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The silent decline of the Turkish Cypriots:

analysis of the factors threatening the existence of a community
constantly fighting for its survival

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Abstract

The thesis aims to demonstrate that the Turkish Cypriot community is at risk of disappearing by identifying the factors contributing to their decline. It will examine Turkey's cultural assimilation strategy and the Republic of Cyprus' Citizenship Law, which denies citizenship to Turkish Cypriot children of mixed marriages, explaining how these two factors contribute to the potential disappearance of this community. Finally, it will propose possible solutions to the problem, based on the current political and social situation in Cyprus.

This decline is not due to violent causes such as genocide or ethnic cleansing but rather to cultural assimilation and the denial of Turkish Cypriot identity, which may ultimately lead to their extinction.

The aim is to raise awareness of an issue largely unknown outside Cyprus, denouncing the threats that Turkish Cypriots are facing.

Keywords: Turkish Cypriots, Turkey, Citizenship Law, Republic of Cyprus, Cypriotism, Cyprus Problem

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ACRONYMS

AKP: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)

CIA: Central Intelligence Agency

CT: Turkish Cypriot Dialect

DAÜ-SEN: Doğu Akdeniz Üniversitesi Akademik Personel Sendikası (Eastern Mediterranean University Union of Academic Staff)

ECtHR: European Court of Human Rights

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

EU: European Union

KTOEÖS: Kıbrıs Türk Orta Eğitim Öğretmenler Sendikası (Cyprus Turkish Secondary School Teachers Union)

KTÖS: Kıbrıs Türk Öğretmenler Sendikası (Cyprus Turkish Teachers' Trade Union)

MIT: Millî İstihbarat Teşkilatı (National Intelligence Organization)

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

OHCHR: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

OSASG: Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General

ROC: Republic of Cyprus

ST: Standard Turkish

TMT: Türk Mukavemet Teşkilatı (Turkish Resistance Organisation)

TRNC: Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus

UBP: Ulusal Birlik Partisi (National Unity Party)

UN: United Nations

UNFICYP: United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UPR: Universal Periodic Review

US: United States of America

INTRODUCTION

At the most southeastern point of the Mediterranean, halfway between Europe and the Middle East, there is an island with a complex history: Cyprus. On this island, where according to Greek mythology the goddess Aphrodite was born, live two distinct ethnic communities: Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. As in many other areas of the world, coexistence between them has not been easy, mainly due to external factors. Tensions between the two communities resulted in an intervention by Turkey in 1974, which led to Ankara's occupation of the Northern part of the island and the final division of Cyprus into two sides. However, this thesis will not discuss the geopolitical situation in Cyprus but will focus on one of the two Cypriot communities, the Turkish Cypriots.

Most of them currently reside in the State that arose after the Turkish occupation, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), which is not recognised by the international community. This condition has had a certain impact on the Turkish Cypriots, an impact that is leading to its slow decline. The thesis will focus precisely on this, exposing the factors that are threatening the existence of the community. These factors concern two aspects: the Turkish policy on the island, aimed at the cultural assimilation of Turkish Cypriots, with a view to a possible incorporation of the TRNC into Turkish territory; and the controversial Citizenship Law of the Republic of Cyprus, which does not grant citizenship to children of marriages between Turkish Cypriots and Turks if the latter have entered the island illegally. The aim is to show how these two events endanger the existence of the Turkish Cypriot community and, if not curbed, lead in the long run to its extinction. Therefore, besides exposing the problems, it will also explain how this negative trend could be stopped. The thesis revolves around a specific concept, the identity of Turkish Cypriots and Cypriotism, a particular form of political ideology that is spreading on the island. This concept, which will be explored in the first chapter, will be the basis for what will be outlined throughout the thesis.

The thesis will be divided into five chapters: starting with an overview of the supporting theses, it will continue with an explanation of the history of Cyprus, useful for understanding the current situation. It will then focus on the Turkification of Turkish

Cypriots, explaining paragraph by paragraph Ankara's strategies in the TRNC that are changing Turkish Cypriot society. It will continue with an outline of the RoC's Citizenship Law, starting with a briefing on how citizenship works before the division, and then moving on to the changes made as a result of events in the North that will lead to the issue of children of mixed marriages. It will then be emphasised why this problem is having an impact on Turkish Cypriots. The concluding chapter will set out the possible solutions that could lead to a reversal of the community's decline. The chapter will consider the current situation in Cyprus and the actors operating on its territory.

The existing literature does not put together all the factors that could lead to the disappearance of the Turkish Cypriot community. Existing sources tend to treat each case individually, moreover, none would mention the Citizenship Law as part of these factors. Therefore, this thesis will bring together all these individually addressed aspects to show the correlation between them and to provide a comprehensive picture of all the elements that could threaten the existence of Turkish Cypriots. The most relevant aspect of the research was the fact that the status of an unrecognised State and the limited international interest in Northern Cyprus made it difficult to find sources that analysed the situation of Turkish Cypriots in detail. Furthermore, during the research, it was important to verify that the references were not distorted by propaganda and nationalism. The thesis will make use of various sources from the existing academic literature, in particular concerning the history of Cyprus. For Turkish strategies, the main sources used are demographic population studies based on the latest population censuses and data provided by the respective Cypriot governments, reports from NGOs in the area, and academic articles regarding the desecularization part. The thesis will also make extensive use of national legislative sources, such as the Constitution of both the RoC and the TRNC, and international sources, such as the various UN resolutions concerning Cyprus. This will be particularly emphasised in the fourth chapter, which focuses on the Citizenship Law, and in the fifth, which sets out the role of the UN on the island. Since the citizenship issue is extremely topical, articles from mainly local newspapers will also be considered. As can be seen, the sources used are of a varied nature, both quantitative and qualitative, demonstrating how the issue affects different areas. What one will notice about this thesis is precisely the topicality of the subject, also evidenced by the date of publication of the various sources used. This is also

because this issue is only now having much resonance on the island. This is why the topic is constantly evolving. Each aspect presented will have as its theoretical basis the theses set out in the first chapters.

The desire to expose this issue lies in the fact that little attention is paid to it internationally. As indicated in the title, this decline would take place “in silence”, precisely because outside Cyprus there is rarely any information about what is happening to the Turkish Cypriot community. The Cyprus issue itself is currently frozen and would not be high on the international community's agenda. However, the disappearance of this community would have important consequences, not only on a humanitarian level but also on a geopolitical one, leading a part of the island to be completely Turkish. One aspect to emphasise is that not only the vulnerability of this community will be exposed, but also its strength, showing, particularly in the last chapter, how Turkish Cypriots are reacting to this situation. In this regard, an emphasis will be placed on civil society activism and the role of NGOs. The aim will also be to give a well-rounded picture of the Turkish Cypriot community and its cultural uniqueness, including its relationship with the Greek Cypriots and with the Turks.

In conclusion, the thesis will attempt to comprehensively show all the factors that are allegedly leading to the decline of the Turkish Cypriot community, while also prompting a reflection on the meaning of community, unity and conflict resolution.

CHAPTER 1 - THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. Introduction to the chapter

This short introductory chapter will outline the theses considered and the literature already available on the issue of the decline of the Turkish Cypriot community. As previously stated in the introduction, the thesis's objective is to identify the factors that are endangering the existence of this community. These factors include the Turkification of the TRNC and the RoC's Citizenship Law. Additionally, the thesis will conclude by also identifying potential factors that could halt this decline. The complexity in dealing with this type of topic lies in the multiplicity of actors involved when it comes to Cyprus but especially the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. The division of the island and the Turkish occupation led to the Cyprus issue becoming an international problem. The presence of the UN peacekeeping mission, one of the longest-running in history, the British bases and, of course, the Turkish presence on the island would be an example of the international interest that Cyprus is still arousing, although due more to strategic reasons given its location close to the Middle East. Besides these actors, the entry of the Republic of Cyprus into the European Union has brought the latter's involvement in the island's affairs as well, bringing the Cyprus issue onto the European agenda. Cyprus can be defined as a small island but full of interests. But at the root of it all is the Cypriot population, those who are directly affected by the situation the island is subjected to. It is therefore impossible to talk about North Cyprus without considering all these aspects. This is why the subject is complex and made up of an intertwining of fields and relations.

The chapter will range from describing Turkish Cypriot identity to explaining the concept of Cypriotism and Cypriotness. Without the sense of belonging to the island and all the cultural aspects that make Turkish Cypriots different from Turks, there would be no reason to even speak of Turkification or the disappearance of the Turkish Cypriot community. To better understand the Citizenship Law, it will be exposed the relationship between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, discussed within the framework of realistic group conflict theories of prejudice and victimization. On the

other hand, to understand Turkey's role and strategy, it is important to refer to one of the most important theories of international relations: that of hard, soft and smart power. To explain how Turkish Cypriots are trying to halt their decline, reference will be made to social and youth activism, both of which play an important role as seen in the last chapter. Finally, there will be an overview of asymmetrical and symmetrical federalism, the two types of federalism proposed for the future reunification of Cyprus, another aspect which, as will be seen in the last chapter, could stop the decline of Turkish Cypriots. As one may note, the dimensions touched upon will be multiple, which makes the topic multifaceted.

1.2. What is Cypriotism?

As mentioned earlier, talking about Cyprus means talking about a complex situation. A divided island, with two ethnically different communities having the same legitimacy to live there, entails many issues, internal and external. The issues become complicated when one takes into consideration the Turkish Cypriots, that part of the Cypriot population living in the non-recognised TRNC. Their minority position compared to the Greek Cypriots and the strong Turkish influence they are subject to, make them particularly vulnerable. Cyprus at the international level is directly linked to Greek Cypriots, because it is Greek Cypriots and Greek Cypriot institutions that represent the recognised part of the island. This is evident not only within international or European organisations, but also concerning tourism or the media reporting on Cyprus. The existence of the Turkish Cypriots is often forgotten and sidelined, contributing to their isolation.

The current literature focusing on Turkish Cypriots tries to handle the many aspects concerning this community, but one common element present in most sources is the question of identity. The question of identity and belonging will be the basis for everything that will be set out in this thesis. By definition, identity, in this case, cultural identity, is belonging to a particular group with which one shares traditions, language, customs values, etc (Chen, 2014). In the field of international relations, identity is central to the theory of constructivism. Constructivism was born at the end of the Cold War, at a time when the theories of liberalism and realism were losing popularity. It sees

the world, and what we can know of the world, as socially constructed (Theys, 2018). Constructivists argue that States can have multiple identities, socially constructed through interaction with other actors. Identity tells the actor and others who he is and tells the actor who others are (Gülseven, 2020:23). For constructivists, identities constitute interests and actions. In a community as divided as Cyprus, one can understand how the issue of identity is of paramount importance. For the Turkish Cypriots, this over time has become a form of resistance, what divides them from the Turks and makes them similar to Greek Cypriots, what allows them to say: “We”, the Cypriots and “Them”, the Turks.

To explain the role of identity, it will be considered a particular form of political ideology, which creates debates among scholars, called: Cypriotism. Probably born during British rule, Cypriotism opposes both Greek (*Enosis*) and Turkish (*Taksim*) nationalism, which sees Cyprus as an extension of these two territories, and considers Turkish and Greek Cypriots as an integral part of the Greek and Turkish population. The debate about Cypriotism revolves around whether to consider it as a form of nationalism or anti-nationalism. Academics who support the first thesis claim that Cypriotism is a particular form of civic nationalism, i.e. a nationalism based not on common ethnic and cultural aspects but on a sense of belonging to the Cypriot State (Pastellooulos, 2022:19). On the other hand, however, this theory would be challenged by the fact that Cypriotism would not present itself as the classical forms of nationalism that have traversed the island, but rather as an anti-nationalism designed to counter Greek and Turkish nationalism (Pastellooulos, 2023). Given its still embryonic form, Cypriotism remains an open topic of study.

Supporters of Cypriotism view Cyprus as a specific entity with its own history, culture, and tradition, and advocate the reunification of Cyprus through the formation of a federal State, which is possible through the cooperation of both communities, over and above existing ethnic differences (Constantinou, 2023). It emphasizes common destiny because the ethnical differences between the two communities are obvious, but the same attachment to the land is the unifying factor (Constantinou, 2023). Cypriotism presupposes a culturally autonomous entity, which would diverge from both Greece and Turkey. This would also be proven by the fact that the language spoken by Greek

Cypriots and that spoken by Turkish Cypriots are two quite different versions of Greek and Turkish. The concept of Cypriotism can explain the feeling of belonging to the land that Turkish Cypriots have developed over the years and can recreate the bridge between the two communities. Recreate, because Greek and Turkish Cypriots have already lived together. Cypriotism and Cypriotness are at the root of past events that saw Turkish and Greek Cypriots stand side by side against foreign powers, such as the Ottomans but also the British themselves. However, its development was delayed due to the British strategy of Divide and Rule, which will be analysed in the next chapter and which caused the division of the two communities and the development of pro-enosis nationalism (Pastellopoulos, 2022:7). To hear about Cypriotism again, we will have to wait for the post-divisional period, which will bring the end of pro-enosis and taksim nationalism and will lead to the development of the new Cypriot identity, particularly among the younger generation, based precisely on Cypriotness. Politically, Cypriotism has usually been embraced by leftist parties, both in the North and South of the island, and the basis of the Union of Cypriots party, one of the Cypriot political parties which put together Greek and Turkish Cypriots (Pastellopoulos, 2022:17).

As will be seen in the various chapters, both Turkish and Greek Cypriots today tend to identify themselves as Cypriots. In contrast, in the past, the majority identified themselves as Greek or Turkish. An example is the change of language that the island is going through. The new generations of Turkish and Greek Cypriots tend much more to define themselves as Greek-speaking Cypriots and Turkish-speaking Cypriots, making the Greek and Turkish influence fall exclusively into a linguistic aspect. This change is creating various controversies, in particular raised by those who, while considering themselves Cypriots, have no intention of renouncing their Turkish and Greek heritage.¹ However, in the thesis, as this change is still in its embryonic stage, it will refer to the two groups as Greek and Turkish Cypriots, being the most common and accepted terms.

The new Turkish Cypriot identity can also be seen in the literature. For example, this poem, written by the Turkish Cypriot poet Nese Yasin, demonstrates this people's connection to this land:

¹ The organisation of young Turkish Cypriots urged on its social networks not to use the expression 'Turkish-speaking Cypriots', which is considered a term that endangers Turkish Cypriot ethnicity and identity.

“One has to love one’s country

This was always told by my father

My country is divided into two

Which part shall I love?”

(Kizilyürek & Gautier-Kizilyürek, 2004:51)

The issue of identity has been addressed in several researches on Turkish Cypriots, which mainly showed how this identity has changed over time. This highlighted how Turkish Cypriots in the past felt much closer to Turkey than to Cyprus, whereas today they consider themselves Cypriots and not Turks. The thesis intends to show how Turkey and the Republic of Cyprus itself are denying this Cypriot identity through actions that have directly affected the Turkish Cypriot community. It will also show how Cypriotism is the basis of Turkish Cypriots' resistance to threats to their survival and the bond that unites them with Greek Cypriots.

1.2.1. Relations between Turkish and Greek Cypriots and the role of Cypriotism

While most of the literature on this issue focuses on the relationship between Turkish Cypriots and Turks, little has been said about the second issue, the law denying RoC citizenship to children of mixed marriages, particularly between Turkish Cypriots and Turkish immigrants. The concept of citizenship encompasses a multifaceted set of cultural, symbolic, and economic practices, as well as a complex array of rights and duties (civil, political, and social) that define an individual's membership in a polity (Isin & Wood, 1999:16). Citizenship, like identity, concerns a group, and establishes who is in and who is out of that group, and it is here that the affinity between these two concepts can be found. Indeed, the identity of a group can find its recognition through citizenship. It is in this last concept that we find the connection with the Turkish Cypriot children of mixed marriages. The denial of this citizenship would result in the denial of their identity. This law is usually analysed more in the context of human rights, raising

the issue of respect for the right of citizenship. Not only that, but the citizenship issue has several consequences, such as the inability to cross the checkpoint and have access to all the rights guaranteed to any other EU citizen. It is important to remember that Turkish Cypriots are considered 100% EU citizens, like Greek Cypriots, even though they live in an unrecognized State. The controversial Citizenship Law is such a topical issue that most of the information about the consequences of this law can be found in newspaper articles, interviews with the people involved, and NGOs report working on the issue. This fact shows that, even though the law dates back to 2007, it is only now creating debate, probably due to the Turkish Cypriot community's change of identification and the general feeling of the younger generation to be closer to the EU instead of Turkey, demonstrating, once again, the new Cypriotism and the desire to be identified as Cypriots.

Both the Turkification and the Citizenship Law aim to deny Turkish Cypriot identity. To understand the problem of Citizenship Law, it is necessary to expose the relations between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. Greek and Greek Cypriot authors see the Turkish presence and especially Turkish immigration into the territory more as a threat to internal stability than as a threat to the Turkish Cypriot community (Ilter, 2015:26). However, as will be seen in the various chapters this threat is also perceived by the Turkish Cypriots themselves. The approach adopted by the Republic of Cyprus towards the North of the country is the one that has characterised the view of Greek Cypriots for many years, particularly those most affected by the occupation, i.e. the displaced persons. This attitude of the Greek Cypriots can be analysed through the realistic group conflict theories of prejudice and victimization. These theories suggest that prejudice towards out-groups arises from perceived threats to the existence, beliefs or lifestyle of the in-group (Levine & Campbell, 1972). Such threats often emerge from negative interactions and conflicts with out-group members. Expanding on these theories, the integrated threat model of prejudice argues that distal factors, such as negative intergroup contacts and conflicts, together with strong identification with the in-group, can influence attitudes both directly and indirectly (Levine & Campbell, 1972). This influence occurs through proximal factors, such as perceived threats from outside the group and intergroup anxiety experiences (Danielidou & Horvath, 2006:406). In the Greek Cypriot case, this feeling was caused by the trauma of the occupation, still alive

among generations, which led to a negative view of Turkish Cypriots and Turkish immigrants (Danielidou & Horvath, 2006:406). This approach was characterised by the blaming of Turkish Cypriots, mainly due to the fact that Turkish Cypriots moved into properties abandoned by Greek Cypriots and for this reason were seen as complicit in the Turkish action and not considered as the other community in the island (Danielidou & Horvath, 2006:408). This view was very strong in the past precisely because of the ethnic differences between the two communities and a lesser Cypriot sentiment (Danielidou & Horvath, 2006:406). This is also seen in the Greek Cypriot literature itself, especially that immediately following the events of 1974, which is often unbiased and influenced by anti-Turkish propaganda. Realistic group conflict theories can explain the reasons for the Cypriot law that denies RoC citizenship to the children of mixed marriages. The latter are in fact seen by Greek Cypriots as outsiders to the Cypriot population, precisely because they are children of Turks. It is no coincidence that the law was passed in the early 2000s, just when the feeling of hostility towards Turkish immigrants was at its peak. This was also seen in the outcome of the Annan Plan, which aimed at the reunification of the island, proposing the federal option. The Turkish Cypriots voted in favour of the federal solution, recognising the ethnic difference between the two communities, the Greek Cypriots voted against, preferring a united Cyprus and not divided into a federation, but above all preferring a Greek Cyprus, with the assimilation of the Turkish Cypriots rather than their recognition as an ethnic group. But this was the past, and much has changed in the approach towards the other community. Dialogue and cooperation between them have increased, once again demonstrating the disconnect between the respective governments and the population itself, particularly the younger generation. This aspect is important to be clear when reading the thesis, because when we talk about the Republic of Cyprus, we are referring to the institutions and not the entire population. As will be seen, cooperation between the two communities is an essential part of safeguarding the Turkish Cypriot ethnicity. Although the issue of identity is still extremely complex, Cypriot sentiment always seems to be the starting point for a united Cyprus but above all the lifeline of the Turkish Cypriots.

1.3. The Turkish strategy and the hard, soft and smart power theories

Deepening Turkey's action in the North, the theories of hard, soft and smart power play an extremely important role. In particular, the smart power theory is the one that would most reflect Turkish action. In the context of international relations, “hard power” refers to the use of military force and economic coercion by a given State to influence the behaviour and decisions of another country (Gray, 2011:5). This strategy has often been referred to as that used by the United States. Soft power, according to the father of the term, Joseph S. Nye, is the ability of one State to attract and influence another without using military coercion, but values such as culture, human rights, etc (Nye, 1990). While it can be seen as a positive factor, soft power for more vulnerable societies, such as divided ones, can establish forms of dependency on the more powerful nation (Koktsidis, 2023:525). Finally, smart power, also developed by Nye, is a strategy that combines the use of soft power with hard power, i.e. attraction and coercion (Nye, 2008:1353). Smart power originated mainly from the American action in Iraq, where, according to American and British intelligence, the use of hard power without giving enough attention to soft power increased rather than reduced the number of Islamic extremists (Nye, 2008:1353).

Turkey's soft power narrative has taken advantage of the Ottoman heritage that binds the Balkan, Middle Eastern, and Caucasian countries, exploiting, in particular, religious and linguistic ties, cultural traits, ethics and customs, historical ties and mutual benefits, behavioural and culinary traditions, architecture and lifestyle (Koktsidis, 2023:526). Since the 2016 coup d'état, Erdoğan has increased his authoritarianism and Turkish soft power rhetoric has steadily lost credibility. The current Turkish soft power mainly uses religion and conservatism as a means of attraction. It is through this type of power, together with the use of coercion, that Turkey is replacing Turkish Cypriot culture with the more general Turkish culture, as will be analysed in the second chapter. To understand the smart power theory, it will be necessary to describe the role played by the AKP, the Justice and Development Party led by Erdoğan. The strategy adopted on the island and the relationship developed with the party of reference, the National Unity Party (UBP), is considered a key element in understanding the Cypriot political issue and how this combines with the other factors mentioned above. While military

protection and economic dependence play an essential role, Turkey's strategy on the island is also based on the rhetoric of culture, religion and the motherland-babyland relationship.

The use of this kind of power was not always welcomed by the Turkish Cypriots. Analysing in depth the relationship between Turkey and Turkish Cypriots it's possible to notice that the narrative changes based on the period under consideration. A more accepting view of the Turkish presence on Cypriot territory is evident in the years immediately following the occupation, but also earlier, due to the spread of Turkish nationalism on the island and the need to protect themselves from the attack of pro-nosis groups. The very use of terminology such as settler rather than immigrant shows a perception of Turkish immigration to the island more as a form of colonialism than as an arrival of people for employment opportunities. While in the past people tended to consider themselves Turks and Turkey's presence and interference was not seen as a big problem, this perception has changed drastically over the years, along with, as mentioned above, the same identity of Turkish Cypriots. The literature shows also hostile behaviour from a part of the Turkish Cypriots regarding Turkish immigrants. The change of approach within the literature demonstrates the disaffection of Turkish Cypriots towards Turkey. Many scholars have used interviews as a means to understand Turkish Cypriots' perceptions of Turks and Turkey. Some of these interviews were not only with Cypriots but also with the Turkish population itself, showing their view of the Cyprus issue. However, the thesis will focus exclusively on Turkish Cypriots' perception.

And it is here, once again, that the concept of identity is central to explaining why Turkish Cypriots are in danger of slowly disappearing as an ethnic group. In all this, the smart power theory best explains the links between Turkey and Northern Cyprus. However, the attraction to Turkish values, which was once quite strong, has now lost much popularity. This is because Turkey has imposed itself forcefully within the TRNC, imposing its culture through policies designed to change Turkish Cypriot culture completely. The Turkish Cypriots realised this and consequently reacted by opposing Ankara's interference. This last aspect will be emphasised in the thesis to show how Turkish Cypriots deal with the Turkification of the TRNC.

1.4. Social activism and youth activism

The last chapter will expose factors that could reverse the decline of Turkish Cypriots. The most important aspect that will be described is activism and the role of youth and Cypriot civil society. The term civil society refers to a wide range of organisations: community groups, NGOs, trade unions, practically all those non-state groups that enable citizens to take an active part in the political agenda (European Commission, 2024).

Activism is a rather recent term, probably originated only 100 years ago and indicates intentional action by an individual to achieve social or political change (Brenman & Sanchez, 2014). In this sense, social activism is about working with other people to achieve change in society. The word “social” applies both to “society” and to the idea that activism promotes opportunities for participation and reflects a personal choice to engage in society (Brenman & Sanchez, 2014). The fact that it is a personal choice is a key aspect because if participation is forced or compelled, it can’t be called social activism. Social activism is often confrontational, against an established power, authority or hegemony, the “status quo”. Underlying the Turkish Cypriots' protests is precisely their desire to change the current status quo that sees them attacked by Turkish policies and divided from Greek Cypriots. Social activism has never been specifically defined, some references can be found in both constructivism which states: “Social interactions and context are necessary for learning to occur” (Dumitraşcu, 2018:86) and Marxism, linked to economic factors, affirming: “The organization of the products has generated conflicts of interests” (Dumitraşcu, 2018:86). The lack of real definitions is precisely due to the topicality of activism, which arose in the last century with the first major protest demonstrations born in the United States (Brenman & Sanchez, 2014). Activism can be practised by any kind of person, regardless of gender, social class and age group. In this thesis, particular emphasis will be placed on youth activism, the role of Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot youth being crucial to the achievement of peaceful coexistence of the two communities.

Youth activism refers to the active engagement of individuals between the ages of 15 and 24 in community organisation activities aimed at social change (Shah & Khan,

2023:2). In today's landscape, young activists advocate on a variety of issues such as climate justice, non-discrimination and gender equality. In the Cypriot case, they are also advocating against the Citizenship Law, Turkish interference and in favour of the reunification of Cyprus. Their engagement transcends traditional methods of protest, taking on a transformative role in challenging entrenched social norms and questioning established systems of authority (Shah & Khan, 2023:1). In particular, the rise of youth activism is closely linked to the digital age. The wide availability of Internet access and the proliferation of social media platforms provide young activists with new tools for mobilising, communicating and driving social change. In the online sphere, individuals exert influence, forge alliances and trigger global dialogues, fundamentally reshaping the nature of activism and advocacy in the modern era (Shah & Khan, 2023:1). In fact, one part of the section dedicated to activism will speak precisely about the contribution of social networks in protecting the rights of the Turkish Cypriot community. Youth activism is grappling with a myriad of challenges, including political persecution, backlash and constant demands for sustained engagement. Precisely, Turkish Cypriot activists, as will be seen, face various risks, such as threats and intimidation from both Greek and Turkish nationalists. Youth involvement in activism is not an isolated event, but rather a crucial component of broader social movements. It interacts with civil society organisations, impacts the way political agendas are developed and captures the pressing social concerns of the day.

Turkish Cypriots are involved in various forms of activism, ranging from protests to participation in local NGOs, aimed at denouncing both the risk of assimilation by Ankara and the injustice of the Citizenship Law. Furthermore, many NGOs, involving both young Greek Cypriots and young Turkish Cypriots, aim to bring the two communities closer together in order to break down the prejudices that divide them. This is a fundamental aspect in view of the possible future reunification of the island. As will be understood from the analysis in the last chapter, activism would play a key role in bringing to global attention all the threats the Turkish Cypriots are facing.

1.5. The symmetrical and asymmetrical federalism

In the last section of the fifth chapter, we will discuss the reunification of Cyprus and look at the federal model, which has always been proposed during the negotiations for the resolution of the Cyprus conflict. In the Cypriot case, the main proposals for federalism are the symmetrical, bizonal and bicomunal federalism advocated by the UN and the EU, and the asymmetrical federalism, suggested by various scholars after the failure of all negotiations regarding the former. This thesis will not argue for one type of federalism in particular but will illustrate both.

Federalism is a political system in which separate States are organised under a central government and it only gained academic popularity after the Second World War (Sahadžić, 2023:165). Before then, federal systems were viewed with disfavour as alternatives to unitary States (Sahadžić, 2023:165). However, over time, federal principles gained ground due to perceived advantages in forming new States, strengthening security and improving administrative management. Today, almost half of the world's population resides under some form of federal government (Hueglin, 2013).

Initially, academic discourse focused on symmetrical federalism, in which the units that make up the State maintain equal relations with the central government, exemplified by federative models such as Germany and the United States (Halberstam, 2012). Symmetry does not take into account ethnic and cultural differences within a country, thereby emphasising uniformity. For this reason, it has been appreciated for its integrative and centralising potential, often prioritising nation-building over the preservation of diversity (Sahadžić, 2023:165). The symmetrical federalism in the Cypriot case was the one proposed by the Annan Plan and the one currently advocated by both the UN and the EU.

The concept of asymmetric federalism, introduced by Tarlton in 1965, gained importance later on to describe the different relationships between component units and the central government (Tarlton, 1965). Despite initial apprehension due to its destabilising nature, asymmetric solutions became necessary to manage internal disputes and accommodate diversity in federal or quasi-federal systems such as Belgium, Canada and Spain (Sahadžić, 2023:166). Asymmetry manifests in political (*de*

facto) and constitutional (*de jure*) forms (Sahadžić, 2023:166). Political asymmetries are differences between different units and federal authorities based on ethnic, religious, linguistic, cultural, political, social and economic factors that reflect the size of the population, the size of the territory, the wealth and the party system of the component units. Constitutional asymmetries, on the other hand, are present in constitutional and legal texts and produce differences in status, distribution of powers and fiscal autonomy. An example is the Canadian Supreme Court where three out of nine judges are from Quebec. Identity differences are the driving force behind asymmetries, as different groups seek recognition. However, asymmetric solutions must also consider factors such as wealth, power dynamics and historical contexts to maintain stability. Asymmetry poses challenges, such as legitimacy disputes and threats to system stability, necessitating a delicate balance between asymmetry, legitimacy and stability. One of the risks of asymmetric federalism is to result in a very divided society and thus create conflict. For this reason, it must be ensured that the State combines asymmetry with policies that can bring together the different communities (Loizides, 2016:42).

Asymmetric federalism is one of the alternatives to the bizonal and bicomunal federalism proposed to solve the Cyprus issue. This is because as there are two communities on the island with different cultural and ethnic characteristics, this type of federalism would be considered ideal to protect the identities of both.

The type of federalism to be applied in Cyprus will have to be decided after careful reflection and an assessment of the pros and cons. Nevertheless, federalism, whether symmetrical or asymmetrical, would probably remain the best solution to solve the Cyprus question.

1.6. Conclusion to the chapter

As seen in the course of the chapter, the theses considered cover different areas. From identity and theories of international relations to activism and federalism, they reflect the multidimensionality of the thesis theme. The main aspect remains that of identity and Cypriotism. The present literature itself is mainly based on the question of identity to show the differences that divide Turkish Cypriots and Turks and the similarities that instead unite them with Greek Cypriots. The question of citizenship also falls under this

aspect as a denial of the belonging of Turkish Cypriots to Cyprus. Regarding the Turkish strategy, it was seen that this involves a mix of hard and soft power that keeps the TRNC invariably subordinate to Ankara and denies the emancipation of Turkish Cypriots from Turkish influence and blocks a possible reunification of the island. The other aspects considered are those of social activism and youth activism, which play an important role in safeguarding Turkish Cypriots, and asymmetrical and symmetrical federalism with regard to the possible reunification of the island. The following chapters will show how these theses find concrete application in the Turkish Cypriot problem.

CHAPTER 2 - THE COMPLEX HISTORY OF CYPRUS: THE ORIGINS OF THE DIVISION AND THE CURRENT SITUATION

2.1. Introduction to the chapter

The history of Cyprus is complex and includes several actors. Its strategic location has attracted the interest of many and the fact that it has been under the control of numerous empires has greatly influenced the island and its population. The continuous presence of foreign powers on Cypriot territory has been and still is one of the main factors of instability on the island and the main cause of the division between the two Cypriot communities. Understanding Cyprus history is therefore the basis for comprehending the current situation and the relationship between Greek and Turkish Cypriots.

The chapter will start from the roots of Cyprus's history to deal in detail with the colonial period, where the seeds of the rupture between the two ethnic communities are found. It will then move to the last century, with independence, marked by the beginning of inter-communal violence and the clash between Turkish and Greek Cypriot nationalist groups. Finally, it will address the 1974 occupation that led to the end of the territorial integrity of Cyprus, up to the present day and the current situation.

The chapter aims to provide a comprehensive view of Cypriot history, emphasising the struggles that the Cypriot people, and in particular the Turkish Cypriot community, had to face to self-determine themselves and those they are still facing today to take Cyprus out of the hands of foreign powers.

2.2. From ancient history to the Ottoman Empire

The history of Cyprus has its roots in antiquity. This island located in the south-eastern Mediterranean was part of many kingdoms and empires and was therefore traversed by a wide variety of peoples, including the Greeks, who then made up the majority of the island's population, the Assyrians, the Egyptians, the Persians, the Macedonians, the Romans, and the Byzantines. The interest of many powerful empires on this island demonstrates its strategic position since ancient times. In particular, the famous port of

Famagusta, known to be the closest to the Levant, was an important base during the period of the Crusades (Goult et al., 2024).²

Despite being part of so many empires, the most important period for Cyprus was probably during the Venetian rule. The Venetians were interested in the island, which at that time was under the Lusignan kingdom³, because of its trading position (Goult et al., 2024). The control of Cyprus ended up in Venetian hands not through a war, but through a marriage, between King James II and a Venetian noblewoman, Caterina Cornaro. After the king's death, she succeeded him and in 1489 Cyprus became definitively part of the Empire. The Venetians built their famous defensive walls first in Nicosia and then, after the Ottomans' incursion of 1539, which destroyed Limassol, in Famagusta and Kyrenia⁴, as a precaution. The Venetians ruled the island for 82 years (Goult et al., 2024), and at that time the population was still mostly Greeks. Thanks to the Venetians, Cyprus discovered Italian culture through literature, philosophy and art, as evidenced by the archaeological remains surrounding the island that resemble those found in today's Veneto region. For example, at the "Porta del Mare"⁵ in Famagusta, it's possible to find a statue of a lion holding a book with the phrase "Peace to you Mark, the Evangelist" written on it (Visit North Cyprus, 2024).

In 1570 the Ottoman Empire attacked the island with extreme force. The Venetians tried to resist the attack but eventually capitulated. The Ottomans brought great changes to the island, first of all, the introduction of a new ethnic group that would become the second largest after the Greeks: the Turks. With the Turks also a new religion: Islam. One change that benefited the Greek population was the abolition of the feudal system, which thus allowed peasants to be able to buy the land they farmed (Goult et al., 2024). The Ottomans implemented the *millet*⁶ system in Cyprus, granting religious authorities the power to govern non-Muslim communities. This approach strengthened the influence of the Orthodox Church and fostered greater unity among the ethnic Greek population. The figure of the archbishop soon became that of not only a religious but also a political and ethnic leader. It is here that it is possible to find the roots of the

² In 1191 the island was conquered by King Richard the Lionheart on his way to the Holy Land.

³ The House of Lusignan was a royal house from France.

⁴ Two important cities located in the north of the island.

⁵ One of the two original entrances to the old city of Famagusta.

⁶ In the Ottoman Empire *millet* was an autonomous self-governing religious community.

Church's influence in Greek Cypriot history. Despite these advantages, Ottoman rule, particularly in the initial period, was characterized by heavy taxation and a degree of repression. In particular, taxes were raised arbitrarily, creating much discontent among the population (Hunt et al., 2024). This led to numerous uprisings, organised by both Greeks and Turkish Cypriots. Unlike the other empires that ruled over the island, for the Sultan, Cyprus was not considered important and this resulted in often corrupt bad governance (Ker-Lindsay, 2020:12). During this period many Greek Cypriots converted to Islam to escape the heavy taxation.

In 1821, the Greek War of Independence that led to the birth of independent Greece had strong repercussions in Cyprus. With independence, the Greeks developed the “*Megali Idea*”, i.e. the will to unite under one State all Greek-speaking peoples living under the Ottoman Empire (Regano, 2018:1). The Greek events greatly affected the Greek Cypriots, who began to talk about enosis, i.e. the unification of Cyprus with Greece. However, this was only an embryonic phase. True pro-enosis nationalism would develop during British rule. It is important to note that Greek Cypriot nationalism will be referred to frequently throughout the chapter, because knowing its history and development is crucial to being able to understand the relations between Turkish and Greek Cypriots.

Despite revolts, bad governance, and new nationalist sentiment, the Ottomans ruled the island for three centuries until Cyprus was ceded to the British. It will be with them that the famous "Cyprus question" will find its roots.

2.3. The British rule and the beginning of division between Turkish and Greek Cypriots

During the 19th century, the history of Cyprus would change again. The Ottoman Empire was going through a deep crisis and was heading towards its decline. The main causes were rampant corruption and the resulting bad governance and instability in the Balkans, which were demanding independence (Britannica, 2021). It also felt threatened by Russia, which was seeking access to the Mediterranean via the Black Sea. On the other hand, the British Empire feared that Russian expansionist desires in the Mediterranean might endanger its Indian route. For this reason, they offered to protect

the Ottoman Empire in exchange for ceding Cyprus to the Crown, considered a strategic territory for London interests (Ker-Lindsay, 2020:14). So, in 1878, during the Congress of Berlin, it was decided to formally transfer Cyprus to the British and in June 1879, through the so-called Cyprus Convention, London obtained the right to administer the island, but nominal Ottoman sovereignty remained until 1914. The fact that the annexation of Cyprus took place by pen and not by violent conflict was particularly significant for that period.

Before continuing, it is essential to emphasise a fundamental aspect of Cyprus. Both under the Ottoman Empire and British rule the Greek and Turkish Cypriots lived together, side by side, more or less peacefully. This aspect is important to bear in mind, especially because of the events that happened later.

As was said for the British, the island represented a strategic point in the eastern Mediterranean, but these convictions were soon disproved when they discovered that the water in the harbour was too shallow to create a large naval base for their fleet (French, 2015:12). When the British gained control of Egypt, Cyprus became even more marginal, nevertheless, the island helped London to control the Suez Canal.

Initially, British control was not contested by the two Cypriot communities, partly because they were allowed a certain degree of political and administrative freedom, but this changed soon due to the high taxation imposed by the Crown to raise money to pay the Ottoman Sultan.⁷ In reality, most of the money ended up in the hands of British bondholders who had invested in the Crimean War Loan of 1855 (French, 2015:14).

During the period 1879-1914, Greek Cypriot nationalism was still uncommon. Certainly, among the Greek-speaking population there remained a desire to unite with Greece, but nationalist groups had yet to emerge. On the other side, Turkish Cypriot nationalism didn't exist yet. There was some influence from the Young Turks movement, but still very marginal and unimportant (Apeyitou, 2003:70).

The new century marked a change in the fate of Cyprus under the British. As mentioned, the island was only administered by the Crown, but sovereignty was still in

⁷ In the Cyprus Convention, the British had agreed to pay an annual tribute to the Sultan.

the hands of Constantinople. The First World War would mark a change in this situation. In 1914 the Ottomans decided to enter the war on the side of the Central Empires and London responded by annexing Cyprus. In 1915 Great Britain attempted to cede Cyprus to Greece to convince it to join the Allies, but Greece refused the offer. Athens had no intention of entering the war (Ker-Lindsay, 2020:16). With the end of the First World War and the consequent destruction of what had once been the glorious Ottoman Empire, the annexation of the island, decided in 1914, materialised with the Treaty of Lausanne in 1924. The Turks renounced all rights to the island.

The annexation of it marked a change in the British approach towards Cyprus and the two communities. The Empire began to apply a common strategy to the other colonies, the Divide and Rule.⁸ The Empire believed that ethnic division allowed it to prolong its control because it is well known that when the people are united, they pose a great threat to the colonizer. The strategy of Divide and Rule was reflected in many aspects of life in the colonies, from politics to education, to the division of cities, etc. In the Cypriot case, a first division concerned the administration of the colony. After the final cession of Cyprus to the British, the Greek Cypriots began to pressure the empire to cede the island to Greece. The Crown to counter these demands decided to give more representation to the Turkish Cypriots, who along with the British had no intention of seeing enosis achieved (French, 2015:15). For this reason, they turned out to be very collaborative with the Crown and this did not please their Greek-speaking compatriots. However, the key role was played by the educational system, which was created specifically to divide the two communities. Two Boards of Education were established, one Turkish and the other Greek, each overseeing their respective school systems. The administration of the schools was given to the Muslim and Orthodox religious authorities and most of the teachers came from Greece and Turkey as did the textbooks (Pollis, 1973:589). The languages used for teaching were Greek and Turkish, which differed from the dialects spoken by the two populations (Pollis, 1973:590). The result was that children on the island learned languages foreign to them and were socialized to believe, as their parents had not, that they were Greek and Turkish respectively (Pollis,

⁸ *Divide et Impera* is a policy that aims to keep someone in a position of power by causing disagreements between people who might otherwise unite against him.

1973:590). As a result, just like the Greeks and Turks, they were enemies.⁹ Nothing prevented the British from creating a unified education system, free from the authority of Turkish and Greek religious institutions and ministries of education. An interesting aspect is that with this system among the Turkish Cypriots, Kemalist ideas spread and this started a process of secularisation deeper than the Turkish one (Apeyitou, 2003:78). This has led Turkish Cypriots to be less attached to religious traditions than the Turks. The British strategy was also aimed at preventing the emergence of possible Cypriot nationalism, which they were very afraid of because they saw it as a threat to Crown power. As proof of this, in 1936 the colonial governor Richmond Palmer sent a report to London stating:

“In order to have ease in the future on the island, we have to continue the administration on the basis of *exceptis excipiendis* (opening the way to exceptions), on the basis of districts. Thus, the concept of Cypriot nationalism – which will be emerging as a new concept after Enosis becomes an eroded value – should be pushed away as much as possible and left in the dark” (Constantinou, 2023).

However, if on the one hand, the "apartheid" mentality created by the empire blocked the emergence of a Cypriot sentiment, on the other side it gave strength to the ethnic nationalist movement, particularly the pro-enosis one, which was the most popular and widespread within the Greek Cypriot community, and as a result, caused some problems for London. In fact, in 1931 there was a revolt led by Greek Cypriots. During the period of the Great Depression, Cyprus was greatly impacted as unemployment rates rose and exports fell. The British decided to increase taxation on the already hard-hit citizens. The Legislative Council, where Turkish and Greek Cypriots were represented, blocked this decision, but the governor, Sir Ronald Storrs, pushed it through and the law was passed. The Orthodox Church encouraged national liberation and on 21 October, 5.000 Cypriots marched on the government buildings shouting: “No to those who shove taxes down our throats. Long live Enosis” (French, 2015:24). The event developed into three hours of stone-throwing and riots throughout the island. When troops, warships and planes from Malta and Egypt arrived in Cyprus, the Crown succeeded in putting down

⁹ In 1919, a war that lasted until 1922 broke out between Greece and Turkey over the possession of Thrace and the district of Izmir.

the revolt. The next solution was repression. The leaders of the revolt were deported, the Constitution was suspended and the Municipal Council and the Legislative Council were dissolved (French, 2015:24). The political representation of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots was severely restricted, political parties were banned, press censorship was introduced and all forms of pro-enosis demonstrations were declared illegal (French, 2015:24). Paradoxically, the British strategy on the island aimed at maintaining control, but eventually set the ground for Cyprus's independence. Indeed, Cypriots' resentment towards London increased.

The Second World War saw the participation of Cypriot soldiers, who surprisingly stayed loyal to the British and fought by their side. They hoped to be rewarded with enosis, but this did not happen and the end of the war was accompanied by the beginning of a general anti-colonial sentiment that swept the island (Ker-Lindsay, 2020:17).

The 1950s were the hot years for Greek Cypriot nationalism and it is during these years that we find one of the most controversial¹⁰ figures in Cypriot history: Makarios III. Archbishop of Cyprus and one of the most important supporters of enosis, he soon became the representative of the Greek Cypriot community. Makarios and his political influence well represent the role of the Orthodox Church in the Cyprus question. His Turkish Cypriot counterpart was the jurist Rauf Denktaş, one of the most important personalities in the Turkish Cypriot resistance to nationalist pro-enosis.

In 1950 an unofficial referendum on enosis with Greece was held in Cyprus. It was organized by the Orthodox Church and voted only by the Greek Cypriots. The 95% voted yes to enosis (Loizides, 2007:175). This result demonstrated the strength of the nationalist movement. However, compared to the past, a substantial change in these years was that the strong Greek influence was also joined by the Turkish influence. Turkey was now an important country and had forged strong relations with the United States. Consequently, the island was also affected. In fact, in the 1950s, for the first time, Turkish Cypriots began to develop their form of nationalism, called taksim or partition. Taksim envisaged the division of Cyprus into two distinct States. This was

¹⁰ Makarios has always provoked much debate between those who claim he was a good leader and those who accuse him of being the one to blame for the divisions between the two Cypriot communities.

driven more by the fear of Enosis, particularly after the annexation of Crete to Greece, which saw the exodus of the Turks of Crete. What would have been the fate of the Turkish Cypriots in the event of Enosis? This question frightened the entire community and it is this question that we must bear in mind when referring to the situation of the Turkish Cypriots. Therefore, while the nationalism of the Greek Cypriots arose for cultural reasons and attachment to Greece, that of the Turkish Cypriots was more of a self-defence. Turkish Cypriots have always been historically more attached to Cyprus than to Turkey, their approach to the “motherland” was dictated more by a seek for protection than by a real feeling of belonging to Turkey. Probably for this reason pro-taksim nationalists were never as organised as pro-enosis nationalists.

The anti-enosis sentiment of that period is noticeably clear in this passage from the autobiographic book “Bitter Lemon”¹¹ :

"Sabri was up there, sitting under the leaves contemplating a black coffee, waiting for me with particular information about carob-wood-he had a special load. 'Sit, my dear' he said gravely, and I sat beside him, soaking up the silence with its sheer blissful weight. The sea was calm. (Somewhere out of sight and sound the caique 'Saint George', loaded with arms and some ten thousand sticks of dynamite, was beating up the craggy coast by Cape Arnauti, making for a rendezvous near Paphos). It is so peaceful here, said my friend, sipping his coffee. 'But for these bloody Greeks Cyprus would be peaceful; but we Turks haven't opened our mouths yet. We will never be ruled by Greece here; I would take to the mountains and fight them if enosis came!'" (Durell, 1958:175)

In 1953 the new Greek government took a special interest in the Cypriot question and enosis, so much so that a year later it tried to bring it to the attention of the United Nations. Makarios, who as mentioned earlier was the leader of the Greek Cypriots, was pleased (Ker-Lindsay, 2020:20). However, they encountered British opposition, which considered the problem as an internal issue and therefore should not be brought in front of the UN (Ker-Lindsay, 2020:20). For this reason, it was ignored. However, the new Greek interest gave strength to the enosis groups. In fact, in 1955 the Cypriot Georgios Grivas, a veteran of the Greek army, founded the first militia: EOKA (*Ethinki Organosis*

¹¹ The book written by Lawrence Durell describes his three years in Cyprus (1953-1956).

Kyprion Agoniston). Its creation was supported by Makarios himself, a choice that, as will be seen in the following paragraphs, would cost him. The main EOKA purpose was to end British rule and in this way allow union with Greece. In EOKA plans, Turkish Cypriots were seen as an ethnic group to be subordinated and would have no part in unification with the motherland. There were two paths for them, either to be assimilated by the Greek majority or to become a minority in their own country, without any political representation (Loizides, 2007:176).

In April of the same year, EOKA launched its military campaign through a series of bombs against administrative buildings. The targets were not only the British but also the Turkish Cypriots themselves and the Greek Cypriots, particularly the Communist Party, who opposed enosis. Initially, EOKA did not strike the Turkish Cypriots because they were Turkish Cypriots but because they were seen as supporters of the British Empire. Indeed, the first victims were mainly police officers (French, 2015:258). The guerrillas were supported by the right-wing parties and the Orthodox Church, and many young people composed its different branches. Through it all, the Turkish Cypriots did not stand idly by. Frightened by the violence of the pro-enosis militia and seeing that the British were unwilling to protect them, in 1956 they formed their first guerrilla organization called *Volkan*. Later on, *Volkan* changed its name to the Turkish Resistance Movement (TMT in Turkish), led by Rauf Denktaş and supported by the same Turkey. In one of their leaflets, the TMT promised that they would: “Frustrate all the plans of those who are seeking to prepare a dark fate of the Turks of Cyprus. It will be your shield against barbarous Greek attacks. It will counter-attack (retaliate) if need be. It will not, from moment, desist from striving with self-sacrifice, to the last man” (French, 2015:259). The irreparable rupture between the two communities represents perhaps one of Cyprus' greatest dramas. Two ethnic groups that lived side by side for centuries now found themselves attacking each other. This was eventually the final result of the British Divide and Rule.

EOKA's actions create international tensions, particularly between Turkey, concerned about Turkish Cypriots, and Greece, on the side of the pro-enosis nationalist. In a Cold War atmosphere, this situation could not lead to anything good. The British tried to solve the situation by inviting Greece and Turkey to the conference on peace and

security in the eastern Mediterranean. The real goal was to discuss Cyprus, however, the dialogue led to nothing (Ker-Lindsay, 2020:22). At that point the British adopted the intransigent line. They increased the number of troops on the island and interned EOKA members. However, they did not give up their attempt at dialogue with Makarios, but the latter did not want to know about giving up enosis. At that point, seeing him as a threat, in March 1956 the British exiled him to the Seychelles. They hoped that this would lead to the emergence of a more moderate Greek Cypriot leadership, but this did not happen (Ker-Lindsay, 2020:23). The British were put under pressure and the instability of the island was out of control.

Seeing that the violence did not stop, London gave up in the face of the evidence and began to prepare a plan for possible Cypriot self-government. The main problem was that there was not only the Greek Cypriot self-determination principle to be considered but also the Turkish Cypriot one. Plus, the Greek Cypriots were unwilling to accept plans that did not include enosis. By 1958 the EOKA campaign and the increase in the number of men and weapons under the TMT (Ker-Lindsay, 2020:25), were increasingly leading to the outbreak of civil war. As a result, conflict would also break out between Greece and Turkey. A clash between two NATO countries would have benefited the Soviet Union, which had opened the way for an expansion in the eastern Mediterranean, and this worried the United States and Britain. It was only then that in September 1958, Makarios, who had never stopped mediating since his exile, accepted the possibility of an independent State rather than a union with Greece.¹² This led to a meeting between representatives of the Greek and Turkish governments in Zürich in 1959. They agreed to the creation of an independent State with powers divided between the two ethnic communities. A second meeting with British, Turkish and Greek Cypriot representatives was held in London. Here the decisions taken in Zürich were confirmed. One year later on 16 August 1960, thanks to the Zürich-London agreement the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) was officially created.

¹² Makarios was scared too of Soviet Union expansion (Ker-Lindsay, 2020:25).

2.4. The Independence and the intercommunal violence

The new Republic of Cyprus had a complex Constitution. Its principal aim was to balance the power between the two communities. First of all, the president had to be Greek Cypriot and the vice-president Turkish Cypriot. Both had the power of veto over the other's decisions and both presided over the Council of Ministers consisting of seven Greek Cypriots and three Turkish Cypriots in a 70:30 ratio (Faustmann, 2002). This same ratio was applied to other institutions such as the civil service and the single Chamber of the House of Representatives, i.e. the Parliament (Faustmann, 2002). The case was different for the Supreme Constitutional Court composed of a Greek Cypriot judge, a Turkish Cypriot judge and a neutral one representing the president of the Court (Ker-Lindsay, 2020:26). The army division was also different, with a 60:40 ratio (Ker-Lindsay, 2020:26). The Constitution aimed: to ensure that the two communities were co-founding partners with equal political rights; that municipal matters were the autonomous responsibility of the elected Municipal Chambers; that there was no fear or likelihood of one community dominating the other (Ker-Lindsay, 2020:26). However, both communities maintained strong cultural ties with their motherlands. For example, public holidays were based on Greek and Turkish ones. Despite this, the Constitution prohibited both enosis and taksim.

Great Britain, Greece and Turkey signed the Treaty of Guarantee to preserve the political order. Through this agreement, the three States committed themselves to protect the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of the new Cypriot State. In addition, they had the right to intervene if the political situation of the country was endangered either internally or externally (United Nations, 1960). Moreover, Greece and Turkey were allowed to maintain their military presence on the territory, and the British were given parts of the territory for their military bases (United Nations, 1960). This agreement provoked different reactions in the two communities, in particular, the most controversial part was the right to intervene. The treaty provided for the three States to intervene together, but if this was not possible, each had the right to act alone to restore the status quo on the island. The Greek Cypriots were against giving this power to Turkey, while the Turkish Cypriots felt it was the only way to protect themselves (Ker-Lindsay, 2020:27).

The first elections saw Makarios III elected as president, with no surprises, while as vice-president was chosen Fazıl Küçük, founder of the Kıbrıs Millî Türk Halk Partisi (National Turkish People's Party of Cyprus).

Independence and the new Constitution did not bring peace between the two communities; on the contrary, it triggered a series of events that would change the island forever. The main problem was that the Constitution was not accepted equally by the two communities. On the one hand, the Greek Cypriots felt that there was an imbalance of power in favour of the Turkish Cypriots. They did not think it was fair that an ethnic group that made up only 18% of the population should have such a large representation within the institutions (Yılmaz, 2010:82). On the other hand, the Turkish Cypriots were quite content and the presence of Turkey as a guarantor State reassured them (Yılmaz, 2010:82). The point where they disagreed the most was the system of municipalities, in particular the establishment of separate Greek and Turkish Cypriots municipalities in the main towns. Separation was to be implemented soon after independence but turned out to be particularly complex. The Greek Cypriot leaders proposed to unify the municipalities and only then think about ethnic division, while the Turkish Cypriots wanted this separation to take place immediately (Ker-Lindsay, 2020:31). Moreover, both of them were sure that the independence was just a transitional phase before the enosis or the taksim (Ker-Lindsay, 2020:30). The disagreements over the Constitution convinced Makarios that the only way to solve the problem was to introduce constitutional amendments. A choice that had strong repercussions.

Makarios consulted both the Greek and Turkish governments and both warned him that a change in the Constitution would lead to clashes not only between the two communities but also between Greece and Turkey themselves (Ker-Lindsay, 2020:32). However, Makarios continued on his path. He wrote the draft of the 13 amendments and after getting the approval of the British prime minister, officially presented them to the Turkish Cypriots and the other guarantor States on 29 November 1963. These 13 amendments greatly reduced the political influence of the Turkish Cypriot community and could be synthesized as follows:

"1. The right of veto of the President and the Vice-President of the Republic to be abandoned; 2. The vice-president of the Republic to deputise for the president of the Republic in case of his temporary absence or incapacity to perform his duties; 3. The Greek president of the House of Representatives and the Turkish vice-president to be elected by the House as a whole and not as at present the president by the Greek members of the House and the vice-president by the Turkish members of the House; 4. The vice-president of the House of Representatives to deputise for the president of the House in case of his temporary absence or incapacity to perform his duties; 5. The constitutional provisions regarding separate majorities for enactment of certain laws by the House of Representatives to be abolished; 6. Unified municipalities to be established; 7. The administration of justice to be unified; 8. The division of the security forces into police and gendarmerie to be abolished; 9. The numerical strength of the security forces and of the defence forces to be determined by a law; 10. The proportion of the participation of Greek and Turkish Cypriots in the composition of the public service and the forces of the republic to be modified in proportion to the ratio of the population of Greek and Turkish Cypriots; 11. The number of the members of the Public Service Commission to be reduced from ten to five; 12. All decisions of the Public Service Commission to be taken by simple majority; 13. The Greek Communal Chamber to be abolished" (Yılmaz, 2010:84).

As was to be expected, this move by Makarios roused the anger of both Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots. Ankara rejected the proposal, and this marked the definitive break between the two communities and the beginning of a series of violent events against Turkish Cypriots led by EOKA. The terrorist group did not end with independence; on the contrary, the great dissatisfaction with the Constitution and Makarios' behaviours gave it even more strength. The discrimination against Turkish Cypriots increased and some testimony from the TMT declared that the Greek Cypriots did not allow the entrance of food and medicine inside Turkish Cypriot villages (Bryant, 2012:30).

The night of 20-21 December marked the beginning of the intercommunal clashes. That night a Greek Cypriot policeman stopped a taxi driver and his girlfriend, both Turkish Cypriots. The two refused to show their documents, and a very violent argument followed, which ended with the policeman killing the couple. The event, which would

later be remembered as “Bloody Christmas” triggered violent clashes in the capital. The capital was divided by the British themselves, who drew a cease-fire line called the “green line”, after the green colour of the crayon that was used to draw the line on the map (Nicosia Municipality, 2024). The green line still exists today. Despite British intervention, violence spread throughout the island, particularly in Limassol and Kyrenia, causing several deaths in both communities. The initiators of the attacks were the EOKA guerrillas opposed by TMT members. One of the most significant events was the murder of the wife and three children of the Turkish military doctor Nihat Ilhan. The photograph of the woman and children lying dead in the bathtub is one of the most significant testimonies of the brutality of the attack (Kasım, 2020:435). There was also much fighting in the mixed villages on the island.

The events alarmed both Greece and Turkey. The latter threatened to start an invasion but was blocked by the US and British intervention, who were worried that the invasion might lead to a major clash between Athens and Ankara (Stevenson & Stevenson, 2022:27). The British persuaded the Greeks and Turks to organise a small peace mission, which succeeded in stopping some conflicts on the island, but never saw the full involvement of Greek and Turkish forces (Stevenson & Stevenson, 2022:27). The Crown, which was facing many conflicts around the world, found itself in a very weak position and the Greek Cypriots themselves had no intention of trusting the British Empire again (Ker-Lindsay, 2020:37). It was at this time that foreign powers started talking about a UN intervention, but opinions were very divided. The US and Britain preferred NATO intervention rather than the UN to avoid any involvement of the Soviet Union. On the other hand, Makarios rejected this option because, in his view, Turkey would benefit from the fact that Cyprus, unlike it, was not yet a member of NATO (Ker-Lindsay, 2020:37).

On 4 March 1964, a final solution was reached. The UN Security Council adopted Resolution 186 which provided for the stationing of a UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP). The resolution in particular: “Calls for the cessation of hostilities and, with the consent of the Government of Cyprus, the deployment of a UN Peacekeeping Force to prevent the recurrence of violence. The resolution also calls upon the UN Secretary-General to appoint a mediator to promote a peaceful solution

and an agreed settlement of the problem confronting Cyprus” (United Nations Peacemaker, 1964).

Speaking of numbers during EOKA's terror campaign in the Christmas period of 1963, 374 Turkish Cypriots were killed, 109 Turkish villages were forced to evacuate, over 2.500 Turkish houses were severely damaged or demolished and between 25.000 and 30.000 Turkish Cypriots became refugees in their own country, according to a UN report published on 10 September 1964 (Security Council, 1964:51).

The question at the end of the clashes was whether this violence was part of an organised plan. An answer came in 1966 when a secret document called the “Akritas Plan”¹³ was published in a newspaper. This document, drafted in 1963 by the Greek Cypriot leadership, contained the plan to arrive at the “final solution”, i.e. union with Greece, and was distributed to the EOKA guerrillas. This solution envisaged a weakening of the Turkish Cypriots that was interpreted as a call to genocide. The same US Department reported that Greek Cypriots were undertaking a systematic genocide of the Turkish Cypriots (Stevenson & Stevenson, 2022:26). On the other hand, the TMT itself was accused of fostering instability between the two communities in the hope of intervention by Turkey (Ker-Lindsay, 2020:35).

Concretely, the result of these events was the end of the presence of Turkish Cypriot representation in the various institutions on the island. In some areas they withdrew voluntarily in others they were forced out by Greek Cypriots (Ker-Lindsay, 2020:35). Another consequence was the relocation of Turkish Cypriots to enclaves distributed along the island and protected by Turkey. Life in these enclaves was extremely hard since there weren't many facilities. The bloody Christmas was a real tragedy for the Turkish Cypriots, the memory of which remains alive to this day. The greatest damage, however, was the definitive break-up of the two communities.

Despite UN intervention on the island, the situation of the Turkish Cypriots did not improve. In the following years, they were subjected to numerous discriminations and violence. Moreover, with the end of the Turkish Cypriot presence within the

¹³ Akritas was the common name by which EOKA was known.

government, the Greek Cypriots became the only representatives of the island internationally, a situation which, due also to subsequent events, will continue to the present day. The Turkish Cypriots were extremely disappointed by this turn of events.

Foreign powers tried to solve the Cyprus question by proposing various solutions. As early as June 1964, the United States proposed a plan called the Acheson Plan.¹⁴ This envisaged the unification of Cyprus with Greece but with compensations and guarantees for Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots (New York Times, 1964). The former demanded the possibility of establishing a military base on the island. The plan was rejected by Makarios who had no intention to accept a Turkish presence in Cyprus. After further attempts to change the plan, Washington gave up.

In 1967 the fate of Cyprus was marked one more time. This time events started in Greece where in April 1967 a military *coup d'état* took place that initiated the so-called colonels' regime. The new junta seemed determined to solve the Cyprus question once and for all, but not in favour of the Turkish Cypriots.

In November 1967 a new intercommunal clash occurred. Greek Cypriots attacked a Turkish Cypriot village causing 27 deaths (Ker-Lindsay, 2020:40). Turkey responded by bombing Greek Cypriot forces and threatening an invasion. In response Greece reduced its forces on the island probably because it wasn't ready to face Ankara. The Turkish Cypriots took advantage of the moment to announce the formation of their own provisional administration. Makarios, who opposed this choice, understood, however, that it was no longer possible not to grant Turkish Cypriots some degree of political autonomy. Surprisingly, Makarios himself abandoned the idea of enosis, realising that there were no longer conditions to achieve it, and agreed to maintain the independence of Cyprus (Ker-Lindsay, 2020:41). This unexpected change marked his fate.

May 1968 represented the beginning of negotiations between Makarios and Turkish Cypriot representatives; these lasted six years, but when it seemed that an agreement was finally on the horizon, the tragic events of 1974 followed.

¹⁴ The name come from the one who proposed it, Dean Acheson, ex-US secretary of State during the Truman administration.

2.5. The Turkish occupation and the current situation

For the first time since the beginning of the violence between the two Cypriot ethnic groups, there would also be conflict within the Greek Cypriots themselves. Makarios' decision to abandon enosis clashed irretrievably with both the Greek Cypriot majority still willing to be united with Greece and the violent Greek junta itself. In September 1971, EOKA co-founder Grivas reorganized the terrorist group and created EOKA-B, a much more violent organization. The terrorists thus began a campaign against the Makarios administration strengthened by the support of Greece. They attempted on Makarios' life many times. After Grivas' death in January 1974, control of EOKA-B passed into the hands of Dimitrios Ioannidis, an influential general who had participated in the Greek coup. Makarios, worried that the Greek army would overthrow him, asked the Athen government to remove all Greek officers from Cyprus but his request was rejected (Ker-Lindsay, 2020:42). From being one of the strongest supporters of enosis and one of the most prominent Greek Cypriot personalities, Makarios was now in danger of being killed by the same people who had supported him during the years of his rule. On 15 July 1974, Greeks and Greek Cypriots led by terrorist Nikos Sampson, one of the killers who took part in Bloody Christmas, assaulted the presidential palace, in a coup d'état organized by Greece (International Crisis Group, 2023:4). Makarios managed to escape to Paphos where the British brought him safely to London. The control of the Cypriot administration passed to Sampson. Enosis seemed very close this time but the only thing that this event would lead to was the destruction of the territorial integrity of Cyprus.

The serious events convinced Turkey that it was the moment to intervene, for real this time. Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit went to London to ask the British to join the intervention within the terms of the Treaty of Guarantee. The British government refused because it was not ready for action on such a scale (Stevenson & Stevenson, 2022:29). The Turks decided to go it alone¹⁵, and on 20 July 1974, they began bombing locations near Nicosia, and paratroopers were dropped along the mountains of Kyrenia. The same day they landed by sea in the northern part of the island and began their

¹⁵ As mentioned in the previous section, the Treaty of Guarantee allowed for unilateral interventions by the guarantor States.

advance. The Turkish army managed to create a corridor to the Turkish Cypriots in Nicosia, but the Greek Cypriot National Guard managed to slow them down. After two days they stopped their advance. Meanwhile, in Athens, the success of the Turkish intervention led to the collapse of the military junta on 23 July, and as a result, Nikos Sampson was forced to resign. Internationally, the United States and Great Britain condemned Turkey's action, but also harshly criticized Greece for causing the crisis, yet they were convinced that the time had finally come for a peace agreement (Stevenson & Stevenson, 2022:30). At the beginning of August, representatives of Turkey, Greece, United States, Britain and the Turkish and Greek Cypriot delegations met in Geneva to find a final solution to the Cyprus issue. The Turkish Cypriots, strengthened by Turkey's support, called for a federal solution, but the Greek Cypriots were not convinced and preferred to stall and consult Makarios, who was in New York at the time. However, Turkey was no longer willing to wait.

On 14 August Turkey began the real invasion. Real because its first intervention was legitimate under international law. As a guarantor power, Turkey had the right to intervene to safeguard the security and territorial integrity of Cyprus and that is what it did (Stevenson & Stevenson, 2022:30). Quickly Turkish forces captured most of the North and many Greek Cypriots had to flee South, where refugee camps were set up. The UN Security Council condemned Turkey and called for an immediate cease-fire, which was not reached until three days after the invasion began, by which time Turkish forces controlled 37% of the island (Stevenson & Stevenson, 2022:30). About 170.000 Greek Cypriots had to abandon their properties in the North and move South, and about 50.000 Turkish Cypriots fled North instead (Loizos, 2008). The invasion is considered a catastrophe for the Greek Cypriots, who saw themselves as refugees in their own country, and the main reason for their current hostility to both Turks and Turkish Cypriots.

The Turkish invasion has created a lot of debate, in particular about the role played by the United States and Henry Kissinger. Although the latter preferred to avoid a conflict between two NATO countries, he did nothing to stop the Turkish invasion. Turkey was considered a valuable ally by the US and tacitly supported it in its choices. Proof of this can be quoted in a sentence Kissinger said to then-President Ford: "There is no

American reason why the Turks should not have one-third of Cyprus" (Office of the Historian, 1974).

Returning to the events of 1974, after the ceasefire, the UN mission's mandate was extended and the buffer zone was created, i.e. the neutral zone controlled by the Blue Helmets, which de facto divides the island in two. This zone, which still exists today, stretches for 180km (UNFICYP, 2024).

The result of the invasion was the distribution of Greek property in the North to Turkish Cypriots and then to Turkish settlers, and the loss of many critical areas, such as Famagusta with its port and Varosha¹⁶, considered the most tourist area of the island before 1974. The North proclaimed itself the Turkish Federated State of Northern Cyprus and the president became Rauf Denktaş. With the division, the idea of enosis finally died and a federal Cyprus was the only possible solution.

In the following years, under the good auspices of the United Nations, numerous talks and negotiations took place between the two communities. Makarios also participated in the first negotiations and returned to Cyprus in 1975. However, the former Cypriot president died two years later. The Greek and Turkish Cypriots could never agree on how to organize the new State, and surprisingly, on 15 November 1983, the Turkish Cypriot administration unilaterally declared independence and created a new State, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. This declaration was considered illegal by the international community and was only recognized by Turkey. The decision to create a new State was probably more dictated by the personal will of President Denktaş, who had always dreamed of the creation of a Turkish Cypriot State (Ker-Lindsay, 2020:52).

Independence did not block the attempt to find a solution for reunification, but all talks ended in a fiasco. The thorniest issues were the right of movement and the right of property, matters of interest to Greek Cypriots (Ker-Lindsay, 2020:50). The fact of losing their home and not being able to return represented and still represents the greatest pain the Greek Cypriots faced with the invasion. Greek and Turkish Cypriot governments could not find a common solution, and in the meantime Northern Cyprus

¹⁶ When it became known that Turkish soldiers had arrived in Famagusta, Varosha, a Famagusta neighbourhood, was evacuated.

was becoming increasingly dependent on Turkey which was also encouraging Turkish immigration to the island, thus changing the demography of the North, as will be analysed in the next chapter. As one can see, Turkey's role in the history of Cyprus is relatively recent, and yet in a truly short time it has managed to forge a strong bond with part of its population.

The 2000s were important years for Cyprus. The island was one of the potential new members of the European Union but the problem was how to bring a divided territory into the EU. Initially, both Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot government disagreed on the island's accession, mainly because this could have reduced Turkey's chances of becoming a member (Yılmaz, 2010:89). It's possible to notice how the political agenda in the North was driven by Turkish wishes and wills. Denktaş did everything to prevent Cyprus' accession to the EU, however, when Erdoğan and his party won the elections in 2002, the situation changed. The new Turkish president wanted to solve the Cyprus issue in order to be able to join the European Union and this led to new negotiations. Nevertheless, the negotiations came to nothing because of the hard line taken by the Turkish Cypriot government (Yılmaz, 2010:89). The latter's behaviour was strongly criticized by the international community and Turkey itself was warned that this situation was putting its possible entry into the EU even more at risk (Yılmaz, 2010:89). To try to calm tempers, North Cyprus authorities made an exceptional choice: they decided to open the green line and allow the crossing of the border through three different checkpoints.¹⁷ Incredibly thousands of Greek Cypriots crossed the border¹⁸ to check their property and surprisingly no violence was recorded. The international community was satisfied with this decision.

During the 2002-2004 period, another important event happened. The United Nations, and in particular Secretary-General Kofi Annan, worked on a plan for the reunification of the island, which was presented to the two Cypriot presidents, Tassos Papadopoulos and Rauf Denktaş for discussion. The two leaders disagreed on parts of the plan, so the Secretary-General had to step in to fill the gaps caused by the lack of agreement. The Annan plan proposed the establishment of a bizonal, bicommunal and federal Republic.

¹⁷ Before this date, it was not possible for Cypriots to cross the border dividing the two States.

¹⁸ To do so they had to show their passports.

It was voted on through a referendum by the two Cypriot communities, on 24 April 2004. The results showed all the divisions on the island: 76% of Greek Cypriots voted NO to a federal State and 65% of Turkish Cypriots voted YES (Loizides, 2019). The Greek Cypriots' rejection was justified by a combination of factors and a lot of misinformation, which led them to believe that the Annan plan was not beneficial. This was because both governments tried to boycott the plan (Ker-Lindsay, 2020:70).¹⁹ A week after the plan failed, Cyprus became part of the European Union. Since then, all of Cyprus has been part of the EU, *de jure*, but the *acquis communautaire*²⁰ does not apply to areas of the island outside the control of the Republic of Cyprus. Turkish Cypriots who have retained citizenship in the Republic of Cyprus have the right to travel, study, and work in EU countries, but the Northern part of the island cannot initiate or receive direct flights, operate internationally recognized universities, or trade directly with the rest of Europe (European Court Of Auditors, 2012). This meant only one thing for Turkish Cypriots: to remain even more isolated and even more dependent on Turkey.

The events of 2004 spread the belief within the island and also in the international community that Greek Cypriots were the ones who opposed peace (Ker-Lindsay, 2020:71). At the same time, the Turkish Cypriots were seen as the real victims of these choices. The Turkish-speaking population hoped for reunification, which is also why in 2005 they voted for Mehmet Talat, from the Republican Turkish Party and always declared in favour of reunification (Kramer & Hein, 2005). However, Talat's presidency was rather unfortunate because he had to deal with the tough economic situation in the North and the resulting dissatisfaction of the Turkish Cypriots. These aspects made it impossible to reach an agreement with the South.

The situation only started to change in 2015, when a new round of negotiations began. The two presidents at the time were Mustafa Akıncı, a great supporter of the federal solution, and Nikos Anastasiades, equally in favour of reunification. The two seemed to have good chemistry, so hopes were high that an agreement could finally be reached (International Crisis Group, 2023:7). The most important meeting took place in 2017 in

¹⁹ Both governments disagreed on the division of powers that had been decided in the plan.

²⁰ *Acquis communautaire* refers to the cumulative body of the European Community law, which includes the objectives, substantive rules, policies and primary and secondary legislation and case law of the EC, all of which form part of the European Union legal order (Eurofound, 2007).

Crans Montana, Switzerland. That meeting, however, was greatly influenced by previous events. Anastasiades, who was in the midst of an election campaign, was accused by the opposition of being too compliant with the Turkish Cypriots' demands (International Crisis Group, 2023:8). On the other hand, Akıncı was recalled by Ankara, which accused him of overestimating Anastasiades (International Crisis Group, 2023:8). In a meeting in Istanbul between Erdoğan and the president of Northern Cyprus, which took place shortly before the negotiations in Switzerland, the former stated: “I wanted to stop this charade, but you requested a last attempt. I will support you one last time, but if it doesn't work, we're not doing it again” (International Crisis Group, 2023:8). And so, the Crans Montana meetings were also a failure. The Turkish Cypriot side was not satisfied with the power-sharing commitments that Anastasiades was willing to offer, believing that they had gone back on the negotiated agreements (International Crisis Group, 2023:8). For their part, the Greek Cypriots did not accept that Ankara was unwilling to give up its guarantor status and significantly reduce the number of troops on the island (International Crisis Group, 2023:8).

After the 2017 negotiations, relations between the North and the South probably reached their lowest point. This was for several reasons but mainly for the political change of Turkish President Erdoğan. His government, particularly after the failed coup in 2016, became increasingly nationalist and conservative (International Crisis Group, 2023:11). The same relations between Turkey and the European Union deteriorated. Consequently, Northern Cyprus also had to follow Turkish choices and in 2020, a filo-Turkish government was created with the election of Ersin Tatar, from the right-wing party National Unity, and in favour of the two-state solution (BBC, 2020). These factors exponentially increased Turkish influence on the island leading observers to call the phenomenon “Ankara Bear's Hug” (International Crisis Group, 2023:14). Another problem was the discovery in 2010 of a huge oil and gas field in the eastern Mediterranean area, between Cyprus and Israel. The exploitation of these resources involved both Greece and Turkey and this created several controversies (International Crisis Group, 2023:24). Another factor was the decision to open Varosha. As previously mentioned, it was the most tourist area of Cyprus but after being evacuated in 1974 it remained a ghost town. Since then, Greek Cypriots who had a lot of property there demanded its return. Its opening for tourism was seen as disrespectful (International

Crisis Group, 2023:19). However, these controversies, the UN and General-Secretary Guterres have never ceased to encourage the start of new negotiations.

The situation was made worse by the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, which further divided the island, blocking the possibility of crossing the border. The post-pandemic period saw as its main event in 2023 the election of Nikos Christodoulides as the new president of the RoC, supported by left-wing parties. In the agenda of the new president, there is the restart of the negotiations. Moreover, on 7 December 2023, the historic meeting between Greece and Turkey and Erdoğan's declaration that he wants to resolve the Cyprus issue seems to give new hope (Cyprus Mail, 2023). However, the day after the meeting, Tatar released an interview to Politico where he declared that the EU had to accept that there would not be a United Cyprus and reiterated his trust in Turkey (Stamouli, 2023). Despite this only 10 days later, in a meeting between Erdoğan and Tatar, it would appear that the former called on the Cypriot president to remain silent regarding the Cyprus issue (Prakas, 2023). Furthermore, the Turkish Cypriot leader was reportedly told that the Cyprus issue would be discussed between Turkey and Greece and that he was ordered not to make any statements “That could bind him” (Prakas, 2023). The current Turkish plans do not seem clear and only the development of events will answer.

Where politics seems to fail, the situation among the population, particularly among the younger generation, is different. As will be analysed in the last chapter, many organizations gathering both Turkish and Greek Cypriots have sprung up in recent years. These seek to combat divisions among the population and pave the way for future coexistence. The European Union itself finances many initiatives to unify the two communities (European Commission, 2023). A remarkably interesting example of pacific coexistence is the village of Pyla, located in the buffer zone, and the last mixed village. Here Turkish and Greek Cypriots live together just as they did in the past. The creation of the Cypriot sentiment that is slowly spreading more and more is the real change this island is facing. However, this does not mean that the population is not still divided, the events of 1974 are still very much felt by Greek Cypriots. On the other side Turkish Cypriots are paying the most for the division, as will be seen in the following chapters, their isolation and dependence on Turkey are putting their very existence at

risk. It is also for this reason that they are the ones who are fighting the hardest for the creation of a Cypriot feeling and union with the Greek Cypriots.

2.6. Conclusion to the chapter

After reading this chapter, it is possible to understand the complexity of Cyprus' history and the influence that foreign powers have had and continue to have on the island. The Cypriots are a people who have been forced to live apart due to the intervention of external forces, first among them the British, whose Divide and Rule led to the development of the two nationalisms that would later result in violence between the two communities, thus creating the very rift that eventually brought the division of the island. The Turkish Cypriots, mainly due to their minority status, were the ones who suffered most from this situation, becoming the target of the pro-enosis nationalist group EOKA. The subsequent intervention in 1974 was the ultimate consequence of an extremely tense situation, in which the island was disputed between Greece and Turkey and stained with the blood of constant violence.

After the Turkish partition and occupation of the Northern part of Cyprus, the Turkish Cypriots who initially supported Ankara's presence, more out of fear than real connection, entered a complex period. The birth of the new self-proclaimed TRNC, not recognised by the international community, and the consequent dependence on Turkey, created an untenable situation. Turkey began to enter more and more into the lives of Turkish Cypriots, tightening the entire TRNC in its "Bear Hug", while every attempt at negotiations with the Republic of Cyprus for a possible reunification of Cyprus failed, leading to the impasse that persists to this day.

In what appears to be a tricky situation, however, there has been no shortage of positive moments, such as the opening of the first checkpoints in 2003 and the possibility of crossing the border between the two territories, giving the two Cypriot communities a chance to get in touch with each other. This also allowed for the development of a long-dormant sentiment among the Cypriot communities: Cypriotism. The desire to create a true Cypriot people is leading the two communities, especially the younger ones, to come closer together with the desire to write a new chapter in the history of Cyprus, the chapter in which peace will finally be achieved on the island. The future of Cyprus is a

white paper waiting to be written, and it is these new generations of Turkish and Greek Cypriots who will have to write it.

CHAPTER 3 - THE TURKIFICATION OF NORTH CYPRUS: THE ATTEMPT TO ERASE THE TURKISH CYPRIOT IDENTITY AND THE ALIGNMENT OF THE TRNC WITH TURKEY

3.1. Introduction to the chapter

As analysed in the previous chapter, since 1974 the TRNC has seen its dependence on Turkey increase year by year, dictated by the fact that the latter is the only State to recognize it. For many years, Turkey justified its ties with North Cyprus on the basis of a motherland-babyland relationship, which gave it the right to intervene to protect Turkish Cypriots. Cyprus has always been seen as an extension of Anatolia, thus an integral part of Turkey and not an independent State, and this was also the basis of taksim nationalism. Ankara, particularly after Erdoğan's election, started to implement rather controversial policies and strategies, which would refer to the theory of smart power, i.e. the combination of hard and soft power, that would seem to want to change Turkish Cypriot society and bring it into line with the Turkish one, making the TRNC a province of Turkey. It was because of these policies that fear began to spread among the Turkish Cypriots that they would soon become part of the Turkish population and lose their Cypriotness. This possible scenario would entail the disappearance of the Turkish Cypriots. This fear led to numerous protests on the island calling for Turkey to withdraw, arousing the ire of Erdoğan. The latter responded to these demonstrations by repeatedly accusing Turkish Cypriots of “Biting the hand that feeds them” (Bryant & Hatay, 2015:46). This interference in the TRNC's internal affairs is creating much concern not only among the Cypriots' populations but also among experts and observers, who see in the Turkish action an attempt at cultural assimilation and Turkification of the North. For example, the CIA mentioned it in 1975, in an analysis of the occupied territories (CIA, 1975).

This process is one of the elements, together with the Citizenship Law, that are endangering the survival, as an ethnic group, of Turkish Cypriots. This chapter will analyse this process of Turkification in more depth, dividing Turkey's strategies on the island paragraph by paragraph, starting by illustrating the differences between Turks and Turkish Cypriots. The arguments put forward in support of the Turkish Cypriots'

Turkification and the TRNC's alignment with Turkey are as follows: Turkish immigration to the island; the erasure of the Turkish Cypriot dialect; the desecularization of the TRNC; finally, Turkish interference in the TRNC's political sphere. Although they seem to be different areas, it will be seen how they are in fact closely interconnected. In the course of the chapter, one aspect can also be noted that will be emphasised in the last part of the thesis: the resilience of the Turkish Cypriots. Indeed, while Turkish policies seek to change Turkish Cypriot culture and identity, the resilience of these people is not making life easy for Ankara.

3.2. The differences between the Turks and the Turkish Cypriots

To comprehend the reasons behind the cultural assimilation and potential disappearance of the Turkish Cypriot community, it is essential to distinguish between Turks and Turkish Cypriots. To define them as equal and part of the same people would mean ignoring the entire history of Cyprus. The first Turkish Cypriots arrived with the Ottoman Empire and are considered the descendants of the Turkmen nomads (Kanli, 2018). Isolation on the island allowed them to preserve the older Turkish culture, language and traditions, later influenced by coexistence with Greek Cypriots and the British. This mix has contributed to creating a unique culture, characterized by cultural aspects, lifestyles and customs different from those found in Turkey. To give a few examples, the Turkish Cypriot dialect, called *Gibrislidja*, represents perhaps one of the most striking testimonies of Turkish Cypriot heredity. For this reason, an entire section will be devoted to the linguistic aspect and the threats to which it is subjected. Turkish Cypriot folklore itself is the result of various influences, making it unique for this reason. There are many typical dances, including the *sirto*, the oldest dance in Northern Cyprus and danced throughout the island (Visit North Cyprus, 2024). Traditional clothes also represent Cypriot culture, receiving both Greek and Turkish influences but still retaining their uniqueness and shared between both Greek and Turkish Cypriots. The mix of these cultures is also clearly visible in the traditional foods shared between the two communities, such as *halloumi*, the Cypriot cheese, of which both ethnic groups are proud, but also the Cypriot ravioli and the *şeftali kebab*, one of the most typical foods of North Cyprus which is possible to find in the South too, under the name of *sheftalia*. All these products are found exclusively in Cyprus and represent only a few examples of a

very wide and varied culinary tradition (In your pocket, 2023). The EU itself financed a project showing the culinary similarities between Greek and Turkish Cypriots, and how these are a symbol of unity between the two peoples under the sign of Cypriotness (Abbilgi, 2023).

Besides the different cultural aspects, the perception of Turkish Cypriots of Turks and vice versa also plays a significant role. The Turks consider the Turkish Cypriots much more Westernized than they are. In particular, they see them as more European and more liberal and open-minded, and this is visible in the Cypriot way of life but especially in the different approach they have towards religion (Jorgensen & Latif, 2022:385). As will be analysed below, Turkish Cypriot society is very secularised, mainly due to the influence of Kemalism. Religion has always been seen as an unimportant issue for Turkish Cypriots, Islam and Islamic traditions are not strictly followed. This is a substantial difference with Turkey, which is why religion is one of the areas where Ankara is most active, with policies aimed at desecularising the North.

The difference between the two populations becomes much more evident when we look at Turkish immigrants in North Cyprus. The first difference is identity. Most Turkish Cypriots identify themselves as Cypriots or Turkish Cypriots, emphasizing their Cypriot character (Sonan et al., 2020:10). On the other hand, Turks see themselves as Turkish, emphasizing their Turkishness. In fact, surveys on the island show that Turkish Cypriots identify Cyprus as their homeland, while Turkish immigrants, Turkey (Sonan et al., 2020:11). The same perception towards Turkey is different. Most Turkish Cypriots, as opposed to Turkish immigrants, feel that Ankara is meddling too much in the internal affairs of TRNC. Moreover, on a political level, the majority of Turkish Cypriots identify their government with the TRNC president, while the Turks identify it with the Turkey one (Sonan et al., 2020:26). And this is also evident from the increased support the Turks give to the policies Turkey is implementing in the TRNC.

As can be understood from the examples given, the differences between the Turks and Turkish Cypriots concern various cultural and social aspects of these two peoples. Obviously, there are commonalities between them, due as it is to the Turkish part they both share. For this reason, Turkish Cypriots still tend to see Turks as brothers.

However, since the increase in Turkish immigration to the island, Turkish Cypriots have increasingly sought to differentiate themselves from the Turks, putting more and more emphasis on their Cypriotness, as an act of resistance to continued Turkish influence.

3.3. Turkey's strategies in the TRNC

3.3.1. Immigration from Turkey: an act of demographic engineering and colonisation?

The 1974 invasion not only meant the end of Cyprus' territorial integrity but also a gradual change in the demographic structure of the island. This demographic change resulted from a combination of incentives for emigration to Cyprus by Turkey, and laws that guaranteed easy access to TRNC citizenship. It is important to specify that the latter is only recognised by Turkey and is mostly requested by Turks or other persons from third countries who entered Cyprus from the TRNC²¹, i.e. all those who do not have access to citizenship of the Republic of Cyprus.

This population change has been gradual. The first example is the transfer of the Greek Cypriot population to the South and the Turkish Cypriot population to the North, ethnically dividing the island. In 1973 the Turkish Cypriots were 116.000, circa 18,4% of the total (Laakso, 2003). Subsequently, demographic engineering work focused on Northern Cyprus. Since the occupation, Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot government itself encouraged massive immigration from the mainland. This Turks' immigration was combined with a high emigration of Turkish Cypriots, leading to a reduction in the number of the latter on the island (Hatay, 2017:39). Analysing Turkish immigration in more detail, three waves can be identified. The first wave, from 1974-1979, had as its main motivation to increase North Cyprus' population to confront the Greek Cypriots. This period was characterized by strong Pan-Turkish rhetoric, supported by the Turkish Cypriot leaders, foremost among them the first TRNC president Rauf Denktaş, who denied the existence of Turkish Cypriot ethnicity by stating:

"I am a child of Anatolia. I am a Turk with all my soul and my roots are in Central Asia. I am a Turk by culture, language and history, by my deeper self. I do have my state my

²¹ Entering the island from the north is illegal since it is not a recognised State.

motherland. All these words like common state, Cypriot culture, Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots are empty words. Greek Cypriots are just Greeks we are just Turks. They have their Greece, we have our Turkey” (Kizilyürek, 2001:202).

Turkish settlers of the first wave were given the properties of Greek Cypriots. Some 28 villages are counted to have been repopulated through Turkish immigration (Hatay, 2017:18). Looking in more detail at the composition of Turkish immigrants, we see that most came from rural Turkey, and were incentivized to come to Cyprus with the promise of being employed in the hotels and gardens left by Greek Cypriots, thus boosting the economy (UK Parliament, 2005). Another good portion were the families of soldiers who died during the '74 operations. Turks arriving on the island were automatically granted citizenship, which is why the first wave of immigration is considered an act of demographic engineering (Hatay, 2017:47). In fact, according to the TRNC Ministry of the Interior between 1975 and 1979 some 15.350 people born in Turkey obtained citizenship (Hatay, 2017:18). Moreover, looking at the 2006 census circa 11.925 arrived in Cyprus between 1975-1979. The first wave of immigration worried the international community, forcing the Turkish Cypriot administration to end immigration facilitation policies and make obtaining citizenship more complex.

The second wave of migration dates back between 1980-1983 and consists mainly of professionals, skilled and semi-skilled workers who came to Cyprus of their own free will in search of new opportunities. Immigration was also boosted by greater freedom of movement between Turkey and Cyprus. During the same period, the establishment of many universities in the North also attracted many students from Anatolia. Although obtaining TRNC citizenship was made more complex, there was an increase in people obtaining citizenship during election years (Hatay, 2017:20). This particular aspect might suggest that citizenship was used as a tool by Turkish Cypriot parties to gain votes.

The third wave occurred during the 1990s, the period of neoliberal privatization in Northern Cyprus that saw highly skilled professionals coming to the island, and the construction boom in the North by Turkish companies led to the importation of Turkish workers (Hatay, 2017:11). In addition, during the same period, thanks to the easing of

regulation for entry to the island²² many Turks arrived in the North under the guise of tourism, but then ended up seeking undocumented employment in the construction industry (Hatay, 2017:17). An important incentive given by Turkey was the decision in 1992 to exempt mainland Turks going to work in the occupied area of Cyprus from military conscription, to which all male Turks are generally subject (Christou, 2014:97). This group of migrants, mostly male and from Turkey's poorer regions, also began to settle in Nicosia and Kyrenia, causing Turkish Cypriots to complain (Jorgensen & Latif, 2022:381). Indeed, the increase in crime following their arrival has changed Turkish Cypriots' perceptions of Turkish migrants, increasing racism and xenophobia. About 30.000 work permits were registered between 2004 and 2005, an increase compared to the 6.000 registered between 2003-2004. With work permits it also became easier for Turks to obtain TRNC citizenship since documented workers had an easier path to gain citizenship (Hatay, 2017:21). A critical point of the various changes made to the citizenship law to tighten it is that Turkey has never willingly accepted these changes, criticising the choices of the Turkish Cypriot government. On the other hand, the latter, due to international pressure, had no choice but to make these amendments. However, with the UBP's rise to power, Turkish immigration has experienced new growth, showing how immigration is a political issue. Confirming this is that the Turkish Cypriot government, paradoxically, has always been particularly keen on giving citizenship to Turkish immigrants, while defining Greek Cypriots as "foreigners" (İlter, 2015:34). Probably a way to please Turkey and ensure the division between the two Cypriot communities.

After analysing the motivations and composition of these migratory flows, let us compare them with the local population. The main problem in Northern Cyprus concerns the fact that the last census was in 2011, and the numbers after 2011 come only from projections, with a considerable margin of error. This is because there has always been opposition from the various governments in wanting to census the population. Some have accused TRNC of not wanting to let people know the real number of Turkish Cypriots on the island, lest they have to admit that they have been outnumbered by Turkish settlers (Aygin, 2023). The first official census was held on 15

²² A law had been introduced allowing Turkish citizens to enter the island only with an identity card.

December 1996. The census recorded data on the social, economic and demographic characteristics of the TRNC population by district. The 1996 census counted the de facto population²³ of the TRNC as 200.587: TRNC citizens made up 82% of this population (164.460), while Turkish citizens (without TRNC citizenship) made up 15% (30.702) and other nationalities another 3%. Of the aforementioned 30.702 Turkish citizens, 8.287 were students studying at various universities in the North and 12.922 were workers. The remaining 9.493 were classified as "others" and included businessmen and dependents, as well as retirees who had settled in the TRNC. The census data reveals significant insights into the demographics of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Among the 164.460 TRNC citizens surveyed, the majority, 137.628, were born in Cyprus, with an additional 11.000 born to parents from Turkey. Meanwhile, 23.924 individuals were born directly in Turkey, 1.322 in the United Kingdom, and 818 in Bulgaria. Notably, the TRNC's de jure population experienced substantial growth over the years, rising from 188.662 in 1996 to 286.257 in 2011, marking a remarkable 52% increase within the 15-year span between the 1996 and 2011 censuses. However, the growth rate of TRNC citizens was comparatively modest, climbing from 164.460 to 190.494 over the same period, representing a 16% increase. Conversely, the number of Turkish nationals residing in TRNC saw a dramatic surge, soaring from 3.702 in 1996 to 80.550 in 2011, marking a staggering 162% increase over the 15-year period. Similarly, the count of third-country nationals also witnessed a notable rise, escalating from 5.425 in 1996 to 15.215 in 2011, indicating a substantial 180% growth within the same timeframe (Hatay, 2017:30). The numbers show that the population of Turkish Cypriot descent is declining at the expense of the population of Turkish origin. The projection for 2022 shows an increase of the population of 40% in 11 years, a very different demographic increase compared to the 10% registered in the Republic of Cyprus (Aygin, 2023). Last November, President Tatar stated that the population of the TRNC would be around 410.000 (Clever, 2023). However, last 7 May, the mayor of Kyrenia Murat Sekul, according to calculations based on domestic waste production, stated that the population of the TRNC might have reached 825.000, a quite different number from the one claimed by Tatar (Hazou, 2024). The question that

²³ The de facto population consists of all persons physically present in the country or area on the enumeration date. The de jure population consists of all habitual residents, whether or not they are present at the time of enumeration (UNSD).

remains is: how many of these people are Turkish Cypriots? The fact that no other census took place raises many questions and accusations about the politicization of not showing the real number of the population.

The issue of Turkish immigration is a very political issue that continues to create tension and controversy. This massive immigration from Turkey has worried not only the same Turkish Cypriots but also the Republic of Cyprus, which saw this as a threat to the stability and an act of colonization, slowing the peace process. The Turkish Cypriots see the new immigration more for political reasons instead of job opportunities like in the past (Jorgensen & Latif, 2022:384). In some interviews taken in 2017 and 2018 the majority of the people admitted that they have a fear of assimilation. The Turkish Cypriots' perception of Turkish settlers is rather negative, many of them are seen as AKP infiltrators or otherwise linked in some way to Erdoğan's party. In the early 2000s Turkish settlers in Cyprus were described as a “Trojan horse” used by Turkey to maintain its control over the island (Hatay, 2017:2). Indeed, immigrants of Turkish origin have shown themselves more attached to the Turkish government than to the Turkish Cypriot one. According to others, the Turks are the main cause of the right-wing party's rise to power (Hatay, 2017:2). Non-governmental Turkish Cypriot newspapers also voiced their concerns, such as a famous cartoon released by the newspaper *Afrika*, which read: “When a Cypriot dies, the population does not decrease” (İlter, 2015:35). However, it is very easy for these opinions to fall into prejudice and racism, so they must be considered carefully. Many families came to North Cyprus to seek their fortune and a different life, their political use not only by Turkey or the Turkish Cypriot government but also by Greek Cypriots damaged their image.

Internationally the charges being brought against Turkey are those of war crimes, in particular Art. 8 of the Rome Statute: “The transfer, directly or indirectly, by the Occupying Power of parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies, or the deportation or transfer of all or parts of the population of the occupied territory within or outside this territory” (Rome Statute 1998) and violation of Art. 49 (6) of the 4th Geneva Convention: “The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies” (4th Geneva Convention, 1949), therefore admissible before the International Court of Justice (Christou, 2014:91). The

main accusation is that of population transfer and colonisation. The same property issue, with the confiscation of the Greek Cypriot's houses and then the donation of them to the Turks is considered unlawful (Christou, 2014:97). In 2014, a group of Cypriots represented by MEP Costas Mavrides filed a war crimes complaint against Turkey at the International Criminal Court for its settlement activity in Northern Cyprus. Interestingly, an Israeli organisation, the Shurat HaDin Law Center, helped them draft the complaint (Al Jazeera, 2014). However, Turkey is not a State party to the Rome Statute.

The matter has also been brought before the European Parliament with the MEP Christoforou stating that Turkey was colonising an EU Member State (Parliamentary Question, 2019). The Council of Europe itself had requested a report on the demographic situation of the TRNC in 2003. This report, then drafted by the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Demography, more specifically by Jaakko Laakso of the Group of the Unified Left, clearly spoke of colonisation. In this report, the reliability of the numbers given by the Turkish Cypriot authorities was disputed, and even then, it was claimed that the number of Turkish settlers exceeded the number of Turkish Cypriots (Laakso, 2003). This report was strongly contested by the Turkish delegation, in particular for the use of terms such as “settlers”, but also for, according to them, the inaccuracy of the numbers reported (Laakso, 2003). However, upon their request to change the title of the report (Colonisation by Turkish settlers of the occupied part of Cyprus), they received a refusal, with the justification that the title reflected the real situation (Laakso, 2003). In 1999, the European Commission of Human Rights ruled that the continued entry of "A considerable number" of settlers into Cyprus violated international law (European Commission Of Human Rights, 1999). However, Turkey has continued its population transfer activities despite the findings of the competent international courts, which ordered the cessation of this activity. From the evidence presented above, the theory of demographic engineering would seem very plausible and the possibility of the Turkish Cypriots being outnumbered in the TRNC seems highly likely.

In the present day, it seems that no actions will be taken to protect the Turkish Cypriot population. In particular an official, UN-monitored census would be necessary to understand the true composition of the TRNC population. The demographic aspect

remains one of the most contentious aspects of Turkish-TRNC relations and a source of conflict between Turkish and Greek Cypriots, slowing the progress of reunification negotiations. The most dramatic aspect lies in the fact that if the situation does not change, soon the Turkish Cypriots will no longer exist.

3.3.2. The desecularization of Turkish Cypriot society

The process of desecularization that Turkish Cypriot society is undergoing mainly concerns two areas which, as will be seen, are very much connected: education and religion. As mentioned in the section on the differences between Turks and Turkish Cypriots, an important role is played by the different concepts of religion. Turkish Cypriots were strongly influenced by Kemalist ideas, and for this reason, their society went through a visible process of secularisation both in their lifestyle and in their way of thinking. With the Turkish occupation and the creation of the TRNC, this process encountered some obstacles, mainly due to the penetration of the AKP's religious policies in particular following the failed coup d'état that increased Erdoğan's authoritarianism and conservatism. To understand why these policies are seen as controversial and as a genuine attempt to change Turkish Cypriot society, it is important to analyse the relationship Turkish Cypriots have with religion.

According to the most recent research, 45.8% of Turkish Cypriots never attend mosque services, while 41.9% attend only on religious holidays or less frequently (Koktsidis, 2023:528). The study also found that 70% of respondents support limiting the influence of religious leaders on voters, and 76% support limiting their influence over the government (Koktsidis, 2023:528). A major difference can be seen with Turkish immigrants who instead consider themselves practicing Muslims and supporters of building more mosques in North Cyprus (Sonan et al., 2020:16). This is an aspect that, as will be seen, greatly influences the relationship between Turks and Turkish Cypriots.

Now analysing Ankara's religious policies, the first evidence of this change in Turkish Cypriot society is the number of mosques, which it has increased significantly in recent decades. Between 1974 and 2002, only 9 new mosques were built (Latif, 2021:816), however, from 2003 to 2013, 39 more mosques were erected, bringing the total number to 199 (Latif, 2021:816). As of 2019, there are now 212 mosques in the region (Latif,

2021:816). The number of mosques currently exceeds the number of schools. On 11 January 2024, the largest mosque on the island, located near the Near East University in Nicosia, was inaugurated (Cleaver, 2024). Initially, the main motive behind the construction of so many mosques was to create a religious identity to contrast with the Christian Orthodox identity of the Greek Cypriots. This also involved the destruction and reconversion of many Orthodox churches into mosques. Not surprisingly, Turkey is responsible for the destruction of part of the Cypriot cultural heritage. Many religious monuments have in fact been desecrated, looted or demolished and several churches have been converted not only into mosques but also into stables, dance studios, warehouses and even a morgue (Zaphiriou et al., 2012:10). In addition, numerous world-renowned archaeological sites were destroyed or excavated illegally and a considerable number of antiquities were smuggled in and remain unknown to this day (Zaphiriou et al., 2012:10).

The construction of new religious sites has gone hand in hand with policies and initiatives both outside and inside TRNC schools, and this is where the education sector comes in. The Turkish Embassy in Nicosia, which has its own office for religious affairs, cooperates with many Turkish institutions such as the Ministry of Culture—Overseas Turks and Relative Communities Directorate (YTB), Cyprus Foundations Administration (EVKAF) and the Yunes Emre Institute, which are intricately linked to Islam. With the support of the Ministry of Education of the TRNC and the Turkish government itself, they finance cultural initiatives, seminars, and scheduled Turkish language lessons to strengthen Turkish roots on the island and disseminate Islamic textbooks in schools. In 2009, during the first UBP government, summer religious education courses were organised, supervised by the Ministry of National Education and Culture and with teachers from Turkey, and in 2009-2010 religious education became compulsory in schools (Koktsidis, 2023:529). Only with the next new government did it become optional again. However, this was criticised by the AKP, which responded harshly by cutting financial support to the Ministry of Education (Latif, 2021:814), that's why religious instruction became compulsory again in 2019. Part of these initiatives included also the introduction of Quran courses run by Religious Affairs Directorate (Diyanet). In 2021, the Turkish Cypriot Constitutional Court ruled that Quran courses must be provided by the Ministry of Culture and Education and not by

religious authorities. This ruling made Erdoğan furious, who commented: “The Constitutional Court must first learn secularism. Northern Cyprus is not France, they should carry Turkey's habits into practice. [They] should quickly correct this mistake, otherwise our next steps will be different“ (Soylu, 2021).

Turkish influence also affected universities, leading to the opening of religious universities. A controversial event was the opening of the Hala Sultan Collage of Theology and Mosque in Nicosia, an *imam hatip*, a type of religious school strongly encouraged by President Erdoğan in order to create what he calls “pious generations” (Latif, 2021:802). The decision to open it has been accused of being an act of assimilation and imposition of more conservative traditions and a way of distancing even more Turkish Cypriots from Greek Cypriots and making reconciliation more difficult. The concern is evident in this statement by the secretary of the teachers' union, KTÖS, the organisation that fights most against religious influence in schools: “We often say to Greek Cypriots: If the solution is delayed further, you might not find any Turkish Cypriots to shake hands with” (Weise, 2018). The increase in religious initiatives pushed by Turkey has created numerous protests in the TRNC, organized mainly by trade unions, which accuse Turkey of eroding Turkish Cypriot society. Parents of state school students also protested against the Islamisation of education, with a large demonstration on 31 August 2023 in front of the Ministry of Education (Project Cyprus, 2023). Recently, another choice that has caused quite a bit of controversy is that of the new textbooks introduced in 2023. Regarding TRNC school textbooks (but the same argument could be made for the Republic of Cyprus), it is important to note that these are highly politicized. In particular, the most obvious evidence is history books. The selection of these books has always depended heavily on the ruling party. Textbooks that were very ethnocentric, presenting Turkish Cypriots as part of the greater Turkish nation, and pushing for the two-state solution, during the more pro-Turkish governments and books where more emphasis is placed on the Cypriotness of the Turkish Cypriots and the federal solution to the Cypriot question, during the leftist or independent governments (Latif, 2019:38). Returning to the recent controversy this was triggered because of some images in elementary school textbooks that depicted a woman wearing a *hijab* as a teacher and where Syrian and Indian traditional family structures were taken as models of ideal families (Cleaver, 2023).

The problem with this religious interference is the attempt to homologate Turkish Cypriots to the Turks, to change their lifestyle and traditions to make Northern Cyprus more and more like Turkey. The same immigrants from Turkey are mostly supportive of these policies, and more attached to religious traditions compared to the Turkish Cypriots (Latif, 2021:812). It is important to point this out because according to various research as a threat to their Turkish identity, the strong political loyalty of immigrants to their country of origin and its political structures is an important element of their political culture, and therefore it is necessary to consider the socio-political attitudes of Turkish immigrants living in Northern Cyprus because they allow us to see and analyse Turkish loyalty to the Turkish State “As part of a political mission to protect Turkish identity” (Ruh & Köprülü, 2022:582). The desecularization of the TRNC is also reflected in the rights of the LGBTQ+ community and an increase in intolerance towards them (Şahin, 2024). Turkish Cypriots are generally much more open to homosexuality than Turks, but heavy immigration from Anatolia and increased religious interference are endangering the rights of this community.

The Islamification of Northern Cyprus remains one of the most controversial and topical issues concerning the erosion of Turkish Cypriot culture. The fact that he wants to religiously align Northern Cyprus with Turkey seems to show how Erdoğan sees the TRNC as a Turkish province and not as an independent State. Moreover, it is probably one of the most obvious cases of cultural assimilation of Turkish Cypriots, and it doesn't seem to stop soon, as the opening of the biggest mosque in Nicosia has since proven.

3.3.3. The cancelation of the Turkish Cypriot dialect

Although there is not much information on the subject, it is important to mention the issue of the language. The latter is a fundamental part of an individual's identity, showing its history, origin and culture. For this reason, throughout history, particularly during the period of colonisation, the imposition of the language of the dominant power on the subordinate one, has been used as a form of control and erasure of the cultural group considered inferior.

In the particular case of Cyprus, language has always played a key role, given the ethnic division of the island. Throughout the history of the island, and specifically of the Turkish Cypriot part, the Turkish language was a powerful tool in the hands of Turkish nationalism to separate Turkish Cypriots from Greek Cypriots. As early as the 1950s, through the “Citizen Speak Turkish” campaign, the leaders of the Turkish Cypriot nationalist movement encouraged citizens to speak Turkish, but especially punished those who spoke Greek (Kizilyürek & Gautier-Kizilyürek, 2004:46). In fact, when Turkish and Greek Cypriots lived side by side, it was much more common for the former to speak not Greek but the Greek Cypriot dialect. Even today there are people, born and raised before the division, who are perfectly bilingual, witnesses of what “one people” really means. However during intercommunal clashes, this was seen as a threat (Kizilyürek, 2001: 34). With the Turkish occupation in 1974, the threat instead became the Turkish Cypriot dialect, called: *Gibrislidja* (CT).

This dialect has unique characteristics. Due to the isolation of the Turkish Cypriots, it bears a striking resemblance to the ancient Anatolian language, differing phonetically from the so-called Standard Turkish (ST), i.e. the Turkish spoken in Istanbul and considered as “real” Turkish. It also has words from Greek²⁴, but also from English, Italian, Arabic and Latin, clearly showing the various influences this community have had (Çavuşoğlu & Evripidou, 2017:1153). And it is precisely these characteristics that represent the Turkish Cypriots' connection to the island and its history. An example is the word “roundabout”, which in Turkish is “*dönel kavşak*” and in *Gibrislidja* “*randabavut*” (Pehlivan & Osam, 2010:234).

Underestimating the language aspect of the Turkish Cypriot issue could be a mistake given its importance for this population. Historically the CT is used by all social classes, showing how much it belongs to Turkish Cypriot history and culture (Cyprus Mail, 2009). With the division of the island in 1974, the official language of Northern Cyprus became Standard Turkish and it was imposed as the official language of education, bureaucracy and mass media (Çavuşoğlu & Evripidou, 2017:1153). It is during this period that we find the implementation of a series of policies aimed at reinforcing the use of ST. It was not only the Turkish Cypriot dialect that was affected by Turkish

²⁴ It presents about 3.500 words borrowed from Greek (Constantinou, 2023).

policies, but also the Greek Cypriot dialect, in particular the former Greek Cypriot villages in the North were renamed with Turkish names, to erase any Greek influence (Çavuşoğlu & Evripidou, 2017:1154). This decision was taken not only to get closer to Ankara but also because Turkey considers the Turkish Cypriot dialect as “bad” Turkish, associated with a barbaric and uncivilised way of speaking, as opposed to the ST often associated with well-educated people (Petraki, 2011:41). The interesting thing is that the same perception exists concerning the Greek Cypriot dialect, which is considered by the Greeks as incorrect (Guney, 2019:348). This shows how dialect has a similar importance for both Cypriot groups. Returning to the question of the "bad" Turkish, with the first contacts with Turkish settlers and with the strong pro-Turkey rhetoric, this view grew stronger and spread throughout the north of the island, creating an inferiority complex in Turkish Cypriots, pushing them to abandon the use of the dialect and adopt the ST (Petraki, 2011:41). In this sense, the Turkish strategy moved more on the issue of identity, pushing Turkish Cypriots to abandon their characteristic language and instead adopt the one considered superior and more correct. It is important to emphasise that several Turkish dialects deviate from the ST, but only the Turkish Cypriot one is considered as the less correct version and therefore belongs to a group outside Turkey (Çavuşoğlu & Evripidou, 2017:1162). It has to be said that despite these policies and the feeling of inferiority to standard Turkish, the dialect remained in use among Turkish Cypriots, so much so that many advertisements, including that of the largest supermarket chain in North Cyprus, *Lemar*, used it in their promotional campaigns (Cyprus Mail, 2009). That was until a very controversial law in 2009, inspired by the then UBP-led government, officially banned its use on national television and radio (Cyprus Mail, 2009). The law created much controversy not only among the population but also among the various party leaders who did not understand the motivation behind this choice, given the CT's popularity. As a consequence of the law, the government body regulating telecommunications, the Higher Broadcasting Council, initiated inspections of 15 television channels and 23 radio stations to ensure that what it considered “bad Turkish” was no longer broadcast culture (Cyprus Mail, 2009). The great unpopularity of this choice and the fact that *Gibrislidja* represented and still represents a particularly important part of Turkish Cypriot identity, led to speculation of an attempt at cultural assimilation by Turkey. Moreover, this law led to the assumption

that the interests of the then Turkish Cypriot government were to conform to Turkey, rather than to truly represent the Turkish Cypriot population. In this sense, one aspect that was emphasised earlier can be noted: the role of the TRNC policy in the Turkish strategy of assimilation of the Turkish Cypriot population. Without the help of the TRNC government all these policies would not be possible.

Of the various strategies seen above, this however, can be considered as one of the least successful. As will be seen later on, despite the initial inferiority complex, the Turkish Cypriots began to see the Turkish Cypriot dialect as a weapon at their disposal. To understand this, it is important to analyse first the reactions and opinions of Turkish Cypriots regarding their dialect and the decision to ban it on national channels. According to studies based on interviews with a sample of the population, it was noted that the majority considered the Turkish Cypriot dialect to be part of their identity, and therefore its possible disappearance would coincide with the disappearance of part of the cultural heritage of Turkish Cypriots (Petraiki, 2011:38). Particularly significant is the statement made by one of the interviewees: “If the dialect is being taken away from the Turkish speaking Cypriots, there would not be anything left to remind them of their ethnic identity, since, they will become Turks” (Petraiki, 2011:40). In another study done instead on both Turkish and Turkish Cypriot university students, the concept of “language=identity” always returns. In particular, even among Turkish university students, there is a notion that ST is superior to CT, believing the latter to be incorrect and funny (Çavuşoğlu & Evripidou, 2017:1163).

As was mentioned a few lines earlier, the attempt to erase the dialect is perhaps one of Turkey's least successful strategies and one of the most difficult aspects of Turkish Cypriot culture to eradicate. This is because, over time, the Turkish Cypriot dialect has become a weapon of resistance, but above all a clear sign of Cypriotism. In fact, the population has never given up using it in private, precisely to show their belonging. A Turk immediately recognises a Turkish Cypriot as soon as the latter starts speaking. This is a demonstration of how language identifies a subject, which is why there is a strong attachment to the dialect among the Cypriot population. With the strong immigration from Turkey, the Turkish Cypriot dialect became the means of differentiation from the Turks and took on political connotations. The same attitude was

seen among Turkish Cypriot immigrants in Great Britain, Canada and Australia, showing how it is a true symbol of belonging (Kizilyürek & Gautier-Kizilyürek, 2004:51). Language as an act of resistance is typical of nations subject to colonialism and, in this case, is an example of how Turkish Cypriots do not want to identify themselves as Turks, but as Cypriots.

The question that arises here is whether in time, the *Gibrilidja*, will be able to survive, particularly due to the huge number of Turkish settlers on the island and the education system that does not include the teaching of CT. As much as it has become an act of resistance to speak the Turkish Cypriot dialect, the spread of the ST in every sphere of Turkish Cypriot society puts the survival of this unique idiom in grave danger. The disappearance of this would result in the linguistic homogenisation of the Turkish Cypriots, losing an important part of their cultural heritage.

3.3.4. Interference in the political elections

One aspect that does not directly concern the culture and identity of Turkish Cypriots is Turkey's interference in TRNC politics. This aspect is important because everything described above would not be possible without Ankara's influence in the Turkish Cypriot political process. According to the Freedom House, the TRNC is considered a free State. Elections are held regularly and there is a plurality of parties on the island (Freedom House, 2022). North Cyprus has a semi-presidential system, in which the democratically elected president is elected for a five-year term. There are civil and political rights and freedom of speech, although Turkish Cypriot journalists who oppose Turkey often receive threats and intimidation, as the report by Reporters Without Borders shows. According to 2023 data, the TRNC ranks 76th out of 180 for press freedom. The score is calculated on the basis of five contextual indicators that reflect the situation of press freedom in all its complexity: political context, legal framework, economic context, socio-cultural context and security. A secondary score ranging from 0 to 100 is calculated for each indicator. Despite its fairly good ranking, the TRNC has the lowest score for the safety of journalists, at 52 out of 100, and is therefore considered “difficult” (Reporters Without Borders, 2024). Its status as an unrecognized State and the strong influence of the AKP have made the democratic process in North Cyprus not

exactly transparent, particularly in recent years. The political history of North Cyprus has seen a succession of right-wing governments close to Turkey and left-wing governments more inclined towards reunification with the Republic of Cyprus. These governments have had different relations with Turkey: there have been presidents more critical of Ankara and others more accepting. With the advent of Erdoğan and his nationalist evolution, the relationship between Turkish and Turkish Cypriot governments also changed, with much more direct threats to Turkish Cypriot presidents less aligned with AKP policies.

The growing Turkish interest in seeing a president close to Ankara's position at the head of North Cyprus questioned the effective transparency of the last elections in 2020, which saw the victory of pro-Turkey president Ersin Tatar. What happened in these elections was an unprecedented case of interference by Ankara. This interference was discovered thanks to the "Report on the Interference in the 2020 TRNC Presidential Elections" edited by a team of civil society representatives, lawyers and researchers who described what happened during the political campaign through interviews with candidates, journalists and the civilian population (Yücel at al., 2021). The testimonies revealed meetings and collaboration between Turkish government representatives and the pro-Turkish candidate Tatar throughout the campaign period. The report describes the involvement of Turkish intelligence (MIT), the Turkish Embassy and the Turkish ambassador in a field operation in the TRNC. The operation aimed to pressure other candidates to withdraw and journalists to support Tatar. The report includes the testimony of Mustafa Akıncı, the main opponent of the UBP leader and running for his second term. Akıncı had antagonised Erdoğan because of certain statements against Turkey regarding its intervention in Syria (Aygin, 2021). He also expressed concern, during an interview with the Guardian before running for re-election, about the possibility of Northern Cyprus becoming a Turkish province (Harding, 2020). Moreover, his close relationship with the Greek Cypriots, and in particular with Anastasiades, did not please Ankara. For this series of reasons, relations between him and Ankara soured so much that Turkish officials began to accuse him of being an American agent (Yücel at al., 2021:12). It is also worth noting that the failure of the Crans Montana negotiations diminished the popularity of the Turkish Cypriot leader. In the report, Akıncı's declarations would show that MIT managed the elections on Tatar's

behalf. Among the various statements he made, the most worrying aspect would be the death threats received against him and his family if he did not withdraw from the election race as soon as possible (Yücel et al., 2021:9). He also added that during one of his meetings with the Turkish ambassador, in which he complained about Turkish interference, he was answered: “You want a federation, and you are after a different identity regarding Turkishness. You are after a Turkish Cypriot identity, Turkey with all its institutions wants a change here” (Yücel et al., 2021:7). Akıncı also claimed that Turkish embassy officials went to the villages to talk to voters. Akıncı's private secretary himself, as he stated, was allegedly contacted by members of the MIT to persuade Akıncı to withdraw. As can be seen, these are very serious allegations. Another testimony comes from another candidate, Serdar Denktaş, who participated as an independent candidate. In his statements, we find many similarities with those of Akıncı. He was also intimidated to withdraw and people who supported him were threatened, adding that his phone had been tapped (Yücel et al., 2021:4). He confirmed the presence of Turkish officers in the Turkish Cypriot villages and also added how State television did not give the same visibility to all candidates. He also pointed out that the UBP had a list with the names of people who had not gone to vote in the first round and that the counting of the ballots, held in the Near East University, had not been done transparently. This would be proven by other testimonies showing that when asked to let observers in on election day, the university refused (Yücel et al., 2021:5). Like Akıncı, Denktaş also stated that under these circumstances the possibility of annexation to Turkey was closer than ever. Akıncı and Denktaş were the only candidates willing to release statements, the others refused to participate in the report.

The second part of the report contains declarations by journalists, in particular that of Ali Kışmır, the President of the Press Workers' Union in the TRNC. He was invited to dinner by a team from Turkey. During this dinner they clearly asked him not to support Akıncı during his election campaign, stating:

“If he is elected, very bad things will happen to him. That's why he should withdraw now, get his ticket and fuck off to America. We know that he has a Greek son-in-law, and we know what his daughter has been up to. Akıncı should not be elected for the sake of the future of Turkey and the TRNC. If Akıncı is elected, very bad things will

happen. Something will happen to him, we don't know what that might be. He is symbolically sitting in that post anyway. He's a man, whose term of office has expired. Whether he is elected or not, we have a list for after the elections. We know all the enemies of Turkey and the agents. We will take them all to Turkey" (Yücel et al., 2021:12).

He added that they told him that they had contacted as many as 50 journalists before him and convinced them not to support Mustafa Akıncı (Yücel et al., 2021:12). He was not the only journalist targeted by Turkey. Those who did not support Tatar's election campaign were threatened and treated with hostility by Turkish representatives, such as Rasih Reşat, a journalist who played an active role in Serdar Denktaş' election campaign and claimed to have been persuaded in several ways to support Tatar. Another target of the Turkish secret service, was journalist Pinar Barut of the Özgür Gazete, because of the investigation she was conducting into meetings between Ersin Tatar and the AKP publicity team at the Lord's Palace Hotel in Kyrenia. Thanks to this investigation, it was discovered that this team was actually in charge of Tatar's election campaign (Özgür Gazete, 2020). The various informants reported that this team had called about 10.000 people to convince them to vote for Ersin Tatar (Yücel et al., 2021:14). Photos were taken and published of Tatar in the company of Ali Genç, the head of the team of Fuat Oktay, the vice-president of Erdoğan. The investigation did not please the future president of the TRNC and both she and the newspaper were threatened and accused of being spies and UBP members allegedly told her that if she set foot in Turkey she would be arrested (Yücel et al., 2021:15). Tatar himself sued the newspaper. However, the investigation into her led to nothing and Tatar was forced to pay compensation to the newspaper (Bianet, 2023). The meetings with the publicity team were not the only controversial act Tatar did. A week before the second round of voting, he broke the electoral silence by appearing in the company of Erdoğan at a public ceremony, where he declared that he would reopen Varosha (Yücel et al., 2021:22).

Another aspect highlighted within the report concerns social networks and fake news. The elections in the TRNC were held during the COVID period, which is why much of the campaigning took place on social media. As a result, there was an important increase in profiles and fake news at the expense of candidates. Between December 2019 and

February 2020, several Twitter accounts based in Turkey were activated or reactivated with different nicknames (Yücel et al., 2021:25). The same happened to Facebook where hundreds of fake accounts were created. The report found that UBP opponents were also those who received the most negative comments from fake profiles. Among the candidates, the most affected was Akıncı. Many fake accounts of the former Cypriot president appeared, accounts that shared fake news. To add to this, there were also cases of cyberbullying against his family (Yücel et al., 2021:28). Observations and technical findings indicate that these were spread by certain media organisations, individuals, and social media accounts with close ties to the Turkish government.

The last item in the report is about the events that happened during the election days, with testimonies from the citizens and the polling officials. It is important to emphasize that the events that happened did not happen everywhere in the TRNC. Most of the people interviewed stated that there was interference in the elections and this is likely to be repeated in the future. Regarding the events of election days, several witnesses reported the presence of UBP members both outside and inside polling stations, where they allegedly exerted pressure on voters. Additionally, there were reports of money being distributed by UBP members. In multiple statements, the interviewees intently claimed that Turkey would deposit 2.000TL into the accounts of 9.872 people under the name "Pandemic Social Support" (Yücel et al., 2021:21). Furthermore, they were observed by multiple individuals holding lists and checking off voters using said lists. Police were noticed to have different approaches with UBP candidates (Yücel et al., 2021:46). Problems were also reported concerning ballot papers. Some were folded differently, and others were counted even though they were clearly invalid. The ballot boxes were transparent and everyone could see someone vote (Yücel et al., 2021:37). Some voters noted the same problem reported by candidate Denktaş, namely the lack of observers during the elections.

All the information in this report, which was later taken up by various newspapers, paints a worrying picture in the TRNC. What happened during the election period shows that Turkey had a very ramified strategy in place, consisting of various actors, such as the secret services and people close to President Erdoğan. Ankara's unprecedented effort to succeed in putting a candidate remarkably close to Turkey in the

TRNC presidency makes one wonder what Turkey's strategy is. One aspect that was frequently found in the statements reported in the investigation was the belief that the time had come for the annexation of North Cyprus to Turkey. Moreover, the claims of members of the secret service against the Turkish Cypriot identity make the affair even more controversial. The question one can ask now is what will happen at the next elections, which will be held in 2025, and whether one will have to worry about another possible interference.

In contrast to the other aspects analysed, this one does not directly concern the cultural assimilation of Turkish Cypriots but represents another attempt to bring the TRNC closer to Turkey. If we add together the various aspects dealt with in the course of the chapter, i.e. Turkish immigration, the desecularization of Turkish Cypriot society, the erasure of the dialect and finally the interference within the political sphere of the TRNC, we can see that the result is the steady decline of the Turkish Cypriot community. Moreover, the presence of a pro-Turkish president would slow down or, even worse, could permanently halt the negotiations for the reunification of the island and condemn the TRNC to move ever closer to Turkey. Added to this is the increase in threats not only to journalists but also to peace activists, as denounced by MEP Niyazi Kızılyürek in the European Parliament in 2022 (European Parliament, 2022). The only certain thing is that the upcoming elections could be a turning point in the history of Cyprus and the Turkish Cypriot people, which is why it must be ensured that they take place in total transparency to avoid dangerous interference from Ankara.

3.4. Conclusion to the chapter

In the course of the chapter, various aspects of Turkish action in North Cyprus were touched upon. From immigration to religion, to the Turkish Cypriot dialect and the political sphere. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Turkish strategy would be based on the smart power theory. Especially after the occupation, Turkish Cypriots were rather attached to Turkish culture, and many Turkish policies concerned cultural aspects such as religion and language. On the other hand, the presence of the army on the territory, the economic dependence and even violent interference in the politics of the

TRNC would show Ankara's use of hard power as well, to be able to maintain control over the island.

The various aspects highlighted throughout the chapter are also interconnected. The high Turkish immigration and the almost certain presence of more Turks than Turkish Cypriots is also reflected in religion, with support for Turkish policies facilitating its spread on the island. The disappearance of the dialect itself is linked to Turkish settlers considering it as an inferior version of Turkish. Finally, at the root of it all is politics. It is no coincidence that the periods when Turkish interference was highest were characterised by the presence of a government and a TRNC president close to Ankara, and Turkey knows this. Moreover, the events of the 2020 elections would show how the latter is willing to strengthen the “Bear Hug” on the TRNC.

As has been seen, the Turkish action has been condemned by the international community, and the fact that there have been condemnations by the European Court of Human Rights and reports by various international organisations, particularly concerning the transfer of population, shows that the problem is real and that the international community is well aware of it, although it has not acted effectively to stop it. Paying the price for this is the Turkish Cypriot population, to whom these strategies are directed. The combination of all the factors analysed is bringing the Turkish Cypriots closer and closer to being no longer part of the Cypriot population, but as a minority on the island, and if the situation continues, to disappearing definitively, becoming part of the Turkish population and permanently losing all the unique characteristics that make them Cypriots. In this dramatic scenario, the Turkish Cypriot historical and cultural heritage that would be lost would be priceless. However, as it turns out, Turkish Cypriots are not passively watching their decline, but are making themselves heard, trying to use the means at their disposal to ensure the survival of their community. This will be explored further later, what is certain now is that the Turkification of North Cyprus is real and must be addressed.

CHAPTER 4 - THE CITIZENSHIP LAW OF THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE TURKISH CYPRIOT COMMUNITY

4.1. Introduction to the chapter

Citizenship in Northern Cyprus has undergone a complex evolution, becoming both a cornerstone for self-identification and a fiercely contested battleground for identity debates. This intricacy is exacerbated by the unresolved Cyprus problem, which amplifies the complexities and controversies surrounding citizenship. The concept of citizenship in Northern Cyprus is inherently complex and multifaceted. It represents an intricate web of conflicting historical narratives and perspectives. While citizenship is typically seen as a singular and cohesive identity defined by the nation-state, in North Cyprus, it emerges as fragmented and fluid, subject to transformation depending on the prevailing circumstances. Citizenship is seen by Turkish Cypriots as a crucial tool to have the recognition of their identity, but above all their existence (İlter, 2015:33). The fact of residing in an unrecognized State has created an urgency in the Turkish Cypriot community to say: “We are here, we exist” (İlter, 2015:24), a slogan that can often be read in the demonstrations that take place in North Cyprus.

For this reason, the last aspect analysed concerning the possible disappearance of Turkish Cypriots is the Citizenship Law of the Republic of Cyprus, in particular, the Civil Registry Law of 2002 and the Council of Minister decision of 2007, concerning children of mixed marriages. While the previous chapter exposed how the Turkish strategy aims at the cultural assimilation of Turkish Cypriots, in this other case we see another kind of denial of Turkish Cypriot identity, dictated more by the prejudice that still exists among Greek Cypriots against Turkish immigrants and Turkish Cypriots themselves. The issue of the Citizenship Law is an extremely topical subject that is causing debate on the island and beyond, as will be shown in the course of the chapter through the exposition of the petition submitted to the European Union and the discussion that took place in the 2019 and 2024 UPR. The protests are putting pressure on the Cypriot government to change a decision made at a time when relations between Greek and Turkish Cypriots were very tense.

The chapter will analyse this law by first examining the functioning of citizenship in the period preceding the division of Cyprus, and then by considering the subsequent changes that occurred following the military occupation of 1974. Bearing in mind that the issue of citizenship concerns children of mixed marriages, a mention will also be made of how these kinds of unions were administered before the occupation. Finally, it will look in detail at the consequences this law is having on the Turkish Cypriot community and why it can be considered one of the factors that is causing their decline. The innovative aspect in considering the Citizenship Law as one of the possible causes of the future disappearance of Turkish Cypriots lies precisely in the fact that it is often treated only under the lens of injustice and violation of the principle of non-discrimination, and not as a factor which, together with Turkification, constitutes a danger to the existence of the Turkish Cypriot community. The objective is to demonstrate how the combined impact of these two factors is accelerating the process of Turkish Cypriot decline.

4.2. The Citizenship Law of the Republic of Cyprus before the occupation

4.2.1. The citizenship during the colonial period

The fact of having been part of so many empires and kingdoms made the issue of Cypriot citizenship change and adapt to the power in place. During Ottoman rule, Cypriot citizenship was based on the *millet* system, through which the two communities were identified according to their religious affiliation. With the cession of Cyprus to the British, began a process of ethnicization of citizenship that would last even after independence. During the colonial period, Cypriots were defined by law as “Natives of the colony”, yet they were divided precisely according to their ethnicity (Trimikliniotis, 2009:391). This process of modification of the *millet* system represented an important change, as identification with religion had been an integral part of Cypriot identity for many years. At this time, the question of mixed marriages was an overly complex issue that the British colonists tried to regulate in numerous ways. This was because, during British rule, traditional Ottoman family law remained in force, which left marriage procedures in the hands of the religious communities. Civil marriage, legal in Great Britain, had not been introduced in Cyprus. This meant that Orthodox and Muslims

could not marry each other and de facto mixed marriages between them were forbidden (Asmussen, 2010:82). However, there have been cases of marriages between Cypriots and British. Initially, if the woman was a Cypriot, she acquired her husband's nationality, but in 1948, gender equality in citizenship was introduced, which ensured that the woman could keep her nationality of origin (Emilianides, 1953:624). The children of these marriages automatically obtained their father's nationality. A different case were marriages between Turkish and Greek Cypriots. As mentioned above, due to the religious division, these were uncommon, but there were a few cases. One particular example was a marriage request in 1935 made in Athens under the Foreign Marriage Act of 1892, by M. Salahi, a Turkish Cypriot and his partner, a Greek Cypriot teacher, which was in fact the first ever case within the colony (Asmussen, 2010:82). This created perplexity among the colonial authorities, precisely because of the illegality of the request from a religious point of view. However, the marriage was celebrated at the "Registry Office" in England, but its legality remained doubtful (Asmussen, 2010:82). Marriages between Greeks and Greek Cypriots and between Turks and Turkish Cypriots, on the other hand, were not considered a problem, precisely because at the time, unlike today, they were considered ethnically and religiously equal. In conclusion, the Citizenship Law was simply based on the ethnicity of Cypriots, who were in any case considered citizens of the colony.

4.2.2. Cypriot citizenship from 1960 to 1974

With independence in 1960 and the birth of the new Cypriot nation, one of the issues to be resolved was that of citizenship. The transition from a colony to an independent State, and in particular the presence of the two Cypriot ethnic communities on the island, created several dilemmas on how to represent the two of them equally, as explained in the historical chapter. The issue of citizenship in this period was characterized by the fact that, compared to the post-divisional time, here there was a united Cyprus and a single population. Mixed marriages were events that occurred in mixed villages, such as the one in Pyla, but still remained an extraordinary and hidden event due to the persistent prohibition of marriage between Orthodox and Muslims.

The 1960 Agreement provided transitional measures for the acquisition of citizenship, reminiscent of those of the colonial period. In fact, the ethnic aspect remained, making the two Cypriot communities choose whether to identify themselves as Greek or Turkish Cypriots. The Constitution stipulated that: “Any matter relating to citizenship shall be governed by the provisions of Annex D to the Treaty of Establishment” (Constitution of the RoC, 1960). This Annex contains all the details concerning the obtaining of RoC citizenship, with particular reference also to the former British settlers now established on the island. Indeed, another problem that the new Cypriot State had to solve concerned the large number of British citizens who had been settled in Cyprus for generations. Annex D, in turn, granted citizenship to individuals who had obtained British subject status through colonial legislation or who were born on the island after 1914, provided that they had resided in Cyprus for at least five years immediately before the Treaty of Establishment (Treaty of Establishment, Annex D, 1960). Article 2 of the Constitution indicated language, cultural traditions and religion as criteria for membership of one or the other community, dividing the two communities according to whether they belonged to Greek or Turkish culture; the fact that this article has not been amended over time would show how a purely Cypriot identity has not yet been created, at least from a legal point of view, but references to Greece and Turkey still remain (Constitution of the RoC, 1960). Returning to the above-mentioned article, this did not provide for non-participation; citizens were free to choose their community, but automatically switched to the other if they renounced. Moreover, minority groups that did not meet the criteria of the Constitution had to collectively choose affiliation to one of the two communities, and in general, these chose to belong to the Greek Cypriot one (Kyriakou & Skoutaris, 2016:462). For the majority of the Cypriots, fulfilling all three criteria was the norm. The Greek segment of the population spoke Greek, adhered to the Greek Orthodox religion and shared Greek cultural traditions. The same was true for the Turkish segment of the population, which was predominantly Muslim, spoke Turkish and participated in Turkish cultural practices. Unlike the classical liberal tradition, which grants citizenship only on the basis of the relationship between the State and the individual and disregards other attributes, the Cypriot paradigm was based on an ethnically mediated citizenship (Kyriakou & Skoutaris, 2016:462). In other words, to be a citizen of the Republic, an individual had to prove that he or she possessed at least one

characteristic that placed him or her within an ethnic community. Only through this kind of participation could an individual be considered a citizen. In essence, subjects were required to adopt a specifically delineated and predetermined identity, which placed them in a separate and competing group of people (Kyriakou & Skoutaris, 2016:462). Thus, despite the island's independence, divisions also existed through citizenship, which indeed made all Cypriots as citizens of RoC, but still recognized their cultural and ethnic differences. While this can be seen as an acknowledgment of the peculiarities of the two Cypriot populations it did not create a true Cypriot people. Consequently, the nationalist discourse that was prevalent in both communities before independence was officially endorsed and confirmed in the new legal system. In this way, the division between communities took on a legal value in the new Constitution and was not merely symbolic, moreover, it would deepen in the years following the independence.

The result was the outbreak in 1963 of intercommunal violence that disrupted the order of the Cypriot State. The violence and the subsequent withdrawal of Turkish Cypriots from the government did not allow for the creation of a true inter-communal or trans-communal citizenship (Trimikliniotis, 2009:392). Also aggravating the situation was the physical division between the two communities, with Turkish Cypriots isolated in enclaves for fear of Greek Cypriot repression. However, by virtue of the law of necessity, the functions of the State continued and so did the granting of citizenship (Trimikliniotis, 2015:4). Despite internal divisions, Cyprus was still a unified State on paper, but as it turned out it would be for a short time yet. The intercommunal violence also resulted in the rare mixed marriages between the two communities no longer occurring, although some testimonies would seem to prove the opposite (Asmussen, 2010:83). As can be seen in the period before the division, the issue of citizenship still does not tie in with mixed marriages, showing how it is a current issue rooted precisely in the territorial division of Cyprus.

Citizenship at this time in the history of Cyprus was a delicate topic. Despite the attempt to create a State in which Turkish and Greek Cypriots were represented equally, the divisions that had already been created under the British, legitimized by the same Citizenship Law that still saw Cypriots as two quite different entities and cultures, later

led to the aforementioned violence. Until 1974, the Citizenship Law was not changed, but the occupation worsened an already difficult situation.

4.3. The Citizenship Law of the Republic of Cyprus after the Occupation

4.3.1. The question of citizenship in the period immediately after the division

As with the independence of Cyprus in 1960, the Turkish occupation and subsequent definitive division of the island created a rupture in the organization of the State and its functions. The new situation also called for a new management of powers and institutions, and in all this, the question of citizenship became more important than ever. The main issue was how to consider, from the point of view of nationality, children born to Turkish Cypriots in the occupied territories. Despite the end of territorial integrity, it was decided to maintain the law in force before the partition, with some amendments relating to the events of '74 (Trimikliniotis, 2015:5). This meant that Turkish Cypriots and their children maintained the citizenship of the Republic of Cyprus. Basically, as before, if only one parent had Cypriot citizenship the child also acquired it automatically. However, the issue was not so simple, particularly during the years immediately following the occupation and before the creation of the TRNC. This was due to the deep divisions between the Greek Cypriot government and the Turkish Cypriot one, but especially the Turkish authorities. As proof of this, the occupying forces initially denied Turkish Cypriots the crossing of the border and access to RoC institutions (Trimikliniotis, 2015:5). It is fair to mention that before 2003 there were no checkpoints to cross the border, and the two communities were effectively isolated. A new change came with the official birth in 1983 of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Now Turkish Cypriots could decide to obtain citizenship of the self-proclaimed new Cypriot State. In the introduction to this chapter, it was mentioned that citizenship is an important part of Turkish Cypriot identity. With the establishment of the TRNC, they found themselves able to choose between three different citizenships: that of the Republic of Cyprus, that of the TRNC and that of Turkey. Choosing between these three had a symbolic value and was a way of identifying with the State in which one saw him/herself most represented.

The TRNC Constitution largely reproduces that of the Republic of Cyprus, providing for citizenship on an ethnic-religious basis (Trimikliniotis, 2015:5). As mentioned in the previous chapter, this citizenship has absolutely no value, as it is recognized exclusively by Turkey. Only Turkish immigrants found it convenient to apply for TRNC citizenship, as they could not obtain RoC one at all. Consequently, to increase the number of Turks on the island as discussed above, the process of obtaining citizenship was made relatively simple. On the other side, Turkish Cypriots preferred to keep their RoC citizenship or apply for the Turkish one. Analysing the issue in light of the current situation, the different approach of Turkish Cypriots towards Ankara is remarkable. Applying for Turkish citizenship would be unthinkable for a Turkish Cypriot today, especially after Cyprus entered into the European Union and the tensions between Turkey and the Western States. As seen in the previous chapter, the relationship between Turkish Cypriots and Turkey is much less close than it was in 1974 (Bryant & Yakinthou, 2017:16). The Turkish Cypriot identity has changed, showing itself much closer to RoC and Europe than Anatolia. This is why identifying oneself as Turkish through applying for citizenship is a much less popular choice than it once was. Returning to the post-founding period of the TRNC, the Turkish Cypriot government initially strongly encouraged people to apply for citizenship of the new State, mainly because of its symbolic role. Choosing to be a national of the TRNC meant giving it legitimacy and, at a time when confrontation with the RoC was strong, this was an important tool for the Turkish Cypriot authorities (Trimikliniotis, 2015:5). In a divided and conflicted nation like Cyprus, home to two ethnic communities, the choice was a real political act. This is why, as was pointed out previously, the TRNC government initially tried to oppose the Turkish Cypriots' acquisition of RoC citizenship. After all, what legitimacy can a State have if the citizens themselves refuse to be part of it? And this the TRNC government was well aware of.

With the entry of the Republic of Cyprus into the European Union, the RoC citizenship became even more appealing to Turkish Cypriots. This was because, with the accession of Cyprus into the EU, it was decided that Turkish Cypriots should also be considered European citizens, even if they resided in an occupied territory (European Commission, 2004). Now RoC citizenship guaranteed many more rights than Turkish one. The possibility to study in an EU country without having to pay expensive fees, to work and

to travel freely, without being considered as third-country nationals became aspects that Turkish Cypriots did not want to give up, especially because of the TRNC's difficult economic situation due to the extreme dependence on Turkey that it was forced into. Not surprisingly, among the most frequently used arguments by children of mixed marriages who want to obtain RoC citizenship is precisely that they want to be considered EU citizens. Initially, in the same way as after the creation of the TRNC, the Turkish Cypriot authorities tried to dissuade Turkish Cypriots from obtaining RoC citizenship but seeing that the number of applications was increasing instead of decreasing, it gave in (Trimikliniotis, 2015:5). Not least because with the opening of the Green Line in 2003, blocking the passage of Turkish Cypriots had become even more difficult. It is in these circumstances that we find the Civil Registration Act.

4.3.2. The new Civil Registration Act of 2002

The real controversial aspect of the division, and the origin of the Citizenship Law problem, was the huge influx of Turkish immigrants to the North. For the Greek Cypriots, these represented proof of how Turkey was carrying out demographic engineering policies on the island, in fact representing a risk to the stability of the island and evidence of the attempted colonization of the North. Hence the strong hostility of Greek Cypriots towards Turkish immigrants. While the rancour of the Greek Cypriots would seem understandable, the response of the RoC government to the arrival of the Turkish settlers was nevertheless controversial.

In 2002, the new Civil Registration Act came into force, a law that was amended four times after its publication. The amendments made concerned the following aspects: the extension from 3 months to 4 months of the period during which a person of Cypriot nationality who is within the Republic is obliged to register in the population registry; a reduction of the penalty for non-registration from €5.000 to €2.500; some lexical clarifications on the provision providing for the automatic acquisition of Cypriot nationality at birth; and finally, the introduction of the possibility of revoking Cypriot nationality for those who have acquired it by naturalisation or by registration as citizens of the Republic (Kyprianou, 2017).

The part concerning children of mixed marriages is found in Article 109(1) which states:

“Any person born in Cyprus on or after 16 August 1960 is a citizen of the Republic, if at the time of his birth, either of his parents was a citizen, or if his parents were not alive at the time of his birth, either of them would have been entitled to become a citizen of the Republic had he or she not passed away: provided that the provisions of this subsection do not apply in cases whereby the entrance or stay in the Republic of either parent of that person was illegal, unless the Council of Ministers decides otherwise” (Civil Registry Law, 2002).

With this decision, all people who arrived after 1974 on the island from the North are considered to be connected to the events of the invasion. Entry from the North is considered illegal because all ports in the TRNC are considered unlawful under international law (Movement for Resolution of Mixed Marriage Problem, 2023). These included not only maritime transport but also air transport, due to the presence of Ercan airport, near North Nicosia, which provides connections exclusively with Turkey. With this law, it was decided that applications for citizenship by the children of these people had to be examined by the Council of Ministers. Understandably, having entered through illegal ports, Turkish immigrants cannot receive RoC citizenship. However, the problem arises when analysing the demographics of Northern Cyprus, particularly following the strong incentive for Turkish immigration to the island, outlined in the previous chapter. As mentioned earlier the actual population of North Cyprus is unknown but the data seems to show that Turks outnumber Turkish Cypriots. This, in addition to undermining the survival of the indigenous population, has resulted in a high number of marriages between Turkish Cypriots and Turks and the children born from these marriages. That is why the law directly affects these children, punishing Turkish Cypriots more than Turkish immigrants.

Under this new law, the children of mixed marriages could indeed apply to become citizens of the RoC, but each application had to be submitted to the Council of Ministers for judgment. At this stage, we do not yet speak of the “Problem of mixed marriages”,

because it was still possible for the children of these couples to receive citizenship. The problem arose in 2007 when the Greek Cypriot government changed the law again.

4.3.3. The 2007 Council of Ministers' decision

In 2007, Cyprus was already experiencing the consequences of the failure of the Annan Plan and the accession of the Republic of Cyprus to the European Union. The island was at an impasse in the negotiations, which would only be resumed in 2015. In addition, the RoC president at the time, Tassos Papadopoulos, who had already strongly opposed the Annan plan, was known for not compromising with the Turkish Cypriots (Smith, 2009). The only truly revolutionary event was in 2003, with the opening of checkpoints and the possibility of crossing the border. The decision to allow movement between North and South has increased the Turkish Cypriot presence in the RoC. It is in this context that we find the new decision of the RoC's Council of Ministers. In February 2007, the latter decided as follows:

“Only the citizenship approval of the following persons will be made by the Council of Ministers: 1. Children born on or before 20 July 1974; 2. Children whose mother or father is not a Turkish citizen but a citizen of another country (The child can acquire citizenship if he/she is an EU citizen or a citizen of a different country where the reciprocity principle applies); 3. Children of people whose parents were married abroad or in Cyprus before 20 July 1974; 4. Children born from the relationship of a Turkish Cypriot father or mother with a Turkish citizen who had nothing to do with the 1974 events; 5. Children whose parents live in the mixed village of Pyla” (Movement for Resolution of Mixed Marriage Problem, 2023:13).

This decision has led to the stalling of evaluations of citizenship applications of all those children who do not fit the criteria listed above. As mentioned earlier, this choice was taken in particular years. In the early 2000s, the trauma of the occupation was still very much felt among Greek Cypriots, particularly among those who lost their properties due to the events of 1974. In the same years, Turkish immigration to the island was very significant. These factors led to various clashes between the RoC and TRNC governments, increasing the hostility between the two communities and in particular between Greek Cypriots and Turkey. As outlined concerning the realistic

group conflict theories of prejudice and victimization, there was a strong prejudice on the part of the Greek Cypriots against the Turkish Cypriots at this time, who saw them as a group totally opposed to their way of life and ideals.

Whereas before, children of mixed marriages still had the possibility to obtain citizenship, with this new decision of the Council of Ministers all applications were blocked, a measure that could be seen as punitive. The result was thus the creation of a legal vacuum, which caused a series of controversies that will be discussed in the next section. This law has not been changed since 2007, but for reasons that will be explained later, it seems that the government is for the first time re-evaluating its choices.

The most interesting aspect of this situation is the fact that a decision made 17 years ago is only now creating a stir, showing how Turkish Cypriot identity and Turkish-Greek Cypriot relations have changed since 2007. Moreover, the spread of social media has helped to reopen the debate on the Citizenship Law and mixed marriages.

The next paragraph will go into detail on why the decision taken in 2007 can be considered, together with the Turkish strategy outlined in the previous chapter, as one of the factors undermining the existence of Turkish Cypriots.

4.4. The consequences of the current Citizenship Law on the Turkish Cypriot community

As seen in these two descriptive paragraphs over time, citizenship has changed and even adapted according to the identity of Cypriots. From being a purely religious issue, it changed to being an ethnic one, leading the two communities to choose which culture to identify with: Greek or Turkish. With independence and the subsequent partition of the island, citizenship also became a weapon in the hands of the Greek Cypriot government, which, driven by the urgency to defend itself from the risk of Turkish colonization, used it against the children of the increasingly frequent Turkish and Turkish Cypriot couples. In all this, the spread of Cypriotism and the new Cypriot identity sees more and more Turkish Cypriots wanting to identify with the RoC thus making the question of citizenship an identity problem. Understanding how Cypriot citizenship works and the

value given to it by the two communities is crucial to be able to understand the weight that the decision taken by the RoC government has on the Cypriot population and on the Turkish Cypriot segment in particular.

After this comprehensive overview, we can now go into detail about the consequences of the 2007 amendment of the Civil Registration Act of 2002. As stated in the previous paragraph, the Republic of Cyprus argues that the considerable number of Turkish settlers on the island would not only change the demographic structure of Cyprus but would create constant tension between the two Cypriot communities and further threaten the stability and security of the Republic, undermining any possibility of reunification (Altunkaya, 2023). Therein lies the decision not to grant citizenship to children of mixed marriages, i.e. children born mainly to couples composed of Turks and Turkish Cypriots. This has created situations that can be described as paradoxical, where a child born in Turkey to a Turkish parent and a Turkish Cypriot automatically obtains RoC citizenship, even without ever having set foot on the island, while one born and raised in Northern Cyprus, but with a parent who entered illegally, is not considered Cypriot (Trimikliniotis, 2015:8). This has therefore resulted in a large number of Turkish Cypriots who are considered by law to be totally alien to the island.

Unfortunately, the exact number of people in this situation is unclear, due to their invisible status and lack of census in the North. However, the various organizations dealing with the problem have managed to identify at least 10.000, but the number could be much higher (Charalambidou, 2023), so much so that they may even reach 30.000 (Agapiou, 2023). However, even this number could be lower than the real one. In fact, if one takes into account the extremely high presence of Turkish immigrants on the island, mixed marriages, but also simply mixed couples, could be considerably more common than we think and, consequently, the children born to these couples could be much more numerous than estimated. Additionally, some individuals may not have applied for citizenship and thus have not been counted in the total number of applicants.

The children of such marriages usually obtain the citizenship of the non-Cypriot parent, in most cases the Turkish one. This has led many mixed couples to marry and give birth directly in Turkey so that their children can quickly obtain citizenship. However, this

has the consequence that many women are forced to travel towards the end of their pregnancy to Turkey, where many do not have a doctor or even someone they know, leading them to suffer health problems due to stress and travel shortly before their due date (Human Rights Platform, 2024:7). In their homeland the only Cypriot citizenship they can have according to the law is that of the TRNC, but as repeated on several occasions this has no value internationally. Therefore, these people born and raised in Cyprus, with a Turkish Cypriot parent, Turkish Cypriot grandparents, whose only reality they know is that of Cyprus, are considered Turkish or otherwise foreign.

Considering the issues outlined in the previous chapter together with the elements above, it is reasonable to conclude that this situation is accelerating the decline of Turkish Cypriots. A strong Turkish presence on the island, the cultural assimilation of Turkish Cypriots residing in the TRNC, plus the denial of citizenship rights and the consequent consideration of these individuals as Turks and not Turkish Cypriots create the mix of factors that are going to affect the survival of this community. This situation could not fail to have legal consequences and could not fail to provoke international and national criticism. Moreover, another interesting aspect is the fact that the debate has only recently become heated. In fact, the issue of citizenship dates back 17 years, but it is still considered one of the most topical problems in Cyprus. This may be due to the whole issue of identity and Cypriotism described above. It is no coincidence that this problem mainly affects the younger generation, precisely those who have the most developed Cypriot sentiment. The will to become citizens of the RoC is in fact dictated by the strong link these generations have with Cyprus. In particular, the children of mixed marriages, who find it difficult to leave their homeland due to their situation, have developed a strong sense of belonging to the island, which is, however, not legally recognized.

As was underlined previously, RoC citizenship gives access to many rights including that of European citizens. Hence the possibility for Turkish Cypriots to participate in European projects, to travel between member States without a passport, and most importantly to study and work in the EU without having to apply for expensive visas and various permits. As a result, all Turkish Cypriots who do not have such citizenship do not enjoy these rights, as they are considered either Turkish citizens or citizens of the

TRNC and therefore non-European, being de facto excluded from all the rights elected above. These people have to pay very high fees if they want to study at a European university, as they are considered international students (Doğan, 2024). This is a great limitation considering that many families may not have the financial possibilities to bear such costs. This situation pushed many Turkish Cypriots to study in Turkey, as many universities in the TRNC are not recognized.²⁵ Despite the similarities between Turks and Turkish Cypriots, many testimonies of young Cypriot students in Turkey have shown how Turks see them as foreigners, in particular because of the differences between the Turkish Cypriot dialect and standard Turkish, but also because of the cultural distinctions that divide the two populations, leading Turkish Cypriots to have integration problems (Haider, 2024). The consequence is an identity crisis in the children of mixed marriages, who on the one hand are legally not recognized as Cypriots and on the other one are viewed with suspicion by the Turks themselves. Analysing the consequences at the national level, it turns out that they have problems in crossing the checkpoints, remaining usually confined to the TRNC and increasing the division with Greek Cypriots. This is because Turks who entered from the North are categorically forbidden to cross the border and consequently their children, having Turkish citizenship, also find it difficult to cross. It is easy to describe this law as discriminatory, creating first and second-class Cypriots just because one of their parents came to the Northern part of the island after 1974.

As mentioned above, much of the data and information in this regard comes from rather recent sources that are unlikely to date before 2021. However, already in 2019, the issue was raised by some States during the Universal Periodic Review of Cyprus.²⁶ UPR recommendations are perhaps one of the most important mechanisms within the Human Rights Council. They help to give visibility to human rights and push the evaluated States to amend their national laws to comply with the recommendations (UPR Info, 2023). In this case, the fact that recommendations were made regarding the RoC's

²⁵ The issue of universities is another hot topic in Cyprus. Initially, these were recognized exclusively by Turkey, thus excluding them from all international academic exchange and cooperation programs. However, after long battles by some universities in the North, such as the Eastern Mediterranean University, which claimed the Right to Education, some were eventually recognized internationally.

²⁶ The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a mechanism of the Human Rights Council that requires every UN Member State to undergo a peer review of its human rights record every 4.5 years (Human Rights Council).

Citizenship Law gave visibility to the issue, which otherwise would have remained exclusively domestic, showing that the international community is actually interested in solving the problem. In particular, the Netherlands had recommended: “Ensure the non-discriminatory application of the law regulating Cypriot nationality, so as to guarantee equal access to fundamental rights for all people on its territory, and to prevent statelessness by acceding to the Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons, the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and the European Convention on Nationality” (UPR of Cyprus, 2019:29). The United States also made a similar recommendation stating: “Process citizenship applications for children of mixed Turkish Cypriot and Turkish parents within a reasonable time frame” (UPR of Cyprus, 2019:33), followed by Great Britain: “Review and amend relevant legal provisions, guaranteeing the right of all persons who have one Cypriot parent to obtain Cypriot nationality, on an equal basis with others, irrespective of the other parent’s ethnicity, gender, place of residence or means of entering the country” (UPR of Cyprus, 2019:33). In all three cases, the RoC had taken note of the recommendations, but did not support them. This is because until recently it was taboo to talk about such an issue. After the 2019 UPR, according to the National Human Rights Practice Reports 2022: Cyprus, prepared by the U.S. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, the Ombudsperson continued to receive complaints that the government delayed or denied citizenship approval to children of Turkish Cypriots married to Turkish citizens and residing in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, 2022:23). It also reported that the government has made no progress in implementing previous recommendations to ensure that such applications are processed within a reasonable time and that applicants are promptly informed in writing when their application does not meet the criteria (Bureau of democracy, human rights, and labour, 2022:23). At the international level, the issue was also raised in the Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the question of human rights in Cyprus. In the report, presented during the 55th session of the Human Rights Council, it was reported that the Human Rights Committee is concerned about the denial of citizenship to Turkish Cypriots residing in the North, recommending that the State evaluates applications for citizenship without discrimination and in a transparent manner (Human Rights Council, 2024:6). On 30 April 2024 Cyprus was again subjected

to the UPR. Also at this session, some recommendations were made regarding the right to citizenship. The countries that intervened in this regard were Switzerland, Ireland, Mexico and Gambia, who urged Cyprus to grant citizenship without discrimination, in particular without taking into account the nationality of the parents (Human Rights Council, 2024). In addition, Germany lauded the Cypriot government's determination to revise the Citizenship Law (Human Rights Council, 2024:6). This is because, as will be explained later, the RoC government recently made a public commitment to change this law.

The questions that the law has raised revolve mainly around whether it respects the right of citizenship and whether those affected by this amendment can be considered stateless. Regarding the latter point, after the appeal of 16 Turkish Cypriots, children of mixed marriages to the Supreme Court, the latter ruled that they cannot be considered stateless, as they hold Turkish citizenship (Prakas, 2024). Even concerning the violation of the right to citizenship or the right to movement and education, in reality, for the same reason as stated above, Turkish Cypriots have these rights precisely because on paper they are Turks. They do not have the advantages that Europeans enjoy, but neither are they denied the above-mentioned rights. The issue of citizenship is seen by NGOs as more of a humanitarian than a human rights issue (Movement of Resolution of Mixed Marriage Problems, 2023:5). The discriminating factor lies in making children pay for the choices made by their parents. No matter how “illegal” one is considered to be, children should be able to enjoy the rights they are entitled to, as they are not guilty of their parents' choices.

In 2018, the issue of children of mixed marriages was brought before the Supreme Court by the trade unions KTÖS, KTOEÖS and DAÜ-SEN, and the decision was expected at the end of 2023 but is currently not yet published. In the event of a negative decision, the trade unions said they would take the case to the European Court of Human Rights (Damaskinos, 2022). If this happens, it would be the first time the case has been brought before the court (Movement for Resolution of Mixed Marriage Problem, 2023).

The issue created various tensions, leading to protests such as those organized by the group “Uncredentialeds”, which marched to demand recognition of Cypriot citizenship for the children of mixed marriages, accusing the RoC government of denying children's rights (Agapiou, 2023). Moreover, the issue was brought before the European Union as a petition signed by as many as 675 people. The summary of the petition is as follows:

“The petitioners complain that the Republic of Cyprus does not grant citizenship to the spouses and children of Cypriot citizens married with people from some third countries. They claim that such an application of citizenship law not only leads to discrimination among EU citizens regarding the rights derived from EU citizenship, but it is also a serious violation of human rights. They explain that, by not granting citizenship, the Republic of Cyprus discriminates in the implementation of its own laws and prevents the children and spouses from becoming EU citizens, thus depriving them of the right to free movement, the right to travel, the right to work and the right to education in the EU. They consider that this situation amounts to a violation of Articles 2, 9 and 10 of the Treaty on European Union and of the Race Equality Directive (Directive 2000/43/EC). Finally, they stress that this is in contradiction with Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which prohibits discrimination, and the additional protocol numbered 12” (European Parliament, 2023).

The RoC had already been condemned by the court in 2004 for violating ECHR Article 14, in the *Aziz v. Cyprus* case, a sentence that however did not concern the right to citizenship but the right to vote. In fact, the applicant brought the RoC before the court because the latter did not allow Turkish Cypriots to vote in parliamentary elections (ECtHR, 2004).

The European Union responded to this petition by stating that citizenship is regulated at the national level, but must still comply with EU law, including the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. However, the Court of Justice of the EU has not yet ruled on the specific limits of EU law on the acquisition of nationality (European Parliament, 2023).

The strong activism in recent years has prompted the RoC government to mobilize to change the situation. In particular, the election in 2023 of the new president of the

Republic of Cyprus, Nikos Christodoulides, and his more open attitude towards Turkish Cypriots, resulted in the approval in January 2024 of the so-called “14 points” aimed at improving the lives of Turkish Cypriots. These measures can be listed as follows:

“1. Examination of all pending applications for the granting of Cypriot citizenship in the framework of the decision by the Council of Ministers of February 2007; 2. The payment of widow pensions to entitled beneficiaries; 3. Access to clinical services of the Cyprus Institute of Neurology and Genetics; 4. Provision of emergency and urgent pharmaceutical needs; 5. Expansion of the list of goods in the framework of the Green Line Regulation with the addition of six specific products; 6. Access to human resources programmes in the framework of the action plan for the European Year of Skills; 7. Access to vocational programmes by the Productivity Centre, as well as to training seminars on issues relating to the EU acquis; 8. The right to acquire a Youth Culture Card upon the completion of 18 years of age; 9. Increase of staffing at the checkpoints; 10. Widening of the crossing point at Agios Dometio; 11. Measures for the rapid crossing of students at the Ledra Palace checkpoint; 12. Hiring of staff with knowledge of the Turkish language at the Nicosia Citizen Service Centre; 13. Safeguarding the continuation of the smooth operation of the Mia Milia water waste unit; 14. Facilitation for access to Muslim monuments in the government-controlled areas” (Financial Mirror, 2024).

These measures were contested by President Tatar, who accused the RoC administration of alienating Turkish Cypriots from the TRNC and putting them under the Greek Cypriot administration (Clever, 2023). This is why these points were not supported by the Turkish Cypriot government. The point that interests us most in this case is the first one, the one that guarantees the examination of pending citizenship applications. As already mentioned, these have not been examined since 2007, leaving thousands of people in a sort of limbo. Initially, the news of these measures was a rumour, but the Minister of Transport himself later confirmed it (Clever, 2024), and as proof of this, the first concrete act was the granting of citizenship to 14 Turkish Cypriots from mixed marriages at the beginning of March (Teterin, 2024). This major decision is seen as the first step towards a possible solution to the problem, demonstrating how the protest against the Citizenship Law and the activism done by NGOs founded to solve the mixed

marriage problem and to give it visibility, is working. The importance of the activism of Turkish Cypriots will also be highlighted in the following chapter. However, paradoxically in the same month, a Turkish Cypriot with a Turkish father was denied the request. This would show that although there are reasons to be positive the road to a final resolution of the problem is still long and complex.

Activism, however, is also costing the children of mixed marriages a high price. Their demand to be recognized as Cypriots and not as Turks has led them to be exposed to attacks by Turkish extremists. Because of their struggle to obtain Cypriot citizenship, they are seen as traitors or otherwise friends of the Greeks. An example of this was an event a few months ago, in which a young activist with a Turkish Cypriot mother and father born in the TRNC but to a Turkish mother who settled in the North after 1974, gave an interview in which she declared that Cyprus is her home and that she feels completely Cypriot and European, which is why she struggles to obtain citizenship of the Republic of Cyprus, as she would be entitled to on the basis of *ius sanguinis*²⁷ (Pompei, 2023). Following this statement, the comments from the Turks were quite violent, such as “You are a Greek bastard,” “Ungrateful”, “A traitor”, “British seed” and other names (Aygin, 2024). This showed the conflict that still exists between Greeks and Turks, and how Turkish Cypriots are not free to identify themselves as Cypriots. For many Turks, they are part of the great Turkish nation and nothing else, but this clashes with the reality exposed above where many Cypriots who emigrated to Turkey were actually seen as foreigners. However, the violent reactions by Turkish extremists are not the only consequences of the activism of Turkish Cypriots. What they risk is being denied entry into Turkey, given the repressive behaviour of the Ankara government towards Turkish Cypriot journalists and politicians who speak out against Turkey (Haider, 2024). The consequence of this risk would be to isolate even more Turkish Cypriot children of mixed marriages, who would really find themselves as "stateless".

If in the North, children of mixed marriages are attacked by Turkey, in the South they find other enemies. The first example is the Cypriot Social Democratic Party EDEK, which despite its centre-left positioning, has Greek nationalist elements and had already

²⁷ The determination of a person's nationality based on the nationality of his or her parents (or a particular parent or parents) at the time of his or her birth (European Commission).

opposed the Annan plan in the past (Christonphorou, 2020). It is therefore no coincidence that as soon as the RoC government showed willingness to examine citizenship applications, the first to lash out against it were precisely the militants of this party. In the course of the discussion on the 14 points mentioned above, EDEK representatives allegedly stated that children of mixed marriages: “Are the product of an illegality that began with the Turkish invasion and was implemented with the continued occupation of part of the territory of the RoC by Turkey, during which the settlement of the occupied territories was imposed” (Philenews, 2024). In the Cypriot political sphere, EDEK is not the only party to oppose the children of mixed marriages. Another example is ELAM, the extreme right-wing party, historically not only against Turks but also against Turkish Cypriots, who are considered inferior to Greek Cypriots and even non-Cypriots (Katsourides, 2013:570). After all, ELAM militants are pro-enosis and their main goal is to reunify Cyprus under the Greek flag, and in this plan the Turkish Cypriots are not considered. Other testimonies by children of mixed marriages showed some discriminatory practices by RoC officials, which allegedly created bureaucratic problems and prevented their freedom of movement throughout the island (Human Rights Platform, 2024:7). Some of the children of mixed marriages who were adults were asked to pass through checkpoints in the presence of their Cypriot parents or were told that their Cypriot parents would have to prove that they were indeed their parents (Human Rights Platform, 2024:7). Some individuals also indicated that the officer's way of communicating was disrespectful towards them. Some were even told by the officers that they were not “Cypriots” and that if they really were, they would have to show their RoC identity card (Human Rights Platform, 2024:7).

The resentment still held by some members of the Greek Cypriot community represents well the realistic group conflict theories of prejudice and victimization set out in the first chapter. The reason behind the reactions of the two parties and the officials on the border is the traumatic memory of the occupation that led them to see both the Turkish Cypriots and the Turks as enemies of the Republic and accomplices of the situation Cyprus currently finds itself in. The children of the Turks and Turkish Cypriots represent for some Greek Cypriots living proof of how Turkey is colonising their territory. This hostility was concretely translated into a decision by the Council of Ministers in 2007, which legally sanctioned the alienation of these children from the

Cypriot population. The current discriminatory behaviour towards not only the children of mixed marriages but also towards Turkish Cypriots and Turks is what remains of the prejudice that Greek Cypriots have had towards these people for a long time.

Amid all these forces trying to deny the identity of children of mixed marriages in all ways, however, we must analyse what reality tells us. These children cannot but be considered Cypriots, since one parent is Turkish Cypriot and some situations have shown that often the Turkish part would not come from a parent but from a grandparent, such as the case of the activist mentioned above. If a parallel can be drawn, a child with an Italian parent, born and raised in Italy is considered legally Italian. Even more so, all these cases of denied citizenship concern people who have never known any other reality than that of Cyprus, and who from a legal point of view have not committed any crime to be denied Cypriot citizenship. From a numerical point of view, since neither the exact number of the TRNC population nor that of the children of mixed marriages is known, on the basis of approximations made from the numbers deduced by the various organizations, it can be said that between 7% and 10% of the TRNC population is in this situation. This would lead on the one hand to a reduction in the number of Turkish Cypriots and on the other hand to an increase in the number of Turks and other nationalities, because in a possible census these people would be counted on the basis of citizenship of the non-Turkish Cypriot parent. This would distort the real composition of the Cypriot community. A census would be needed to be able to make precise estimates and to see the impact on the Turkish Cypriot population.

As has been explained in the course of this paragraph, the decision taken by the Council of Ministers in 2007 has had several consequences in the lives of Turkish Cypriots born of mixed marriages, causing concern not only among the Turkish Cypriot community but also among the international community. As repeatedly stated, this represents a direct attack on the identity of a part of the Turkish Cypriots, who, guilty of being born of a parent who entered Cyprus illegally after 1974, are considered a product of illegality and part of the Turkish population. The decline of the Turkish Cypriot community also passes through this denial of their identity by the RoC authorities, which combined with the cultural assimilation of Turkey and the alignment of the TRNC with Ankara, is the mix that in the long run could threaten the existence of the

Turkish Cypriots. However, this did not stop them from mobilizing to push the RoC government to change this situation that has been going on for too long.

4.5. Conclusion to the chapter

The Greek and Turkish Cypriots have developed a strong bond with Cypriot citizenship, particularly with the development of Cypriotism in recent years. The Turkish Cypriots residing in the occupied territories, due to their situation, feel this attachment even stronger. As it turns out, this feeling has not always been the same over time but has been changing along with the Cypriots themselves. If citizenship on the one hand is seen as a form of recognition of Cypriot identity, as well as a way to access a series of rights, on the other, it is seen as a weapon in the hands of the Greek Cypriot institutions. This was in fact used as a punitive measure against the Turks but also against the Turkish Cypriots themselves, the two groups seen as alien and distant from the Greek Cypriots, as realistic group conflict theories have shown. However, if this sentiment has changed over time, with a reconciliation of the two Cypriot communities, the same cannot be said about the Turks, who for obvious reasons are still seen as enemies. And this is why the issue of citizenship has not yet been fully resolved.

The problem has raised concern not only at the national level, with the emergence of many NGOs campaigning for the right to citizenship and with the strong activism of Turkish Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots from mixed marriages, but also at the international level, as reflected in the OHCHR report and the UPR recommendations of 2019 and 2024. The fact that the issue has been brought to the UN is a positive sign, showing that international organizations are finally showing concern. However, the issue is approached under the lens of human rights, as discriminatory treatment against Turkish Cypriots. The discriminatory character would seem to be particularly evident, not only because for the Greek Cypriot authorities anyone entering Cyprus from the North is considered illegal, unless this person is a citizen of the European Union, but also because to punish this person they punish the children he or she might have with a Cypriot. In addition to this aspect, the other consequences of the Citizenship Law for Turkish Cypriots should also be addressed, such as the distortion of the real demographic composition of the TRNC, as children of mixed marriages are not

considered Cypriots but from third countries. Certainly, there are many elements that the international community will have to take into account. Moreover, the petition submitted to the EU also brought the issue to the European level, where it had not been discussed before.

In conclusion, the problem of denying citizenship to children of mixed marriages is not only a discrimination against Turkish Cypriots, but also a denial of their identity. To legally consider these individuals as Turks would contribute to the decline of this community by decreasing the number of Turkish Cypriots. The main problem in being able to quantify them lies in the lack of precise numbers. However, as mentioned above, the high presence of Turkish immigrants on the island, but also of other nationalities, would suggest that the number of mixed marriages could be remarkably high, as well as that of the children of this marriage. What would result from the aspects analysed is that Turkish Cypriots see themselves as threatened by both the North and the South, making their situation complex. However, their strong activism is producing results, both with regard to Turkish interference and the Citizenship Law, showing that the situation can still be changed. The Civil Registry Law and the problem of children of mixed marriages is an evolving issue, being an ongoing debate. For this reason, many questions remain open and only future events will be able to provide an answer on the resolution of this issue.

CHAPTER 5 - REVERSING THE DECLINE OF THE TURKISH CYPRIOTS: FROM THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO CYPRUS REUNIFICATION

5.1. Introduction to the chapter

The previous chapters have analysed all the factors that are allegedly causing the decline of the Turkish Cypriot community, putting their existence at risk. Their decline is not caused by violent events such as wars or ethnic cleansing, but by factors that are affecting their identity and cultural aspects. Turkish action on the island, based on smart power that is erasing the differences between Turks and Turkish Cypriots, and the RoC's Citizenship Law, with the Council of Ministers' decision of 2007, represent the main causes of the decline of the community.

Despite the complex situation they would find themselves in, aggravated by the fact that they reside in formally occupied territories, there are possible solutions to safeguard this community and halt their decline. These solutions are based on the role of certain actors who would contribute through their work on the ground to protect Turkish Cypriots. These actors, however, need to be strengthened. What will be presented is based on hypotheses built on the current situation in Cyprus and the relationship between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. These solutions include: the role of international organisations, in particular the UN and the EU, not only for their diplomatic influence but also for their projects aimed at both bringing the two communities closer together and directly supporting the Turkish Cypriots, moving it away from dependence on Turkey; the growing activism of Cypriot civil society, with the emergence of new associations of young Cypriots fighting for the rights of the Turkish Cypriots and cooperation between the two communities; and finally to one of the most logical solutions: the end of the occupation and the reunification of Cyprus under the federal system. All these factors contribute to bringing to the attention of both the international community and the rest of the Cypriot population the threats that the Turkish Cypriot community is facing, which would otherwise remain unknown to most.

As will be clear from reading the chapter, the basis of any action to safeguard the Turkish Cypriots is the development of Cypriotism, the feeling of belonging to Cyprus

that binds both communities. For this reason, it will be visible in each paragraph that the ultimate aim of each possible intervention to halt the decline of the Turkish Cypriots is precisely to create a new Cypriot community, by breaking the current divisions that persist between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. This does not mean erasing the cultural differences that divide them but valuing them as an integral part of the Cypriot population. The creation of this Cypriot community would ultimately lead to the reunification of Cyprus. As will be seen, each solution presents obstacles and weaknesses that will have to be overcome to achieve the goal of saving this community.

5.2. The role of the United Nations and the European Union

Although the current Cypriot question would not seem to arouse much international interest, as it is seen more as an internal Cyprus problem than a real global threat, the island's history has shown us that there have always been foreign powers on its territory. This demonstrates that, at least on a strategic level, the island has always attracted the interest of many, Greece and Turkey above all. Since the outbreak of intercommunal violence, the UN has had one of its longest peacekeeping missions, UNFICYP, active on the territory. In addition to this, it has always worked with both communities to succeed in reaching an agreement for reunification. Since 2004, when Cyprus joined the EU, the latter has also become active in the country through various projects and funding. In addition, Cyprus hosts British military bases on its territory, given its strategic location close to the Middle East. However, this paragraph will only focus on the UN and the EU and how, through their projects and diplomatic power, they can contribute to protecting and ensuring the continuity of the Turkish Cypriot community.

The TRNC is subject to an economic and cultural embargo: it cannot export without permission from the RoC, is banned from any sporting events and legally cannot have ports and airports (International Crisis Group, 2023:6). This situation has resulted in the international isolation of the Turkish Cypriots, leading them to a strong dependence on Ankara and accelerating their assimilation into Turkey. This situation has been improving over time, thanks to a greater openness of the international community, not towards the TRNC, but towards the Turkish Cypriots themselves, unfairly affected by these decisions. This openness has resulted in a series of projects financed by both the

United Nations and the European Union, aimed not only at improving the situation of Turkish Cypriots but also at bringing them closer to Greek Cypriots. In fact, community projects are a useful tool to develop and strengthen the Cypriot sentiment that is already spreading among the younger generations, which, as mentioned in the introduction, would be the key to arresting the decline of the Turkish Cypriots. Moreover, being impartial actors, the UN and the EU would be the ideal supervisors of such projects and ensure they are not distorted by propaganda and nationalism. Moreover, the role of these two organisations would lie not only in their initiatives to support the two communities, but also in their diplomatic power. The EU could pressure the government of the RoC to change its Citizenship Law. Moreover, the non-resolution of the Cyprus problem is one of the aspects that would not allow Turkey to become an EU member and this, in the view of possible less tense relations between Brussels and Ankara, could push Turkey to solve the problem. On the other hand, the UN itself could pressure both Turkey and the TRNC government to re-evaluate their positions and the RoC government to amend the Citizenship Law. These proposals, however, are more idealistic, as the Cyprus issue does not currently seem to be on the top of the international community's agenda. It is no coincidence that the Cyprus question is described as a “frozen conflict”.

With regard to concrete activities on the island the United Nations, as already mentioned, is present there with the UNFICYP peacekeeping mission, which was created: “In the interest of preserving international peace and security, to use its best efforts to prevent a recurrence of fighting and, as necessary, to contribute to the maintenance and restoration of law and order and a return to normal conditions” (Security Council resolution 186, 1964). Today, it also offers several initiatives involving both Turkish and Greek Cypriots through its Civil Affairs section, founded in 1998 and dedicated to building trust between the two communities (UNFICYP, 2024:6). The projects are based on supporting dialogue between women and young people; training in innovation and entrepreneurship and the culture of peace; safeguarding the common cultural environment and preserving the cultural heritage (UNFICYP, 2024:6). Great importance in this field is given to the role of Turkish and Greek Cypriot women in the dialogue for peace (UNFICYP, 2024:6). Furthermore, in 2017 the NGO Networking Group was established as a forum for the purpose of facilitating connections between the various NGOs in the area, academic institutions and other

groups, in order to share ideas aimed at improving Cypriot society (Marisa & Köprülü, 2022:47). This aspect ties in with the topic that will be presented in the second paragraph: namely, the role of NGOs, particularly those founded by young people. Many other initiatives are carried out in the mixed village of Pyla, located in the buffer zone and thus in the area controlled by UN forces. One example, started in 2015, is the football match featuring mixed teams of Turkish and Greek Cypriots, under the initiative of “Sport and Cooperation”, also organised by the Civil Affairs section (UNFICYP, 2015). The match is then followed by folk dances performed by both communities, as evidence of Cypriot culture. While these initiatives do not specifically concern the Turkish Cypriot community, the collaboration between various members of civil society is an important aspect in the enhancement of both communities, thus also contributing to the safeguarding of Turkish Cypriots (Marisa & Köprülü, 2022:47).

In addition to the peacekeeping mission, the UN is present through the Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General (OSASG). Although both have the resolution of the Cyprus problem as their main objective, their mandates are different. UNFICYP's mandate, as mentioned above, is to maintain order and security in the country, while that of the Good Offices of the Secretary-General and the Office of his Special Adviser is to support the conduct of negotiations between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders (UNFICYP, 2024). On a practical level, the main steps taken with the support of the Secretary-General's Good Offices were accomplished in March 2008. The leaders of the two communities established six working groups to initiate a review of the main substantive issues to be negotiated (governance and power-sharing, community issues, security and guarantees, territory, property and economic issues) (UNFICYP, 2024). They have also established seven technical committees to work on confidence-building measures aimed not only at improving the daily lives of Cypriots, but also at encouraging and facilitating greater interaction between the two communities. In all this, the UN is providing infrastructural and personal support to the negotiations (UNFICYP, 2024).

Besides the abovementioned entities, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is also present in the territory. Since 2001, in partnership with the European Union, it has been supporting various projects aimed at the sustainable development of

the island and at strengthening trust between the two communities, encouraging dialogue and cooperation. This collaboration aims to bring concrete benefits to future generations of Cypriots, not only economically, but also socially (UNDP, 2024).

Although the UN is criticised for failing, after years of negotiations, to solve the Cyprus problem, its presence still plays a crucial role. In January this year, the mission was extended by one year and Guterres appointed the new UN Personal Envoy the Colombian Maria Angela Holguín Cuéllar, still showing determination to solve the Cyprus question (Kaymak, 2024:3). The UN has significant diplomatic power, and the newly chosen special envoy could represent a change for the future of the Turkish Cypriots. This is because the new envoy, already part of the negotiating team that achieved a historic peace agreement between the Colombian government and the Farc guerilla group in 2016, would represent the UN's newfound interest in succeeding in opening new negotiations (Smith, 2024). Holguin proposed a new, more inclusive, and participatory approach to achieve this. This would include not only meetings with Cypriot leaders but also with civil society groups. In addition, the envoy also decided to be assisted by advisors and experts from other peace processes, including that in Northern Ireland (Kaymak, 2024:5). Moreover, the UN and in particular the Human Rights Council has always been an important forum for Turkish Cypriot NGOs to publicly expose the risks the community is facing.

The European Union, compared to the United Nations, has much more specific programmes concerning the Turkish Cypriot community. Although even at the European level there is an isolation of the TRNC, the Turkish Cypriots, who hold RoC citizenship, are considered to be all European citizens, as specified in the previous chapters. The European policy toward them is based on the following statement made by the General Affairs Council on 26 April 2004:

"The Turkish Cypriot community have expressed their clear desire for a future within the European Union. The Council is determined to put an end to the isolation of the Turkish Cypriot community and to facilitate the reunification of Cyprus by encouraging the economic development of the Turkish Cypriot community. The Council invited the Commission to bring forward comprehensive proposals to this end with particular

emphasis on the economic integration of the island and on improving contact between the two communities and with the EU" (European Commission Representation in Cyprus, 2004).

The EU has had a specific aid programme for the Turkish Cypriot community since 2006, which has allocated €688 million for the period 2006-2023 and €241 million for the subsequent period until 2027 (European Commission, 2024). Based on Council Regulation 389/2006, its main objectives are to reunify Cyprus by encouraging the economic development of the Turkish Cypriot community, with a focus on the economic integration of the island; the improvement of contacts between the two communities and with the EU; and preparation for the body of EU law (*acquis communautaire*) (Abbilgi, 2006). More specifically, the programme supports projects in areas such as agriculture, the environment, infrastructure, civil society, community development, cultural heritage, education and telecommunications, as well as private sector development, the labour market, border crossings, traffic safety and energy. Important aspects of this programme are emphasised in Objective 3: "Fostering reconciliation, confidence-building measures, and support to civil society" (European Commission, 2023:5) and Objective 4: "Bringing the Turkish Cypriot community closer to the Union" (European Commission, 2023:6). In particular, the latter is an important goal for young Turkish Cypriots, those who feel the European sentiment the most and want to get closer to Europe. Bringing Turkish Cypriots closer to the EU also means distancing them from Turkish influence and shortening the differences with Greek Cypriots. A project already mentioned in chapter three and financed with these funds, concerned a documentary in which Turkish and Greek Cypriots cooked together sharing stories about Cyprus, showing how the two communities are more similar than people think. In cooperation with the Goethe Institut²⁸ it has offered 159 scholarships for Turkish Cypriots to attend European universities (European Commission, 2023:6). The right to study has always been an important issue for Turkish Cypriots, who due to the economic condition of many families and their isolated situation are often forced to study in public universities in the TRNC, notable to be close to Ankara, or directly in Turkey (Chabre, 2021:29). Nevertheless, there is the fact that Turkish Cypriot students

²⁸ The Goethe Institut is the Federal Republic of Germany's cultural institute, active worldwide, promoting German study abroad and encouraging international cultural exchange (Goethe Institut).

studying at TRNC universities do not have the opportunity to participate in the Erasmus+ project, a decision also declared unacceptable by the European Parliament's Culture Committee (Cleaver, 2024). This would show that although Turkish Cypriots are European citizens, they would not enjoy the same rights as other citizens of the member States. Therefore, despite the granting of scholarships, the EU should re-evaluate its position on the Erasmus programme, as this is a great opportunity to lift young Turkish Cypriots out of isolation.

Returning to the aid plan, concrete examples of achievement are the following: 263 kilometres of water supply distribution networks were renewed; 2.700 small and medium-sized enterprises and start-ups received grants; 1.800 Turkish Cypriots were given educational opportunities in Member States through EU scholarships; 800 businesses were assisted with COVID-19 emergency measures (European Commission, 2024).

On 26 May 2023, “Europe Day” was celebrated in northern Nicosia, an event organised with the support of the European Commission under the slogan “United in Diversity” aimed at bringing Turkish Cypriots closer to the various EU-funded projects and making Europe known through the various Member State stands (Abbilgi, 2023). The fact that this event was organised in the Turkish Cypriot-administered part of Nicosia was an important signal from the European Union, showing its real interest in the community.

Beyond projects, an important achievement at the European level was the election in 2019 of the first Turkish Cypriot MEP: Niyazi Kızılyürek. This is a historic achievement considering that he was elected by both Turkish and Greek Cypriots and would prove that a change was taking place in Cyprus and among the Cypriot community. And historic too is the fact that Kızılyürek's party, AKEL, a Greek Cypriot party, put forward a Turkish Cypriot candidate (Al Jazeera, 2019). This would have demonstrated Turkish Cypriots' great interest in the EU and the desire to see themselves represented in Brussels. In fact, the presence of a Turkish Cypriot MEP has made it possible to bring to Parliament the issues Turkish Cypriots are facing, such as assimilation by Turkey and the problem of citizenship. For example, last December, the

parliament group the Left, organised a meeting entitled “Turkish Cypriots and the Eu - Perspectives for the reunification of Cyprus”, coordinated by the Turkish Cypriot MEP himself, and among the various topics of discussion was the issue of the assimilation of Turkish Cypriots to Turkey and how to curb it (The Left, 2023). Furthermore, on 26 April, another meeting was organised by Kızılyürek, this time entitled “Citizenship in the Context of Human Rights”, where it was discussed the issue of citizenship for children of mixed marriages and how this represents a form of division and discrimination against Turkish Cypriots (Cyprus Mirror, 2024). However, the positivity of the 2019 elections was reversed by the results of the 2024 European elections. Only 5% of Turkish Cypriots went to vote and no Turkish Cypriot candidate managed to get a seat in Parliament (Cleaver, 2024). For Turkish Cypriot pollster Ahmet Aslim, the low turnout of Turkish Cypriots is mainly due to these two reasons: “The number of citizens of the Republic of Cyprus in the north of Cyprus has now decreased. The voters who appear [on the electoral roll] to be here are not actually here anymore. They are looking for their future elsewhere” and “the candidates and their teams did not find any response in society” (Cleaver, 2024). More negative opinions coming mainly from the trade unions stated that this event would bring the Turkish Cypriots closer and closer to extinction since if before the South took little consideration of the Turkish Cypriots, after these results they would ignore them completely (Cleaver, 2024). This result could be a bad sign of distrust on the part of Turkish Cypriots towards the European institutions showing that what has been done for the community would not be enough. For this reason, action is needed to restore trust in the European Union by analysing the causes of this distrust and by increasing EU interest in the Turkish Cypriot community and its challenges. The risk of Turkish Cypriots turning away from European institutions would mean that they would move closer to Turkey, as it would be the only alternative on the ground, accelerating their assimilation.

The initiatives of both the European Union and the United Nations represent important help for the Turkish Cypriot community, but as was said it is not enough. Certainly, projects aimed at bringing the two communities closer together are an important means of developing Cypriot sentiment and reducing the dependence of Turkish Cypriots on Turkey. However, the situation of isolation still remains strong. On top of that, the EU has not been able to move actively on the issue of citizenship, showing little activity in

that respect. Furthermore, in a hypothetical future it could be decided to allocate three of the six seats that Cyprus is entitled to in the European Parliament to Turkish Cypriot candidates, thus giving even more relevance to the problems of the community. The UN on the other hand, with the extension of the mission for another year, confirms its interest in continuing to work on reunification, but the problem of the decline of the Turkish Cypriot community is not seriously addressed, showing a rather weak line towards Turkey. For the Greek Cypriot community, both the European Union and the United Nations have been too soft towards Ankara. In particular, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, there was an immediate international reaction, whereas for Cyprus, in their view, this was not the case (Neophytou, 2023). The response given to the petition on the right to citizenship of children of mixed marriages by the European Parliament also shows the weak line the EU maintains on this issue. Furthermore, as will be detailed in the next chapter, the funding allocated to NGOs by the EU would be insufficient, not allowing NGOs to operate at full capacity. Although these issues have been brought before the EU and the UN, particularly the Human Rights Council as in the case of the UPR, little has been done by either.

There are ways in which both organisations could do more for Turkish Cypriots. On the one hand, the UN could initiate an independent investigation regarding the strategies Turkey is implementing in the TRNC, assessing whether the Turkish Cypriot community really risks cultural assimilation, on the other hand, the EU could ask for explanations from the RoC government regarding the Citizenship Law, as this is also a denial of European citizenship to the children of mixed marriages. The international importance of both and their human rights interest can be an important help for the Turkish Cypriot community and a way to curb their decline. This, however, must be accompanied by more concrete projects that address this problem.

5.3. The role of civil society and young Cypriots

As mentioned before, Turkish Cypriots are resilient people who have always spoken loudly for their rights and activism is an essential aspect for them and one of the few ways to let their voices be heard. In the course of the various chapters, we have seen how much has been achieved through both the work of NGOs and trade unions, such as

the Movement for Resolution Mixed Marriage Problem, founded in 2022 by young Turkish Cypriots, which is achieving important results on the issue of citizenship, and KTÖS, which fights more against Turkish interference in schools; and through the many manifestations organised by Turkish Cypriots. In addition to citizenship rights organisations, there are also many groups fighting for the rights of the LGBTQ+ community, which are endangered by the conservative drift in the North. These groups bring together Turkish and Greek Cypriots advocating under the slogan “United by Pride” (Philippou, 2023). In this paragraph, as in the previous one, it can be seen that most NGO projects aim to bring the two Cypriot communities closer together, leading to future reunification.

There have been demonstrations for a long time, such as the one before the Annan plan in which thousands of Turkish Cypriots took to the streets demanding an end to their isolation and access to the European Union (Loizides, 2016:153). Although the isolation continues, Turkish Cypriots have gained their status as European citizens, a small but significant victory. Demonstrations and protests have been quite frequent in recent years because of Turkey's increasing interference in the affairs of the TRNC, but also because of the difficult economic situation and corruption problem in the country (Aygin, 2024). Particularly with the advent of Tatar and the pro-Turkish policies, dissent has grown a lot among Turkish Cypriots, so much so that demonstrations now take place on a regular basis, often in front of either the Turkish embassy or the TRNC Parliament (Clever, 2023). Turkish President Erdoğan himself has been repeatedly challenged by Turkish Cypriots for excessive interference in the affairs of the TRNC, particularly after the 2020 election case exposed in chapter three, where Ankara reportedly piloted the elections in favour of pro-Turkey candidate Ersin Tatar. This shows how Turkish Cypriot civil society is not afraid to expose itself even against those who most decide the fate of the TRNC. Through activism, young Turkish Cypriots condemn Turkish actions and those of the RoC government, drawing not only national but also international attention to the factors that are threatening this community. This is why their activism is a crucial tool to stop their decline.

Youth activism is what is making the difference in recent times and increasingly young people are taking action to defend various causes (Shah & Khan, 2023). And it is

precisely here that the importance of the role of young people in Cypriot society can be found. Only through cooperation between young Turkish and Greek Cypriots will it be possible to build a peaceful and united Cyprus. The new generations of Greek and Turkish Cypriots are those who feel the Cypriot sentiment the most and want to shorten the distance between them, with a view to future reunification and peaceful coexistence. The majority of young people do not identify as either Turkish or Greek, but rather as Cypriots, and this is another important sign of unity (Özgür et al, 2019:253). Furthermore, as stated in the first chapter, also through language young Cypriots are emphasising their belonging to Cyprus, defining themselves as Greek-speaking Cypriots and Turkish-speaking Cypriots, and these new terms are spreading rapidly on the island. The fact that Turkish Cypriots do not identify with Turkey would demonstrate their resistance to Turkish policies, which despite their continued interference in many aspects of Turkish Cypriots' lives do not seem to really change their identity. If one looks more specifically into the characteristics that distinguish young Turkish Cypriots it can be found that, also because of their status as residents of the occupied territories, they are the ones who would most like to move closer to Southern Cyprus. This is also demonstrated by the fact that they statistically cross the border more times than their Greek Cypriot counterparts (Özgür et al, 2019:9). As a consequence of this frequent crossing of the border to the South, they have developed a deep sense of affinity with their Greek Cypriot peers (Özgür et al, 2019:9). In fact, in a study held in 2019, the majority of Turkish Cypriot youth interviewed stated that there were very few differences between them and Greek Cypriots (Özgür et al, 2019:11). The majority of Greek Cypriots interviewed also hold similar views but in a different proportion to the Turkish Cypriots, probably due to the fact that they cross the border less than the latter (Özgür et al, 2019:10). This would show that bringing these two communities together, especially the younger generation, is the right way to consolidate Cypriotism and distance the Turkish Cypriots from Turkish influence by avoiding their assimilation, which without these contacts with the Greek Cypriot community would be accelerated.

Looking specifically at the organisations and initiatives that have had the most significant impact on the Turkish Cypriot community, several examples can be identified. One is “Home for Cooperation”, an educational centre founded in 2011 and run by Turkish and Greek Cypriots together. Located in the buffer zone, it offers

workspaces and opportunities for non-governmental organisations and individuals to design and implement innovative projects. It facilitates situations where people meet and get to know each other (Home for Cooperation, 2024). Home for Cooperation hosts a wide range of cultural, artistic and educational programs and activities with the aim of promoting creativity and intercultural trust in Cyprus and internationally (Home for Cooperation, 2024). One example among many is the “Minilingo” project, a bilingual educational card game, aimed at teaching Turkish and Greek, with some words from the respective Cypriot dialects, to bring Turkish and Greek Cypriots linguistically closer together (Home for Cooperation, 2023). Another project also carried out by Home for Cooperation, is “United by sound”, which sees music as the protagonist of the union between the two communities. Unity through music seems to be quite popular in Cyprus given the presence of many organisations holding events in both the North and South that feature both Greek and Turkish Cypriot musicians and DJs. One example is Room 4 Collective, founded by Cypriot DJs, which has repeatedly organised an event called “Room 4 local”, i.e. music evenings aimed at giving visibility to local artists without any difference between the two communities (Room 4 Collective, 2023).

Many other projects also involve Greek and Turkish Cypriot children, breaking down the divisions between the two communities from an early age, and emphasising the aspects they have in common. One example is the PeacePlayers, which use basketball as a means to bring the two communities closer together and target 8-18 year olds. PeacePlayers bring together children from different communities through twinning and tournaments, giving them the opportunity to interact with “the other side”, while leadership activities and exchanges allow their leaders to further explore these relationships (PeacePlayers, 2019).

Turkish Cypriot activism is not only present at the national level but also in international organisations. In October 2021, the Human Rights Platform Project was launched, bringing together various Turkish Cypriot NGOs such as Queer Cyprus Association, Refugee Rights Association, Civil Society Initiative, Turkish Cypriot Human Rights Foundation and Universal Patient Rights Association (Human Rights Platform, 2021). The platform is an important tool for monitoring human rights in Northern Cyprus and its reports are submitted to the Human Rights Council. The last

report, as mentioned in the previous chapter, presented precisely the issue of the Citizenship Law. Projects like these are a valuable tool to expose to the international community the threats Turkish Cypriots face on their national territory.

In the 21st century, activism is not only done on the ground. Surveys of Turkish Cypriot civil society have revealed that social media is the most widely used vehicle for activism (Civic Space, 2020:26). Indeed, the advent of social media has facilitated the development of a great deal of activism on these platforms. This led to the creation of various groups condemning Turkish actions and those of the RoC government. These groups have given a level of visibility to these issues that they did not have before. Social activism initially developed on Facebook, one of the most used social networks by Turkish Cypriots, and then moved to Instagram. Turkish Cypriots' Facebook activism is believed to strengthen their community, protect their distinctiveness from mainland Turkey and increase their self-confidence (Akçali, 2019:514). As early as 2009, young Turkish Cypriots created Facebook groups and pages against the Quranic courses imposed by Turkey (Akçali, 2019:522). In 2013, there appeared the first groups focused on Cypriotism, aimed at countering Turkish hegemony and emphasising Turkish Cypriot culture (Akçali, 2019:524). More recent groups, on the other hand, focus on bringing Greeks and Turkish Cypriots together, moving to another level of Cypriotism, i.e. emphasising the bond that unites both to Cyprus and the aspects they have in common (Akçali, 2019:525). Examples of Instagram pages dealing with the problem are: “Project Cyprus” (@projectcyprus), “United Federal Cyprus” (@unitedfederalcyprus), “Love Our Cyprus” (@loveourcyp). In particular, the latter shares historical images of when Greek and Turkish Cypriots lived together and interviews with those who had the opportunity to live at that time, testifying that despite the outbreak of violence caused by nationalism, there was a time when Greek and Turkish Cypriots lived together peacefully. These testimonies are important because today's new generations were born in an already divided Cyprus and have never known the union between the two communities. As was said, these forms of social activism are also an important tool for the Turkish Cypriot community. While social media amplifies the opinions also of those who would like to maintain the current status quo of Cyprus or would like to see it as part of Greece and Turkey, it has also given voice to many young Turkish Cypriots who publicly denounce what Turkey and the TRNC

government are doing to the North of the island. Moreover, the issue of RoC citizenship for children of mixed marriages has also found popularity again thanks to the resonance given to it on social networks by pages run by both Turkish and Greek Cypriots. Moreover, when the activist for the rights of children born of mixed marriages was attacked by Turkish extremists because of her pro-European stance, there was a social media solidarity campaign against her by members of both communities.

The activism of civil society, not only Turkish Cypriots but also of Greek Cypriots, the work of NGOs, the development and diffusion of the will for unity of the new generation of Cypriots, and the help of social media not only provide Turkish Cypriots with a means to voice the injustices and risks they are facing, but also allow for the consolidation and strengthening of Cypriot sentiment in both communities.

However, even these aspects have their weaknesses and obstacles to face. First of all, the main problem that many Turkish Cypriot NGOs face is the financial one, as their budgets seem to be rather limited (Civic Space, 2020:34). Moreover, there is a funding gap compared to Greek Cypriot NGOs (International Crisis Group, 2023:23). The EU in fact only finances small-scale projects, which is why it would be necessary to fill this gap so that Turkish Cypriot NGOs would have the necessary resources to organise more projects to emancipate themselves from Turkish control and develop Cypriot sentiment (International Crisis Group, 2023:23). Moreover, due to the lack of funds, most of them are only volunteers, thus limiting their capacity for action (Panov & Varon, 2017:6). Apart from the budget problem, another aspect to be taken into account is that still a large part of Turkish Cypriot society is not interested in activism, due to the low level of trust within Cypriot society in general, which is not conducive to the development of the civil society (Panov & Varon, 2017:7). Furthermore, it would be necessary to increase the number of projects targeting children from both communities, because studies have shown that freeing them from prejudice from an early age has positive effects in bringing two conflicting communities closer together (Husnu et al., 2016). In fact, young Greek and Turkish Cypriots are often influenced by their families regarding the opinion one has of the other (Husnu et al., 2016). Another problem would be the fact that many organisations would receive periodic inspections by the authorities, an aspect

that could hint at a possible restriction by the government on the work of such organisations (Civic Space, 2020:35).

In addition to the problems outlined above, activism also entails many dangers to the activists themselves, as was also mentioned in the previous chapter. There are many cases of activists being denied entry into Turkey because they would pose a threat to national security (European Parliament, 2022). This problem was also presented in front of the European Parliament by the Turkish Cypriot MEP Kızılyürek in 2022, who asked how the EU intends to solve this issue (European Parliament, 2022). In addition to the ban on entering Turkish territory, there are many threats and repercussions suffered by activists from Turkish but also Greek Cypriot extremists, as was shown in the previous chapter. Death threats, violence, raids by both Turkish and Greek Cypriot radicals and the risk of imprisonment are what activists fighting for the rights and self-determination of Turkish Cypriots face every day (Amnesty International, 2024).

The activism of the Turkish Cypriot civil society, although in need of incentives and greater involvement, is nevertheless one of the best ways to bring to national and international attention the threats that the entire community is facing. This is combined with concrete projects in cooperation with the Greek Cypriot community to create the Cypriot society of the future.

5.4. The reunification of Cyprus and the federal solution

Most of the problems Turkish Cypriots are facing are a direct consequence of the events of 1974. The division, Ankara's "Bear Hug" and the emergence of the self-proclaimed Turkish Cypriot State have put the community in a vulnerable position. This is why the reunification of Cyprus and the cessation of the division could be regarded as the most logical solution to the decline of the Turkish Cypriot community. The same projects outlined in the previous paragraphs have as their ultimate goal the reunification of the island through reconciliation and cooperation between the two Cypriot communities. Moreover, the main role of the United Nations and the European Union on the island is to solve the Cyprus question.

After the division of Cyprus, the most popular proposals for its reunification were three: the bizonal, bicomunal federal solution, supported by the international community; the two-state solution, supported by the current TRNC government but rejected by the RoC one; and the solution of a united, non-federal Cyprus supported by the Greek Cypriots but rejected by the Turkish Cypriots. In this section, the proposed solution will be the federal one, setting out the one proposed by the United Nations and the other alternatives.

The bizonal and bicomunal federation, proposed by the Annan plan, was reiterated by Security Council Resolution 2561 (2021) which: “Recalls the importance of achieving an enduring, comprehensive and just settlement based on a bicomunal, bizonal federation with political equality, as set out in relevant Security Council resolutions, including OP4 of its resolution” (Security Council, 2021). This would mean having a federal Cyprus consisting of two areas, one under the control of the Greek Cypriots and another under the Turkish Cypriots (bizonal), which would answer to a central government composed, equally, of representatives of both communities (bicomunal) (Press and Information Office, 2010). The necessity to add bicomunal and bizonal within federal reflects the current demographic and territorial composition of Cyprus where there are precisely two communities and two distinct territorial zones in which Greek and Turkish Cypriots live. This is the only one supported by both the United Nations and the European Union, but also the one that is generally most popular among the Cypriot population and which would represent a compromise between the various proposals. Indeed, the bicomunal and bizonal federal solution would seem to be the only one that would unite both communities and guarantee a fair division of powers. However, despite the fact that this solution has always been at the centre of all reunification negotiations, its acceptance has never been achieved. This was, as will be seen, more for political reasons. After the failure of the last negotiations in 2017, which led to a stalemate that continues to this day, the federal idea began to falter. Nevertheless, among the diverse options, it would still be the only one that would result in some degree of consensus. Of course, not all public opinion agrees, but this also depends on individual political thinking.

The fact that for the argument presented in this thesis, the federal idea is considered the best perspective is based on the following considerations. The first is that the two-state solution, strongly desired by both Erdoğan and Tatar, would bring Turkish Cypriots out of isolation, but would not solve the problem of assimilation and would go against the very will of the population. Such a solution would allow Turkey to maintain control over the island and would lead to the final division of it, forever breaking the link between the two communities and the developing Cypriot sentiment, while on the other hand, it'd continue to keep the Turkish Cypriots tied to Turkey and its policies. On the other side, the incorporation of the TRNC into the Republic of Cyprus, without a division of powers between the two communities, would see the Turkish Cypriots overwhelmed by the Greek Cypriot majority and would risk making Turkish Cypriots one minority among many, not solving the problem of their decline and not considering them as indigenous Cypriots on a par with Greek Cypriots. In this way, there would be a risk of returning to the situation of 1964, when the Turkish Cypriots lived in fear and isolation.

The federal solution, as already mentioned, was the core of the Annan Plan, which was rejected in a popular referendum in 2004. As was described in the historical chapter, the rejection of the plan by Greek Cypriots was dictated more by misinformation and opposition from the RoC government of the time. Moreover, relations between the two communities were quite different from what they are today. Among the various reasons that made not only the plan, but also the subsequent negotiations fail, was the inability to find a compromise on how to share power between the two communities. This is because the Greek Cypriots have always been reluctant to share power equally with their Turkish counterparts, not finding it fair that the Turkish Cypriots, being in a numerical minority, should have the same degree of power as the Greek majority (International Crisis Group, 2023:13). Yet an equal division of power would be the only way for Turkish Cypriots to see themselves effectively represented and not overwhelmed by the Greek majority. Another aspect that has always blocked all negotiations is the demand by Greek Cypriots for the withdrawal of the Turkish army from the territory. The Turkish Cypriots have always rejected this proposal, as they see the presence of Turkish forces as a form of protection in case intercommunal violence breaks out again.

To change this negative trend in the negotiations, alternative proposals to bizonal and bicomunal federation have been put forward. For some, the mistake of the international community lies in proposing a symmetrical type of federalism, which divides powers equally between the two communities without taking into account the ethnic and cultural differences that divide Turkish and Greek Cypriots. For this reason, some hypotheses proposed the model of asymmetrical federalism, i.e. federalism with different degrees of autonomy and power-sharing arrangements (Sahadžić, 2023:2). It would give enough autonomy to both communities, taking into account the differences that divide them. This type of federalism is already present in Belgium, Spain, and in some aspects of the Canadian administration, countries with cultural divergences within them. That is why, for the promoters of this solution, these countries should be taken as models (Loizides, 2016:42). The risk of this type of federalism would lie in the fact that the two communities would be too divided, which is why it must be accompanied by initiatives and projects aimed at bringing the two communities together (Loizides, 2016:42). Other proposals see a federal solution with the 1960 Constitution amendment as the starting point. These amendments could be modelled on institutional arrangements that promote cooperation on governance, including the Presidency, security, the Supreme Court, issues Supreme Court, territorial and property issues and should take into account: the events of 1974; Cyprus's accession to the EU and later the Eurozone; and the relevant UN Security Council resolutions (Theophanous, 2023).

Choices on how to handle possible federalism will have to take into account many factors, starting with the opinions of the population. This is why a new referendum like the one held for the Annan plan would be useful but beware of the disinformation that could be spread on social media by extremists on both sides. The importance would lie in the fair balance of power between the two communities, but above all in the inclusion of the differences that divide both. Compared to other ethnically divided societies, Cyprus, far removed from the strong influence of pro-enosis and taksim nationalism, would show a population more inclined to coexist and come into contact with each other, particularly on the Turkish Cypriot side, as also demonstrated by the culture of peace that is spreading on the island. This could prove that the days of intercommunal violence are long gone and that the island is ready to take a step toward reunification. Despite the Cypriot sentiment that characterises both communities, they have

undeniable differences like language and religion. For this reason, the State will have to guarantee the cultural rights of the two communities, and the latter will have to be inclusive towards each other. This is because neither community should overpower the other, attempting to assimilate, also because in this way we will be at loggerheads with the problem set out throughout the thesis. The key would lay in being able to live peacefully side by side. A future reunification of the island must not only pass through an equal division of powers between the two communities, but also a cultural rapprochement, starting with the language barrier. The teaching of both Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot in schools, the creation of festivities and traditions, based on cultural aspects that both communities share, while maintaining the uniqueness that distinguishes both groups could be the right path, not only to ensure the stability of the State, but also to stop the cultural assimilation of Turkish Cypriots and ensure the continuity of this community. Another important aspect of a possible reunification would be the withdrawal of all foreign troops present in the territory, whose current presence would continue to maintain the current status quo on the island. The reunification of Cyprus would trivially solve a myriad of problems. From regulating entry to Cyprus also from the North, from moving away from both Greek and Turkish influence, to find a real solution to the problem of citizenship for children of mixed marriages.

The problem in reaching an agreement for reunification would be that both Greece, but especially Turkey, would have to give their consensus. The strong grip Ankara has on the TRNC would not allow decisions to be taken without its consent, while on the other hand, a decision that would penalise Greek Cypriots would be unacceptable to Athens. Despite being a sovereign State, Cyprus would still be living under foreign influence.

However, to create a united State, it is necessary to create a united people. Despite the closeness between the two communities, there are still many divisions between them, also caused by propaganda and prejudices still prevalent in both communities. This is why the projects mentioned in the previous paragraphs and the initiatives undertaken by young Cypriots to bring the two communities closer together are crucial. The strengthening of Cypriotism and Cypriotness is the basis for the smooth functioning of a

future united Cypriot State, and what was really missing in 1960. Nationalism and the lack of Cypriot sentiment were the main causes of the failure of coexistence.

However, the current political conditions do not yet allow for an agreement. Tatar's position on the two-state solution seems unmovable, as does Erdoğan's. While RoC and UN on the other hand, would not accept any other solution than the bicomunal and bizonal federation one. Moreover, the TRNC president would not seem willing to participate in new discussions, as his recent rejection of UN Secretary-General envoy Holguin's proposal for a trilateral between him, her and the RoC president would prove (Kades, 2024). Moreover, the last bilateral meeting between Tatar and Holguin reportedly lasted only 20 minutes, and saw the special envoy leave without making a statement (Bimbishis, 2024). His refusal and intransigence have aroused much controversy among the Turkish Cypriot population, who accuse him of being the real problem for the failed reunification of Cyprus. His choice of a two-state solution would seem suspicious and would go against the majority of the Turkish Cypriot population, who would instead like a federal, bizonal and bicomunal solution (Kades, 2024). Perhaps a discussion can only be reopened after the elections in the TRNC to be held in 2025, which will see the confirmation or downfall of the pro-Turkish UBP party. If Tatar would be re-elected president, this would probably mean the definitive end of any discussion on the resolution of the Cyprus problem and the end of the UN mission in the territory.

5.5. Conclusion to the chapter

The chapter set out several ways in which the Turkish Cypriot community could be safeguarded, involving different topics.

Starting with the role of the United Nations and the European Union, the ones most involved in the Cyprus issue, which through their support to Cypriot civil society with projects of various kinds, and their diplomatic power could contribute to distancing the Turkish Cypriots from Turkish influence and putting pressure on the government of the Republic of Cyprus to solve the problem of citizenship for the children of mixed marriages. Moreover, within these institutions, Turkish Cypriots can find a safe forum

where they can expose what is happening in the TRNC, from the demographic issue to the citizenship problem, raising awareness among the international community.

It then outlined the role of civil society, not only the Turkish Cypriot but also the Greek Cypriot, emphasising the role of young people. Various forms of activism were seen, from protests to NGOs on the ground to the role of social networks. All, however, with a clear goal: to create a united Cypriot community through the collaboration of young Greek and Turkish Cypriots and to oppose both Turkish and RoC government policies.

It concluded by explaining how the reunification of Cyprus under the federal model is one of the best solutions for halting the decline of the Turkish Cypriots, wrenching them away from Ankara's "Bear Hug" definitively, and pushing the new government to solve the citizenship problem. However, it was also seen that each of these aspects has weaknesses and obstacles that need to be resolved in order to truly make a difference for the Turkish Cypriot community.

Each of the points made would show a fundamental aspect: the way to stop the decline of the Turkish Cypriots would be to develop Cypriotism, uniting the two Cypriot communities and moving towards a reunification of Cyprus. This would not lead to the erasure of the cultural differences that divide the two communities, which represent their uniqueness, but would unite a people under a sense of common belonging to Cyprus. Many other States have shown that the coexistence of communities with different cultural aspects is possible: Belgium, Switzerland, Canada are just a few examples. To achieve this, we need the contribution of all the actors presented throughout the chapter. Only in this way could the Turkish Cypriot community not only be saved but also valued and empowered. It is evident that practice differs from theory. The Cyprus issue remains unresolved, and the diplomatic situation is not optimal. However, among the Cypriot population, especially the youth, there seems to be an increasing willingness to reconcile, and this could be the real turning point of the whole Cyprus question and a beacon of hope for the Turkish Cypriots.

CONCLUSION

The thesis set out several factors that would prove that the Turkish Cypriot community is in danger of disappearing. The plurality of actors and dynamics involved make this a very ramified issue that touches on several aspects of the Cyprus question. The Turkish strategy outlined in the third chapter, which would use a combination of soft and hard power, showed how Ankara has an interest in turning the TRNC into a Turkish province, not only geopolitically but also culturally, by changing Turkish Cypriot society to make it more and more like the Turkish one. In addition, the transfer of a part of the Turkish population to the island, through immigration incentives decided by Ankara and supported by the Turkish Cypriot government, which brought Turkey to be accused of war crimes, reportedly changed the demographic composition of the TRNC. In fact, according to the data, the current number of Turkish immigrants seems to exceed that of Turkish Cypriots. This process called Turkification, if not stopped, could in the long run lead to the disappearance of the Turkish Cypriot community. Ankara's hard line, which would contemplate no other option for the Cyprus issue than the two-state solution, would prove a possible interest in later succeeding in incorporating the new Turkish Cypriot State within Turkey.

In addition to the Turkish action, there would be another factor that would undermine the existence of the Turkish Cypriot community: the Republic of Cyprus Citizenship Law. This law, through a 2007 amendment, states that children of mixed marriages, where one of the parents entered the island illegally, do not obtain RoC citizenship. This law would specifically affect children born to couples formed by Turks and Turkish Cypriots, because most Turks entered the island from TRNC ports, which are illegal under international law. The children of these couples can only apply for Turkish citizenship or that of the TRNC, which only has legal value in Turkey, being recognised as Turks and not as Turkish Cypriots. Although it appears to be a totally different aspect of Turkification, the aim would be similar, namely to deny the belonging to Cyprus (Cypriotness) of the Turkish Cypriots. This law would reflect the hostility towards Turks and Turkish Cypriots that characterised Greek Cypriot society for a long time after the division. In fact, the law would seem to be a collective punishment for the events of 1974, however, it appears to affect Turkish Cypriots more than Turks. In a

situation where the number of Turks present in the North would be higher than the number of Turkish Cypriots, and therefore such couples could be quite common, citizenship would be denied to a large number of Turkish Cypriot children, further reducing, at least legally, the number of members of this community. This law, however, is a reflection of a sentiment that would no longer be so widespread in today's time. Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots are much more united than they used to be and hostilities would seem to be reduced. Moreover, in recent times there has been a certain activism on the part of the children of mixed marriages, which has also brought the problem before European and international institutions, putting pressure on the RoC government to change the law. This is why the current Greek Cypriot government has promised to find a solution soon. Only future events will show whether the RoC leadership will keep its promises.

Caught between these two poles, the Turkish Cypriots would not appear to be passively subjected to such policies. In fact, as outlined in the last chapter, many Turkish Cypriots have been active in opposing both Turkish influence and the controversial Citizenship Law, through protests but also through the foundation of NGOs aimed at bringing these issues to national and international attention. This activism has found particular strength through the spread of social networks, which has allowed Turkish Cypriots to reach more people. These forms of activism are characterised by a strong presence of young Greek and Turkish Cypriots, who work together not only to defend the rights of the Turkish Cypriot community, but also to build a new Cypriot society, based on Cypriotism, i.e. the feeling of belonging to Cyprus that binds the two communities. These aspects are part of the possible ways to halt the decline of the Turkish Cypriots. In fact, the thesis not only exposed the factors that would threaten the existence of the Turkish Cypriots but also put forward workable solutions to the problem.

In addition to the activism of Cypriot civil society, the role of the European Union and the United Nations was also outlined. Both of them, through various initiatives, would contribute to the self-determination of the Turkish Cypriots, moving them away from Turkish influence, and fostering cooperation between the two communities. The UN would seem determined to reopen negotiations for the reunification of Cyprus that have been stalled since 2017, while the EU has a funding programme exclusively dedicated

to supporting the Turkish Cypriot community. However, these aspects should be strengthened, both through increased funding, which is currently insufficient, and through more diplomatic intervention to succeed in putting pressure on both Turkey and the RoC to revise their positions. However, the Cyprus issue would not currently be among the international community's priorities, also because of the current geopolitical tensions in Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

Finally, as a last but also significant possible solution, there is the reunification of Cyprus into a federal state. This proposal, which is opposed to the two-state solution, would solve both the problem of the Turkification of the North, permanently distancing Turkish Cypriots from Ankara's objectives, and the problem of the Citizenship Law by forcing the new government of both Turkish and Greek Cypriot composition to revise the law. In fact, the federal solution that could be either based on the UN proposal of a symmetrical bizonal and bicomunal federation where powers are equally divided, or the asymmetrical one that would instead give different degrees of autonomy to the two communities, would be the best solution to succeed in building, on the one hand, a united Cypriot society, and on the other hand, preserving the ethnic and cultural diversity of both communities. The aim is not to create a homogeneous Cypriot society, which would mean that one community is absorbed by the other, but to succeed in building a State in which the cultural uniqueness of both is preserved. The success of this objective could also set a precedent for resolving conflicts between other ethnically divided societies, such as the Balkans or Palestine, where the two-state solution has always been the only one considered. Of course, this has to be adapted according to contexts and situations. The case of Cyprus also shows us how a society that has long been characterized by nationalism and violence between the two ethnic communities, where there has even been talk of genocide against Turkish Cypriots, is becoming increasingly reconciled. And this too could give rise to reflection on other geopolitical issues.

In conclusion, the subject of the decline of the Turkish Cypriot community is a topical issue that is creating debate, especially at the national level. Turkish Cypriots throughout their history have faced various threats, from the violence of pro-enosis nationalist groups to the current policies of both Turks and Greek Cypriots that

undermine their Cypriotness. In all these cases, however, this community has always struggled to ensure its survival, proving to be a resilient group. In addition to exposing all the factors that threaten the continuity of the Turkish Cypriot community, the thesis also sought to emphasise this last aspect, which is playing a key role in this situation.

Although the future of Turkish Cypriots remains unknown, given the activism and change that is spreading among the new generations of Cypriots, there are reasons to think about a possible end to this decline. Only future events will be able to give a definitive answer to the whole question set out in the thesis. Apart from this, a reflection must also be made on the meaning of community and unity, which the history of Cyprus tries to teach and which, despite its divisions, would show that a way to peaceful coexistence can always exist.

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