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Peace or a Peace Agreement? Negative Peace, Ripeness, and the Persistence of the Cyprus Status Quo

Assist. Prof. Dr. Tijen Zeybek

Near East University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses a puzzle at the centre of the Cyprus conflict. Although successive settlement texts have been negotiated and provisionally agreed since 1977, none has entered into force, yet the island has experienced no sustained direct intercommunal violence for more than four decades. Drawing on Johan Galtung's distinction between negative and positive peace and on I. William Zartman's ripeness theory, the study argues that Cyprus has achieved a durable negative peace, and that the recurrent collapse of settlement agreements is better explained by the absence of a mutually hurting stalemate than by any deficiency of diplomatic effort. The argument is examined across three critical junctures, namely the post-war period of 1974 and 1975, the 1992 Set of Ideas and the 2004 Annan Plan. In each case the failure tracks the absence of ripeness rather than a shortfall of diplomatic effort or design. The later collapse at Crans-Montana in 2017 is consistent with the same reading. Methodologically, the article is a qualitative single-case study that combines documentary and qualitative content analysis of treaties, United Nations (UN) resolutions and negotiation texts with process tracing of the sequence of agreed but unimplemented settlements. The analysis suggests that pressing toward a comprehensive settlement in the absence of ripeness may itself strain the negative peace it seeks to formalise. Whether the existing status quo ought to be formally institutionalised is treated as a separate and explicitly normative question rather than as a finding of the analysis.

Keywords – Cyprus problem, negative peace, ripeness theory, negotiation process, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

INTRODUCTION

The saying "*A bad peace is better than a good war*", commonly attributed to the Russian writer Pushkin, captures an intuition that has long informed thinking about protracted conflict. The presence of peace, even an imperfect one, indicates that disputes may be addressed without further loss of life. The peaceful settlement of a dispute that carries the potential for renewed conflict ordinarily proceeds through discussion and negotiation, and negotiation in turn presupposes at least a relative absence of violence. Only once such an environment exists can the parties pursue their disagreements without resorting to force.

The Cyprus negotiations are an unusually strong illustration of this dynamic. For more than half a century, comprehensive settlement talks have continued in various formats, spanning the terms of seven UN Secretaries-General and more than twenty Special Representatives. Over roughly the same period, and especially since 1974, the island has largely been free of sustained direct violence. This combination of an interminable and repeatedly unsuccessful negotiation process with a stable absence of war is the empirical puzzle from which this article proceeds.

The study is structured around a single research question. Why have successive Cyprus settlement agreements been reached at the level of text yet never entered into force, and what does the persistence of a non-violent but unresolved status quo imply for the value of continued negotiation? The argument presented here is that the situation on the island is best characterised, in Galtung's terms, as a durable negative peace. The repeated failure of agreements is a reflection, in Zartman's terms, of the absence of a mutually hurting stalemate rather than a lack of diplomatic will or technical ingenuity. From this perspective, the common desire to conclude the process with a signed agreement, while reasonable, could be dangerous if the means, the agreement, is mistaken for the end, the preservation of peace itself.

It is important to distinguish two claims that the remainder of the article keeps separate. The first is descriptive and analytical, namely that the conflict is not presently ripe for comprehensive resolution. The second is normative, namely that the de facto status quo ought therefore to be formally institutionalised. The analysis supports the former. The latter is a policy judgement that the analysis can inform but cannot by itself establish, and it is treated as such in the discussion.

This puzzle has attracted a substantial scholarship, and the present study builds on it rather than setting it aside. A first body of work explains the persistence of the deadlock through the international and regional context, and in particular through the incentive structure created by the European Union accession process. Tocci (2004) shows how the prospect of membership, intended to act as a catalyst for settlement, could instead reduce the pressure on the Greek Cypriot side to compromise once accession of the Republic of Cyprus was assured. A second body of work offers detailed narrative and analytical accounts of the negotiations themselves. Michael (2009) traces the successive rounds of talks and treats the failure to settle as a problem of the negotiating process and its management rather than as the inevitable product of ancient enmity. A third and more general literature provides even-handed overviews of the problem and its possible outcomes, including the increasingly discussed option of a formalised separation. Ker-Lindsay (2011) surveys the whole dispute in these terms and closes by asking directly whether partition is in fact the best available solution. More recent scholarship has turned to the collapse of the 2017 Crans-Montana conference and to the subsequent hardening toward a two-state framing on the Turkish Cypriot and Turkish side. Sözen and Şahin (2024) examine why this most promising round also failed. Ergüven and Köprülü (2023) read the later Turkish policy shift as a re-securitisation of the question.

The present article draws on all three but combines them in a way that, to the author's knowledge, has not previously been applied to this case. It reads the post-1974 situation through Galtung's typology of peace and interprets the record of failed agreements through Zartman's theory of ripeness. The contribution is therefore not a new fact about Cyprus but a framework. It connects an established observation, the long absence of direct violence, to an established puzzle, the repeated failure of settlement texts. It shows that the two are aspects of a single condition. Other scholars have stressed the role of identity and mutual fear, showing how defensive moves by each community were read as threats by the other. This study is compatible with that reading and draws on it at several points, though its central claim concerns the conditions for settlement rather than the psychology of the parties. Bringing Greek Cypriot, Turkish Cypriot and third party scholarship together in this way also helps to offset the imbalance of any single national account.

The article proceeds as follows. Section 2 sets out the theoretical framework. Section 3 describes the qualitative single-case design and its limitations. Section 4 provides a consolidated historical background. Section 5 traces the sequence of agreed but unimplemented settlements and interprets it through ripeness theory. Section 6 characterises the post-1974 status quo as a negative peace and examines its limits. Section 7 discusses the implications and engages the principal counterargument, and Section 8 concludes.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Defining peace is notoriously difficult. In its narrowest, lexical sense peace is simply the absence of war, and the vocabulary of world politics commonly distinguishes three conditions, namely war, the absence of war, and peace (Evans and Newnham, 2007). This tripartite usage already signals that the absence of war and peace are not straightforwardly identical, and it is precisely this gap that the frameworks adopted here are designed to clarify.

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Negative and positive peace

Galtung's (1969, 1996) distinction between negative and positive peace provides the study's principal conceptual anchor. Negative peace denotes the absence of direct, physical violence. Positive peace denotes something more demanding, namely the absence of structural and cultural violence together with the presence of cooperation, integration and the institutions that allow a shared life to be sustained. Galtung develops this contrast through two further ideas that matter for the present case. Structural violence refers to harm that is built into social and economic arrangements rather than inflicted by an identifiable actor, such as unequal access to resources, recognition or political voice. Cultural violence refers to those elements of a culture, including religion, ideology and the teaching of history, that make direct or structural violence appear normal or acceptable. On this account a society may enjoy a stable negative peace, with no killing and no armed clashes, while remaining structurally divided and far from the reconciled identities and shared institutions that positive peace requires. This is precisely the condition that the later sections attribute to Cyprus, where a prolonged absence of direct violence coexists with a persistent territorial division and with divergent national narratives that have not been reconciled.

Ripeness and the mutually hurting stalemate

Zartman's (1989, 2001) ripeness theory addresses the timing of conflict resolution rather than its substance. In this account, negotiations are likely to succeed only when the parties perceive a mutually hurting stalemate. This is a situation in which neither side can achieve its objectives by force, and in which the costs of continuing the deadlock become painful enough that a negotiated way out looks attractive. Zartman's account has two components that must both be present. The first is the mutually hurting stalemate itself. The second is a perceived way out, a sense on both sides that a settlement is available and that a credible interlocutor exists to deliver it. Ripeness is thus a matter of perception as much as of objective conditions, and a moment can pass unused if the parties fail to seize it. Critics have noted that the concept risks circularity, since a moment may look ripe largely because a settlement followed and unripe largely because none did. This study takes that objection seriously and therefore does not infer unripeness from failure alone. At each juncture it looks instead for independent evidence, asking whether the costs of continued deadlock were in fact painful to both sides and whether a credible way out was genuinely on offer, before drawing any conclusion about ripeness.

Combining the frameworks

Taken together, the two frameworks structure the analysis. Galtung's typology characterises the outcome to be explained, a negative peace that is not yet a positive peace. Zartman's theory supplies the mechanism that accounts for the repeated failure of settlement texts, namely the absence of a mutually hurting stalemate, reinforced rather than relieved by developments such as the 2003 opening of the crossing points. This combination also guards against a common weakness in single-perspective accounts of Cyprus, which tend to explain the deadlock by the intentions or bad faith of one party. Framing the outcome as a negative peace and the deadlock as a problem of timing shifts attention from motives to conditions, and it allows the same analytical vocabulary to be applied to both communities on equal terms. Neither framework, on its own, entails a preference for partition or for any other final arrangement, and that question is reserved for the discussion.

METHODOLOGY

The study is designed as a qualitative single-case study of the Cyprus negotiation process. The single-case design is appropriate because the aim is not to generalise across many conflicts but to explain a specific and theoretically interesting pattern within one protracted case, and because Cyprus offers unusually rich documentation across a long time span.

The empirical material consists of documentary sources analysed through qualitative content analysis. These sources include the founding treaties of the Republic of Cyprus, that is the 1959 Zurich and London Agreements and the associated Treaties of Guarantee and Alliance. They also include the 1960 Constitution and the relevant UN Security Council resolutions. A third group consists of the successive settlement proposals advanced under

UN auspices, namely the de Cuéllar initiative, the Ghali Set of Ideas and the Annan Plan. The high-level agreements concluded between community leaders and the recorded statements of key political figures are also used, and secondary historiographical works establish sequence and context.

The documents were selected and weighed according to a small set of criteria. The primary legal instruments, that is the treaties, the constitution and the UN resolutions, were treated as the most authoritative record of what was formally agreed. Contested factual claims, such as casualty and displacement figures, were where possible triangulated across sources associated with different communities and against neutral or official bodies. Partisan or polemical works were used only for uncontested matters of sequence and were treated as advocacy rather than relied upon for interpretation. Where a recent and peer-reviewed international source was available, it was preferred over older or more partisan material.

The analytical strategy is process tracing. Rather than treating each failed agreement in isolation, the study follows the sequence of settlement attempts over time in order to identify whether a recurring causal mechanism links them. The frameworks set out in Section 2 guide this tracing, so that at each juncture the study asks whether the conditions for ripeness were present and how the resulting arrangement maps onto the negative and positive peace distinction.

Two of the study's central terms are used in a specific sense. Negative peace is taken to hold when there is no organised armed violence between the communities across a sustained period. It is treated as broken by any return to systematic intercommunal killing, forced displacement or armed confrontation along the dividing line, rather than by isolated incidents. The peace is described as durable when this condition has held continuously for a long span, in the present case the more than four decades since 1974, and when everyday cross-line contact has been possible without provoking a return to violence. Because these indicators are observable, the later claims about the presence and robustness of negative peace can be assessed rather than merely asserted.

Two limitations must be stated frankly. First, the available documentary and secondary literature is unevenly distributed, since a substantial part of the accessible material reflects the Turkish Cypriot and Turkish perspective. A fully balanced source base would require deeper engagement with Greek Cypriot scholarship and archival material than the present study can claim. The inclusion of independent and international scholarship such as Michael (2009), Tocci (2004) and Ker-Lindsay (2011) is intended to reduce this imbalance. Second, the historiography of Cyprus is deeply contested, and the same events are narrated differently by the two communities. Where accounts diverge, this article attributes contested framings to their sources rather than presenting one community's account as settled fact, and it flags casualty figures and disputed episodes as contested where appropriate. These commitments mitigate, though they cannot wholly remove, the partiality inherent in the source base.

Historical Background

The history of the Cyprus problem long predates its internationalisation, but it entered the agenda of the international community only in 1954, when it was raised at the UN. The account below is presented once, in chronological order, and is intended to establish the sequence of events on which the later analysis draws rather than to adjudicate between competing national narratives.

From Ottoman administration to British annexation (1878 to 1923)

Britain's legal relationship with Cyprus began with the Treaty of Alliance signed between the Ottoman State and the United Kingdom on 4 June 1878. Under that agreement Britain undertook, in specified circumstances, to defend Ottoman territory, and the Ottoman State in return consented to Britain's administration of the island, an arrangement that was to lapse if Russia returned certain territories. At the outbreak of the First World War, Britain declared the 1878 arrangement void and, by an Order in Council of November 1914, annexed the island. Turkey recognised the annexation under the Treaty of Lausanne of 24 July 1923 (Toluner, 1977).

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Enosis, self-determination and the internationalisation of the dispute (1878 to 1955)

Two competing national aspirations shaped the island's politics. Much of the Greek Cypriot leadership pursued *Enosis*, that is union with Greece, an aspiration frequently linked to the wider irredentist idea known as the "*Megali Idea*" (Mütercimler, 1990). A series of plebiscitary initiatives expressed this aspiration, from an appeal for union following gatherings in 1921 (İsmail, 1992a) to a Church-organised plebiscite in 1950 in which a large majority of participating Greek Cypriots endorsed union with Greece (Birinci, 1999). Persuaded by this result, the Greek Cypriot leadership pressed Greece to bring the matter to the UN, which it did in 1954, framing the issue as one of self-determination, the right of Cyprus to determine its own future.

On 17 December 1954 the UN General Assembly decided not to take up the Cyprus question for the time being, and Greece's application was left unanswered (Mütercimler, 1990). From the Turkish Cypriot and Turkish standpoint, the self-determination framing was contested on the ground that two distinct communities, with different languages, perceived homelands and future expectations, inhabited the island. From 1 April 1955 an armed campaign was conducted by EOKA (Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston), led by General Grivas (Grivas, 2012). Initially directed against British rule, it later extended to intercommunal violence, and Turkish Cypriots reported being compelled to leave a number of villages in the 1955 to 1958 period. Turkey, which had until then emphasised Turkish and Greek friendship, now engaged actively with the question (Gazioğlu, 1960), and by late 1956 the Turkish Prime Minister, Adnan Menderes, was publicly canvassing partition (*taksim*) as a possible solution (Akçura, 2009.). Against the Greek Cypriot enosis thesis and the Turkish Cypriot taksim thesis, the idea of an independent Republic of Cyprus emerged as a middle path.

The 1959 to 1960 settlement and the Republic of Cyprus

Following the London Conference of 1955 and further negotiation, the outline settlement was agreed at Zurich on 11 February 1959. It was signed in London on 19 February 1959 by the British, Greek and Turkish Prime Ministers. Archbishop Makarios signed on behalf of the Greek Cypriot community and Dr Fazıl Küçük on behalf of the Turkish Cypriot community (Ali, 2002). The resulting Republic of Cyprus was, by design, unusual. It rested not on the self-determination of a single people but on an international settlement guaranteed by three states, namely Turkey, Greece and the United Kingdom. That guarantee operated under the Treaties of Guarantee and Alliance. These reserved to the guarantors, jointly or in specified circumstances singly, a right to act to restore the constitutional order (Toluner, 1977). The United Kingdom retained sovereign base areas on the island.

The 1960 Constitution embodied an explicit power-sharing design. It allocated positions between the communities on fixed ratios, broadly 70 to 30 in the civil service and 60 to 40 in the military, established a Greek Cypriot President and a Turkish Cypriot Vice-President, and granted the Vice-President a veto over certain decisions. Turkish Cypriots were recognised not as a minority but as a co-constituent national community. Contemporary observers on both sides doubted that this intricate arrangement could function. Archbishop Makarios himself, who became the first President of the Republic and had signed on behalf of the Greek Cypriot community, reportedly observed that the agreements had "created a state, but not a nation" (İsmail, 1992b). In the terms of the comparative literature on power-sharing, the 1960 order can be read as a consociational design whose subsequent breakdown is a recognised risk of such arrangements.

Constitutional breakdown and intercommunal conflict (1963 to 1974)

The settlement proved short-lived. In November 1963 Makarios proposed thirteen amendments to the Constitution, including the removal of the Vice-Presidential veto, and the Turkish Cypriot side and Turkey rejected the proposals in December 1963. From the Turkish Cypriot perspective, the amendments were an attempt to establish unilateral control that the community had resisted before independence (Mütercimler, 1990). Greek Cypriot accounts frame them instead as a necessary constitutional reform. On that reading, the separate-majority voting requirements and the Vice-Presidential veto had rendered ordinary government unworkable, and the proposed changes were intended to restore its functioning (Ker-Lindsay, 2011). Interpreted through the

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security-dilemma logic that underlies much of the conflict literature, either reading produces the same escalatory outcome, and intercommunal violence duly followed.

The violence of December 1963, remembered by Turkish Cypriots as "*Bloody Christmas*", is associated with the so-called Akritas Plan, later published in the Greek Cypriot press. Turkish Cypriot sources report that tens of thousands of Turkish Cypriots were displaced from a large number of villages and confined to enclaves under difficult conditions, and the precise figures are contested and reported differently across sources (Gibbons, 1997). On 27 December 1963 a "*Peacekeeping Force*" drawn from the three guarantor states was constituted, and on 30 December the "*Green Line*" dividing Nicosia was drawn. On 4 March 1964 the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 186, providing for a UN peacekeeping force (UNFICYP) and a mediator, and Sakari Tuomioja was appointed mediator later that month (Toluner, 1977). Intercommunal violence nonetheless recurred through the following decade, during which Turkish Cypriots administered their own affairs within the enclaves.

1974 and the territorial status quo

On 15 July 1974 Makarios was overthrown in a coup carried out by officers of the Greek junta, and a short-lived administration under Nikos Sampson was proclaimed (Mütercimler, 1990). Invoking the Treaty of Guarantee, Turkey launched a military intervention on 20 July 1974. The Turkish side describes this as a peace operation undertaken to prevent further violence and to secure the Turkish Cypriot community. The Greek Cypriot side and much of the international community describe it as an invasion. The coup had been mounted by the Greek junta against Makarios and was itself opposed by much of the Greek Cypriot population. The events of 1974 imposed heavy costs on the Greek Cypriot community as well. Around 160,000 Greek Cypriots were displaced from the north, while roughly 40,000 to 50,000 Turkish Cypriots moved in the opposite direction. The Third Vienna Agreement of August 1975 gave formal shape to this separation (Gürel, 2012). The unresolved fate of those who went missing during the violence of the 1960s and of 1974, recorded by the bi-communal Committee on Missing Persons as 1,510 Greek Cypriots and 492 Turkish Cypriots, remains a source of grief in both communities. The territorial division established in this period has persisted, without sustained direct violence, to the present.

The Negotiation Process and a Pattern of Agreed but Unimplemented Texts

From 1974 onwards the parties engaged, directly and through UN good offices, in a long series of negotiations that has continued in varying formats ever since (Mütercimler, 2007). What is striking about this record is not the absence of agreement but its recurrent incompleteness, since texts have repeatedly been agreed in principle and then failed at the point of interpretation or implementation. This section sets out the sequence and then interprets it.

High-level agreements, UN initiatives and later rounds

A number of high-level agreements were concluded between community leaders but never entered into force. These included the following.

- the 1977 Makarios and Denktaş high-level agreement,
- the 1979 Kyprianou and Denktaş high-level agreement,
- the 2008 joint statement of Talat and Christofias, and
- the joint declaration of Eroğlu and Anastasiades of 11 February 2014.

In parallel, successive UN Secretaries-General advanced comprehensive proposals.

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- The de Cuéllar initiative of 29 March 1986, under which a document previously discussed was submitted to the two leaders, was accepted by the Turkish Cypriot side and rejected by the Greek Cypriot leader Kyprianou (İsmail, 1992a).

- The Ghali Set of Ideas of 1992, developed under Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali, envisaged a bi-communal and bi-zonal federation with political equality, a single international identity, independence and territorial integrity, and prohibitions on union with or partition toward any other state. Territorial questions, including maps affecting Güzelyurt and a number of villages, proved central. The Turkish Cypriot side stated that the majority of articles were acceptable and some were negotiable, while the Greek Cypriot side rejected the proposals.

- The Annan Plan, first tabled in 2002 and revised in successive versions, was put to simultaneous referenda on 24 April 2004. Some 65 per cent of Turkish Cypriot voters were in favour of the plan, and some 76 per cent of Greek Cypriot voters were against it. The subsequent accession of the Republic of Cyprus to the European Union on behalf of the whole island was widely experienced as a disappointment on the Turkish Cypriot side (Hasgüler and Özkaleli, 2010).

The process did not end in 2004. Successive rounds followed, culminating in the Akıncı-Anastasiades talks that resulted in the July 2017 conference at Crans-Montana, Switzerland. The conference is widely seen as the closest the two sides have come to a settlement. It too failed to produce an agreement, faltering above all on the linked issues of security and guarantees, and on the mistrust between the leaderships (Sözen and Şahin, 2024). Since then, both the Turkish Cypriot leadership and Turkey have moved away from the federal model that had underpinned the negotiations since the late 1970s. They have moved towards a framing based on two states and sovereign equality. Several analysts interpret this shift as a re-securitisation of the Cyprus question (Ergüven and Köprülü, 2023).

The recurring mechanism

A consistent pattern is visible across these episodes. Agreement is repeatedly reached at the level of framework or text, only to collapse when the parties come to interpret and implement what they have signed. At that point, differences that the text had papered over resurface as decisive. The failure is therefore not primarily one of drafting or of mediation technique. It is located at the transition from agreed text to binding implementation, a reading that is consistent with Michael (2009), who treats the failure to settle as a problem of the negotiating process and its management rather than as an inevitable product of enmity. Process tracing across the sequence shows the same juncture recurring, which suggests a structural rather than an incidental cause.

Reading the pattern through ripeness

Ripeness theory offers a parsimonious explanation of this recurrent failure. A settlement requires both sides to believe that the costs of continuing the deadlock are greater than the concessions it would demand, and both must see a credible way out. As noted in Section 2, the analysis below does not view the mere fact of failure as evidence of unripeness. It asks, at each of three junctures, whether the costs of deadlock were indeed painful to both sides and whether a credible settlement was on offer.

The first juncture is the immediate post-war period of 1974 and 1975. The creation of a contiguous and defensible territory in the north, secured by the presence of Turkish forces, substantially relieved the physical insecurity of the previous decade for the Turkish Cypriot side. Once the population exchange was complete, the stalemate had largely ceased to hurt on that side. The Greek Cypriot side had suffered serious losses in 1974, but the response was to seek redress through international recognition, and through legal and diplomatic channels, rather than in a settlement on terms that the Turkish Cypriots would accept. The two conditions for ripeness were not jointly satisfied.

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The second juncture is the Set of Ideas presented under Boutros-Ghali in 1992. A detailed settlement text and accompanying maps were now before the parties, so a concrete way out existed on paper. The underlying costs of continued division, however, remained tolerable to both sides. The Turkish Cypriot leadership found the territorial provisions unacceptable and could sustain that position under the protection of the status quo. The Greek Cypriot side, which administered the internationally recognised state, had little reason to accept a political equality that it had resisted since 1963. A way out existed, but there was no hurting stalemate to drive the parties through it, and the proposals failed.

The third and most instructive juncture is the Annan Plan and the referendums of 24 April 2004. This case most clearly separates the two components of ripeness. There was a fully elaborated settlement backed by the United Nations and the prospect of European Union membership, so the way out was real and credible. The plan nonetheless failed because, at the moment of decision, the stalemate was not mutually hurting. However, as Tocci (2004) argues, the sequencing of European Union accession took away much of the incentive for the Greek Cypriot side to compromise, as the Republic of Cyprus was assured of membership whether or not the island was reunited. Accession thus altered the incentive structure in a way that reduced rather than increased the pain of continued division for one party. The result was acceptance by roughly two thirds of Turkish Cypriot voters and rejection by roughly three quarters of Greek Cypriot voters.

Across all three junctures the same pattern holds. Where a credible way out was absent, as in 1974 and 1975, no settlement could take shape. Where a way out was present, as in 1992 and 2004, it was not matched by a stalemate painful enough to both sides to compel agreement. The failure of the Cyprus settlements is therefore better understood as an absence of ripeness, independently evidenced at each stage, than as a deficiency of diplomatic effort or of the texts themselves. The later collapse at Crans-Montana in 2017 fits the same reading. Even the round that came closest to success gave way over the security and guarantees question, in the absence of a stalemate painful enough to force a final compromise (Sözen and Şahin, 2024).

The Status Quo as Negative Peace

Four decades without direct violence

If the negotiation record is one of repeated non-implementation, the situation on the ground is one of sustained non-violence. For more than four decades there has been no sustained armed conflict between the communities. Applying Galtung's typology, this is properly described as a negative peace, since direct violence is absent and disputes have not been settled by force. Whether it should be described more ambitiously as peace without qualification is the question the next subsections address.

The 2003 opening of the crossings and everyday contact

A significant development followed the opening of the crossing points in 2003, shortly before the Annan Plan referendum. For the first time since the division, the two populations could move relatively freely across the line. Long queues formed as people crossed to revisit places they had left, and, by widely reported accounts, these encounters were peaceable. Ordinary economic and social relations, including trade, friendships and the renewal of pre-1974 acquaintance, developed across the line. The number of crossing points has since increased. This everyday contact is evidence of the robustness of the negative peace.

The limits of the status quo and why this is not positive peace

Yet the same period demonstrates the limits of the arrangement, and it is here that the negative and positive peace distinction does analytical work. Beneath the peaceable everyday contact, the two communities continue to hold divergent and largely unreconciled national narratives. This divergence is visible in the very calendar of commemoration, where events celebrated by one community are mourned by the other. The Greek war of independence against Ottoman rule is a day of celebration for Greek Cypriots and of mourning for Turkish Cypriots. The recapture of İzmir in September 1922 is celebrated by the Turkish side and mourned by the Greek side. Even the 1960 Constitution recognised the national holidays of Turkey and of Greece, respectively, as the official holidays of the two communities.

Such structured divergence in collective memory indicates that the two national narratives have not merged, and that the shared identity and integrated institutions characteristic of positive peace are absent. This is consistent with accounts of nationalism which stress that national identity rests on historically constructed foundations rather than arising automatically from shared territory or common institutions (Karyelioğlu, 2012). The point was captured, tellingly, from the Greek Cypriot side. Glafkos Clerides reportedly described the Cyprus flag as the best in the world "*because there is not a single person who will die for this flag*" (Kızılyürek, 2005). It is an emblem, that is, that commands no shared allegiance. It is also worth noting, without moralising, that the long duration of the process has generated an ecosystem of offices, working groups and expertise around the Cyprus question, and that domestic politics in the north is heavily oriented toward the negotiation process. These are features of a protracted case rather than evidence of bad faith. The status quo is, in short, a stable negative peace that is not yet a positive peace.

DISCUSSION

Two conclusions follow from the analysis, and they must be kept distinct. The first is analytical and, within the limits of the evidence, well supported. The Cyprus conflict is not presently ripe for comprehensive resolution, and the recurrent failure of settlement texts is a predictable consequence of that unripeness rather than a series of avoidable diplomatic accidents. On this reading, treating the conclusion of an agreement as the overriding objective mistakes the means for the end. The end is the preservation of peace, and negotiation is one instrument toward it, valuable when conditions are ripe and liable to generate friction when they are not. There is, accordingly, a real risk that a leader drawn by the prestige of concluding a decades-long process might press for a settlement in unripe conditions and, in doing so, strain the very negative peace the process exists to protect.

The second conclusion is normative and is deliberately not presented as a finding. This is the judgement that the de facto status quo ought to be formally institutionalised, for instance in a two-state arrangement based on good-neighbourly relations. Ripeness theory can explain why comprehensive settlement has not been achieved, but it cannot by itself establish that non-settlement is desirable. That is a value judgement, and it must be argued on its own terms rather than smuggled in under the authority of the analysis.

Doing so requires engaging the strongest counterargument directly, and that counterargument is serious. A negative peace is not self-evidently stable over the long run. The comparative record of protracted and so-called frozen conflicts includes cases in which a long period without fighting gave way, sometimes suddenly, to renewed and severe violence. The new war over Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020 followed more than two decades of relative calm, and that arrangement broke down further in 2023. These events illustrate how a stalemate that seems to be working can come apart when the balance of power or the will of one side changes. Applied to Cyprus, this record cautions against treating the absence of violence since 1974 as a guarantee of future stability rather than as a condition that has so far held.

The counterargument raises a second, quieter cost. A frozen division, even where no shots are fired, carries with it the structural and cultural violence discussed in Section 2. A negative peace leaves in place the real harms of the north's isolation and limited economic development, the unresolved questions of property and displaced persons, and the transmission of divergent and often antagonistic histories through separate school systems. On this view, to settle for the absence of war is to accept the indefinite continuation of these harms, and a comprehensive settlement, for all its risks, is the only way to their genuine resolution.

These are strong objections, and the analysis offered here does not claim to refute them. What it claims is narrower and therefore more defensible. The descriptive conclusion is that the conflict has not been ripe for comprehensive settlement, and that pressing hard for one in unripe conditions has repeatedly failed, and could in the worst case unsettle the very peace it seeks to secure. This finding holds true regardless of one's opinion on the desirability of the status quo. The normative question, whether the division should be formally accepted,

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must then be settled by weighing the risks of a forced settlement in unripe conditions against the ongoing costs of leaving the conflict unresolved.

A responsible normative case for formalising the status quo would therefore need to show one of two things. The first is that the Cyprus negative peace is unusually robust, resting on genuine everyday reconciliation of the kind evidenced by the crossings rather than on a mere balance of deterrence. The second is that the risks of a mistimed settlement outweigh the real and continuing costs of division. The present study identifies the considerations that bear on that judgement and supplies the framework within which it can be made. It deliberately stops short of claiming to settle it, because to do otherwise would repeat, in a new form, the very move this article has criticised, the treatment of a contestable normative preference as though it were an established result.

CONCLUSION

This article set out to explain why successive Cyprus settlement agreements have been reached in principle yet have consistently failed to enter into force, and to consider what the resulting situation implies for the value of continued negotiation. The study has used Galtung's distinction between negative and positive peace together with Zartman's ripeness theory, and has proceeded as a qualitative single-case study combining documentary content analysis with process tracing. On that basis it has argued that the island has sustained a durable negative peace. The repeated non-implementation of agreements reflects the absence of a mutually hurting stalemate rather than a failure of diplomatic craft.

The contribution has two parts. Analytically, the case illustrates how the distinction between negative and positive peace, taken together with ripeness theory, explains a long-standing pattern that is otherwise puzzling. Methodologically, it demonstrates how process tracing across a series of failed agreements can transform an impressionistic sense of repetition into a systematic claim about mechanism. The limits of the study need to be reiterated, since the source base is uneven, the historiography is contested, and the normative question of whether the status quo should be formally accepted remains open.

The scope of these claims should be stated carefully. The analysis is most directly applicable to Cyprus, but its logic can be extended to a wider class of protracted conflicts. Three features define that class. The first is a territorial separation which is stable on the ground. The second is an external guarantee or protection which lowers the security costs of non-settlement. The third is a bi-communal structure in which the two sides have distinct national attachments. Northern Ireland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Nagorno-Karabakh all exhibit some of these features and would make natural comparisons for testing whether the relationship between the absence of ripeness and the persistence of a negative peace holds beyond the present case. The study does not claim that its conclusions are automatically transferable, and the limitations noted in Section 3, particularly the uneven source base and contested historiography, apply with equal force to any such extension. Future work drawing more fully on Greek Cypriot scholarship and primary archival material, and engaging the comparative literature on the durability of frozen conflicts, would be well placed to test and extend the argument advanced here.

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