

The Cyprus Issue: the View from Russia

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Abstract

Being an heir of the USSR, modern Russia has always advocated independence and territorial integrity of Cyprus. It was particularly true of those historic moments when the viability of Cyprus' Statehood was subjected to a severe ordeal. Russia, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, encouraged, encourages, and continues to facilitate all efforts under the aegis of the UN Security Council to achieve a viable, just, and comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus issue. The Russian Federation tends to support and develop friendly ties with the Republic of Cyprus in all spheres. A solid system of inter-state and inter-governmental agreements and contracts that were brokered when the Cypriot State was established effectively proves that Russian-Cypriot ties are multifaceted and conducted on a high level. Legal framework of bilateral relations goes on enriching itself, while it is constantly improved against the backdrop of the world economic crisis and complexity of European and global situation. Cooperation between Russia and Cyprus is based on friendship and mutual benefits. It does not depend on temporary or instantaneous difficulties. Hence, the statement made by the Russian Foreign Minister, Mr. Lavrov, is believed to be acute, 'Cyprus is an important and long-time partner of Russia in Europe. Our cooperation rests on the long-standing bonds of friendship and mutual sympathy, on the spiritual and cultural kinship of our people and serves the cause of security and stability in the Eastern Mediterranean, on the European continent as a whole'.²

Keywords: the Cyprus issue, Russia-Cyprus relationship, the Cyprus settlement, Russia and Cyprus, United Nations

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² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Press Release No 377-22-02-2019 'Speech by the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov at a Joint Press Conference following Talks with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus N. Christodoulides (Moscow, 22 February 2019)', available at http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/meropriyatiya_s_uchastiem_ministra/-/asset_publisher/xK1BhB2bUjd3/content/id/3540202.

Cyprus within the Sphere of Great Geopolitical Powers' Interest

In defining the relationship between Russia and Cyprus one should take into consideration the fact that, for both the Soviet Union and later the Russian Federation, Cyprus was of vital importance in terms of enhancing its strategic influence in the eastern part of the Mediterranean region and in the Middle East.

When the Cold War was in full swing, superpowers, such as the USSR and the US, expressed their interest in Cyprus to get the upper hand on the global stage. Thus, the interest of the global players in Cyprus can be traced back to the strategic importance of the island. Cyprus has been a vital bridgehead during its history, as it is located at the crossroads of three continents and major trade routes, linking the east and the west together. The island essentially was the farthest eastern point of the Mediterranean basin, and it could be used in practice to conduct large-scale land, naval, and air operations in the Middle East.

While the US tried to contain the conflict and keep Cyprus under western control, the USSR pursued the goal of influencing politics of Cyprus in order to insulate the island from NATO's interests. Moreover, the USSR's involvement could be attributed to its broader regional interests. The major goal –to get access to the Mediterranean Sea– used to be seen as a catalyst for Soviet foreign policy. At the same time, the significance of transportation of Middle Eastern oil for western economies forced USSR to act in that region.

First, Cyprus was the country where the 'Left' gained a foothold. The local communist party, AKEL (the *Progressive Party of Working People*), was definitely the most powerful political organisation on the island. It was loyal to Moscow, stuck to independence and took an anti-western position on the Cyprus issue. It also supported demilitarisation, and favoured the ousting of the two British military bases³.

Secondly, when the Government of the Republic of Cyprus gained its independence, it started pursuing the policy of non-alignment and developing friendly ties with Moscow. President Makarios⁴ turned to Moscow for military and diplomatic help several times in order to counter western pressure and American plans to tackle the conflict according to the western scenario⁵.

³ A. Stergiou, (2007) 'Soviet Policy Towards Cyprus', *The Cyprus Review*, Vol. 19, No. 2.

⁴ Archbishop Makarios III, of the Church of Cyprus and the first President of Cyprus (1960-1977).

⁵ A. Stergiou, *Soviet*, 93

Thirdly, the USSR treated the Cyprus conflict as a possible source of disputes and instability within NATO. In other words, supporting the conflict could have undermined unity of the Euro-Atlantic bloc⁶.

With the conflict escalating and entering a critical phase, Soviet participation in the Cyprus issue reached a climax during the 1960s being transformed into diplomatic support of the island's government, independence, territorial integrity, and its policy of non-alignment.

Against the backdrop of the tragic events in 1964, the US made an effort to contribute to a ceasefire, thus avoiding a military confrontation between Greece and Turkey in the first place. At the same time, the US tried to prevent the UN and the Soviet Union from interfering in the issue. Washington D.C. believed involvement of multilateral organisations with a view of solving the conflict (through the UN) would give communist countries leverage on that strategically located island.⁷

Therefore, the US suggested deploying a ten thousand strong UN peacekeeping contingent on the island. The Cyprus authorities strongly rejected that proposal and insisted on favouring only international peacekeeping forces approved by the UN Security Council. The US tried to influence the Cyprus authorities then by laying down conditions under which neither the US nor other western countries could do anything to stop Turkey from conducting a military invasion provided the latter resorted to its unilateral right to interfere in Cyprus internal affairs.⁸

Despite joint pressure from the US and the UK, and in the face of a Turkish invasion, Cypriot authorities remained adamant. The US proposals to act as a sole mediator were rejected and then Cyprus reached out to the UN Security Council to counter aggression and interference in its internal affairs. Cyprus' steadfast position could also be attributed to the stable support of the USSR. The Cyprus president received Moscow's assurances that the Soviet Union would give its full support in case of confrontation with the West. These commitments were forwarded by the Soviet ambassador in Nicosia, Mr. Ermoshin, and were published in official statements in the Soviet newspapers *Pravda* and *Izvestiya*, as well as in the Soviet news and information agency TASS. Makarios was dubbed 'Mediterranean Castro' in

⁶ Ibid., 95

⁷ G. Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern: Memoirs* (New York/London: Norton, 1982) 340.

⁸ See Zurich & London Agreements, in *Conference on Cyprus: Documents Signed and Initialled at Lancaster House on 19 February 1959* (London: HMSO, 1959) (Cmnd. 679); see also M. M. Whiteman, *Digest of International Law*, Vol. I (Washington DC: US GPO, 1963) 525-529.

Washington D.C., and the US believed force and intimidation to be the only means of communicating with him.

The first Soviet arms were shipped to the island in early 1964.⁹ The harsh message that the Soviet leader Mr. Khrushchev sent to President Johnson was the culmination of the Soviet support. He condemned the US initiative, which was essentially aimed at NATO troops occupying the Republic of Cyprus, which adhered to the Non-aligned Movement.¹⁰ The Soviet head of state accused the US and other western countries of trying to make Cyprus do what they wanted, despite the desire of the Cyprus government to reach a solution through the UN. Khrushchev explained in his message that, although the USSR did not border the Republic of Cyprus, it could not remain aloof from that situation developing in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea, which was not far away from the southern border of the USSR, provided how dramatically the term 'distance' changed at that time.

The UN Security Council became an open forum for debates about the Cyprus issue between the US and the USSR. On the one hand, the permanent representative of the Soviet Union to the UN, Mr. Fedorenko, claimed the reasons for misunderstanding between the communities could be traced back to the Zurich and London Agreements that were dictated to Cyprus by western countries. On the other hand, the US representative to the UN, Mr. Stevenson, advocated for these agreements. He claimed that the three guarantors were entitled to invade the island, whether together or separately, under the Guarantee¹¹ Treaty¹². Nevertheless Mr. Fedorenko made his point in the dispute: How could a country be treated as an independent one if third countries had a right to interfere in its internal affairs? The Guarantee Treaty squarely contradicted the main principle of the UN.

Cyprus is said to have won, with the assistance of the USSR, the first round in its confrontation with the US. The Resolution 186 was adopted by the UN Security Council on 4 March 1964. It urged all countries to abstain from any kind of invasion against Cyprus. The UN Security Council also recommended sending the United Nations Peacekeeping Forces to Cyprus (UNFICYP) with a view of preventing

⁹ T.W. Adams and A. J. Cottrell, *Cyprus between East and West* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1968) 35.

¹⁰ Letter from Chairman Khrushchev to President Johnson, in J.S. Joseph, *Cyprus: Ethnic Conflict and International Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997) 155.

¹¹ Treaty of Guarantee (Cyprus – Greece – Turkey – United Kingdom) (signed & entered into force 16 August 1960) *United Nations Treaty Series*, Vol. 382 3.

¹² 'Stevenson Urges Quick Agreement for Cyprus Peace', *The New York Times* (20 February 1964).

armed conflicts, maintaining law and order, and getting the country back on track. In addition, the UN Cyprus mediator was appointed.

The US, on its part, tried to bring Greece and Turkey to the negotiating table. When Greek and Turkish prime ministers, Mr. Papandreou and Mr. İnönü, respectively, were invited to Washington D.C. to take part in negotiations with President Johnson, the latter reminded them of the Soviet 'threat' and the unity of the UN. The American president called on the parties to overcome contradictions between the communities and firmly counteract communist aggression. He asked them to treat the problem more broadly in terms of confrontation between the west and the East. The US attempted to force the Greek government to exert its influence on the Cyprus authorities and to persuade them 'to quit flirting with Moscow and Mr. Khrushchev'.¹³ Nevertheless neither the Greek nor the Turkish party showed any substantial interest in carrying out negotiations in that direction.¹⁴

The Cypriot leadership made the official request to Kremlin for military aid to protect independence of their country. Moscow immediately gave the green light. The Soviet navy, which had appeared several times before, ostentatiously headed for Cyprus. At the same time Soviet arms, including heavy and anti-aircraft artillery, tanks and torpedo boats were shipped to the island in large numbers. The USSR warned Turkey off dropping bombs on Cyprus with impunity, as it might result in a 'boomerang effect'.¹⁵

Thus, the effect of counterbalancing confrontation between superpowers became the crucial factor in the Cyprus issue, while the ethnic community aspect was downplayed because there was political and strategic, as well as an ideological, confrontation between Moscow and Washington DC. The involvement of superpowers and transformation of the conflict into a Cold War dispute transferred the issue to a new dimension and worsened regional and ethnic disagreements. Ethnic and ideological factors taken together changed the situation from bad to worse.

Changing the Status Quo: The Crisis of 1974

New political forces, unfriendly to the USSR, ascended to power in Greece. Rather than targeting Turkey, the Kremlin targeted Greece together with the US and

¹³ A. Papandreou, *Democracy at Gunpoint: The Greek Front* (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1970) 133.

¹⁴ UNSC Res. 186 (1964), 'The Cyprus Question', UN Doc. S/RES/186 (4 March 1964).

¹⁵ J.S. Joseph, *Cyprus: Ethnic Conflict and International Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997).

NATO. That change could be attributed to the revival of Soviet-Turkish neighbourly relations, which started in 1965.¹⁶ One should shed light on that fact. Turkey was ready¹⁷ to invade Cyprus in summer 1964. Nevertheless, it did not benefit either the US or NATO in general, as it could have resulted in a large-scale war between Turkey and Greece,¹⁸ which in its turn could have undermined the south-eastern flank of the alliance. Hence, President Johnson sent a letter to the Turkish Prime Minister, Mr. İnönü. The main idea of the letter was that if a Turkish invasion of Cyprus entailed direct intervention of the Soviet Union, the NATO allies would not back Turkey.¹⁹ Right after the letter was published in the Turkish press, Turkey decided not to invade,²⁰ and thus Johnson's letter made Ankara reassess its foreign policy, which eventually led it to forge closer ties with the USSR.

The Soviet Union announced its full support of Makarios in the UN Security Council²¹, where the USSR and the US exchanged their points of view in the context of the Cold War and in the environment that gave the taste of the Caribbean crisis of 1962. Thus, the crisis in 1967 was resolved through diplomatic channels, but the need to settle worsened ethnic and political conflict remained.

A number of agreements on the Cyprus issue between Greece and Turkey were negotiated in the course of the NATO Lisbon session in 1971. The Greek government²² suggested creating a position of a minister for autonomy of the Turkish community (or a position of a deputy minister) within the Cyprus government according to one of the terms²³. The post was to be held by a Turkish national. Greece exerted pressure on Cyprus in advance to force them to accept the demand of the Turkish community, although Makarios rejected that plan, underlining that it could have resulted in a State within a State situation.²⁴

The situation on the island was evaluated in the USSR in December 1971. The plan approved at the NATO session in Lisbon meant Cypriots agreeing to the dou-

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ 'Johnson Warns Inonu on Cyprus', *The New York Times* (6 June 1964).

¹⁸ A.P. Kyriacou, (2000) 'A "Just and Lasting Solution" to the Cyprus Problem: In Search of Institutional Viability', *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 3 65.

¹⁹ Letter from President Johnson to Premier Inonu (1964), in Joseph, *Cyprus* 158.

²⁰ . Stergiou, *Soviet*, 95

²¹ 'Soviet Pledges Support', *The New York Times* (1 January 1964).

²² The military junta was in power in Greece from 1967 until 1974.

²³ D.B. Chogla, *Foreign Policy of Turkish Republic During the Second Half of the XX Century* (Krasnodar 2015) 78, available at <http://refleader.ru/polatyrnaujgige.html> [in Russian].

²⁴ Ch. Kassimeris, *Greece and the American Embrace* (London-New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010) 94.

ble *enosis* (union) that is to divide the island between Turkey and Greece. There was also information about Greek officers serving in the Cyprus National Guard who conducted a sabotage aimed at undermining State pillars of the Republic of Cyprus. They also reportedly interfered in its domestic politics and grossly violated their residence status.²⁵

The Secretary General of AKEL highlighted, 'When plans to solve the Cyprus issue, proposed by Dean Acheson,²⁶ fell through, the imperialistic groups in NATO started to cherish the idea of toppling the legitimate regime through the local revolutionary groups which were lavishly supplied by them with money and arms'.²⁷

The strategic doctrines of the Cold War that shaped policies on Cyprus in the US and in the USSR in 1960s were once again in the spotlight during the crisis in 1974. The US wanted to include Cyprus in NATO's sphere of influence, as the Acheson plan purported. The USSR aspired on the one hand to encourage Cyprus' non-alignment policy and on the other hand to support the pro-Soviet government. Cyprus was in the middle, balancing the opposing interests of Greece and Turkey, of the west and the East. The final aim of the Cyprus authorities was to create an independent and united Cyprus, a State in which the interests of the ethnic majority remained a priority. Improvement of the Soviet-Turkish relationship and establishment of friendly ties between the US and the Greek junta became important elements of rival national and strategic interests concerning Cyprus.

A bloody coup, staged in 1974 in Cyprus, resulted in disturbing a fragile balance on the island. It was characteristic of the US not to condemn the coup. On the contrary, it was the only country, apart from Greece, to be inclined to recognise the new regime in Nicosia.²⁸ Makarios had to leave the country temporarily, which deprived the Soviet Union of the important leverage on the island. Then the events started to develop logically and rapidly. Turkey invaded the island on the pretext of defending Turkish Cypriots. The USSR condemned the Greek coup, calling it an American conspiracy against Cyprus, and demanded to reinstate Makarios.

During the UN Security Council session in summer 1974, the Soviet delegation, without mentioning Turkey, accused Greece, the US, and NATO of trying to eliminate the Cyprus political leadership. This fact was put down to a better So-

²⁵ 'NATO's Machinations in Cyprus', *The Pravda Newspaper* No. 351 (17 December 1971) [in Russian].

²⁶ US Secretary of State in 1949-1953.

²⁷ B.M. Potkhveria, *Turkish Foreign Policy in 60s early 80s* (Moscow: Nauka, 1986) 232 [in Russian].

²⁸ Joseph, *Cyprus* 72.

viet-Turkish relationship. Close political and economic ties between Moscow and Ankara had been established by 1974, against the backdrop of a tense Turkish-US relationship. Establishment of these ties was in the interests of the Soviet Union, which wanted to deepen the split within NATO.

If you evaluate the situation objectively, a quite logical question will then arise. Why did the US not put an end to Turkish aggression in spite of possessing some leverage over Turkey? First of all, the ouster of Makarios benefited the US. Secondly, any further act of aggression against Turkey by the US could have triggered yet better ties between the USSR and Turkey. Moreover, the consequences of the Turkish intervention coincided with the articles in Acheson's plan, put forward in 1964.

Both the US and the USSR did not attempt to stop the Turkish army from moving inland. Due to the strategic importance of the island, both countries tried to win Turkey over, which in its turn created conditions for Turkey to occupy Cyprus.

When Turkey initiated the second massive attack on Cyprus, Greece officially turned to NATO Secretary General, Mr. Luns,²⁹ requesting to hold the council of ministers meeting to exert pressure on Turkey. However, Luns refused to do it or to take any active measures to interfere in the conflict. The answer to it was the withdrawal of Greece from NATO. It came as a serious blow to the south-eastern flank of the alliance.

The powerful Greek lobby managed to influence foreign policy in the US in 1975. It resulted in imposing an embargo on arms shipments to Turkey. The latter reacted by closing American military bases on its territory. That fact extremely discomposd Washington D.C. and split the western defence system even further, though it created, at the same time, a sense of satisfaction in Moscow. The embargo was lifted by the end of 1978, and military bases resumed their operations.³⁰

Thus, the superpowers, pursuing their own strategic interests on the island and in the wider region, took the Cyprus conflict to a new level – from ethnic to global confrontation – hence complicating it and making it harder to resolve.

²⁹ 'The Cyprus Test' (9 October 1974), *The New York Times*, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/1974/10/09/archives/the-cyprus-test-foreign-affairs.html>.

³⁰ Potskhveria, *Turkish foreign policy* 232.

Strengthening the Key Role of the UN Security Council in the Cyprus Settlement in Post-Cold War Era

Russia, being a permanent member of the UN Security Council and pursuing its strategic interests in the Eastern Mediterranean region, aspired to be actively engaged in settling the Cyprus issue, although the US and the EU pressure would offset Russia's activities concerning that problem. After the break-up of the USSR, Russia was more engaged in domestic politics than in the foreign policy matters.

Starting from the late 1990s, Russia's foreign policy concerning the Cyprus issue was on the rise because its leadership wanted to reinstate the country's prestige and influence on the international stage. Russia is known to be an advocate for Greece's interests and that of Greek Cypriots. It can be accounted for by their religious (Orthodox) and allied ties. History shows that Russia and Greece do not have differences as far as the situation in the Mediterranean region, in the Balkans, in the Middle East, and in the Black Sea is concerned.

Military cooperation between the two countries is of interest, too. NATO members were only able to purchase military equipment produced by the US or other European countries. However, Greece became the exception to this rule, when it was the only country to purchase arms from Russia. Whereas purchasing Russian missile systems S-300 was high on the agenda set by the Greek Cypriots in 1997 and 1998, it caused quite a stir among the Turks, who believed it to be a direct threat to their security.³¹ The Cyprus authorities, in order not to worsen the already rising tensions with Turkey, rejected that idea and eventually these systems were deployed in Crete. It became the subject of close military cooperation between Russia and Cyprus.

One should not forget about the economic facet of bilateral cooperation. Cyprus is an important business and financial hub. Low corporate tax, low operation costs, and different tax refunds created favourable conditions that attracted thousands of foreign companies and individuals to the Cyprus offshore zone. Hence, after the break-up of the USSR, more than 30,000 Russian companies and 30 Russian offshore banks were established. Such a great number of Russian companies cannot be found elsewhere, other than in Cyprus, which made the country vitally important to Russians. After the Republic of Cyprus joined the EU on 1 May 2004, the

³¹ E. Athanassopoulou, (1997) 'Blessing in Disguise? The Imia Crisis and Turkish-Greek Relations', *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 3 76.

Republic started to lose its offshore attractiveness. The tax reform implemented in 2002, at the EU's request, preceded the accession to the Union. Starting from 2003, the corporate tax was increased to 10% from 4.25%. Despite the fact that the EU and Cyprus legislation impeded Russian capital flows after the Cyprus joined the EU,³² Cypriot authorities paid special attention to ties with Russia, as they were a kind of alternative to the relationship with the US and Russian investment contributed to developing the economy. Russia, in turn, tended to support the Cypriot authorities, implementing a coherent policy to settle the Cyprus issue.

Russia treats the Cyprus issue as a serious international problem. The unresolved Cyprus question creates tension in the Eastern Mediterranean region. Russia continues to adhere to a definite and consistent position in order to resolve the Cyprus issue peacefully and politically, taking into account interests of the Cypriots – both Greek and Turkish. To create conditions in order to find compromises on the Cyprus issue, one needs to ‘minimise the external pressure’, according to President Putin.³³ A comprehensive, just and viable settlement is possible within a framework of the UN Security Council resolutions on Cyprus. Free will of both Cypriot parties accounts for a viable settlement. Any decision dictated to Cypriots externally, as there have been many likewise cases in the contemporary history of Cyprus, will not be viable and functional.

Russia respected the results of both referendums that the Greek and Turkish communities had on the last version of the *Annan Plan*, which took place on 24 April 2004. The Russian government considered them to reflect the citizens’ democratic and free will.³⁴ It is worth recollecting that Moscow’s interest and active participation resulted in blocking the UN Security resolution on Cyprus, which had been proposed by the US and the UK two days prior to the plebiscites (Russia vetoed the resolution in 1994 when the Bosnia issue was on the agenda). It involved carrying out a UN peace-making operation on the island, implementing an embargo on arms shipments to Cyprus, sanctioning the extension and a change of the UN mandate, which had been in effect in Cyprus from 1964. Russia considered approving the resolution before releasing the results of the referendums to exert pressure on

³² D.U. Eralp and N. Beriker, (2005) ‘Assessing the Conflict Resolution Potential of the EU: The Cyprus Conflict and Accession Negotiations’, *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 36, No. 2 178.

³³ ‘In the interests of Russia and Turkey’, *Krasnaya Zvezda (The Red Star)* (2 September 2004), available at http://old.redstar.ru/2004/09/02_09/3_01.html.

³⁴ A. Suleymanov, (2019) ‘Cyprus Problem: History and Present’, *Mirovaya ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya*, Vol. 63, No. 2.

the island's population. According to the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the UN *ad interim*, Mr. Gatilov, plebiscites on both parts of the island were 'to be carried out freely, without any interference or external pressure'.³⁵ It was an attempt for Russia to remind the global community of its former superpower status. Despite prior stages of discussions on the Cyprus issue, Russia was isolated from the negotiations³⁶ on the *Annan Plan*, and was not even informed that the US and the UK were preparing their own plan back then. Needless to say, the Russian position was welcomed by the Republic of Cyprus with gratitude.

Russia believes that it is necessary to encourage the Cypriots' positive determination to go on working with a view of reaching a lasting peace, unity, and prosperity on the island. The Russian Federation stands for further talks between the Cypriot two communities under the auspices of the UN General Secretary and within a framework of the Good Offices mission. Hence, the set of documents to settle the situation on the island, known as *Annan Plan*, is considered a sufficient basis to carry on the peaceful process in order to settle the Cyprus issue for the benefit of both parties, including achieving an agreement on key aspects of the Cyprus settlement set out in the plan. These aspects encompass constitutional and territorial arrangements, procedures for the return of refugees, international guarantees, and the security of the Cypriot State. Russia is inclined to go on fostering favourable conditions to promote the Cyprus settlement both within a UN Security Council framework and within its cooperation with representatives of both Cypriot communities and other stakeholders, including Greece, Turkey, and the EU.

A new vector of the Cyprus issue, forming in the course of Cyprus becoming a full EU member, and the EU's decision in 2005 to start negotiations with Turkey on its accession to the EU, transformed the settlement process.³⁷ The EU principle decision to start negotiations with Turkey on its accession to the EU created favourable conditions to solve the Cyprus issue. At the same time, the European path not only abolished but increased the necessity to maintain and enhance the key role of the UN and the UN Security Council in the global community's further attempts to find a lasting and comprehensive solution to reunite the island in accordance to the

³⁵ 'Russia Blocked the Adoption of the UN Security Council Resolution on Cyprus', (22 April 2014), available at <https://www.newsru.com/world/22apr2004/kipr.html>.

³⁶ S. Stavridis, (2006) 'Towards A "European Solution" of the Cyprus Problem: False Promise or Real Opportunity?', *The Cyprus Review*, Vol. 18, No. 1 93.

³⁷ Z. Önis, (2001) 'Greek-Turkish Relations and the European Union: A Critical Perspective' *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 6, No. 3 31.

UN Charter, basic principles and rules of international law, and the UN resolutions on Cyprus.

According to Russian Foreign Ministry Special Representative for Cyprus, Leonid Abramov, it is necessary to foster economic development of the Turkish Cypriots and to gradually create a common economic space on the island. It is important to encourage integration processes in Cyprus instead of fuelling separatism. Levelling the economic conditions of both Cypriot communities will facilitate the final settlement. Russia is open to enhancing economic ties with both communities, although such cooperation is not to be conducted to the detriment of the settlement process or contradict UN Security Council resolutions and international law.³⁸

The issue of legitimate contacts with the Turkish Cypriot community in Cyprus was raised during the meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan, which took place in Sochi in July 2005. Putin arranged a visit of Russian businesspersons to the northern part of the island in order to build bridges and to define methods of cooperating, with a view of starting new perspective projects.

The delegation, headed by the Vice-Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Russian Federation Georgy Petrov, paid a visit to Cyprus in November 2005. A trilateral meeting between the Russian, the Cyprus and the Turkish-Cyprus Chambers of Commerce took place. The Russian delegation also had an informal meeting with the president of the Turkish-Cyprus Chamber Salih Tunar, and members of its management. The aim was to establish contacts with the representatives of the Turkish community on the island and find possible ways of legitimate trilateral cooperation between Russian and Cyprus businesspersons, with the parties to negotiations complying with travel procedures adopted by the Cyprus Government regarding crossing the 'Green Line', as well as with the necessity to carry out foreign trade. The discussions resulted in outlining the following perspective spheres of cooperation: water and electricity supply, tourism, and agricultural products, mainly citrus. Parties also agreed on establishing information exchange on a constant basis with a view of signing a respective agreement between the chambers.

³⁸ L. Abramov, (2010) 'Cyprus Settlement in the Context of Modern Approaches to European Security', *Russian State University for Humanities Bulletin*, Vol. 47, No. 4, available at <http://www.bibliorossica.com/book.html?currBookId=17927>.

Putin gave definitive answers concerning Russian foreign policy at his press conference in January 2006³⁹. He explained Russia's position on Cyprus among other things. He said:

'As far as our policy on Cyprus is concerned, it has not changed. However, we would like it to be balanced and we want all parties to that process, which is the Turkish Republic, the northern part of Cyprus, Greece and the Republic of Cyprus, to respect what Russia does on the global stage in general and how it handles the Cyprus issue in particular. We will go on cooperating with the UN Secretary General. We believe that only people living on the island can determine their future. We hope that compromises satisfying both the northern and southern parts of the island will be found. We consider the northern part to demonstrate a clear perseverance to reach settlement. It is worth encouraging. In any case it would be quite just as far as joint economic ties with the northern part of Cyprus is concerned without violating the balance of interests and without violating Russian relationship both with Greece, with which we have had very close and friendly ties for centuries, and with Cyprus as a State.'

It is worth noting that Moscow's and Ankara's approaches towards that issue coincide, through community-based economic assistance to reunite the island. Encouraging integration processes on the island by all stakeholders will boost a settlement of the Cyprus issue. Russia is ready to move in that direction with a view of reaching a mutually beneficial settlement of that situation.

Fresh Hopes for Restarting Negotiations

Later on, the fact that Russia welcomed a new President of Cyprus, the late Demetris Christofias, who was elected in February 2008, can be put down to his arrival in Moscow in late 1960s to study at the Institute for Social Sciences in Moscow. He finished a postgraduate programme at the Academy for Social Sciences and received a PhD in History.

He made his first official visit to Moscow in November 2008. The first meeting between Christofias and Russian President, Dmitry Medvedev (2008-2012), took place on 19 November 2008. Christofias admitted that there was a 'spark' of understanding and sympathy between them during the first meeting that facilitated further contacts and negotiations. He also underlined that,

³⁹ 'Press Conference of the President of the Russian Federation' (Moscow, 31 January 2006), available at <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/23412>.

'[...] friendly ties and cooperation between two nations have deep roots. They can be traced back to the period when the Republic of Cyprus got its independence. They are based on cultural and spiritual traditions. After gaining independence we have rich ties based on mutual support and understanding. The Russian-Cyprus relationship is the one that must develop between countries. They can be a striking example to the many'.⁴⁰

The two presidents discussed developing their relationship in all spheres, the global situation, as well as economic, cultural, and humanitarian cooperation. The heads of the two States signed a political declaration – the first such document in the history of relationship between Cyprus and both the USSR and the Russian Federation. The parties pledged the necessity of reaching a comprehensive, just and viable settlement in Cyprus based on relevant UN Security Council resolutions adopted in 1977 and 1979, in accordance with the Joint Declaration on Further Intensification of the Relations of Friendship and Comprehensive Cooperation between the Cyprus and Russia. It would allow to transform the unitary State of the Republic of Cyprus into a bi-communal, bi-zonal federation, enjoying a single sovereignty, citizenship, and international personality, which in its turn reflects political equality the way it is defined in the respective UN Security Council resolutions. Being a permanent member of the UN Security Council, the Russian Federation took on obligations to support a mutually agreed solution between Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities without arbitrations and artificial timetables, where at the same time safeguarding the Cypriot ownership of the process.⁴¹

The Russian-Cyprus talks resulted in signing the following documents:

1. the agreement between the Government of the Republic of Cyprus and the Government of the Russian Federation for Cooperation in the field of Public Health and Medical Science;⁴²
2. the memorandum on cooperation between the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation and the Ministry of Justice and Public Order of the Republic of Cyprus;⁴³

⁴⁰ 'Press Statements following the Russian-Cyprus Talks' (Moscow/Kremlin, 19 November 2008), available at http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/press_conferences/1553.

⁴¹ Joint Declaration on Further Intensification of the Relations of Friendship and Comprehensive Cooperation between the Republic of Cyprus and the Russian Federation, available at <http://docs.cntd.ru/document/902161670> [in Russian].

⁴² Available at <https://base.garant.ru/2568061/>.

⁴³ Available at <https://minjust.ru/ru/perechen-soglasheniy-i-dogovorennostey-o-sotrudnichestve->

3. the document regarding cooperation on mutual understanding between the federal service for financial markets of the Russian Federation and the security exchange commission of Cyprus;⁴⁴
4. the joint action programme between Russia Tourism and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Tourism of the Republic of Cyprus for the implementation of the agreement between the two governments on cooperation in the field of tourism;⁴⁵
5. the agreement on cooperation between ITAR-TASS and the Cyprus News Agency;⁴⁶
6. the memorandum on cooperation between the JSC 'VTB Bank' and the Cyprus stock exchange;⁴⁷ and
7. the memorandum between Yuniastrubank and the Bank of Cyprus.⁴⁸

Thus, the first meeting between two presidents resulted in boosting ties between Russia and Cyprus in all fields: politics, economics, culture, and humanitarian aid. The heads of the two States were satisfied with both the process and atmosphere of the talks and the documents executed, since they fully reflected the amicable and close cooperation between the two countries.

At the same time, Putin signed an agreement with Turkey on the 'South Stream' in August 2009. After concluding this document, he said, 'Russia is inclined to build relationship both with southern and northern parts of Cyprus to facilitate the Cyprus settlement'.⁴⁹ Such announcements aroused mixed feelings among media all over the world, because some of them treated these statements as support of separatism rather than a settlement process on the island.'

The historical visit of the President of Russia, Mr. Medvedev, to Cyprus in October 2010 was the next significant event in the history of two countries. It can be considered historical, because the Russian head paid an official visit to the Republic of Cyprus for the first time. Medvedev held talks with Christofias in Nicosia. Two

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⁴⁴ Available at <http://docs.cntd.ru/document/902178637>.

⁴⁵ Available at <https://www.russiatourism.ru/news/938/>.

⁴⁶ Available at <http://docs.cntd.ru/document/902161672>.

⁴⁷ Available at <https://ria.ru/20081119/155474857.html>.

⁴⁸ Available at <https://www.banki.ru/news/lenta/?id=2619892>.

⁴⁹ RIA Novosti, 'The Russian Federation will cooperate with Greek and Turkish parts of Cyprus' (6 August 2009), available at <http://www.rian.ru/politics/20090806/179982941.html>.

documents were signed following the meeting: the Joint Programme of Actions for the Period 2010-2013, and the Joint Statement to Commemorate the 65th Anniversary of the Defeat of Fascism.

The executive protocol to implement the Agreement on Readmission between the Russian Federation and the European Union was signed by the governments of Russia and Cyprus. The parties entered into negotiations for the protocol to amend the agreement between the governments for the avoidance of double taxation with respect to taxes on income and capital. Furthermore, a memorandum of mutual understanding was signed between the Diplomatic Academy of Russian Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Cyprus. Another memorandum concerning prevention of stealing, tomb raiding, illicit import, and export of cultural property was also signed between the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation and the Ministry of Communications and Works of Cyprus.⁵⁰ Additionally, the Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation and Cyprus' Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Tourism signed the memorandum of mutual understanding regarding cooperation in the field of energy efficiency and renewed energy. Finally, the Ministry of Transport of the Russian Federation and the Ministry of Communications and Works of Cyprus concluded a memorandum of mutual understanding too.

A number of important documents were also signed:

1. the Joint Programme for the Period 2011-2012 concerning cooperation in the field of Tourism;
2. the declaration of Russian-Cyprus cooperation to modernise the economy;
3. the agreement between the Federal Chamber for State Registration of the Russian Federation and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism of Cyprus;
4. the agreement on cooperation between Chambers of Commerce and Industry;
5. the agreement on cooperation between the Federal Chamber for State Registration of the Russian Federation and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Cyprus;
6. the memorandum of mutual understanding concerning cooperation in the field of service delivery, scientific researches and education in neurology, genetics and biomedicine; and

⁵⁰ Available at <http://www.kremlin.ru/supplement/731>.

7. the memorandum of mutual understanding between the Stock Exchange 'RTS' and the Cyprus Stock Exchange.

The Russian head gave the Order of Friendship to the President of Cyprus 'for a big personal commitment to closer ties and multifaceted development of the Russian-Cyprus relationship'. Medvedev stated that Russia would do its best to promote a peaceful Cyprus settlement with a view of building a unified sovereign State. 'I told Mr. President that the Russian position had not changed – we will do our best to facilitate the Cyprus settlement to achieve a result. It is worth mentioning – it will be achieved in a peaceful environment without any pushes or excessive impulse,' said Medvedev at a joint conference with the Cyprus President. He added that this was the way the things were to be done in the world community. 'It goes without saying that the aim is to build a unified State with international personality and common sovereignty – the idea proposed by Mr. President', he underlined.⁵¹ At the conference, President Christofias said, 'We are interested in helping Russia to secure the abolition of visa requirements with all EU countries'.

Russia: Is it Possible to Resolve the Conflict Today?

A new phase of the talks to settle the Cyprus issue started in 2014. It is rather natural, taking into consideration the fact that new political parties ascended to power in the Republic of Cyprus and in the northern part.

Besides, it is obvious that the decision to resume talks on a Cyprus settlement may have been triggered by Russia's gradual expansion in the Eastern Mediterranean. In January 2014, the Republic of Cyprus (for humanitarian and emergency cases) gave a green light for Russian Armed Forces to use the Andreas Papandreu airbase in Paphos and to deploy its navy to Limassol. Russia is also known to have a sole base in the Syrian city of Tartus, which might be endangered if the regime changed. The UK and the US retain their presence on Cyprus at the British Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia. They were used during the Iraqi campaign not long ago. Another round of talks that were held in Switzerland ended in stalemate in 2017. The rival parties failed to reach an agreement on the key issue of revising the system of guarantees under the Zurich and London Agreements of 1959. The energy factor added insult to injury. Natural gas deposits were discov-

⁵¹ 'Joint Press Conference (D. Medvedev & D. Christofias) following the Russian-Cyprus Talks' (Moscow, 7 October 2010), available at http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/press_conferences/9186.

ered off the coast of Cyprus. Experts believe them to be quite significant.⁵² Territorial demarcation can play a major role in the Cyprus settlement.

There are several regional actors and other stakeholders who oppose each other: Israel and Cyprus, where these gas deposits were found, and Turkey, which is striving to boost its power in the Mediterranean region, *tout court*. At the same time, the US and Russia are starting to take part in that energy struggle (President Putin discussed with the Palestinian leader if it was possible for Gazprom to develop oil and gas deposits off the coast of Gaza). The opposition will be difficult. It can only show one thing: the settlement of the Greek-Turkish conflict may not be beneficial in such circumstances, as it will inevitably result in powers regrouping and establishing new alliances.

To crown it all, it is worth mentioning that the Cyprus example proves that the inter-ethnic conflict, complicated by internal and external factors, might turn into the inter-state or inter-regional one.⁵³ If the superpowers interfere, it can add, under certain conditions, destabilising elements to the global level of international relations as well.

In that respect, Russia sincerely and continuously supports efforts aimed at successfully uniting the island on conditions favourable to both communities. The Russian Federation wishes to settle the Cyprus issue honouring the UN Security Council Resolutions and the inter-community agreements under which the island is to become a bi-zonal federation, where Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities could peacefully co-exist and co-evolve.

Russia does not take part in talks on the Cyprus issue, but it wields a limited power to affect the whole process through the UN Security Council where it holds the position of a permanent member. At the same time, the Cyprus issue is not merely a challenge Moscow has faced. The importance of decisions concerning that question shapes the relationship with the main parties engaged in that process. Hence, it is important for Russia not to let situations arise when it would have to be on friendly terms with some countries and make enemies of others. At the same time, tradition-

⁵² M. Diakantonis, 'The Cyprus Problem, the Energy Games and the US Elections', *Liberal.gr* (12 May 2016), available at <https://www.liberal.gr/diplomacy/to-kupriako-ta-energeiaka-paignia-kai-oi-amerikanikes-ekloges/49360>.

⁵³ M. Hadjipavlou, (2007) 'The Cyprus Conflict: Root Causes and Implications for Peacebuilding', *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 44, No. 3.

ally warm ties with Cyprus and Greece together with better relationship with Turkey have let Russia claim to be an unofficial mediator in the Cyprus issue.

The President of the Republic of Cyprus, Nicos Anastasiades, paid an official visit to Russia in October 2017. Following the talks with his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, the latter pointed out, 'We assured Mr. Anastasiades of our principal position that is to justly and comprehensively settle the situation in Cyprus, adhering to the UN Security Council resolution and the agreements between the parties. We strongly believe the Cypriots to make a decision without exerting external pressure and suggesting ready-made recipes'.⁵⁴

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⁵⁴ TASS News Agency, 'Putin: the Cyprus Settlement Must not be Dictated Externally' (24 October 2017), available at <https://tass.ru/politika/4673903>.

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