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Political parties and the meaning of Europe in northern Cyprus

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the impact of the European Union (EU) on political party discourses in northern Cyprus. While the Turkish Cypriot community remain on the margins of the EU – with their prospects of EU integration depending on the resolution of the Cyprus conflict – an intriguing Europeaniation process has nonetheless taken place there since 2004, carrying significant potential to leave a mark on the future socio-political development of the Turkish Cypriot community. Drawing from constructivist readings on Europeanization, the paper shows that despite the lack of a resolution or substantive effects of EU policy in practice, the day-to-day articulations of Europe still play an important position within political party narratives. Revealing the ways in which political actors conceive of Europe in a context shaped by the ongoing Cyprus problem, the paper also complements existing accounts of the EU's role in other conflict settings.

Introduction

Cyprus joined the European Union (EU) in 2004 as a divided country. Subsequently, the application of European law has been suspended in the northern part of the island pending a solution to the Cyprus problem. Despite the peripheral nature of the EU's engagement with northern Cyprus,[1] an intriguing Europeanization process has nonetheless taken place there since 2004, carrying significant potential to leave a mark on the future socio-political development of the Turkish Cypriot community. Whilst an impressive body of work already exists on the EU's role in the Cyprus conflict (Tocci 2007; Demetriou 2008; Yakinthou 2010; Christou 2013), and more broadly, on the EU as an actor in conflict resolution (Diez et al. 2008; Whitman and Wolff 2012; Pogodda et al. 2014), there is scant information on how the European integration process has impacted the domestic context in Cyprus in relation to the Turkish Cypriot community. This paper seeks to contribute to filling this gap by revealing how Europe is conceived within the mainstream political discourses in northern Cyprus and how it has been sustained since the Cypriot accession into the EU in 2004.

The case of Cyprus is puzzling both from a conflict resolution perspective but also in relation to the EU's effect on domestic governance, an implication which has guided the research agenda of the burgeoning Europeanization literature (Featherstone and Radaelli

2003; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005; Exadaktlyos and Radaelli 2012). With regards to the role of the EU in Cyprus, there was an early preoccupation with the latter as a new actor that could use its 'soft power' to transform the incentive structures of the parties in a conflict (Yakinthou 2010). Yet, despite the presence of an 'EU factor', the island remains divided .[2] In addition, while the prospects of EU membership contributed to a political sea-change for the Turkish Cypriot north in the run-up to accession, subsequent engagement of Brussels has failed to meet the expectations in relation to 'ending the isolations over [sic] the Turkish-Cypriot community' (European Council 2004). As the analysis undertaken below demonstrates; however, the day-to-day articulations of Europe still play an important position within political party narratives [3]despite the lack of a resolution or substantive effects of EU policy in practice.

In this vein, the article assesses the mainstream Turkish Cypriot political parties' stance at the centre of the EU debate with a focus on their responses to the prospects of EU membership through a critical exploration of how the EU and Europe have been conceived within well-entrenched narratives. The analysis focuses on the discursive level [4] in order to trace the impact of the EU in the articulation of a variety of positions by political parties in a particularly intriguing setting that has received inadequate attention so far.

The specific argument in this article is that the referendum in April 2004 on the United Nations (UN) sponsored 'Annan Plan' for resolution of the Cyprus conflict that resulted in a 'no' vote (75 per cent) in the Greek Cypriot south and a 'yes' (65 per cent) vote in the Turkish Cypriot north, represented a 'critical juncture' in redefining Europe within the mainstream political discourse. The discursive space for the re-articulation of Europe in northern Cyprus opened up in the post-Annan (2004) period which, despite limited transformative effects, allowed the moderate parties to seek legitimation for their efforts in relation to Cyprus' reunification and witnessed the traditionally hard-line parties to take moderate stances on EU membership. As the paper further shows, while the new context did not challenge the well-entrenched narratives on the conflict or national identity favoured by the parties on either side of the political spectrum, it nonetheless led to the introduction of a new, consensual and depoliticized discourse on EU membership into the Turkish Cypriot political repertoire.

More concretely, the analysis of party narratives identifies three broad discourses on Europe that inform Turkish Cypriot party preferences: 1) an *open Europe* emphasizing an active role of Europe for peace and a post-national form of belonging; 2) a *Europe of nations* discourse which places greater emphasis on traditional forms of identification and state sovereignty; and 3) Europe as a polity emphasizing the *modernization* of the public administration. The comparison of party narratives also displays several important over-laps across discourses which indicate a certain contingency in the parties' framing of Europe. In this sense, it is argued that the post-referendum period provided the context for such divergent articulations by opening up the discursive space both for and against the EU, for those actors who had traditionally opposed EU membership on the basis of federal reunification in particular. It was also within this context that the more recent 'Europe as modernisation' discourse has emerged to display an intriguing convergence of party narratives on Europe and EU membership.

Conceptually, the article draws from an eclectic body of work on Europeanization to examine the ways in which the EU has been articulated by the Turkish Cypriot political parties. Policy documents, official statements, news reports and interviews conducted by

the author with political party representatives [5]are analysed qualitatively in order to provide rich empirical insights into the ways the EU has been perceived by the political parties and into the ways in which the ongoing conflict colours the ways in which parties conceive the EU. The analysis supports the key argument of this study that the EU – though constrained by domestic factors – remains an important reference point for the Turkish Cypriot political parties.

A logical approach to setting the timeframe within which the representations of the EU will be analysed is to look at narratives at the outset of Cyprus's EU accession process and after. Though Cyprus's membership bid was formally launched in July 1990, a discretionary criterion has been preferred here to select 1995 as the beginning of the analysed period. Despite the significant symbolism of the July 1990 bid, it was not until March 1995 that Cyprus's suitability for membership was confirmed. In this sense, it can be suggested that the prospects of EU membership became more salient only after 1995 and would mark the beginning of a period of intense contestation in the Turkish Cypriot community. The chronological point marking its end is set by the Turkish Cypriot legislative elections of 2018 and its aftermath.

The article is organized as follows. The first part reviews the theoretical debates on the Europeanization of political parties and situates the Turkish Cypriot political parties within this literature as a case-study of Europeanization, drawing also on other constructivist theories to further complement its analytical focus on discourse. The second part then briefly sets out the peculiarities of northern Cyprus in which Europe is constructed. This is followed by the third part which analyses the multiple discourses of Europe that exist within the Turkish Cypriot political space. The fourth part then explores the change and continuity in the ways in which the EU and Europe have been sustained in this space. The article concludes by highlighting the implications of its empirical findings for Europeanization research and the EU's engagement in post-conflict settings.

Discourses and the framing of Europe

The EU's role in conflict settings has been well established in the academic literature (Pace 2007; Pogodda et al. 2014; Whitman and Wolff 2012). The existing body of work which deals with Cyprus also provides rich analyses of the EU's institutional relations with the conflict parties (Tocci 2007) its impact in conflict situations (Demetriou 2008), perceptions (Diez et al. 2008) and discursive strategies (Christou 2013). There is, however, scant information on how the European integration process takes place in the context of the ongoing division.

Kyris' (2015) work is an important exception here which deals specifically with how Europeanization has impacted the domestic scene in Cyprus in relation to the Turkish Cypriot community. Kyris devotes an exclusive chapter to explain how the EU has affected Turkish Cypriot political parties drawing on 'ideational' Europeanization while focusing on party competition (2015, 75). However the work – by means of its theoretical concern with the impact of Europeanization 'mechanisms' – does not deal explicitly with the way the EU and Europe is conceptualized.at the domestic level, which requires engagement with the articulations of competing conceptualizations and the way these articulations draw from multiple discourses. Kaymak and Vural's work (2009) on the other hand, focuses on elite

discourses by distinguishing between the 'neo-official discourse' of the government post-2004, the 'liberalist leftist opposition' and the 'reactionary nationalists'. While an important addition to our knowledge of the domestic contestation in northern Cyprus over Europe, the work does not elaborate on the prevailing identity narratives while acknowledging their relevance to the debate on EU's impact. More remarkably perhaps, the potential of the 'nationalist-reactionist circles' reformulating their anti-EU arguments (2009, 22) noted in the study and the rather ambiguous position of the nationalist parties following the failed referendum – which has become more apparent ever since – deserves a thorough consideration.

This article, therefore, aims to contribute to filling this gap by focusing on the discursive articulations of Europe and EU membership by the mainstream Turkish Cypriot parties after 2004. Through prioritizing discourse, its intention is to try and capture the contingent articulations of Europe and the European Union – understood here as a specific form of Europeanization – and the discursive rivalry that exists in the Turkish Cypriot political scene regarding the impact of the EU membership.

Whilst there has been a remarkable growth of the literature on Europeanization since the 1990s, the chief concern has been on the way in which European-level processes, policies, and institutions have transformed the domestic political structures (Featherstone and Radaelli 2003; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005; Exadaktylos and Radaelli 2012). More recently, a growing number of critical engagements with Europeanization have nonetheless begun focusing on the extent to which Europeanization impacts domestic politics in the way it is framed in public discourse (Della Porta and Caiani 2006) in legitimizing political positions (Jacquat and Woll 2003; Günay and Renda 2014) but also in altering political identities (Diez et al. 2008; Kaliber 2013; Öniş 2007). An underlying assumption that is broadly shared within this constructivist perspective is that the meaning of Europe is not established, it is what can be conceived as an 'essentially contested concept' (Diez 1999). Most approaches that work within this constructive vein thus emphasize the power of discourse in defining Europe, the EU and European integration. (Marcussen et al. 1999; Checkel and Katzenstein 2009). This, in turn, shifts focus from policy change onto 'the political', i.e. the role of cleavages and contestation in shaping context and outcome This renewed focus has further complemented the findings of the earlier theorization on the Europeanization of political parties, toward capturing the degree of influence, impact on opportunity structures as well as the consensus-producing effects of integration (Ladrech 2012; Mair 2000).

Discourse is conceived here of primarily topic-related, and as a cluster of signifying practices which frames an issue (Reisigl and Wodak 2009, 26). A macro-topic allows for many subtopics (or signifiers) to be subsumed within it: so, issues such as 'free market', 'democracy', 'human rights' or 'sovereignty' can all be articulated in relation to Europe. A related concept, *interdiscursivity*, can be seen when the discourse about Europe for instance refers to topics or subtopics of other discourses, for instance when a nationalist argument is used (taken from the discourse on identity) to argue for a Eurosceptic position. A similar preposition is echoed in the claim that seemingly antagonistic subject positions often build on some fundamental commonalities (Wæver 2001). From this perspective, discourses are characterized as hybrid and open. This allows for the identification of historical and ideological narratives that have traditionally impinged on a specific discourse. In relation to articulating Europe in northern Cyprus then, the aim is to identify and

evaluate the sub-topics that signify Europe (macro-topic) and the ways the parties have constructed the meaning of Europe by drawing on multiple discourses.

Another important aspect of the conceptual framework utilized here is the continuity and change within the respective Europe discourses. The notions of *critical juncture* and *critical moment* elaborated by Bulmer and Burch (2001) to describe a period of significant change are relevant here in revealing the contingency of the discursive structures. Their approach distinguishes critical juncture from a 'critical moment' to emphasize the realization of the latter at which '*there is a clear departure from previously established patterns*' (2001, 81). The distinction is crucial which allows for the consideration of the factors that determine the degree of change. In relation to the framing by the Turkish Cypriot political parties, this turns attention to the contingency of dominant discourses on Europe but also the specific critical juncture that was presented in the run up to the 2004 referendum which challenged the nationalist discourse, leading to the configuration of a new discourse on EU membership. As highlighted earlier, the case of Cyprus is particularly intriguing here. Cyprus is a member of the EU and is often seen as having a peculiar status within the latter as a divided country where the Europeanization process has evolved in a rather unique way in the northern part of the island. Cyprus is also significant as a country in which the process of EU accession initially created a dramatic polarization within the Turkish Cypriot community that resulted in a political sea-change in the run up to the island's accession in 2004 even though its subsequent impact has varied enormously over the last decade. In this regard, the article also outlines several contextual factors which shaped the framing of the EU in Turkish Cypriot politics. [6]

Situating Europe: the Turkish Cypriot case

Cyprus–EU relations were first initiated in the context of an association agreement in 1972 .[7] The agreement envisaged a customs union, which was fully implemented by the late 1980s. However, it was when the suitability of Cyprus' application for EU membership was confirmed in 1995 following the decision taken at the Corfu Summit the previous year (European Council 1994) that EU became an important cleavage of a very complex political dispute. For the Republic of Cyprus (RoC), there were clear socio-economic benefits to be attained from EU membership (Republic of Cyprus 2001). The prospects of joining the EU were also conceived, in the context of the Cyprus problem, as a catalyst that could encourage the sides to reach a deal. For its part, the EU and the Commission also maintained the view that EU membership would bring the two communities closer together (European Commission 1993). While the decision of the European Council in 1994 to include Cyprus in the next round of enlargement and the initiation of the accession process which then followed would not bring about reunification, the prospects of EU membership had an intriguing impact, not least, on Turkish Cypriot politics.

One of the most important outcomes during this period was the strengthening of the moderate parties (Kaymak and Vural 2009) who would then successfully articulate the idea of Europe in tandem with a strong commitment to the resolution of the conflict. As elaborated further below, this relates more specifically to articulating the opposition's subversive agenda, which successfully managed to bring together the issues of reunification, EU membership, and the replacement of the nationalist leadership within

an alternative identity discourse. This impact of the EU became visible in the parliamentary elections in northern Cyprus in 2003, in which the largest opposition party, the Republican Turkish Party (CTP) with its main election slogan being 'Europe is within sight' defeated the right-wing National Unity Party (UBP) government.

Indeed, there was great expectation in Cyprus and elsewhere with the publishing of the Annan plan and during the subsequent negotiations that an eleventh-hour effort could reunite the island in time for accession. However, by the time the UN Blueprint for a settlement (also known as the Annan Plan) was put onto separate, simultaneous referendums on either side of the divided island, accession had become all but an eventuality, unable to obtain the approval needed from the Greek Cypriot community. Over 75 per cent of the Greek Cypriot community rejected the 'Annan Plan' whilst there was a similarly remarkable 'yes' vote (65 per cent) in the north. The failure of the plan notwithstanding, Cyprus joined the EU in May 2004 divided and with the Turkish Cypriot community left on the margins.

The new context was sharply marked by the tension between what the Turkish Cypriot community expected from the EU in relation to the ongoing isolation and what the EU, constrained by international law but also by the position of the Cypriot government, could endorse (Christou 2013). On 26 April 2004, the EU foreign ministers agreed '*to end the isolation of the Turkish Cypriot community, and to facilitate the reunification of Cyprus by encouraging the economic development of the latter community*' (European Council 2004). The Commission (2004) subsequently drafted further regulations to 'lift the isolation' on the Turkish Cypriot community, who, according to the UN Secretary General, by 'no fault of their own' were left outside of the EU (UN 2004). The process ended in stalemate however, with the European Council unable to decide on the Commission's proposals on direct trade with the Turkish Cypriot community as a result of the Cypriot veto with Nicosia insisting that to so-called Direct Trade Regulations, or opening up of northern Cyprus to international trade would imply recognition of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus or the TRNC (Republic of Cyprus 2008). While there has since been a gradual easing of trade from northern Cyprus into the Republic that is assisted through the Commission's Green Line Regulations (European Council 2004), the issue has become highly politicized, enforcing in turn, a narrative of injustice emphasizing the failure of the EU to fully deliver on its promises to lift the isolation of the Turkish Cypriot community.

Europe and the EU in Turkish Cypriot political discourse

In the north, the prospect of EU membership was from the outset linked to other antagonisms relating largely to the Cyprus problem which in the following years lead to a remarkable polarization of the political scene. By the end of that decade, the anticipated EU membership enabled the Turkish Cypriot political actors to formulate robust arguments both in favour and against EU membership – conditional for the Turkish Cypriots to the resolution of the conflict – whilst facilitating at the same time the large-scale mobilization of the opposition forces within the Turkish Cypriot community toward these mutual goals. As such, the EU became a key feature of the dominant political discourses and those concerning identity above all, which the political actors across the political spectrum invoked. The intense polarization and heavy contestation in the run up to accession notwithstanding, the meaning of Europe for the Turkish Cypriot political parties has

since become more diffused. The referendum in April 2004 on the Annan Plan, in this sense, represented a critical juncture allowing the Turkish Cypriot political parties to redefine Europe within their narratives. It did so by signifying a new enlargement framework [8] which allowed for the reduction of the ideological contestation over Europe but also the emergence of a cross party, consensual discourse marked by non-identitarian and highly-depoliticized conceptualizations. In this vein, the analysis of post-referendum party narratives identifies three broad discourses on Europe that inform Turkish Cypriot party preferences: 1) *open Europe* emphasizing an active role of Europe and peace; 2) a *Europe of nations* discourse which places greater emphasis on traditional forms of identification with a strong commitment to national sovereignty; and 3) Europe as a polity emphasizing a *modernization* of the public administration, policy harmonization and free trade. Moreover, the comparison of party positions on Europe displays several important overlaps across all three discourses, which further indicate that parties' commitment to these narratives is not exclusive.

Open Europe

The CTP and the TDP [9] are the two mainstream, centre-left parties that have traditionally subscribed to this position, emphasizing the post national character and the supranational nature of the European Union as well as the internationalization of the Turkish Cypriot community that would ensue following EU membership. Almost from the onset of Cyprus' accession process, these parties assigned a positive or constructive meaning to the EU (Cyprus PIO 1997a, 1997b). In this sense, reunification of Cyprus that had been the dominant focus of their strategy was soon meshed with the prospects of EU membership. Europe and Cyprus' EU membership in this vein signified a post national future for Cyprus which would transcend the ethno-nationalist conflict between the Turkish Cypriots and the Greek Cypriots. Other benefits that would emanate from EU membership were also increasingly echoed in tandem with demands for reunification. In this regard, the leftist CTP would argue that: 'Replacing the old system with peace, democracy and human rights within a free market economy will bring about a freer movement of goods and services, more production and higher profits' (CTP 1993).

At the turn of the century and with the EU accession for Cyprus fast approaching, both the CTP and the then TKP came to play a critical role in the unprecedented and spectacular mobilization of the Turkish Cypriot community in favour of reunification and EU membership (see also Çarkoğlu and Sözen 2004). Further underpinning the discursive positioning of the EU at the programmatic level was its coupling with parties' rhetoric on identity. In this context, the newly adopted CTP manifesto emphasized that the progress and future prosperity of the Turkish Cypriot community depended on the adoption of EU norms and values (CTP 2003). The Peace and Democracy Movement, or the BDH (which had now replaced the TKP) also adopted a new manifesto that tied the future viability of the Turkish Cypriot community as a distinct and self-governing entity to EU membership:

> Those who subscribe to the hard-line philosophy care more for territory than the actual people living in northern Cyprus. For them, people may come and go but the land must be maintained and used as a bargaining chip when and if necessary. This mentality has so far

denied Turkish Cypriot people the right to determine their own future in a referendum. Turkish Cypriot people should thus turn the December 2003 elections into an opportunity to take back their right to hold a referendum in line with the growing popular demand for one. The Peace and Democracy movement has been set up precisely for this purpose by the pro-reunification and pro-EU segments of our community who wish to work together in the [upcoming] December 2003 elections to elect a new negotiating team that will pave the way for reaching a deal and subsequent EU membership (Hürriyet 2003).

An additional subtext here was that the latter would safeguard the Turkish Cypriot community and its 'distinct' identity against political and demographic assimilation from Turkey. Put differently, the opposition believed that EU membership would end northern Cyprus' economic reliance on Turkey, curtail the interference of Ankara in Turkish Cypriot affairs (by fortifying the latter's autonomy within a federal sovereignty) and stem not only the outflow of 'native' Turkish Cypriots but also the much-resented influx of Turkish immigrants and their 'wholesale' naturalization. Indeed, for the CTP, 'the transfer of population which eschewed international norms in favour of short-sighted political gains' thwarted the development and flourishing of the community's political will and endangered the long-term viability of its presence on the island as a distinct entity (Cumhuriyetçi Türk Partisi (CTP) 2003). [10] These latent worries, however, were articulated positively as demands for greater democracy, prosperity and peace that EU membership came to signify. In other words, Cyprus' EU member-ship gradually came to be viewed by the left as a political project that could enhance their community's security and consolidate its distinct identity emphasizing its Cypriot character. For the leftist CTP and the BDH (2003), the EU signified 'a social imaginary' whereby Turkish Cypriot community was embedded in the global political conscious-ness as members of the international community but also a stronger collectivity (the EU) beyond the control of Turkey. As such, the EU soon became a central element of the identity narratives echoed by the two parties and played a critical role in galvanizing support against the nationalist leadership.

To this end, both parties remained committed to reunification and EU membership in the post-referendum period although the EU was articulated in tandem with a notion of Turkish Cypriotness in the context of the progressively improving international image of the community but also under the shadow of the on-going isolation. In this sense, the CTP's EU rhetoric during this time signified a notion of legitimacy for the Turkish Cypriot identity with reference to the easing of the community's ostracization especially in inter-national diplomacy seemingly as a result of the 'yes' vote. Several high-profile meetings held between the Turkish Cypriot leader Talat and the likes of the then EU Commission President Barroso and the former US Secretary of State Colin Powell also served to articulate the notion of a 'global leader' that could facilitate the integration of the Turkish Cypriot community into the international community. In this regard, the Party asserted that: 'The determination of the Turkish Cypriot people which was reflected in the outcome of the [Annan] referendum is a great source of pride. Our people's aspirations for peace was symbolized with the "yes" vote, boosting our international reputation like never before. With their "yes" vote, Turkish Cypriot people have successfully lifted themselves up from the wreck that had in the past created the impression that they were being "intransigent" and "not willing to reach a deal" (Yenidüzen 2011). The BDH's position, on the other hand, departed from that of CTP's toward that of the EU .[11] In a sharper rhetoric, the party

emphasized the "European identity of Turkish Cypriots" whilst accusing Turkey of hindering the integration efforts (due to Turkish refusal to implement the Ankara protocol) and for compelling the Turkish Cypriots to sacrifice their rights for the interests of Turkey' (Cyprus PIO 2005). In any case, both parties continued to make positive references to the EU 'as a factor of security and prosperity', as a project that uproots nationalism but also one that would offer a safeguard for the distinct character and identity of their community that was increasingly undermined (in the parties' own terms) by its asymmetrical relations with Turkey (interviews with CTP and TDP officials, Nicosia, 2014) .[12] There has nonetheless been a gradual decrease in the projection of Europe as an oppositional narrative largely in line with the aborted reunification, the inability on the part of the EU to implement the direct trade regulations and the lack of progress on peace talks. In fact, the most recent parliamentary elections held in January 2018 witnessed a clear shift of focus away from the Cyprus problem (Cyprus Mail 2018) thus the normative conceptions of the EU tied to identitarian concerns with the emphasis placed on the need to modernize the system of governance in which the EU has increasingly become a point of reference.

Nationalist conceptions of Europe

Constructions of Europe within this largely inward-looking discourse type which places greater emphasis on ethno-national forms of identification with a strong commitment to national sovereignty have undergone considerable change over time. The nationalist parties UBP and the DP initially opposed EU membership which the Turkish Cypriot side considered 'illegal' with reference to the wording of the 1960 Constitution (and the Treaty of Guarantee), which grants the president and vice president (a Turkish Cypriot) a veto over any foreign policy decision, particularly any decision on joining an international organization or alliance that does not count both Greece and Turkey among its members (TRNC 2001). Both parties also retaliated by adapting a bolder nationalist rhetoric, claiming that EU membership would only create renewed conditions for *enosis* (or unification with Greece) .[13] Indeed, with the publication of the Annan Plan in 2002 envisioning a bi-communal, bi-zonal federation and a limited role for Turkey in terms of security, the ultimate EU membership was portrayed as an existential threat to the Turkish Cypriot identity that has largely been conceived by the parties in terms of independent statehood. The UBP asserted that the Annan Plan veiled threats on the issues of guarantees, power-sharing and territory that would bring about a dark future for the Turkish Cypriot community by ultimately getting rid of their sovereign state (Anadolu Ajansı 2004). For the most part, the DP also followed UBP in voicing similar concerns and arguments (Kıbrıs 2002) though insisting that the Plan could be revised (Kıbrıs 2003). This difference in nuance was also reflected in the party's decision to grant its members a 'free vote' or a 'conscience vote' (Kıbrıs Postası 2004)

But a somewhat more favourable view of EU membership began to emerge in the post-referendum period though with important reservations. In this context, the DP constructed a more moderate stance on EU membership and reunification with its 2009 manifesto claiming the party supported a bi-communal and bi-zonal solution based on political equality that would also maintain Turkish guarantees (DP 2009). However, it did not mince its words on the EU and its 'biased relationship' with the Greek Cypriot leadership. More specifically, the DP lamented about the 'unfulfilled EU promises' –

relating in general to the lifting of the isolation of the Turkish Cypriot community first envisaged in a European Council (2004)resolution but more specifically the Direct Trade Regulations that had subsequently been blocked by a Greek Cypriot veto – and accused the latter of surrendering to 'Greek Cypriot interests' and aiming at 'settling a score' with Turkey (Kıbrıs Postası 2009a). It also conceived the Turkish Cypriot relations with the EU in the context of these 'promises', relating in general to the lifting of Turkish Cypriot isolation, but more specifically the Direct Trade Regulations towards the north that had been blocked by a Greek Cypriot veto. More remarkably, the 'promises' the DP referred in its EU rhetoric signified the collective rights which construed its narrative on Turkish Cypriot identity conceived in politico-legal terms and with reference to the equal political status of the Turkish Cypriot community. [14] In this narrative, the distinct identity of the Turkish Cypriot community emanates from the 1960 Constitution that was 'rampaged' by the Greek Cypriots in 1963 who then 'hijacked' the title of the partnership Republic and prevented Turkish Cypriots from exercising their 'rights' as the politically equal party for over 40 years (interview with a DP official, Nicosia, 2015). The international isolation that followed in the aftermath of the de facto partition of the island in 1974, are for the DP (but also the UBP) part of the same 'injustice' toward the Turkish Cypriot community. It was in this context that the DP claimed the EU should fulfil its 'obligations' and 'keep its promises' to end the isolation (read injustice) by facilitating direct trade from and into northern Cyprus that would enhance the economic prospects of the TRNC and bring the Turkish Cypriots closer to the EU. As the party leader, Serdar Denktaş claimed:

> We have to make these claims and demand our rights [from the EU]. The goal of joining the EU does not stop us from demanding our rights. On the contrary, we can only be 'European' to the extent we obtain these rights [from the EU] (Kıbrıs Postası 2009b).

The UBP in the post-accession period also continued to champion independent Turkish Cypriot statehood in the form of the TRNC. This was emphasized in the idea that the Turkish Cypriot people, should there be no solution (and with or without EU membership) had their own independent, sovereign state. [15] It is important to note nonetheless that there was a rather subtle change in attitudes in which the party adopted a somewhat milder tone toward EU membership a federal solution. Such change can also be traced back to the party's souring relationship with Turkey: it can thus be considered also as a move towards rekindling its relationship with Turkey that had come under particular strain during the referendum period when it led a 'no' campaign despite the clear support of the AKP government in Turkey in favour of the Annan Plan.[16] Only a year after the referendum, in the run up to the 2005 elections, the UBP expressed support for the resumption of the peace negotiations and for a solution (though one that would be reached on 'Turkish Cypriot terms') while the earlier framing of the EU as an existential threat with reference to the Annan Plan terms was also temporarily abandoned. As such, the party leadership claimed:

> [...] we said 'no' [to the Annan Plan] because the changes we'd asked for were not made. This is now a new era. Our search for a solution in Cyprus continues. It was our duty towards the people to inform them of the content of the plan. Nonetheless, it was a 'yes' vote backed by 65 per cent [of the voters]. We respect the decision of the [Turkish Cypriot] people (Yeni Şafak 2005).

In the following years however, there was a gradual amplification of the well-known rhetoric which emphasized the unrecognized status of the TRNC as an unjust treatment of the Turkish Cypriot people by the EU and the latter's denial of Turkish Cypriot identity. In this context, the UBP also emphasized pursuing closer links with 'mother-land' Turkey, conceived in explicitly nationalist terms as the only safeguard of 'Turkish Cypriot existence' in Cyprus. [17] The narrative of a 'biased relationship' with regards to EU relations with the Greek Cypriot leadership was also articulated by the UBP frequently in accusing Brussels of perpetuating the conflict. For the former party chief Özgürgün, the EU consistently disregarded the democratic institutions of the Turkish Cypriot community and lacked in sincerity by suspending the implementation of the *acquis* in the north (Kıbrıs Postası 2017). More recently, the EU was blamed for the 'unjust suffering of the [internationally isolated] Turkish Cypriot people and the party argued that the two-state formula was the only viable option and that if anything, the EU could facilitate the close cooperation by admitting the Turkish Cypriot state as full member' (Kıbrıs Postası 2018).

Europe as modernization

An important development in the post-referendum period has been the forming of pragmatic but also rather ambiguous positions toward the EU as a polity emphasizing modernization of the public administration, policy harmonization and free trade. Although the ideological positions of all four mainstream parties (CTP, TDP, UBP and the DP) in conceiving of Europe within identitarian discourses remained largely intact, EU membership and other related issues were discussed increasingly in an enlargement context facilitated to an important extent by the specific critical juncture that was presented in the run up to the 2004 referendum. The impact of the critical juncture at the discursive level was two-fold: first, it gradually diminished the projection of Europe as an oppositional narrative largely in line with the aborted reunification; and secondly, it rendered Europe available for alternative articulations. To put it differently, the 2004 referendum was a critical juncture in both bringing about a new enlargement context for the Turkish Cypriot community and opening the discursive space, allowing the UBP and the DP who had traditionally opposed EU membership on the grounds of reunification, begun to conceive Europe as a process of modernization displaying an intriguing convergence of party conceptions on Europe and EU membership.

Indeed, whilst favouring a clearly nationalistic stance vis-à-vis the Cyprus problem and displaying occasional hostility toward Brussels, the pro-market DP and the UBP have refrained from voicing outright opposition to membership prospects in the post-referendum period. The discursive space which opened up in the post-Annan (2004) period also signified a re-categorization of the EU onto an enlargement context. A key feature of this discourse is that it is dominated by valence issues (Grzymala-Busse and Innes 2003; Green 2007) or by issues on which all parties declare the same objectives (in this case, open and competitive markets, public sector/administrative efficiency, balanced budgets, reduced public spending and entry into the European Union). As a result, a key focus of recent party competition in relation to Europe in northern Cyprus has been how to manage the accession agenda, i.e. the harmonization efforts.

Such argumentation has been mounted by the CTP in recent years within a 'reform' narrative that championed pro-active EU convergence for the TRNC (CTP 2014). The party argued rather assertively that it was due to its own efforts and credentials that the Turkish Cypriot community was able to develop meaningful relations with the EU and that the opportunities offered by the EU were 'utilised to their full potential to start modernizing the Turkish Cypriot legal and administrative structures' in line with the comprehensive Harmonization Strategy it developed during office (Cumhuriyetçi Türk Partisi (CTP) 2014). Beyond the framing of its reform proposals with reference to EU *acquis* and the 'European norms' in its policy-oriented party programme (TDP 2015), the TDP too in a similar vein frequently drew on the EU harmonization process and highlighted what it saw as the lack of oversight into the implementation of the newly-passed legislation arguing it could lead the harmonization process more effectively (Havadis Kıbrıs 2017).

On the other hand, the DP continued to lament the EU's lower aptitude but also stressed at the same time the need to prepare the Turkish Cypriot community for EU membership through the swift harmonization of domestic laws with the European *acquis* (Toplumcu Demokrasi Partisi (TDP) 2015). It is also primarily in these terms that the UBP has interpreted EU membership more recently. Though the party has remained a firm advocate of upholding national identity within what it described as a 'Europe of nations' (interview with senior UBP official, 2015) it nonetheless sought to earn an image as a promoter of reform through harmonization. To this end, its campaign poster for the 2009 legislative elections featured an EU flag under the slogan 'Our place is in the EU' with a promise to introduce 'European standards in all fields' (UBP website). The party managed to regain support among those previously disgruntled by its stance on reunification which was perceived by the party's own admission as anti-EU [18] and subsequently its 2009 government programme also declared commitment to 'harmonization efforts and strengthening of relations with the EU' (TRNC 2009, 10). The UBP-DP coalition agreement drawn up following the 2016 elections continued this trend by retaining a strong emphasis on convergence (TRNC 2016) and recently, the new UBP leader Ersin Tatar committed his party's full support for supporting the harmonization efforts and the further developing of Turkish Cypriot relations with the EU (Kıbrıs Postası 2019). For its part, the four-party coalition set up by the CTP, TDP, DP and the HP, which came into power in January 2018, expressed its commitment toward the harmonization efforts by pledging to work with the EU on improving the bilateral relationship (TRNC 2018).

The meaning of Europe in northern Cyprus

Despite the lack of a resolution or substantive effects of EU policy in practice, the day-to-day articulations of Europe still play an important position within the Turkish Cypriot political party narratives. In accounting for change and continuity in the party conceptions of Europe, the EU's effect on northern Cyprus and over the Turkish Cypriot political parties more specifically, can be conceptualized through a constructivist approach which complements other areas for investigating EU-related party change identified by the Europeanization literature. The assumption that the meaning of Europe is not established, it is what can be conceived as an 'essentially contested concept' is not new (Diez 1999). In the northern Cyprus case, this was evidenced by identifying three broad discourses on

Europe that inform Turkish Cypriot party preferences: 1) an *open Europe* emphasizing an active role of Europe and peace; 2) a *Europe of nations* discourse which places greater emphasis on traditional forms of identification, mostly uncomfortable with post-national forms of governance and 3) Europe as a polity emphasizing a *modernization* of the public administration.

The prospect of EU membership was from the outset linked to other antagonisms relating largely to the Cyprus problem, which in the following years led to a remarkable polarization of the political scene. As such, the EU became a key feature of the dominant political discourses and those concerning identity above all, which the political actors across the political spectrum invoked. In other words, the EU was articulated in tandem with existential worries competing conceptions of identity conceived in the context of the Cyprus problem. An important finding here in this vein is that these discourses did not articulate exclusive conceptions of collective European identity in the strict sense but were mainly concerned with reifying competing visions of political community in which Europe became an important point of reference.

Since the 2004 referendum however, and the intense polarization and heavy contestation in the run up to Cyprus' EU accession notwithstanding, the meaning of Europe for the Turkish Cypriot political parties has become more diffused. The discursive shifts in the parties' narratives can be explained with reference to a critical juncture that was presented in the Annan Plan referendum, which challenged the nationalist discourse, leading to the configuration of a new discourse on EU membership. The concept of a critical juncture turns attention to the contingency of dominant discourses on Europe, which was mostly related to the non-discursive context. The immediate context was marked by the tension between what the Turkish Cypriot community expected from the EU in relation to the on-going isolation and the EU's capacity, constrained by international law but also by the position of the Cypriot government in relation to formulating its policy toward the northern part of the island in which the application of EU law is suspended. The internal dynamics of the EU (not least RoC's stance within it) meant that efforts to achieve the desired impact or the expectations in relation to ending the isolation of the Turkish Cypriot community were greatly circumscribed. The new context nonetheless signified a new enlargement framework that allowed for the articulation of a consensual discourse marked by non-identitarian conceptualizations.

Though conditional on the resolution of the Cyprus conflict, the post-2004 period nonetheless represents an enlargement context for the Turkish Cypriots represented by greater engagement in part of the EU in terms of financial and technical assistance toward reunification and the implementation of the EU law following reunification. In addition, since 2004, there has been greater engagement in part of the EU with the Turkish Cypriot community, its civil society but also institutions that has made it difficult for the hardliner parties to ignore (Kyris 2015). The start of accession negotiations with Turkey in 2005, has also made it possible (and initially facilitated, as in the case of UBP) to sustain a favourable stance toward reunification and simultaneous accession. A growing frustration with the political parties in relation to the undertaking of the long-overdue reforms and popular demands for good governance, transparency and accountability (Cyprus Mail 2018) often synonymized with EU – as evidenced by the party rhetoric articulating the EU as a 'moderniser' – also explain the increasing preference for a non-identitarian and highly-depoliticized conceptualization of the latter. Last but not least, the European citizenship

rights that most Turkish Cypriots enjoy has brought with it new freedoms to travel, study and work in Europe which consolidated at the societal level the enormous potential of political and economic integration .[19]

At the ideological level too, increasing preference for Europe supporting open, competitive markets which culminated in the adoption of the Lisbon Strategy in 2000 and later on, the Europe 2020 blueprint (Copeland and Papadimitriou 2012) is also consistent with the centrist character of the mainstream Turkish Cypriot political parties, that had progressively aimed to reduce of the ideological contrasts particularly with the end of the Cold War. Subsequently, similar to other cases of enlargement, the successive Turkish Cypriot governments have begun to prepare for (eventual) membership by implementing the *acquis* to fulfil the accession requirements. In this regard, the formal requirements, or the so-called Copenhagen criteria, require both a market economy and institutional guarantees for transparent democracy. This is also coupled with new administrative structures and high administrative capacity in the public and private sector. From this perspective, virtually all Turkish Cypriot political parties agree that EU membership translated into a competitive, modernized polity with access to European and international markets. But the context of enlargement is also a critical factor here. For prospective members, the accession process offers very little room for manoeuvre in the adoption of EU law. The necessity of the reforms or the implementation of the *acquis* in this sense forces the governments to administer a set accession agenda of reform and convergence. Though EU conditionality in the traditional sense (see Gateva 2015) does not apply to the non-recognized northern Cyprus,[20] the enabling factors outlined above (public perceptions, influence of Turkey and ideational compatibility and the newly-defined parameters of the Cyprus problem) together with the precedent the EU has set during previous rounds of accession (not least of the RoC in 2004) have all contributed to the emergence in northern Cyprus of a consensual, non-politicized discourse for reform and EU entry.

The change and continuity in party narratives can also be explained in relation to *interdiscursivity*, which can be seen when the discourse about Europe for instance refers to topics or subtopics of other discourses, for instance when a nationalist argument is used (taken from the discourse on identity) to argue for a defensive position on Europe. A similar preposition is echoed in the claim that seemingly antagonistic subject positions often build on some fundamental commonalities (Wæver 2001). From this perspective, discourses are characterized as hybrid and open. This allows for the identification of historical and ideological narratives that have traditionally impinged on a specific discourse. In relation to articulating Europe in northern Cyprus then, the ideological open Europe and Europe of nations discourses remain relevant and have proved rather resilient to change. Within the reformist discourse, on the other hand, the EU signifies the modernization of the public administration, policy harmonization and free trade while the competition is in terms of which party can better manage and more efficiently lead the harmonization process.

As the analysis above has shown however, the overlap in party narratives and the apparent convergence need to be treated with care. This is more the visible in the case of the UBP. While the party has since the referendum conceived the EU largely within the reformist narrative outlined above, the Europe of nations narrative it subscribes –

characterized by loyalty towards statehood (i.e. the TRNC) and two-state solution – is largely incompatible with efforts to find a federal solution to the Cyprus problem that an eventual EU membership depends. This is an important finding which complements investigations of EU-related party change. In the Turkish Cypriot case, references to EU exist in virtually all party programmes though assuming a consensus-producing effect of Europeanization' often pointed out in the Europeanization literature requires closer inspection at the discursive level which reveals that the parties' conceptions of Europe draw on multiple discourses demonstrating their contingent character.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that the Europe discourse in northern Cyprus has been (re) constructed within party competition that reflects, on the whole, the new parameters of the conflict since Cyprus' accession into the EU as a divided island. The most remarkable feature of the new context for the domestic politics of the Turkish Cypriot community has been the emergence of a new, consensual discourse on Europe. This is more the remarkable considering the marginal positioning of northern Cyprus following the failure of the 'Annan Plan' to reunify the island on the eve of its EU accession. However, despite all the odds stacked against the latter in projecting a positive image as a force for good in promoting peace, and considering the highly ideological and polarized nature of the debate over membership in the run up to accession, there has been a gradual convergence of party-political narratives since 2004 toward a more pragmatic approach vis-à-vis Europe and the EU. Within this frame, political parties have conceived Europe in a contested environment whereas the impact of this has been most intriguing for the hard-line parties; whilst Europe was initially conceived as an existential threat with reference to a federal solution to the Cyprus problem, the post-referendum period saw important rhetorical and programmatic changes with regards to EU membership in general and the harmonization of Turkish Cypriot legal framework with the European *acquis* in particular. From this perspective, the analysis has provided rich empirical support for the claim that domestic change related to the EU impact, as far as political parties are concerned, is discourse-orientated as well as structural. The northern Cyprus case has shown that virtually all mainstream parties have articulated Europe as part of their day-to-day narrative or within normative positions in a similar way to what has been documented in other examples of Europeanization. The focus on discourse has further allowed the investigation to re-orientate the debate onto the political and bring in the political parties thus putting the contingency as centre stage.

A significant challenge to furthering the Europeanization research agenda in these contexts but also in other, more classical cases are distinguishing between EU related responses and wider environmental variables. The evidence in this case nonetheless corroborates an additional (and often overlooked) research strategy for the Europeanization research on political parties emphasizing contingency and discourse in an intriguing case not only characterized by the absence of traditional EU input but also in which the EU has a unique remit.

Notes

1. Note on terminology: This article does not wish to engage in the debate over the status of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. For reasons of clarity, domestic institutions are referred to by their official name (e.g. Government, Prime Minister, etc.).

2. At the Helsinki Summit in 1999, Greece agreed the granting of EU candidacy to Turkey in exchange for the removing of the conditionality of a resolution ahead of Cyprus' EU accession. For Tocci (2007, 52) the removal of the conditionality, which guaranteed accession for the Greek Cypriot side impeded the much-acclaimed catalytic effect of the EU in resolving the conflict.

3. Only the Republican Turkish Party (*Cumhuriyetçi Türk Partisi* or the CTP), the Communal Liberation Party (*Toplumcu Demokrasi Partisi*, the TDP), the National Unity Party (*Ulusal Birlik Partisi*, UBP) and the Democratic Party (*Demokrat Parti* or the DP) are analysed here. These parties are considered mainstream both in relation to their ideological outlook and the consistent representation they have attained in the Turkish Cypriot legislature. The CTP and the TDP on the left of the political spectrum are strong supporters of unification and are pro-EU. The UBP and the DP on the other hand are usually placed on the right of the political spectrum and are typified with strong loyalty to independent Turkish Cypriot statehood (in the form of the TRNC) and ever-closer links with Turkey. In the most recent legislative elections of 2018, two new parties, the YDP (*Yeni Doğuş Partisi*, New Birth Party) and the HP (*Halkın Partisi*, People's Party) were able to gain seats though they are omitted from the analysis due to space restrictions.

4. It is important to note that the discursive analysis undertaken here concentrates less at the micro-linguistic level but more so on the content level, i.e., on the specific interpretations of key elements and concepts as well as the recurring patterns of argumentation. Regarding the analysis of discourse then, the qualitative methodology utilised here focuses on identifying and evaluating the sub-topics which signify Europe (macro-topic) and the ways the parties have conceived Europe by drawing on multiple discourses, a process which is explained with reference to *interdiscursivity*, i.e. when the discourse about Europe refers to topics or subtopics of other discourses.

5. All interviews were conducted in confidentiality, and the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.

6. It is in this sense that, while the focus of this article is to shed light on how Europe is articulated by the mainstream political parties, the analysis is carried out by situating Europe within these complex dynamics related to other cleavages – most notably, the unresolved conflict, the unrecognised status of northern Cyprus but also the bilateral relationship it has developed in this context with Turkey – which structure the political discourse but also the field of action.

7. It is important to underline that the Turkish Cypriot community has played no part in the governing of the Republic of Cyprus since 1974 and did not take part in the EU accession negotiations.

8. Though the EU enlargement regarding Cyprus officially ended in 2004 and the extension of the *acquis* to the Turkish Cypriot Community is conditional on the resolution of the Cyprus conflict, the post-2004 period nonetheless represents an enlargement context for the Turkish Cypriots represented by greater engagement in part of the EU in terms of financial and technical assistance toward reunification and the implementation of the EU law following reunification.

9. The Communal Democracy Party (the TDP hereinafter) was established in 2007 and has replaced the two social democratic parties, the BDH (*Barış ve Demokrasi Hareketi*, or the Peace and Democracy Movement) and its predecessor, the TKP (*Toplumcu Kurtuluş Partisi*, the Communal Liberation Party).

10. For a general discussion of the party positions on immigration and the citizenship status of Turkish nationals in the pre-referendum period, see Council of Europe (1992) but also the Select Committee (2005) report on Cyprus.

11. For a detailed account of this schism between the CTP and the BDH, see Kaymak and Vural (2009).
12. More recently, M. A. Talat, the former Turkish Cypriot leader and leader of the CTP reiterated that the lingering Cyprus problem would inevitably push Turkish Cypriots closer to Ankara (Michalopoulos 2016).
13. Tocci 2000, 7; The Joint Declaration of Turkey and the TRNC of 20 January 1997, for instance, declares the 'Greek Cypriot side' to have 'no other interest than entering the European Union as a second Greek state and thus achieving an indirect integration with Greece' (Republic of Turkey 1997, 7).
14. The principle of political equality enshrined in every plan or proposed settlement stems directly from the 1960 Constitution which attributed equal powers to the Cypriot President (Greek Cypriot) and Vice President (Turkish Cypriot). For example, the Ghali Set of Ideas of 1992 (United Nations General Assembly 1992) saw that the '[…] the solution to the Cyprus problem was based on one State of Cyprus comprising two politically equal communities' (par.11).
15. Indeed, this was articulated during the 2005 electoral campaign with the slogan 'You are not without an alternative'.
16. See, for example, Derviş Eroğlu's interview with Turkish journalist Fikret Bila (2009).
17. The right-wing parties UBP and (to a lesser extent) DP have both acted as staunch advocates of ever-closer links with Turkey, conceived not only in geo-strategic terms that denotes the latter clear political/military rights in relation to Cyprus, but also in nationalist-mythological terms as the 'motherland' that the TRNC (as the so-called infant-lan' or *yavru vatan* in Turkish) and the 'Turkish population of Cyprus' depends for its security and well-being. Turkish Cypriot identity, within this 'motherland/infant-land' narrative, is conceived not as a *sui generis* identity but as a form of ethnic/local variation in which *Turkishness* takes pride of place and signifies belonging to the larger Turkish nation. This is also evident in the parties' pro-grammes, describing the Turkish Cypriot community as an indivisible part of the Turkish nation based on history, culture, language and religion (UBP 1998; but also Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus 2016).
18. Kıbrıs (2005a, 2005b).
19. The temporary suspension of the *acquis* does not have any bearing on individual rights and entitlements the Turkish Cypriot citizens (of the Republic) enjoy as EU citizens outside northern Cyprus.
20. With the adoption of the Financial Aid Regulation in 2006, the EU's engagement with northern Cyprus was expanded to include harmonisation efforts i.e. alignment of the Turkish Cypriot legal order with EU law. Due to lack of recognition however, the Commission is unable to use traditional conditionality or enlargement-related instru-ments, such as 'twinning contracts', technical assistance to public bodies or provisions requiring mandatory results. For a more detailed discussion, see Kyris (2015).

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