ARTICLE

Roadblocks to Peacebuilding Activities in Cyprus: International Peacebuilding Actors' Handling of the Recognition Issue

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Abstract

In this paper, we argue that the strategy adopted by international peacebuilding actors for dealing with the recognition issue in Cyprus has created significant problems for implementing effective bottom-up peacebuilding activities. Rather than encouraging cooperation between the two communities, the 'do no harm' approach applied has strengthened the position of the ethno-nationalists who try to prevent cooperation beyond the Cyprus Green Line. We argue that this approach shows how international actors can be limited in comprehending and dealing with local problems, particularly when their official position is aligned with the official position of one side involved in the conflict. International peacebuilding actors can be much more effective if they thoroughly understand the root causes of conflicts and ensure they take a neutral stand before engaging in peacebuilding work in post-conflict regions.

INTRODUCTION

Compared to the majority of studies related to peacemaking and peacekeeping, peacebuilding literature is mainly occupied with bottom-up rather than top-down conflict resolution strategies. Tracing the roots of this research shows how Galtung (1969) made a plea for concentrating on positive peace related not just to the absence of violence but also to the integration of human society. Davidson and Monteville (1981-1982) later concentrated on track II diplomacy, which includes interactions for conflict resolution between actors from the wider society; Boutros Boutros-Ghali's (1992) aim was to change structures in post-conflict zones, and Lederach's (1997) endeavour was to integrate the society as a whole into peacebuilding activities in order to transform conflicts in post-conflict societies.

Along with subsequent studies following the same line of reasoning, they are primarily occupied with culturally sensitive, everyday, bottom-up peacebuilding (Oda, 2007; Mac Ginty, 2008; Rubinstein, 1989; Roberts, 2011; Duffey, 2000; Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013), considering civil society organizations as indispensable actors (see Marchetti and Tocci, 2009; Barnes, 2009; Paffenholz and Spurk, 2010).

These publications urge us to stop trying to introduce 'Westernized peace' or what the authors name 'liberal peacebuilding', arguing that we should instead create peacebuilding strategies by taking into account the cultural perspectives and the immediate needs of the societies in
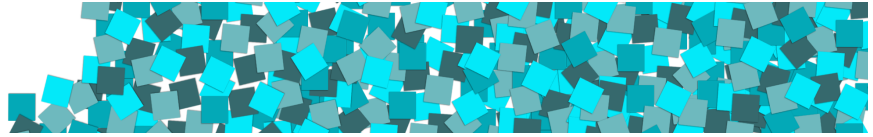
conflict zones. The authors try to distance themselves from rational-choice approaches as they believe that societies are constructed in different ways in different places. Hence, it is very difficult to formulate universally applicable hypotheses. The predominant approach in peacebuilding literature is case-oriented, without generalising, rather than variable-oriented research (Ragin, 1997). This does not mean that the findings will not lead to general conclusions, but that the researchers are mainly interested in the internal validity of their research in each case. Case-oriented research aims to describe, explore and explain phenomena that may be solely of interest to the case under study, with inference as only a secondary issue. As in most experimental research, the general impact of variables can be better understood through meta-analyses and literature reviews. However, doubts remain whether generalizations are possible at all, as specific variables may not be relevant in different cases, or may have other effects.

Despite the advantage of in-depth analysis, peacebuilding scholars doing locally sensitive in-depth research cannot advance our knowledge much further than the suggestion that peoples' perspectives and needs should be taken into consideration during peacekeeping and peacebuilding processes. This simple argument creates doubts about the constructiveness of the results, when the conclusions are restricted to a simple and clear argument that is more of an assumption than a finding.[1] We argue that case-oriented scholars should now start to explore how specific, locally sensitive issues may reduce the effectiveness of peacebuilding activities. Although descriptive studies are effective in pointing out the need to take the 'local individual' seriously, we have reached a point where we should concentrate on determining which external factors can explain why the efforts of international peacebuilding actors may not be congruent with local needs. Only then can we understand exactly what diminishes the effectiveness of peacebuilding activities promoted by these international actors. This would enable us to move from simply criticizing liberal peacebuilding to suggesting how we can improve peacebuilding in general.

Autesserre (2011) argued that anthropological and constructivist research in peacebuilding neglected three research topics that are imperative to peacebuilding. Firstly, while bottom-up studies look at the interactions between various cultures and military peacekeepers, they fail to study how culture interacts with track II actors. Secondly, different types of activities, such as peacemaking, peacekeeping or peacebuilding, and local and external actors are studied separately and we lack an understanding of the interactions between them. Finally, our knowledge on the similarities between peace-builder strategies that use indigenous approaches to peacebuilding is lacking.

Along the lines of Autesserre's (2011) second point, this paper looks into the interaction between local and external actors. The research method and the question examined follow that of Denksus (2012) who advocated the use of in-depth analysis that takes into account the everyday challenges of peacebuilding organizations.

Among Turkish Cypriots, public opinion is divided with a majority preferring independence and seeing a federation only as a secondary option (Cyprus 2015, 2010). On the other hand, the Greek Cypriots who previously dominated political power try to prevent the recognition of the breakaway Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Greek Cypriots prefer to maintain their territorial sovereignty and dominate political power in a unitary state (Cyprus 2015, 2010). Delicate issues such as property ownership (Gürel and Özersay, 2006; Loizides and Antoniades, 2009) keep the tension between groups alive. Amid the clear conflict between these two communities, civil society actors from both sides are engaged in peacebuilding activities. Our endeavour here is to understand how the international peacebuilding actors' handling of the recognition issue has affected the success both sides are achieving. We argue that the 'do no harm approach' adopted by these external actors in order to prevent any political risk for themselves has created a major problem for the civil society actors that try to consolidate peace in Cyprus. Following is a formulation of the argument, substantiated by a brief case study, and some conclusions.

INTERNATIONAL ACTORS' HANDLING OF THE RECOGNITION ISSUE AS AN OBSTACLE FOR PEACEBUILDING

There is extensive literature on the Cyprus conflict, however most research concentrates on Track I diplomacy (Yesilada and Sozen, 2002; Kyriacou, 2000; Eralp and Beriker, 2005; Schiff, 2008; Sözen and Özersay, 2007; Loizides and Keskiner, 2004; Souter, 1989; Bahceli, 2000). Recent publications argue that negotiations have failed or they should not have been the focal point for resolving conflict in the first place (Kanol, 2010; Turk, 2006, 2007, 2009). The writers argue that contact between individuals can reduce prejudice and create a feeling of "we", which is the way forward if a solution is to be found to the Cyprus problem (Turk, 2006, 2007, 2009; Trimikliniotis, 2007; Lönnqvist, 2008; Broome, 2004; Kanol, 2010; Anastasiou, 2002; Loizos, 2007; Hadjipavlou, 2004, 2007; Ladisch, 2007). Kanol (2010) argues that civil society holds the key to

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1 See Paris (2010) for an extensive critique of the deficiencies of the literature that criticizes liberal peacebuilding.
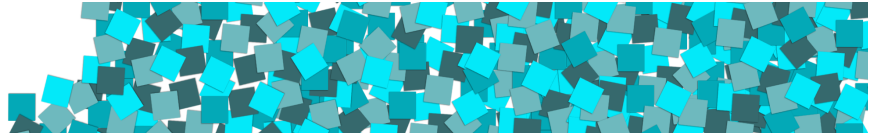
transforming negative attitudes towards the other community into positive attitudes, creating a "we" feeling. The full history of peacebuilding activities to date was covered by Hadjipavlou and Kanol (2008). Most activities took the form of problem-solving workshops (see Kelman, 1972 for a definition). These Track II workshops were complemented by Track III activities such as young people going to bi-communal camps or protest meetings. Recently, some organizations have also concentrated on peace advocacy in the form of bi-communal demonstrations and inside lobbying, which is one-on-one communication with the policy-makers.

Recent research on civil society and peacebuilding in Cyprus has found that the sensitivity of the recognition issue has been a significant obstacle to implementing effective peacebuilding activities. One research project implemented by the Cyprus Centre for the European and International Affairs states clearly: "by far the most important (and obvious) issue that hinders cooperation or even generates antagonistic behaviour is that of recognition" (Cyprus Centre for the European and International Affairs, 2011, p. 10). One of the findings from roundtable discussions with civil society members is that cooperation with the Turkish Cypriots is hindered in the Greek Cypriot community who fear that any collaboration may somehow lead to the recognition of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) (Cyprus Centre for the European and International Affairs, 2011). The pressure on Greek Cypriot civil society usually comes in the form of 'naming and shaming', accusing those who cooperate in facilitating recognition of the breakaway region. The social pressure within the Greek Cypriot civil society is very strong: no one wants to be the proverbial 'black sheep', so people shy away from actively collaborating and working with the other community. This problem is exacerbated by the actions of certain groups in the Turkish Cypriot community (Cyprus Centre for the European and International Affairs, 2011).

Donor funding for peacebuilding was found to be a double-edged sword (Paffenholz et al., 2010): while most peacebuilding activities would not have been possible without it, donor funding also contributed to the professionalization of peace work. This meant most social movements were transformed into non-governmental organisations, voluntary work came decreased, the social roots of the movements weakened and peacebuilding initiatives turned from grassroots cooperation into efforts for fundraising. The authors argue that the NGOs that managed to secure funding are led by an urban, educated middle-class which causes problems of social capital, ownership and legitimacy (Paffenholz et al., 2010). Unlike these general points, the recognition issue is case-specific. The focus here is on this issue, specifically on how the international actors handled it and how this had an impact on peacebuilding in Cyprus.

The Republic of Cyprus was founded as a power-sharing state between Greek and Turkish Cypriots as a result of the London-Zurich (1959) agreements which included Greece and Turkey as guarantors of the sovereignty, and the constitution of the Republic of Cyprus based on kinship. As the former colonial power in Cyprus, Great Britain acknowledged independence and it became a third guarantor power. Consociationalists argue that rigid proportionality, grand coalitions, cultural autonomy and minority veto ensure peace, democracy and stability in deeply divided societies (Lijphart 1969, 2004). The Republic of Cyprus satisfied all of these conditions (Yakinthou, 2009). The London-Zurich agreements, however, did not satisfy the Greek Cypriot community, 78.20% of the population at the time. A majority within the Greek Cypriot community was either in favour of unification with the 'motherland' or a unitary state. The Greek Cypriot elite were of the opinion that the corporate consociationalist system of the Republic of Cyprus gave too much power to the Turkish Cypriot community, which constituted only 18.13% of the population at that time. Lack of support for the power-sharing government soon created problems. The Republic of Cyprus has functioned without the effective participation of Turkish Cypriots since 1964. In 1974, after a coup led by the Greek military junta, Turkey responded and occupied about 37% of the island.

Agreements between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot political elites failed to establish a viable common state and in 1983, Turkish Cypriots, supported by Turkey, proclaimed the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus as an independent state. To this day, no country except Turkey recognizes the breakaway region as an independent country. The Republic of Cyprus claims that Turkey is an occupying force and that TRNC is a puppet state of Turkey, demanding that Turkish soldiers leave the island. The majority of Greek Cypriots believe that the problem is the 35,000 soldiers still deployed in Cyprus, their inability to claim their properties occupied by Turkey and the illegal flow of Turkish immigrants to Cyprus. Turkish Cypriots on the other hand argue that the 'doctrine of necessity' implemented by the Republic of Cyprus has caused an 'invasion' of Greek Cypriots, leading to a unilateral transformation from a bi-communal to a monocommunal state. The majority of Turkish Cypriots believe that the Turkish soldiers ensure their security. While Turkish Cypriots are in favour of an independent state, federation is an acceptable second best solution. Greek Cypriots on the other hand prefer a unitary state. However, they claim they rejected the 2002 United Nations plan for settlement of the problem not because it proposed a federal state but because it was unfavourable towards the Greek Cypriot community.

On 11 November 2002, the United Nations launched the Annan Plan. A comprehensive proposal to settle the Cyprus problem, as a continuation of the top-level negotiations that had begun in late 1999 (Anastasiou, 2008), it foresaw a bi-zonal federation of the communities. After several revisions, the fifth draft was put to a referendum on
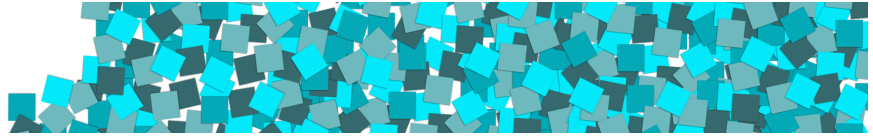
24 April 2004, with 65% of the Turkish Cypriot community supporting the plan and 76% of Greek Cypriots rejecting it. As approval depended on a simple majority of both sides, the plan was rejected. Some analysts suggest that the peace process was completely curtailed by the rejection of the Annan Plan by the Greek Cypriots and the ensuing stalemate in the negotiations between the left-wing leaders Mehmet Ali Talat and Demetris Christofias. But this idea may be erroneous due to the misconception that the peace process was a way of reaching institutional agreement on a one-state or a two-state solution. In reality, since the Turkish Cypriot decision to allow cross-border visits, during the Annan Plan process, varying degrees of relationships have been created between the communities. Although a substantial number of people still do not cross the checkpoints, and therefore are not exposed to contact with the other community, there is a growing number of people who – willingly or unwillingly – have had contact since the opening of the borders in 2003. Bi-communal activities, some funded by international organizations, have also increased as a result of the relaxation of border controls and the more positive environment. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that there is still a rigid psychological divide between the two communities and that and any positive effects of contact will only be seen over time.

In our opinion, when international actors – in this case, the UN, the EU and the USA – intervene in a reconciliation process without treating the two conflicting parties equally, they block opportunities for implementing peacebuilding activities. They are bound by a political stance which dictates they recognise just one side of the conflict. Since the Republic of Cyprus is 'legal' and the Turkish Republic of Cyprus is 'illegal', the UN officials in Cyprus are accredited by the Republic of Cyprus which is represented solely by the Greek Cypriots, who are only one side of the conflict. UN officials working to facilitate and provide conflict resolution services through the UN Good Offices mission are under constant pressure from the Greek Cypriot authorities to not get involved in any activity which might imply recognition of the Turkish Cypriot authorities or institutions. So, while the UN acknowledges the equality of the two sides, recognition is only extended to the Greek Cypriot government of the Republic of Cyprus This dilemma puts the UN in an awkward situation as a neutral actor supporting the peace building activities, whether through its Good Offices to facilitate the inter-communal talks or through the UNDP offices which provide funding for the peacebuilding projects operating at various levels and sectors on the island.
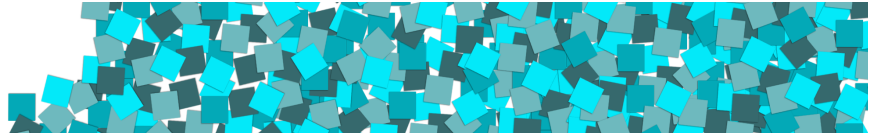
Organizations like the UN and the EU are bureaucratic institutions and the officials managing or overseeing peace building projects are often career-conscious and risk-averse, so reluctant to push the limits of their operations. This caution is usually disguised by certain not well-defined practises such as 'do no harm', which is conveni-

ently translated by officials as maintaining the current state of affairs. This then becomes a problem in itself, since the aim of peacebuilding is to transform a situation of conflict into one of reconciliation. In the case of Cyprus, there have been some exceptional occasions where UN and EU officials managed to find 'creative' ways to surpass the difficulties imposed on them not only by the Greek Cypriot authorities but also by their own political/legal frameworks. However, they had limited impact and were dependent on the competencies of the individuals in these positions and their in-depth understanding of the local context. In most cases, risk-avert officials adopt the 'do no harm' approach which simply means not granting permission for any bi-communal activity that could be interpreted by the Republic of Cyprus as granting legitimacy to the TRNC.

ENGAGE II: ACTIVE DIALOGUE NETWORKS

Findings from a case study demonstrate how our argument fits reality. Process tracing was used to determine if and how X leads to Y. We traced the process from X – the international peacebuilding actors' handling of the recognition issue – to Y – the reduction in effectiveness of the peacebuilding activity that was exposed to X. By effectiveness, we mean being able to realize the goals of these projects concerning building trust and promoting sustainable peace. We looked at the sequence: "(1) a specific event or process took place, (2) a different event or process occurred after the initial event or process, and (3) the former was a cause of the latter" (Mahoney, 2012, p. 571). From the case studies that can provide evidence for our hypothesis, we used documents and interviews with the project managers of the ENGAGE II project, a recent and important scheme which was implemented in the Turkish Cypriot community by the Management Centre of the Mediterranean, based there, and in the Greek Cypriot community by the NGO-Support Centre.

In 2012, the ENGAGE II project implemented the Active Dialogue Networks (ADNs) approach to conflict resolution in Cyprus. The main aim was to empower local authorities and local civil society organizations to become more engaged in the peace process and build confidence between the two sides. The ADN meetings were strategically designed to create an inclusive environment for different sectors, covering business representatives, academicians, rural groups and local authorities. One of the main strengths of the meetings in rural areas has been the close collaboration with the local authorities in creating strategic partnerships for implementation of the project. At these meetings, the decision on the main project was voted on by 217 people from the Turkish Cypriot Community and 162 from the Greek Cypriot Community, from six sectors of so-

ciety (civil, academia, local authorities, the private and the public sector, and the media). They were from the towns of Derynia, Pafos, Limassol, Larnaca, Yenibogazici/Ayios Epiktitos, Catalkoy/Ayios Epiktitos, Guzelyurt/Morphou and Dikmen/Dikomo. Out of 49 options, a confidence-building project covering the whole island was chosen as the main peacebuilding priority with 16% of the votes.

The project was to translate all official documents and signs on government buildings, and all road signs into Greek, Turkish and English in specific regions on the island.

Famagusta in the north of the island and part of Limassol in the south were selected for the pilot project, with the three names highlighted on the road signs. The project included historical heritage sites, thereby serving tourists as well. The expected results were to develop cooperation between local authorities, civil society and other sectors, engaging them in the peace process, promoting trust and confidence between the two sides, improving services for citizens and visitors and contributing to a more positive climate for high-level talks between the leaders of both sides.

We should emphasize here that there was far more legitimacy to this than the usual projects implemented through key stakeholder Track II meetings. It was a participatory and inclusive process that gained the support of the local authorities as well as various participants from civil society organizations. It is also noteworthy that most of these organizations were not bi-communal, meaning that they were not the usual 'suspects'.[2] Therefore, the project satisfied the conditions for moving from track II towards the much needed track III diplomacy in Cyprus (Turk, 2006).

However, the international donors opposed the project when the actions were to be realized. According to the people interviewed, the international actors argued – as they always do – that the political risks had to be weighed up before accepting and facilitating the implementation of projects, and blocked this one because the dual names on signs would not be recognized as legitimate by the Republic of Cyprus.

"CSOs, academics and local authorities all agreed that we should do this suggesting that it is a very important confidence building measure and very important for revitalizing the peacebuilding efforts…to have them agree to it was a success in our opinion…funding was going to be from the small grants programme which we have tentatively agreed with the international donor and then at a particular stage of the project the decision was reversed. This is where our blocking and barriers came from; the actual funders but not the municipalities which we thought would be the barriers. It

was rejected because they said it was going to be too politically sensitive. The funder was presuming that changing the road signs and putting Turkish texts on the road signs as well as the Greek would imply legitimizing "north" and will upset the Greek Cypriot authorities."(Canlibalik, 2013).

"I think that our biggest fear in the ENGAGE project has been convincing people. This time we managed to convince them. The barrier in this case was the funders…you would expect it to be the other way around. This time locals were ready but the funders were not ready…The initial argument of the international donor was that ministry of foreign affairs in both sides would not accept changing the road signs… for funding, ministry of foreign affairs in the south can stop funding from international actors… they have to be consulted at all times…the donor argued that ministry of affairs would stop funding in the case of changing the road signs" (Andriotis, 2013).

Here we see that the 'do no harm' approach of the international actors was an obstacle for the reconciliation efforts of local peacebuilding organizations, even before the Republic of Cyprus authorities made an attempt to block the project. The fear the international actors have of disturbing the balance has made them an obstacle towards peacebuilding on the island. Furthermore, it is arguable whether the translation of road signs would have had anything to do with the recognition of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. The question arises as to whether the 'do no harm' approach has actually harmed the peacebuilding process.

CONCLUSION

Over time, the value of the bottom-up approach to peacebuilding is being increasingly taken into account. However, peacebuilding literature has been limited to describing phenomena and stating the obvious fact that culture should be taken into account. It should be recognized that it is more useful to concentrate on focused hypotheses as to why and how the activities of international peacebuilding actors were so limited rather than simply suggesting that indigenous peacebuilding is superior to liberal peacebuilding. Here we have formulated a hypothesis on how the strategy for dealing with the recognition issue has created problems for the effectiveness of bottom-up peacebuilding in Cyprus. Evidence for our hypothesis is based on an important and recent case. Rather than encouraging coop-

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2 'Usual suspects' is a name given to the small elite group engaged in bi-communal peacebuilding projects.
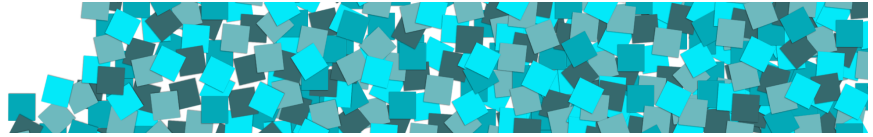
eration between the two communities by trying to convince the local authorities of its benefits, the international actors applied a 'do no harm' approach that strengthened the position of the ethno-nationalists who try to prevent cooperation across the Green Line. We argue that this approach shows how international peacebuilding actors can be limited in comprehending and acting on 'local' problems. They might improve their effectiveness if they thoroughly understood the root causes of conflicts before engaging in peacebuilding work, and took a more neutral and progressive stand. It is doubtful that internationally funded projects, if they are detached from the real issues in the field and have unbalanced interactions with the sides in conflict, can contribute much to the consolidation of peace in any post-conflict country.

At the time of writing, the leaders of the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities are restarting secret Track I negotiations. We have commented that this strategy, backed by the UN, is not viable since mistrust between the communities is still widespread. At the same time, Track II and Track III level diplomacy is still being conducted. Funding by international donors has eliminated some practical obstacles and led to professionalization of peacebuilding activities. However, the brief case study presented here shows that their approach may limit the possibility of any genuine cooperation between the communities, curbing the positive effects of peacebuilding work. Our opinion is that international peacebuilding actors should rethink their approach with regards to bi-communal activities if they want them to have a real effect on peacebuilding in Cyprus.

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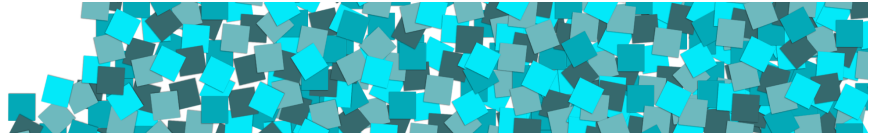
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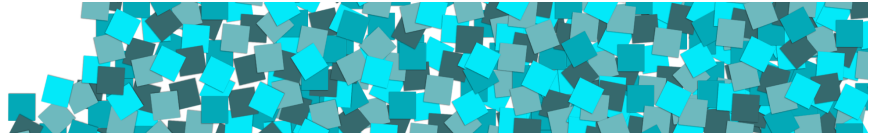
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