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## **Enhancing Civil Society's Role in Conflict Prevention and Peace-Building in Cyprus**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND BOOKLET STRUCTURE

This booklet is the outcome of a research project entitled *Enhancing Civil society's Role in Conflict Prevention and Peace-building in Cyprus*. The research was funded by the European Commission<sup>1</sup> and was carried out by the Cyprus Center for the European and International Affairs in the period of January 2010 – May 2011. The aim of this booklet is to present the main findings of the research in an uncomplicated and non-academic way so as to widen the audience spectrum that could use the findings of the project and thus disseminate the results to the maximum level possible. Subsequently, the bigger part of the booklet is comprised of small bullet-point like paragraphs that emphasize the different issues discussed. The booklet is available, free of charge, both in hard copy and electronic forms at [http://www.rcenter.intercol.edu/round\\_tables/](http://www.rcenter.intercol.edu/round_tables/).

*Structure of booklet:* The booklet is separated into three broad sections with several sub-categories in each one. The first section is a brief introduction highlighting the main objectives and methodology of the project. Following that is a detailed outline of the main issues discussed during our roundtable meetings and interviews. These are issues that potentially hinder further cooperation (and thus resolution) and increase mistrust between the two sides. That said, the booklet will not present the findings of each roundtable separately, but will rather present the overall findings with references to specific issues that were particularly relevant to certain individuals. The last section will present recommendations that were either suggested by the participants themselves or emerged from our analysis of the issues raised during the roundtables and the interviews.

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<sup>1</sup> More specifically the project was under the Instrument for Stability Crisis Preparedness Component Annual Action Programmes 2007-2008 - Peace-building Partnership Support Organization of Round Tables, contract number PBP-2008-2-AAP-2007/2008.

## **SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION**

For the implementation of the project we held a series of bi-communal roundtable meetings with individuals from different sectors of the society, namely artists, NGOs, academics, students, business people and low-level elite, while we also conducted a number of interviews with significant actors in Cyprus.

### ***1.1. Objectives***

The project had several broad (general) objectives, some long-term and over-optimistic and some short-term and quite feasible. One of the overall and long-term objectives of the project was to use the findings of our meetings to decrease the possibility of further crises and create more efficient peace-building reconciliation measures. Whether we managed to contribute towards this goal cannot be entirely clear. Certainly the people involved in the roundtables became more aware of the problems and fears of the “other” and suggested ways to improve the environment in which they operate. Moreover, the recommendations (see below) that derive from this project may help towards this goal. We certainly hope that through this booklet we will enhance this knowledge and come one step further to this very hopeful goal. Overall, and even though we should not have great expectations from a small project like this towards the prevention of future crises, we believe that at least the people that were directly involved (and thus influenced) will certainly contribute towards achieving this objective.

The creation of more efficient peace-building reconciliation measures was more achievable and feasible goal. All participants had recommendations on how the two sides (especially on an elite level) could contribute towards the creation of measures that would lead to more tangible and concrete outcomes.

This project also aimed at identifying the sources of mistrust and fears of the “other” and help increase communication between the two sides. We are confident that we these two goals, but especially the former, were fully met. The list of factors that lead to both fear and mistrust are outline in the next section.

Two additional objectives were the creation of a long-term network and early warning systems. It became obvious quite soon that this would be a feasible and rather easy task for some sectors of the society, namely artists, NGOs and even students, but not for others, such as business people, elite and academics. The post-roundtable communication between us and among Greek and Turkish Cypriots indicates that a form of network has been created between the two sides. That said, we cannot yet argue with certainty that this is a “long-term” network as by definition it requires time to prove that this is indeed the case; we certainly hope this is the case.

Regarding the early-warning system, we have some indication that this is beginning to work as well. More specifically, with the first political developments (change of Turkish Cypriot leadership) that hinted potential future crises, some of our participants immediately invited us to discuss the possible impact on the Problem. Similarly, other organizations (NGOs, such as Cyprus 2015) also invited us as participants and observers in roundtable discussions that involved new opinion polls (that could also act as indication for future crises) on the Cyprus problem. We are confident, therefore, that to a degree this project has met this objective.

In addition to the overall objectives the project also had smaller and specific ones. More specifically, it aimed at creating a database with individuals from the different sectors that could be “used” for future cooperation between the two sides. Since the database is not publically available, CCEIA could be used as ‘hub’ through which individuals or organizations that are interested in engaging in bi-communal events could find information about potential partners.

Another specific objective was the creation of grounds for mutual understanding and cooperation in specific fields. There is certainly an increased probability among our participants to cooperate now as they have a better understanding of the 'other' and less fears. However, we cannot argue that we have changed the overall environment in Cyprus to a degree that cooperation is much easier on a wider level. This is precisely why our most important recommendation is that we need to conduct follow-up projects that will not deal with the understanding of the factors for the problem, but rather with "cooperation games". In other words, there is a need for the actual promotion of cooperation through funded activities.

### ***1.2. Methodology and logistics for roundtables and interviews:***

All roundtables were bi-communal, with the number of Greek and Turkish Cypriots being almost always evenly distributed, and never exceeding a 60%-40% ratio towards one or the other side. Particular attention was also given to have both male and female participants in the groups. Participants were chosen based on their expertise and profession and not on their political orientation with the only exception of academics when we chose, on purpose, academics with different views on the Cyprus problem to stimulate more profound discussion.

More specifically:

For the *artists* roundtable we chose a wide spectrum of artists, including painters, musicians and poets. Similarly, we chose individuals who are part of *NGOs* that focus on the environment, education, art, etc. The *students* who joined us were between the age of 15 and 17 and were accompanied by two of their teachers. Many of the student-participants were also part of a US-funded bi-communal project which made the discussion very interesting, not least because they were very opinionated in regards to the 'other' and to the prospects of friendship between the two sides, but also in regards to the criticism and hostility they faced because of their actions. We chose *business people* from the construction and banking industries, as these are two of the most important industries in both sides of the Green Line. The

participants for the *civil society* roundtable were individuals who were part of the Master Plan, a UN-sponsored bi-communal plan aiming at renovating the old city of Nicosia on both sides of the Buffer Zone.

In addition to the roundtables we also conducted a series of interviews that complemented the group discussions. More specifically we interviewed officials from the Greek and Turkish Chambers of Commerce, officials from Fire Departments, UN personnel, a bi-communal UN-stationed police (that act as a liaison for the police forces on the two sides), business people and political elite.

Both the roundtables and the interviews had a semi-structured format with some 'fixed' questions that were used for inter-sector comparison purposes. We were, however, also open to 'free' discussion, as the aim was, inter alia, to understand the issues that trouble the two sides.

All the roundtable meetings took place at the premises of the University of Nicosia, with the exception of that of the civil society, which took place in the old city of Nicosia. CCEIA also arranged for the transportation of Turkish Cypriots who required transportation to and from the University. All the interviews on the other hand took place at the premises of the individuals we interviewed. On average each roundtable lasted for two and a half hours, and each interview for one hour.

## **SECTION 2: MAIN ISSUES THAT HINDER COOPERATION AND LEAD TO DISTRUST**

### ***2.1. Frequency of Interaction (pre and post 2003)***

#### **2.1.1. Overall assessment on interaction**

The first thing we wanted to establish during this project was how frequently individuals and/or organizations from the two sides cooperate(d). As expected, interaction between the two sides changed significantly with the opening of a number of crossing points in 2003 and the subsequent years. Prior to 2003 meetings were very scarce and were usually limited to the buffer zone under the auspices of the UN or organizations such Fulbright. Many times meetings were held abroad, away from the authorities' control (e.g. in the 1990's the government of Sweden organized a series of bi-communal events).

In the post 2003 period events and interaction increased dramatically, albeit not among the wider population. People who do engage in such activities are indeed particularly active and took advantage of the opening of the crossing points. The same does not apply however for the wider public. While a significant percentage of the population crossed or crosses the Green Line there is little or no interaction with the 'other' (e.g. creation of friendships, business, sport activities or any other form of socialization).

The artists and NGOs seem to be the most active groups. NGOs organize numerous events, while artists from both sides constantly struggle to show that arts should be over politics and nationality. The same applies for academics. Prior to 2003 it was much easier for them to meet abroad than in Cyprus, and their cooperation was essentially limited to American efforts to arrange bi-communal conflict resolution groups. In Cyprus, these events were usually organized by the American embassy and were hosted mostly at Ledra Palace in the Buffer Zone or at the mixed village of Pyla. The Cyprus Fulbright Commission also made efforts for Greek and Turkish Cypriot academics to meet in Cyprus and abroad (e.g. Tel Aviv). After 2003 academics can freely and much more frequently meet for conferences in both sides of the Green Line, albeit there is still hesitation to truly cooperate (e.g. co-publications) for the reasons mentioned earlier.



Business people did not cooperate at all prior to 2003. After the opening of the crossing point however there is some interaction, which, however, is monitored by the EU and the Greek and Turkish Cypriot authorities. The construction business is perhaps the sector that utilized the opening of the crossing points the most. That said, however, the business activities between the two sides are insignificant for the economies of either side.

Other officials, such as fire departments or police have even less interaction. The former do not cooperate in cases of forest fires or other natural disasters and they do not have any plans to do so. Interestingly, while on an unofficial level they know each other (i.e. fire department elites), they do not have any form interaction (e.g. training, seminars, drills, etc). Cooperation on police-related matters is somewhat different. There is no official interaction, but there is a liaison committee stationed in the old Nicosia airport (UN buffer zone). The committee is comprised by two Greek and two Turkish Cypriots who act as liaisons for their respective sides, so indirectly there is some form of interaction on a top elite level. Direct interaction, however, is impossible due to the fear of recognition of the 'other' side.

### **2.1.2 Enclosed vs. open environment**

Our participants raised the issue of open vs closed environments and emphasized that the latter have more chances of having an impact. It appears that the more effective meetings are the ones that create an 'enclosed' environment where participants are 'forced' to spend a lot of time together (without being able to 'escape') and exchange views and learn to understand each other better, and more specifically understand their concerns and fears. Such meetings could be either abroad or in Cyprus.

Similarly, the enclosed events last longer (many days or even weeks sometimes), increasing thus the chances of success. Almost all participants who experienced

both 'kinds' (short and long) emphasized that events that last only a few hours or a day are not as efficient.

It must be noted, however, that even 'enclosed' meetings do not seem to have a long-term effect as in most cases the communication between the participants cease after the meetings. This might have to do with the fact that the participants go back to their 'normal' lives where they are confronted with prejudice, social pressure, and a lack of understanding regarding bi-communal activities.

## ***2.2. Recognition issues***

By far the most important (and obvious) issue that hinders cooperation or even generates antagonistic behavior is that of recognition. On one hand Greek Cypriots, elite and public alike, are terrified of the prospect of recognizing "TRNC", while Turkish Cypriots on the other hand actively seek to achieve direct or indirect recognition. The fact that the Cyprus problem and the efforts for its resolution revolve around that of sovereignty and recognition makes this issue very important and extremely sensitive.

The recognition pressure varies from quite implicit, as in the case of Academia, to very explicit, as in the case of government employees, army, police, etc. The implicit pressure, especially on Greek Cypriots, comes in the form of "do not engage in bi-communal activities because you might indirectly recognize "TRNC". The pressure could be very unofficial or "semi-official" through "reminders" and "warnings". Indicatively there are circular letters that remind interested individuals not to participate in bi-communal events as members of their institutions but rather only under their own individual capacity. This is not surprising, since no private or public institution would like to bear the cost of being the "one" which recognized "TRNC". Said otherwise, these circular letters come primarily due to concerns for the impression that such acts may generate implied recognition. This is particularly the case if an event is organized in the northern part of the divide.

It must be noted that this fear is exacerbated because of the way the media present such events. The pressure is thus particularly intense for the interested individuals as well as the organizations they work for; no participant wishes to become the scapegoat or the reason for political trouble. That said, however, it is not just the Greek Cypriot media that creates problems in this respect. The Turkish Cypriot media (and political elite for that matter) take advantage of cases where individuals or organizations participated in events in the northern part to imply that an indirect form of recognition occurred. It is worth noting that this might not necessarily have been the organizer's aim.

Some participants argued that there is an inappropriate misrepresentation of the international law, and that recognition could not occur even if participants went under their professional capacity (e.g. as professor of 'x' university or employee of 'y' ministry). In accordance, it could be concluded that the mere act of meeting with people from the Turkish Cypriot community even in territories that are not under the RoC control does not in effect constitute recognition, as so indicated in the series of meetings between officials of the two communities in all levels.

Overall, regardless if any activities in bi-communal events truly constitutes recognition or not, the pressure on participants and organizers is so significant that it hinders cooperation on all levels (business, academic, social, athletic, etc).

### ***2.3. Social Pressure***

Social pressure can be exercised by a number of different groups. In order to understand the dynamics of this form of pressure it is imperative to break down the different 'kinds' that exist, namely family pressure, peer pressure, colleagues and the wider society in general. Before proceeding to the more detailed observations it is worth noting some general issues that emerged during the meetings.

Turkish Cypriots who took part in bi-communal events with their Greek Cypriot

counterparts were primarily accused of cooperating with the Greek Cypriot 'tricksters' (since Greek Cypriots are portrayed as such in the northern part of the island). The problem however became significant when the pressure became personalized. It is indicative that the names of Turkish Cypriot participants were mentioned in the Turkish Cypriot press as CIA agents and were portrayed as people who are "selling their souls". In the Greek Cypriot community things were not so dramatic (i.e. mentioning people's name in the press), but there is still significant social pressure, which is usually portrayed in the form of 'cooperation with the enemy'. Moreover, and as some academics noted, the use of international law is many times used (even in a misinterpreted way) to apply social pressure (e.g. indirectly the "TRNC" will be recognized through such bi-communal activities).

Overall, the society (on both sides) is generally very skeptical regarding bi-communal activities. Among other things this is due to a general fatigue with the Cyprus problem, but also because expectations as regards a political solution to the division are diminishing. What came out from most participants reactions was that the pressure is rather implicit and is expressed, many times, through their refusal to take part in bi-communal activities and by ignoring others' efforts in this respect.

### **2.3.1 Family pressure**

Families and friends are a significant source of societal pressure. This is not surprising because they (family and friends) also feel social pressure because a family member or a friend is engaged in such activities with the 'other'.

Families exercise more explicit pressure, asking many times not to cross the Green Line or participate too often in such events, as this is considered as a form of betrayal and unpatriotic. A lot of the participants say that their families' views have a significant impact on their decisions for this issue. This is particularly relevant for students who are under the age of 18.

Regarding the stance of parents of youngsters involved in bi-communal activities, it can be observed that although most parents are supportive of the partaking of their children, more distant relatives take the side of more nationalist sentiments and blame the parents and children for their “wrongdoing”. This is of particular importance as the young who get involved in such activities feel particular pressure from their relatives, including cousins who are close to their own age.

What is more, because many parents are afraid of the reactions of their friends and relatives they try their best to keep their children’s “acts” a secret. The pressure is based on the foundation that the ‘other’ is the reason for ‘our’ suffering therefore there cannot really be any trust and thus friendship. Unsurprisingly then, even if they do not oppose their children they do not show any interest in knowing the details of the activities.

### **2.3.2 Peer Pressure (students)**

Students encounter considerable pressure from peers who have anti-bi-communal views and who are also very outspoken about them. The social pressure could be explicit as well as implicit, especially for young individuals. Explicit pressure could come in the form of name-calling (e.g. traitors, Turk or Greek lover), ‘cyber-war’ (e.g. facebook, youtube, etc). They may even be accused of ‘losing their identity’ (i.e. Greekness or Turkishness) and so on and so forth. Implicit pressure could come in the form of social exclusion (i.e. may not be invited to events or other peers do not want to associate with them socially). As a result, many interested individuals (for bi-communal activities) refrain from doing so out of fear what others may say and how they may make them feel because of the social exclusion.

In a number of cases students choose not to go to any presentations or activities they ideologically disagree with. In other cases however, when they do go (despite their disagreement), they do not hesitate to show their convictions during those school activities and thus exert enormous pressure on their peers. For example,

when some of our participants presented the positive side of the 'other' in school events, the result was the emergence of groups of students with "hard-line" and anti-bi-communal feelings, which openly blamed the participants for "making up" with the enemy who has murdered 'us' and who is to be blamed for much of our pain and suffering. They also blamed participants for bringing the enemy to 'our' camp as friend (i.e. like a Trojan horse). Young people involved in bi-communal activities are presented as traitors and therefore face harsh criticism from their schoolmates. Furthermore a number of students ask to avoid discussions like this outside the merits of a particular program. They also may threaten in advance about the applied terminology of the presentation to avoid any offending topic.

Unsurprisingly, the pressure is more significant in cases where the anti-bi-communal students are the majority (as opposed to cases where the majority is neutral to the organization of such events). It must be noted that this form of behavior and social pressure applies to both sides of the Buffer Zone.

Interestingly, when the students involved into bi-communal activities insist on their views, some classmates, friends and relatives eventually give in into listening to their opinions and many open up more to the possibility that some form of friendship could indeed develop between the two sides (even though they still may be unwilling to participate themselves into bi-communal activities).

What is particularly important to note is that according to our young participants, the younger generation "extremists" (as our participants called them) have more extreme views than the older generation, even though the former have not experienced any violent conflict themselves (as the 1974 war took place many years before they were born). With this in mind it is not surprising that they find it particularly difficult to listen to any of their classmates who are engaged in bi-communal activities.

The solution to this problem, according to the students-participants, is to show understanding and respect for their views as well (i.e. anti-bi-communal) so as to make them listen to the compromising argument of the bi-communal supporters

afterwards. The key, they argue, is to let them talk first and ‘pour out their pessimism’, and then make their counter-arguments; otherwise what will remain is antagonism without any value added to the conversation.

Another interesting aspect is that a number of people seem to believe that the students’ participation in bi-communal activities do not necessarily change any opinions, but rather help identify where a particular (young) audience stands politically and ideologically so that they can individually be approached (by foreigners and interested locals) and used as opinion ‘carriers’. Said otherwise, they could potentially become actors that would transfer specific opinions to their peers.

### 2.3.3 Colleagues

Another aspect of social pressure is that of colleagues, which takes place either at the work environment (i.e. physical place of work) or among individuals who are in the same line of work even though they do not work at the same place (e.g. academics in different universities).

The social pressure in this sub-category could either be direct (explicit) or indirect (implicit) and it depends, to a significant extent, on the profession (e.g. government, NGOs, academia, private sector, etc).

One of the general observations is that individuals who refuse to cross over or associate with individuals from the other side tend to try to convince their colleagues of acting the same way. But even those who may engage in bi-communal activities may also change their views once circumstances change (e.g. political developments).

The pressure in the academic and research institutions, and among scholars in general, is quite implicit and frequently take place through circular letters that remind faculty not to participate in international conferences as members of their

institutions, but rather only under their own individual capacity (e.g. as experts in a specific field). These circular letters are usually the outcome of direct or indirect pressure from the political elites who are concerned with issues of direct or indirect recognition or with issues that could potentially harm their side's position on the Cyprus problem. It should be noted that this pressure is on private universities as well.

Some of the academics at the roundtable argued that pressure is applied with the use of inappropriate misrepresentation of the international law. Specifically they argue that recognition could not occur even if scholars went under their professional capacity (e.g. as professor of "x" university). According to these participants, the mere act of meeting with people from the Turkish or Greek Cypriot community even in territories not under the control of the Republic of Cyprus does not in effect constitute recognition of its entirety, as so indicated in the series of meetings between officials of the two communities in all levels.

The pressure on civil servants may be much more direct as there are usually explicit "recommendations" on issues regarding the other side. Almost always cooperation between the two sides is unacceptable unless there is an agreement on a top (political) level. Moreover, colleagues may also place significant pressure on each other, involve superiors to extent the pressure, or even use one of the political parties to take action. Individuals working in the private sector are slightly more "free" than civil servants, even though this depends to a great extent on the corporation.

The pressure that artists or employees in NGOs face is slightly different, not least because the majority of them are actively involved in bi-communal events. In addition, most place art (be it music, painting, dance or other activities) above political issues. That said, many artists are very opinionated and may react and place pressure on colleagues if they consider something to be unacceptable (e.g. a recital that takes place in a church north of the buffer zone).



#### 2.3.4. Religious pressure

Religious pressure is exercised both officially (e.g. financial support for an NGO) and unofficially on the Greek Cypriot side. Currently, north of the Green Line religious pressure is not prevalent yet. However, due to demographic changes religion is becoming more visible in the daily lives of Turkish Cypriots and there is a growing demand for more mosques to be built and the Quran to be taught. It appears that on the side of politicians the religious surge is instrumentalized in order to further their interests, which participants expect to have a big impact on the bi-communal activities as pressure is anticipated to grow.

The religious element is very significant for many families as well in their exercise of explicit pressure to convince relatives not to cross to the other side or to participate too often in bi-communal events, as this is considered as a form of betrayal to their religion and culture.

#### ***2.4. Sensitive Issues and terminology***

One of the most commonly discussed issues during the roundtables and the interviews were those of 'sensitive' issues and the 'correct' terminology. This issue is not, of course, unrelated to that of recognition. What was particularly interesting was the fact that not even the people who are frequently involved in bi-communal activities seemed to be aware of the significance of these two issues for the 'other'.

Turkish Cypriots raised the issue that Greek Cypriots (including bi-communal event organizers) lack the understanding of the Turkish Cypriot culture and religious beliefs. They gave the example that during meetings many times the only available food offered is pork, which, obviously, is not part of their diet. Greek Cypriots on the

other hand had similar feelings and gave examples of events organized in places that made Greek Cypriot participants uncomfortable (e.g. churches or monasteries in the northern part of the island). The majority of Turkish Cypriots argue that the choice of these buildings is solely based on their suitability for the events (e.g. recitals, galleries, etc) and that there is no intent to aggravate Greek Cypriots. The Greek Cypriot opinions, however, are split. Some argue that there is a purposeful choice on behalf of Turkish Cypriots in order to 'irritate' Greek Cypriots, while others argue that the choice may indeed be without any negative intent, even though this does not provide an excuse for the lack of basic understanding that the use of such areas would make the (Christian) Greek Cypriots very uncomfortable.

Another contentious issue seems to be the question over terminology and topographical names (e.g. Istanbul vs Constantinople or North/South, with capital "N" and "S", the use of the word "President" for the Turkish-Cypriot leader, the use of TRNC without quotation marks, etc.). These are issues that many times create problems in events such as academic conferences, social or art-related activities. More specifically, a number of times people may focus on the use of words such "President" or "TRNC" and miss the entire point of the event, while they will most likely leave dissatisfied and angry with the organizers, with all the negative repercussions that this will have on future events. What should be noted is that, especially Greek Cypriots, may 'get in trouble' if they participate or co-organize an event where the 'proper' or expected terminology is not used. More specifically, they will most likely be accused of indirectly recognizing the entity in the northern part as an independent state.

Overall, therefore, if the aim of these events is to promote the bi-communal spirit and reduce the conflict between the two sides, the organizers must be particularly careful with the terminology they use and try to avoid the promotion of any political agenda. It must be noted that whether the use of quotations on words or the 'proper' terminology could indeed have an impact on the political development of the problem is irrelevant. What is relevant is that both the participants and the

audience of such events many times focus on these issues and not on the essence of the event. An indicative example is that of a young musician who frequently participated in a series of bi-communal events until she realized that on the program it was written in Turkish (not in the English or Greek translation) “under the auspices of the President of TRNC”. After this realization not only she refused to receive any payment for her work, but also notified the Ministry of Education and Culture about this development. Needless to say that neither she, nor any of her close associates, will participate in such events in the future.

## ***2.5. Media***

Generally, the media has had at best a neutral and at worst a negative role to play. Overall the media (including television, newspapers and radio) do not take a supportive stance and do not promote sufficiently bi-communal activities. On the contrary, it was widely accepted from most participants (but especially those of NGOs and academics) that the media has harshly criticized participants and organizers alike, on both sides of the divide. The criticism created psychological obstacles for participants on both sides of the divide, as a number of people were unwilling to participate in events that would ‘label’ them as ‘non-patriotic’.

The media criticisms were particularly harsh and frequent prior to 2003 (opening of the crossing points) and in the period leading to and following 2004 and the simultaneous referenda. During periods of “national decision making” (e.g. period of the Annan Plan) particular emphasis was given to scholars who were engaged in bi-communal work. It must be noted that the media is still actively involved in the Cyprus problem and still criticize elite and non-elite alike for their activities, especially when there are ‘interesting’ or potentially path breaking developments.

In general, in regards to bi-communal activities and not just the Cyprus conflict, the media approach acted as a disincentive for individuals (especially academics and NGOs) to work together. That said, not all newspapers/stations behave the same way. Some are more critical and influential than others.

## ***2.6. Social projection of 'other'***

How Greek Cypriots are portrayed in the Turkish Cypriot community and the other way around is also an issue that is ranked high in the list of bi-communal cooperation obstacles. There is no active or conscious effort in either community to 'educate' the public about the 'other's' culture, fears, concerns, etc. As a result, there is many times a false or exaggerated representation about the people on the 'other' side of the Buffer Zone.

It is not a coincidence that many of our participants focused on the heated issue of the history books. Some were against the current structure and content of the book that, as they argue, stress motherland identities (Greek and Turkish) rather than a common Cypriot one. Others however defended the content of the books arguing that it is factual and not biased. Specifically the argument against Greek Cypriot books was that much of the content focuses on the history of Greece rather than that of Cyprus, except for the medieval period. In addition, they also argue that an effort has been put on detail elaboration on the sufferings caused and killings made by the Turks whereas the potential mistakes and misconducts of the Greeks have been ignored or downsized. Unlike the Greek Cypriot books that have remained unchanged, the Turkish Cypriots did make some changes, but, according to some participants, they political elite is thinking of changing them back due to 'factual errors' (an argument that seems to be corroborated by the press). The overall argument is that the education systems of both sides and more specifically the books and celebrations create an environment where the 'other' is always perceived as the 'brutal enemy', with all the problems this creates for possible cooperation between the two sides. NGO participants and students were particularly

vocal about this issue. Interestingly no participant argued against the validity of the historical facts (e.g. whether or not there have been killings or not); what they argued instead was the need to include an acknowledgement of ‘our’ mistakes and the need for more emphasis on positive past experiences between the two sides.

Some of our students (from both sides) emphasized that they complained about the content of the history books, but not much attention is given to their complaints. On the contrary, teachers have become more cautious to avoid any comments or opinions beyond official guidelines of schools.

The outcome of this dominant social projection of the ‘other’ is the creation of an atmosphere of divisive misunderstanding, specifically among the youth who have not experienced the normal life as it used to be between the two communities. General alienation among communities has given way to the existence of a rather confrontational sentiment among individuals, the youth in specific, towards the ‘other’ that is perceived as someone responsible for all ‘our’ suffering. The problem is that once opinions are formed, it is difficult to change them as they become internalized.

## ***2.7. Psychological barrier about crossing***

One of the issues that was particularly evident from the roundtables as well as the interviews we contacted was the psychological barrier that exists when it comes to crossing to the ‘other’ side. This is especially true for Greek Cypriots, whose main objection is that they should not be forced to show their identity or passport within their own country. It must be noted that some refuse to do that because they do not want to indirectly recognize the ‘TRNC’, while others understand that this does not imply recognition but still refuse to do it anyway for ideological reasons. Thus, many Greek Cypriots do not cross the Green Line even if they are invited to work-related events such as training projects. That being said, most are very willing to work with Turkish-Cypriots as long as the events take place in the government-controlled areas (i.e. south of the Green Line).

To support their argument, Greek Cypriots pointed out the conscious efforts made by the Turkish Cypriot community to emphasize the feeling that the area north of the Green Line is an independent state. Specifically, this feeling is exacerbated by the heavy Turkish symbols such as flags, signs and statues (e.g. that of Atatürk). As the argument goes, if communication was truly the goal of both communities, both sides would do their best to make the 'other' feel comfortable and not the other way around.

### ***2.8. 'Recycling' of Organizers and Participants***

Participants who were actively and frequently involved in either the organization or participation of bi-communal events (e.g. artists, NGOs, academics, artists, students, etc) raised a very important issue, namely that of the 'recycling of people'. More specifically, it has been observed that there is a core of the same participants who can be found in almost all bi-communal activities, be it professional (e.g. conferences) or social activities. The bigger problem with this 'recycling' is rather obvious: the bi-communal activities do not have an impact on the wider population; at least not to the degree that some actors hoped.

Subsequently, what we have in Cyprus is an environment where in bi-communal meetings the 'preachers preach to the converted'. Said otherwise, while the issues discussed in the meetings may indeed be very important that could potentially have an impact on the Cypriot society, their impact actually remains among the people who already share the same ideology, as no 'outsiders' follow such events. This is not surprising though as most people hold either anti-bi-communal or neutral views regarding such activities and subsequently they refrain from attending. As a result, these issues that could have an impact do not reach the wider population but only those who believe in them anyway.

In conclusion, a general observation is that there is a problem with the dissemination of bi-communal outcomes/activities.

## ***2.9. Funding Problems***

Another particularly important problem is the insufficient financial grants for bi-communal activities. Most participants (perhaps with the exception of academics) argued that the reason behind this problem is not so much the lack of funds, but rather the chances of getting them. More specifically, the participants focus on the difficulty and complicated structure of the applications, especially for non-experts who are not familiar with the research proposal writing. As a result the chances of getting funding through a competitive procedure (e.g. research proposals) are significantly reduced.

Similarly, there is usually a considerable time lapse between the application, the granting of the funds and the transfer of the money to the local actors. This creates a problem for the organizers of events, as many times they do not have sufficient funds to conduct their work (especially the NGOs) throughout the year.

The abovementioned problems are in regards to domestic and international grants (e.g. EU, USAID, etc). However, what they noted is that there is very limited access to domestic grants – i.e. from the government of the Republic of Cyprus and the authorities in the north - for bi-communal projects, which subsequently means that all the funding must come externally. This creates other problems though, namely social pressure because it is many times assumed that behind any (external) funding there is a particular political agenda of the agency or the country that provides the grant. It is not surprising that individuals engaged in bi-communal projects with USAID funds were many times labeled as CIA agents.

## ***2.10. Dissemination Problems***

The difficulties of disseminating bi-communal projects are in a number of cases closely connected to the 'recycling of participants' (§8) and to that of funding (§9). Besides the aforementioned problem of recycling, the effectiveness of the dissemination activities are handicapped by the lack of funding, as effective advertising measures are in most cases out of reach.

Moreover, since the media have either a neutral or rather negative stance towards bi-communal activities they are not of particular assistance when it comes to reaching the wider population. Therefore, the dissemination of information usually does not take place with the help of the mass media such as the press or TV, but rather with small publications or through the Internet, or even through word of mouth. This means, however, that only those who are interested in such activities will actively search for published material or actively listen to their peers.

## ***2.11. Use of the 'other' as a 'token'***

Perhaps the most unexpected issue raised during the meetings was that of the use of the 'other' as a 'token'. Both Greek and Turkish Cypriot participants pointed out that they have been used as 'tokens' by one or the other side at some point in time. More specifically, organizers frequently invite participants from the other side simply to prove that there are participants in events from the 'other' community. Said otherwise, organizers might invite a Greek or Turkish Cypriots just to say that there is participation from both sides (when in reality they are not truly interested in their presence or their views).

The reasoning behind this behavior has to do with the logistics of organizing bi-communal events. Such 'tokens' could help the organizers improve their image



internationally and increase their funding opportunities from the EU or other local or foreign institutions.

### ***2.12. Term 'bi-communal' could be counterproductive***

Similar to the case above, the use of the term 'bi-communal' could sometimes end up hurting any reconciliation process rather than helping it. A number of participants pointed out that the use of the term 'bi-communal' is perceived by outsiders as negative and often becomes a 'social weight' these individuals have to carry, becoming thus less efficient or even counterproductive.

More specifically, the use of the term 'bi-communal' does not necessarily create increased interest or enthusiasm; on the contrary it creates skepticism. In addition, many feel that instead of diminishing the barrier between the two communities, the use of the term 'bi-communal' rather increases the awareness of the 'otherness' and the differences between the two sides. Instead, it was suggested to use simply the term 'Cypriot' in order to underline what is common between the two population groups and not what is different.

### ***2.13. Translation issues***

This is a practical problem, which, however, has a significant impact on the activities and the impact they may have. According to our participants it is particularly difficult to find, and very expensive to use, translators. This creates a problem for the organization and implementation of projects, but also the dissemination of the results in both languages.

To overcome this problem translation is often done from Greek into Turkish and vice versa with online help. This, however, can be controversial and even cause political problems when it comes to sensitive terms such as 're-unification' vs.

‘unification’. These are details that online software or paid online translation cannot easily handle. Similarly, problems arise when terms cannot be translated literally into the other language.

What is more, there cannot be direct translation during the meetings, which also creates a number of problems, including the actual implementation of bi-communal meetings. This problem is difficult to overcome mainly for two reasons. The first is that there are not many people who can translate from Greek to Turkish and vice versa. The second is that it costs a lot of money to hire translators and funding is very limited.

#### ***2.14. Academic Cooperation:***

This section focuses specifically on the prospects and difficulties academics face or might face (should they decide to cooperate). According to our participants there are several minor, yet significant, issues involved in the process of mutual academic work, such as co-authorship of articles and books and the co-hosting of conferences. Most of these problems derive from the issue of recognition mentioned above. Specifically, a number of these issues revolve around the question of location, the publishing house and the assertion of the institutional affiliations of the authors. This is issue if much more sensitive for Greek Cypriots who do not want to inadvertently recognize, or be accused of recognizing “TRNC” through their academic work. That said, it seems that Turkish Cypriots are also particularly sensitive on this issue, even though our participants did not openly admit it, given the fact that you very rarely see Turkish Cypriot authors publish in Greek Cypriot journals.

It is thus very rare to see local edited volumes with both Greek and Turkish Cypriot authors with the exception of PRIO publications (or other similar NGOs). In the rare cases where you see conference proceedings, many times the authors are mentioned without any reference to their institutional affiliation. However, when the volumes were

edited and published by foreigners outside Cyprus, then mentioning of institutional affiliation was no longer considered a problem as it was not in the hands of either Greek or Turkish Cypriots, but rather in the hands of the editor and/or publishing house (e.g. Oxford University Press). As a result, indirect academic cooperation abroad could be achieved relatively easily and without any personal cost for the academics involved.

The same matter is persistent when it comes to the participation of Turkish Cypriot scholars even in international conferences held in the Greek Cypriot side. Interestingly the problem is not just with Greek Cypriots. More specifically one of our participants emphasized that there was a case of a Turkish Cypriot academic whose affiliation with the Turkish university where he taught was not considered an issue of concern in its public expression by Greek Cypriots, but when he moved back to his academic institutions in the northern part he faced problems. More specifically, it was considered to be ‘unacceptable’ that his work would be publicized by a Greek Cypriot university press.

Some scholars believe that it is the wrong approach to endeavor towards seeking principle grounds in the evaluation of bi-communal conventions. This is not least because the effort is based on a seemingly idealized perception of the existing facts and that is why activities like co-authorship suddenly become significant. In reality the essential fact is that there is a general conflict in Cyprus which has consequently resulted in subsequent overlapping conflicts within each community, which in turn, lead to conflict of interests as there are many stakes essential for various players, like universities, government, media, etc. Therefore, according to the participants, it is a mistake to think and talk as if there is or must be an idealized frame of principles which implicitly assume that they would have an impact on the problem. In so thinking, it is concluded that eventually it is simply up to individuals to decide on their actions.

### ***2.15. Insufficient use of technology***

While the Internet is a particularly useful communication tool (for social or professional issues), this does not seem to be the case in Cyprus when it comes to the exchange of information and/or communication between the two sides. Specifically, the only way for an individual to follow non-political developments (which is covered by the media) on the other side (e.g. academic work) is through the Internet, as the use of the ‘other’s’ libraries and/or other facilities is more of a science fiction than a realistic scenario. The use of Internet, however, assumes that the scholarly work is available online in journals that the institutions from the other side subscribe to (i.e. international journals). In the cases where the work is published in local journals that the ‘other’ side does not subscribe to, then it becomes almost impossible to access them. Similarly, any non-journal work (e.g. books, reports, etc) published by local publishing houses (e.g. University of Nicosia Press, or Eastern Mediterranean University Press), is also de facto inaccessible since it is highly unlikely that the libraries of academic institutions would carry that work (from the ‘other’ side), as this would mean indirect recognition of the ‘other’s’ institutions and thus state. Clearly this limits to a great extent the options for scholars who deal with the same Cypriot issues (in any subject and not just politics) to follow the domestic research developments.

## **SECTION 3: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***3.1. Overall Project Conclusions***

Perhaps the most positive aspect of the project is that we were able to identify common variables in all sectors of the society. These commonalities are witness to the fact that some issues are not sector-specific, but are rather systemic, in the sense that they affect individuals in all sectors of the society. This identification allows us to make more educated recommendations that would help improve the overall environment and not just a specific sector.

In addition, another unexpected positive result was the fact that all participants were willing to offer not just their negative personal experiences that led to cooperation problems, but also the positive ones. Indeed they emphasized how some people on both sides try to improve the environment the best way they see fit (since for some people such efforts are hurtful). The fact that participants focused on the positive aspects as well, not only allowed for the creation of a very positive environment during the roundtables, but also increased dramatically the prospects for further cooperation between the participants.

Equally important was the fact that all participants found the project particularly interesting and were willing to contribute to the project by updating us and 'including' us in their daily operations. As a result a form of network, regardless of how small it may be for the time being, seems to be quite strong.

### ***3.2. Recommendations:***

There are a number of recommendations that emerged from the roundtables and the interviews (either directly from the participants or from our own analysis) the most important of which are:

#### **3.2.1. Funding for bi-communal projects ("forced" cooperation):**

While projects that help understand the problems behind the distrust in conflict areas such as Cyprus are indeed important and essential, they are still just the first step in any reconciliation process and cannot, without any follow-up activities, have a concrete effect on the conflict. What is necessary therefore is the funding for projects that take a step further (beyond step one) and will promote actual activities that will "force" people from the two sides to engage in *long-term* activities and not just one-time events (e.g. participation in a roundtable).

Such projects could be activities in areas where the zero-sum mentality cannot easily prevail; an indicative example would be projects revolving around the environment, pollution, water management, waste management, etc. A cleaner and greener Cyprus, for example, would increase the quality of life of all Cypriots on both sides of the Buffer Zone. Such projects will not just enhance cooperation between the two sides, but may also build friendships and relationships that could have spillover effects to other areas (families, peers, or even officials (elite)). In addition, cooperation on environmental issues are not easily be politicized *assuming* that the elite or organizers on both sides do not actively choose to do so in order to promote their own political agenda.

### **3.2.2. Reduction of social pressure:**

As noted above perhaps the biggest hindrance for cooperation after that of the fear of recognition, is that social pressure. As a result, it is of utmost importance that there is a significant reduction in the social pressure for both the organizations as well as the individuals that organize or participate in bi-communal events. The need for domestic and external mechanisms that would reduce this pressure is imperative, and these mechanisms could and should involve the domestic elite as well as the international community (primarily the EU).

One recommendation that emerged from this project is increased EU “pressure” from the EU on the local elite to endorse bi-communal activities in attempt to reduce the civil society’s concerns and divisions (i.e. patriots versus nationalists). It is understandable that the elite are concerned with the political cost that such endorsements may entail, but the EU could be used as a referent point (or an excuse) to justify their actions. However, for such actions to have any chance for success they must be truly unbiased and must not promote either side’s political agenda.

Similarly, there could be mechanisms where elite could lead by example. For example funding for bi-communal projects on a low-level elite level (e.g. municipalities) would show the public that the official authorities are not against bi-communal activities. Such acts would certainly reduce the social pressure on other civil society actors, which means that they would automatically be empowered and their role would become much more important. More specifically, there could be grants that would involve training for Greek and Turkish Cypriot fire fighters to handle natural disasters. Moreover, there could be cooperation for the creation of specific plans in case of natural disasters (e.g. earthquakes), as according to our interviewees there are currently no plans for cooperation or common actions.

### **3.2.3. More publication of successful cases of cooperation:**

There is also a need to make known all the successful cases of cooperation and the impact they have had (no matter how small). This would have an even bigger impact if the EU along with the local elite praised the actors involved, the actual activities and the outcomes, and emphasized their importance and the need for their perpetuation and enhancement. Similarly, there is a need to bring forward 'personal' stories, such as the creation of good friendships that emerged because of bi-communal activities. This could also help reduce the social pressure as the 'other' would also be viewed as a 'potential friend' and not just the enemy.

### **3.2.4. De-linking of politics with civil society activities:**

As mentioned above the issue of recognition is by far the most important problem. On one hand Turkish Cypriots are trying to gain recognition through non-political paths (e.g. education, sports, etc) and Greek Cypriots are trying to stop this from happening in. As a result everything is politicized and not just politics. Unavoidably, the degree of politicization is influenced by the developments of the negotiations between the two sides. While a complete delinking of activities with politics is

improbable and perhaps impossible, a reduction of the degree of political influence on non-political issues is not. However, for this to happen the elite cooperation is somewhat necessary. Elite interventions (foreign and local) that emphasize that politics and social activities should not be linked would certainly help. They could use examples of how individuals within the same community continue to cooperate despite their political disagreements. A number of our participants emphasized that if their own political elite explicitly stated that it is not unpatriotic or harmful for their side to have social relationships with the 'other', they would engage in many more activities than they currently are.

#### **3.2.5. More student / young activities:**

The younger generation has not experienced the violent past. Their biases and fears exist because of the education (official, social and family education) they receive. As we have seen, however, they could break free from them if they have the correct opportunities. As a result, more emphasis should be given to projects and activities that involve the younger generation as they are more likely to change their minds than the older one that may have experienced violence. Examples of such activities could include camping, sports (e.g. diving, rock climbing, soccer matches, etc) or even academic projects related to the environment, technology, etc. What must be noted is that all activities must be de-linked to any political agenda and efforts to use these activities as means of recognition.

#### **3.2.6. Better use of technology:**

The use of technology can significantly increase the prospects of cooperation both on a social and a professional level. For example, electronic socialization 'tools' (e.g. facebook) are unquestionably important, especially for the younger generation. It is an easy way to keep in touch and share experiences. Similarly, technology, and more



specifically the Internet, could be used to increase the flow of information regarding developments or activities on a professional level. An indicative example is the academia where there could easily be a much more efficient flow of information regarding research developments on Cyprus-related issue, which could, inter alia, lead to cooperation between the two sides, especially on non-political issues (e.g. environment).

The EU could promote electronic communication between the two sides. EU-funded or EU-run websites would help eliminate any potential biases regarding any potential biases and political agendas.

Lastly, the development of a “virtual Cyprus” similar to the well-known “second life” ([www.secondlife.com](http://www.secondlife.com)) could be an extreme but innovative way of bringing people (especially the young generation) closer together.

### **3.2.7. Creation of bi-communal cultural center:**

One recommendation that emerged from a number of different roundtables was the creation of a bi-communal cultural center (near the Green Line), which could offer classes and other activities (e.g. summer school, theater performances, etc). This could lead to a wider participation of people from both sides, especially since the issues will have a non-political nature. Such a Center, obviously, requires significant funding and cannot be fully funded by one or the other community alone, as this would create biases. Perhaps the optimum solution would be co-funding by the two sides and other international actors such as the UN or the EU, but not individual states such as the UK or the US as many people consider them to be very biased.

### **3.2.8. Careful phrasing:**

As mentioned above, the term bi-communal sometimes creates problems. However, because many grants require bi-communal activities, it is rather inevitable not to use this term. Thus, one recommendation would be the EU to allow for grant applications for bi-communal projects, without however the term bi-communal being necessary.

Similarly, and as mentioned, both sides are sensitive about certain words or terminology. As a result there could be EU projects or activities that focus specifically on the education of NGOs or other institutions that engage in such activities.

#### **3.2.9. Sensitivity lessons:**

Similar to the point above, it would help if there were projects or funding that would help increase the knowledge about basic things regarding the 'other's' culture. This could include religious issues, diet limitations (e.g. pork), etc. Just like there are Jean Monnet sponsored Modules that aim at improving knowledge regarding European Integration, there could be funding for cultural learning. These "sensitivity lessons" could help towards the understanding of the 'other', which would subsequently lead to more tolerance.

#### **3.2.10. Translation Services and Training:**

There could also be funding for translation services. As mentioned, translation is one of the major problems as translators are basically non-existent in Cyprus. As a result, one recommendation would be to create grants for projects that would fund translation training (from Greek to Turkish and visa versa). The 'graduates' from these programs would then be registered as 'official' translators and they could be hired for events or for publication translations.

### **3.2.11. Bi-communal library:**

As mentioned there is no direct access to books/articles published by Greek Cypriot presses for the Turkish Cypriots and vice versa. If a researcher wishes to acquire a book/article from a local press s/he needs to go to the libraries on one or the other side, assuming of course s/he knows that such a publication exists. This is due to the fact that libraries are unwilling to hold books from the 'other' side, for the reasons mentioned above. As a result, one recommendation would be for the EU offices on both sides to create a small library that would hold only publications from local publishing houses from the 'other side'. For example, the "EU House" in Nicosia (southern part) could hold the books published by Turkish or Turkish-Cypriot publishing houses that would be available to any interested party. This way the local institutions would not bring themselves in the awkward position of holding an article or book from a 'non-recognized entity'.

### **3.2.12. Better network:**

The police forces on both sides have a 'liaison office' stationed in the UN that helps facilitate police matters between the two sides. A similar situation could exist for other areas as well (e.g. academia, environment, business, etc), where individuals from both sides could work closely simply for 'updating' and 'information' purposes. Put simply, what could be done, with the help of the EU and/or the UN, is a bi-communal team that would update its members on any developments (e.g. in academic, business, environment sectors) that the 'other' side does not have access to. The members of this team would then transfer this knowledge to their own respective communities. This way dissemination is much more efficient and does not create any issues of recognition or peer pressure. This team need not be comprised of full-time employees, as this would require a significant budget. What could be done instead is create a network of interested parties who are actively engaged in their field to communicate with individuals from the other community who are equally engaged in their field. The academia is an indicative example of how

this recommendation could put into action. Academics in a number of different fields, who actively follow the local research developments, could be in contact with their counterparts in the 'other' side and update them on any developments. The individuals on the 'recipient' side will then have the responsibility to update their colleagues in their own community. This is not difficult to achieve considering that there are only a handful of academic institutions on both sides of the Buffer Zone.

### **3.2.13. Decrease psychological barriers:**

There could be more conscious efforts from the local elite, and the international actors should help in this respect, to decrease the psychological barriers of people (e.g. symbols, such as signs, flags, statues, etc, that emphasize the 'Turkishness' immediately after the crossing point). Another indicative example is the (now lighted) gigantic flag on the mountains of Pendadaktilos, which was created in a position that would be visible, essentially only, to Greek Cypriots. These are issues that create significant psychological pressure to a number of Greek Cypriots, who, unsurprisingly, refuse to cross to the 'other' side. We do acknowledge that Cyprus is a highly politicized (and securitized) environment where everything has a political connotation and any 'de-linking' with the political aim (of either side) is often impossible. However, small acts such as provocative signs at the crossing points could potentially help and their removal should not have a significant political cost for either side. The international actors should pressure both sides, but especially the Turkish Cypriot one, to make the 'crossing' psychologically smoother.