

# **The Europeanisation of Contested Statehood: The EU in northern Cyprus**

**GEORGE KYRIS**

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*The Europeanisation of Contested Statehood: the EU in northern Cyprus* (2015) tackles a single case study with a view to assessing the engagement with and consequent impacts on contested states, which are relatively ‘under-researched’ phenomena. Beyond this manuscript, we may witness the EU’s mediation role in the Balkans, Caucasus, the Middle East, and elsewhere. Generally, the EU functions in a context of growing political complexity facing the European Union (EU) with increasing irredentism. While the EU has developed greater institutional capacity (or what the ‘actorness’ literature refers to as cohesion), the political context, both externally and within the EU, has been proving increasingly challenging. The author, George Kyris, assures readers that the focus on Cyprus sheds light on both the wider discussion on contested statehood, on the one hand, and the impact on the EU, on the other.

In a number of ways, the case of northern Cyprus is tailor-made for the analysis. The impacts of Europeanisation on the internationally unrecognized ‘Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus’ (‘TRNC’) can be chronicled prior to and after the accession of the Greek Cypriot-led Republic of Cyprus in 2004. Kyris also utilizes the mechanisms of Europeanisation of national affairs, including impacts on polity, politics, and policy. The analytical questions that follow relate to how Europeanisation processes are applicable in the context of a contested state. Specifically, the book is concerned with the impact of the EU on Turkish Cypriot civil society, the programmes of political parties, and the power and practices in Turkish Cypriot institutions. In all cases, there is the further question of how the context of contested statehood – including international isolation, lack of recognition, and the influence of a patron state – may have mediated impacts.

Northern Cyprus has been internationally isolated for many decades and Cyprus has been partitioned since 1974. Europeanisation failed as a ‘catalyst’ for reunification, yet the Republic of Cyprus joined the EU in 2004. Whereas a significant majority of Turkish Cypriots voted in favour of reunification approving a UN blueprint in a 2004 referendum – itself evidence of a Europeanisation impact among Turkish Cypriots – the Greek Cypriots rejected the compromise package. Given the de facto division of the island into two jurisdictions, the EU accommodated the continued division

through Protocol 10 of the Accession Treaty, so the EU's *acquis communautaire* remains suspended in northern Cyprus pending a comprehensive settlement to the Cyprus problem (i.e. reunification).

The upshot was that 'the accession of a divided country brought the contested Turkish Cypriot state to the forefront on EU affairs' (p. 47). Specifically, the EU developed activities for Turkish Cypriot development and eventual implementation of EU law in northern Cyprus, in anticipation of a settlement. These include the Financial Aid Regulation, the Green Line Regulation, the CYTR – European Parliament Group, and the forestalled Direct Trade Regulation.

The book then goes on to analyze Europeanisation impacts on civil society, political parties, and institutions, respectively. Regarding (post-accession of Cyprus) civil society impacts, Kyris concludes that the international isolation of the 'TRNC' has created additionally opportunities for civil society actors who serve as interlocutors in a context of non-recognition. Against this, civil society remains underdeveloped and insufficiently professionalized, again as a mediated impact of contested statehood. Regarding political parties, Kyris argues that the political opportunity structure has been affected due to the emergence of a European dimension of political competition. Yet, as Kyris also acknowledges, the 'issue of European integration has been linked to an existing cleavage in the party competition (the type of solution to the dispute)' (p. 92). Finally, on institutional impacts, Kyris chronicles and analyzes some of the EU harmonization efforts of 'TRNC' officials (the EUCC), as well as civil society (the Turkish Cypriot Board of Commerce), with which the EU does not face a recognition dilemma. The Financial Aid Regulation allowed for the development of activities and projects that facilitated capacity building and preparation for EU law implementation, especially through interaction with the TAIEX unit.

The book concludes by reintroducing the model of EU engagement and characteristics of contested statehood in an effort to generalize from the Cyprus case (p. 126). Kyris is no doubt right to suggest that the lack of international recognition of the 'TRNC' has been an important factor mediating the impact of the European Union. The failure of the EU to agree on the proposed Direct Trade Regulation is case in point.

However, Kyris might also have considered some counterfactuals. Protocol 10 of the Accession Treaty requires unanimity – and therefore the acquiescence of the Greek Cypriot-led Cyprus government – to deal with the Turkish Cypriots. The debate regarding the Direct Trade Regulation related to the text and intent of Protocol 10. In other words, whatever handicaps and predicaments exist on the EU side are partly self-inflicted. Meanwhile, whereas the Financial Aid Regulation was eventually approved and implemented, it is subject to oversight stemming from the same interpretation. In short, the principle of unanimity – versus majoritarianism – has

restricted the capacity of the EU in significant ways. Perhaps this is more important than recognition.

Kyris' assessments regarding the impacts of international isolation are generally valid but there are some nuances to point to. Significantly, Turkish Cypriot society has been polarized not only in terms of ideology (pro- or anti-EU) but also differentiation in terms of rights and privileges between those who have become 'EU citizens' (thus a 'visa' to Europe) and those who cannot cross the Green Line. Kyris suggests that 'Turkish Cypriot students cannot take part in exchange programmes like Erasmus' (p. 123). The truth is that 'settlers' (i.e. offspring of mainland Turks) generally cannot acquire Republic of Cyprus citizenship and thus are excluded. A comprehensive settlement would naturalize most of these 'TRNC' citizens, but at present their status remains problematic.

Kyris' optimism regarding EU impacts in the context of contested states is largely unwarranted. Whilst it is true that the relative underdevelopment of Turkish Cypriot institutions provides opportunities for EU intervention, the reality of daily life in the 'TRNC' suggests otherwise. The EU harmonization activities of the EUCC mentioned earlier have been effectively shelved by the current government. The lack of momentum for a settlement provides further evidence that the EU is in retreat in northern Cyprus, notwithstanding its continued financial support and engagement with civil society.

On the role of Turkey (i.e. 'patron state') the author might consider some revisions and updates in light of the growing antagonism between the EU and Turkey in recent years. Turkish Cypriot parties and politicians align themselves with Turkey in many policy areas, so the shift in Ankara away from Brussels negates many of the efforts of the EU in northern Cyprus.

Kyris is aware that an analysis based on a single case study has its limitations. Therefore, his first call is for future research that focuses on 'the EU and other contested states' (p. 129). Indeed, the book could or should have been an edited volume dedicated to the analysis of Europeanisation and contested statehood that incorporated the expertise of other researchers and relevant case studies.

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