steps towards resolving the Cyprus conflict appear to be closely related to Türkiye and its relationship with the EU, as many of my interviewees have demonstrated. R1 suggests that the EU could "apply political and economic pressure towards Türkiye, by linking EU-Türkiye relations to constructive engagement". Professor Ker-Lindsay offers an alternative perspective, arguing that "it's very, very difficult to see what the EU can do to put pressure on Türkiye on Cyprus settlement. Maybe it would have more room to put pressure on the Greek Cypriots", despite asserting that the EU "doesn't like to usually go against its own members". R2 also refers to Türkiye's relations with the Union, albeit with a harsher approach that emphasises the importance of focusing attention on Cyprus rather than on the strategic partnership: "the EU needs to stop trying to balance its relationship with Türkiye while simultaneously claiming to support the resolution of the Cyprus Problem. Cyprus should be treated unequivocally as an EU member state and should receive the political attention and support it deserves, regardless of Türkiye's reactions". These differing viewpoints highlight the Union's structural need to prioritise its member states' interests and rights, while taking into account other actors when considering further action. In this context, perceptions of Türkiye and its role in the conflict significantly shape the EU's potential initiatives, as it seeks to intervene effectively without undermining strategic partnerships.

The non-recognition of the TRNC by the EU creates a significant barrier to any possible initiative aimed at the Turkish Cypriot community. This is why Professor Sözen's stance on the matter is so critical, suggesting that the EU should do "just the opposite of what they've been doing now". He elaborates: "Engage with the authorities. Engagement without recognition. Bringing Turkish Cypriots closer together. Finding ways of including Turkish Cypriots into projects, programs like Erasmus, and finding ways of applying the *acquis* in the northern part of Cyprus, rather than treating the northern part as if it's a diseased area which needs to be sanitised". From a lighter perspective, R1 outlines possible actions that the EU could take, including adopting "a more strategic, visible, and coordinated approach not just as a passive supporter of the UN, but as an active political stakeholder", and recommends "targeted initiatives towards both communities, such as infrastructure funds, green and digital transition" as these could potentially foster trust. This subject sheds light on the perceptions of people living on the island who experience the division and subsequent restrictions first-hand. It is interesting to note that Turkish Cypriots primarily focus on issues related to engagement, recognition and sovereignty, whereas Greek Cypriots take a more structural approach, emphasising broader institutional and normative aspects.

As previously analysed, the willingness of both Cypriot governments to negotiate and solve the Cyprus conflict is crucial for any action to be efficient. While the interest in resolving the conflict has fluctuated among the Greek and Turkish sides, it currently appears that the Turkish Cypriot side is not willing to engage in negotiations or reach a settlement. As explained by Professor James Ker-Lindsay, “at the moment, the Turkish Cypriots are saying they don’t want talks. It’s not Christodoulides. So, there’s not really much the European Union can do at the moment, to be very honest”. Such misalignments in willingness to negotiate prevent the Union from acting efficiently. Mutual perceptions and trust are essential, as they influence how any external actor can intervene successfully. Therefore, unless an agreement is reached between both sides, the European Union's role in the conflict will continue to be limited.

3.6. – Field Observations

During my week in Cyprus, I had the chance to visit several different places on the island, allowing me to experience the contrasts between each side. The conference I attended took place at the Cyprus campus of the University of Central Lancashire in Pyla, which gave me the opportunity to spend three days in a small village located within the UN buffer zone known as the last mixed village on the island, where both Greek and Turkish Cypriots live. On a divided island, being in such a place is almost unbelievable. After the conference came the field trips.

Visiting Nicosia is experiencing two distinct realities within a single town. The trip began on the Greek Cypriot side, with visits to monuments related to EOKA and the island’s history, including the Museum of the National Struggle – the first museum of the Republic of Cyprus. Nicosia felt very different from what I had seen in previous days and from other European capitals, yet it clearly seemed an important city. We walked along the Green Line, passing through old and abandoned buildings, and crossed to the Turkish Cypriot side at a UN checkpoint. The Turkish Cypriot side of the island felt entirely different, with the division sharply accentuated. The architecture contrasted strongly with the Greek Cypriot side, making it seem like a completely different place. It did not feel like a European city; the contrast between the two sides is striking, despite being separated only by a security checkpoint. The trip ended at the Home for Cooperation, a landmark located in the buffer zone where the UN presence is particularly visible.

The visit to Famagusta was especially enriching. Along the way, we saw the British Sovereign Bases and the parts of the buffer zone that had been abandoned, almost completely deserted. The trip focused on the narrative of Varosha, the ‘ghost town’ that has remained frozen in time since 1974. After a presentation on the Turkish Cypriot perspective at the Eastern Mediterranean University, we walked through the open-air museum that is Varosha, where decaying buildings stand as a reminder of the conflict. We then returned to the Greek

Cypriot part of the island, where we were introduced to the Greek Cypriot narrative at the Cultural Centre of Occupied Famagusta in Deryneia. There, we used binoculars to look at Varosha from an observatory. This way, we experienced two contrasting narratives of what happened in Varosha, reflecting the perceptions of each Cypriot community.

In just one week, I visited the Republic of Cyprus, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, a village situated in the buffer zone, and the British Sovereign Base Area in Dhekelia. All these places exist on a small island in the Eastern Mediterranean, yet it felt as if I had visited different countries. However, I could not help but notice that, whereas the presence of the United Nations is evident – either through its buildings or the presence of UN soldiers – the EU seems to be absent. Although it is possible to pay in euros even on TRNC territory, it is difficult to remember that at least half of the island is an EU member state. While the distance between the two sides may be only a metre or so in some places, crossing from one side to the other feels similar to crossing the border from one country to another.

Conclusion

The Cyprus conflict remains a significant issue for the European Union, despite being overlooked within the international system. The existence of a divided member state within the Union deserves more attention, given that the EU went against its own criteria by accepting Cyprus' membership under such conditions. However, the inherent complexity of the dispute poses several challenges to an effective approach, as perceptions and identities play a significant role in shaping the history of the Cyprus conflict. The intervention of any external actor was perceived differently by the two Cypriot communities, adding another layer of difficulty to any potential action. Ultimately, this happened to the Union when the Turkish Cypriot community stopped perceiving it as a neutral actor. The EU's ability to play an effective role in Cyprus was constrained by multiple factors, including the influence of other parties to the conflict – namely Greece and Türkiye – as well as the differing positions of the two Cypriot communities.

Constructivism has proved the most suitable theoretical framework through which to study the Cypriot case, as it takes into account all the ideational factors that characterise the conflict. Furthermore, Normative Power Europe's contribution to this approach is significant for studying the European Union's involvement in such a unique conflict. As an international institution, the Union aimed to prove its relevance in dealing with external conflicts through normative mechanisms. However, such tools proved insufficient due to the complex character of the conflict, which required a less institutional approach. In addition to the theoretical framework, the interviews conducted for this research were essential for a thorough analysis: having respondents from diverse backgrounds, each with their unique perspective, offered a more comprehensive approach to the topic. Fieldwork also provided a valuable opportunity: visiting different parts of Cyprus and witnessing the realities of a divided island deepened my understanding and allowed me to develop a more informed perspective.

In these circumstances, many authors argue that the EU has failed to become a catalyst for conflict resolution. Indeed, the Union's action may have prolonged the conflict and increased tensions between the two sides. Despite its efforts to help the Turkish Cypriot community, which proved insufficient, feelings of frustration arose, and European ambitions waned in the TRNC. The Union's role was once seen as a hope, but it has turned out not to live up to expectations. Even in cooperation with the United Nations, the European Union has not intervened in Cyprus as the main actor in conflict resolution, mediation or even management. This highlights the EU's weaknesses in dealing with such sensitive issues and the need to work on the necessary skills. The Union has always been an advocate of peace in Cyprus and has sought to implement measures that would promote reunification and improve the situation on the island, but it has not facilitated the resolution of the conflict as some of

these measures have worsened relations between the two Cypriot communities and compromised its role as an international institution. The UN came to be seen as the only neutral actor in the conflict and thus became involved in the most important events of conflict resolution: the peace talks – in which the EU ended up as a mere observer – and the control of the buffer zone.

To date, the Cyprus conflict remains unresolved, with no efforts to find a settlement succeeding. The European Union continues to support UN decisions, initiatives and efforts to resolve the dispute, despite not addressing the conflict directly. Notwithstanding, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, has recently appointed a special envoy for Cyprus, who will work in cooperation with the personal envoy of the UN Secretary-General. However, the current Turkish Cypriot leadership does not appear interested in negotiations – a situation which may change following the presidential elections in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in October 2025. If a more moderate, pro-solution president were to be elected, progress could be made.

Even though there have been minor and subtle developments, the Cyprus problem is being discussed less and less within the international community, as new conflicts involving states that pose a more significant threat to the Union's security break out near the EU's borders. The question of whether the EU should have accepted Cyprus as a divided island into the Union continues to be a subject of debate, with researchers' perspectives being shaped by their own perceptions. Meanwhile, the prospect of reunification seems distant, as does the prospect of the EU playing an effective role in resolving the conflict, which highlights the limits of its normative ambitions in external affairs.

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