

Cyprus

By late 2009, Cyprus was heading toward a critical turning point, with the possibilities of reunification or partition both very much alive and the path to be taken likely to be determined within a very short time frame. During the course of the year the two community leaders—Demetris Christofias, president of the Republic of Cyprus, and his Turkish Cypriot counterpart, Mehmet Ali Talat—made significant progress in negotiations that started in September 2008, but faced dwindling support among their own communities.

Uncertainty regarding Cyprus's political future extends to the future of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), which has been deployed for forty-five years. Either reunification or a decided shift toward partition would have a profound impact on this long-deployed operation.

UNFICYP was established in 1964 with a mandate to prevent violence between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities. In 1974, renewed fighting led to a UN-brokered cease-fire and an expansion of the UNFICYP mandate to include cease-fire monitoring and administration of the buffer zone between the Cyprus National Guard and the Turkish Cypriot forces. Since that time, UNFICYP's mandate has consistently been renewed on a six-month basis.

Over the decades, negotiations between the leaders of the two sides have had limited success. A large-scale effort launched by then-Secretary-General Kofi Annan in 1999 led to the resumption of face-to-face peace talks in December 2001. But the process came to an abrupt end in April 2004 when an ambitious UN reunification plan was rejected in a referendum by the Greek Cypriot population, even as the Turkish Cypriot population gave it their support.

In 2003, the first crossing point between the north and south was opened. Since then, seven more have followed, including, in April 2008, the crossing point at Ledra Street, Nicosia's main thoroughfare. The opening of the Ledra Street crossing represented a significant breakthrough: after four decades of closure it is currently used by thousands of people on a daily basis.

During 2009, UNFICYP continued to support day-to-day issues in the buffer zone such as education; medical services, including evacuations and transfers of the deceased; and clearing of minefields. It also conducted socio-cultural gatherings. While there were some tense exchanges between UNFICYP and Turkish military forces, which frequently restricted peacekeeper movements, these incidents were generally quickly resolved.

Parliamentary elections within the Turkish Cypriot community in April 2009 saw the defeat of Talat's Republican Turkish Party by the

UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP)

• Authorization and Start Date	4 March 1964 (UNSC Res. 186)
• SRSG	Tayé-Brook Zerihoun (Ethiopia)
• Force Commander	Rear Admiral Mario César Sánchez Debernardi (Peru)
• Budget	\$55.9 million (1 July 2009–30 June 2010)
• Strength as of 31 October 2009	Troops: 858 Police: 68 International Civilian Staff: 40 Local Civilian Staff: 112

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National Unity Party, led by hard-liner Dervis Orogulu. Orogulu favors a two-state solution and does not aspire to membership in the European Union—a position that represents a clear change in Turkish Cypriot politics. Mounting opposition from nationalist parties has intensified the pressure on Talat to reach an agreement on reunification before he seeks candidacy for a second term in elections slated for April 2010.

Negotiations between President Talat and Greek Cypriot leader Demetris Christofias continued throughout 2009, but their slow pace was a concern. Disagreements remain between the two leaders, on a range of difficult issues. At the center of these is the difficulty of constructing a reunified federal state on the basis of bicommunality and bizonality, which have yet to be defined. Other difficulties also persist. The reopening of the crossing point at Liminitis,

a village in northwestern Cyprus, has not been achieved. Even more telling, as of October 2009, the two parties have yet to discuss the divisive issue of property disputes related to Turkey's 1974 invasion of the island after a Greek coup that sought to reunite Cyprus with Greece.

Optimism surrounding the prospects for a reunification agreement remained cautious in the final months of 2009 as the two leaders continued negotiations and the Security Council renewed UNICYP for a further six months. Yet it has become increasingly clear that the status quo is unlikely to persist. The negotiations so far have relied significantly on the two leaders' shared vision for reunification. If a deal is not struck in the early months of 2010, a significant opportunity will have been lost—perhaps irreversibly.