

POLICY SUGGESTIONS

The findings of the study show that there are areas and audiences in both communities that require more attention for developing a positive stance towards reconciliation. Civic action can, however, play a vital role in changing the negative tendencies towards reconciliation, coexistence and forgiveness. As governments on both sides have been reluctant to engage in such processes, international institutions and local NGOs could be instrumental in creating platforms for sustainable dialogue among the groups most reluctant to reconciling: the women, the youth, and the people who lost loved ones. At this point the main question is: "how can we reach those people?"

Research can be instrumental in providing women a voice: this can help us understand why their dispositions are negative and enable us to identify ways to make contacts and encourage interaction. Concerning the youth, the school curriculums require change, promoting less political/nationalist discourses and offering more examples of cooperation from the past and the present. Educational authorities are advised to concentrate on a reconciliatory education system, one that recognizes common bonds and perceptual differences, reflects on forgiveness and reconciliation, and works to heal the wounds of separation.

Teacher and student unions can establish a broad reconciliatory environment by initiating student and teacher contacts across the divide, by visiting each others_ schools/classes or having common activities.

Ways should be explored that will allow the people from the two communities who lost their loved-ones and/or have been victims of violence, to come together and share experiences and learn about each other's suffering - the recognition that they share a similar pain could ultimately unite them. If it proves difficult to establish such meetings, academics, NGOs and the media could be called upon to help in the exchange of narratives, the sharing of common pain, which could facilitate societal reconciliation.

This policy brief is based on Ari Sitas, Dilek Latif, Natasa Loizou (2007), *Prospects of Reconciliation, Co-existence and Forgiveness in Cyprus in the Post-Referendum Period*, Nicosia, PRIO Cyprus Centre.

We can't change the past, but we can change the future

Prospects of Reconciliation, Coexistence and Forgiveness in Cyprus

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INTRODUCTION

Studies of the Cyprus conflict have lacked in-depth analysis of social structure, class stratification, and urban/rural linkages on the conflict. This policy brief presents research that aims to understand and interpret the dispositions of Cypriots concerning the terms of reconciliation, coexistence and forgiveness.

The methodology was designed to cover the broader demography of the island and its stratification patterns, to look at the Cypriot society as a whole rather than identifying ethnical differentiation. In order to achieve this, 170 individuals were interviewed: (a) 100 people in their 50s, (b) 50 people in their 20s-30s, (c) 20 people who are members of non-governmental and civil society organizations, and/or bi-communal groups. The numbers of interviewees were equal in gender and ethnicity, refugees and non-refugees, and from all major cities except Paphos. The findings have been presented to and discussed with interviewees, academics and civil society representatives. The quotes presented below are taken from the feedback session with the bi-communal focus group.

THE QUESTION

The main question the study examined was "what factors influence people's dispositions and behaviors?" The dispositions were divided into hard and soft variables, where soft variables refer to the exposure in everyday life and the lived experiences influencing people's dispositions and behaviour, and hard variables refer to people's tendencies to act or to be disposed to certain choices that are constrained by prior forms of socialization embedded in social structures and institutions.

HARD AND SOFT VARIABLES

HARD VARIABLES

The study found that hard variables of class, ethnicity, gender, age, religion and refugee status very strongly influence the responses towards prospects of reconciliation, coexistence and forgiveness, and if at present the opportunity is opening up or closing:

Class: Those most reluctant to reconciliation are primarily members of the working class; the second and third most reluctant are members of the upper class and people of old peasant descent. Yet, both the new and the traditional middle class believe that reconciliation and co-existence are possible.

Ethnicity: Being a Greek Cypriot or Turkish Cypriot is a significant variable, but there is also a radical differentiation within each community. A similar proportion of people on both sides are unsure about prospects of reconciliation. While half of the Greek Cypriots believe that reconciliation is possible, only one-third of Turkish Cypriots agree. The view that co-existence is possible has higher acceptance in both communities. More Turkish Cypriots than Greek Cypriots believe that forgiveness is possible, while more Greek Cypriots believe the current period leads to closure.

"We are Cypriots, we should focus on our Cypriotness, rather than referring to our Greekness and Turkishness."

Gender: Being a man or a woman is an important variable: women are more cautious and insecure about most of the elements that constitute an emotional overcoming of the past. Half of the men, as opposed to a third of women, see positive prospects of reconciliation. Similarly, almost two-thirds of men see co-existence as possible as opposed to just above half of the women, and more men than women see forgiveness as possible. Almost half of the women see the current period moving towards closure as opposed to a third of the men.

Age: There is no major difference between the two generations regarding positive dispositions towards reconciliation, while that is not the case for negative dispositions: almost 40% of the younger generation are against reconciliation in contrast to 29 % among the older generation. Slightly more youngsters than elders are certain that forgiveness is not possible. Almost half of the younger generation believes that the current period is leading to closure.

"Two wars in my time are enough, now it is time for peace."

Religion: Contrary to the general perception, the study found that the majority in both communities is only casually religious. Most resistance to reconciliation is found in the active religious category, where half of these see no such prospects. On the prospects of co-existence and forgiveness all categories think that these are possible.

Refugee Status: It matters whether you were a refugee and displaced or not. Almost all refugees believe that the consequences of 1974 have been negative. The primary trauma identified by a third of the refugees was the experience of displacement. Nevertheless, more refugees than non-refugees believe that reconciliation and forgiveness are possible. However, they are more circumspect and below the general positive picture regarding coexistence.



SOFT VARIABLES

The soft variables explored are education, civic involvement, exposure to the 'others' and traumatic experiences. These are vital in determining the dispositions of the Cypriots as they involve a larger degree of choice than the hard variables.

Education: The level of education makes a significant impact on dispositions. The greatest difference is between those who have postgraduate education and those who only completed high school. High school graduates do not see much hope for reconciliation and are the most negative towards co-existence and forgiveness; the opposite is the case for those with postgraduate education. Moreover, the place of education matters, as we see that those who studied in Cyprus are below the average in support of reconciliation, coexistence and forgiveness.

Civic Involvement: Involvement in voluntary, social and political associations and organizations is a significant variable. The small minority who are active in pro-peace, rapprochement and bi-communal NGOs exhibit the strongest dispositions towards reconciliation, coexistence and forgiveness. But the trend is the same among those involved and active in civic associations. By contrast, those who are not involved in such activities tend to have greater reservations towards reconciliation, coexistence and forgiveness.

Exposure to 'Others': The strongest dispositions towards reconciliation and co-existence, correlate with people who claim to have had not only exposure to the "other side" but who have also had strong and intense encounters with people from "there". Of those who claim strong exposure only, 84% are still disposed towards co-existence, and 68% are in favor of forgiveness

"Old people feel the way they felt before, but the younger generation doesn't identify with them, they are proud but they don't know "the other people" they have not seen the beauty of the past."

Experienced Trauma/ War/ Violence: For the research team this area of analysis was the most overwhelming. Almost two-thirds of those who experienced violence and forced displacement during the hard years are open to both reconciliation and co-existence, and over half of them are open to forgiveness. Three-

fourths of those who suffered and were victims of inter-ethnic violence are open to reconciliation. The figure rises to two-thirds in terms of co-existence and diminishes to just above half in terms of forgiveness. However, there is an exception: if you have lost a loved-one.

CONCLUSION

The study established that among those interviewed the majority believe that dialogue is possible across the divide; and there is general openness towards co-existence, forgiveness and a solution.

The main pro-reconciliation variables are: strong North/South exposure; postgraduate education; active in civil society and voluntary associations; a-religious and having experienced trauma or been victims of violence.

The main anti-reconciliation variables are: occasional travelers; studies in Cyprus; Turkish-Cypriots; experience of negative encounters from North or South; high school education only; and those who experienced immediate trauma: loss of loved ones.

It needs to be noted that as women in general feel more insecure than men, and the youth are less committed to change, a reconciliation process will require time. Nevertheless, the study establishes that the more exposure across the dividing line, the more open the climate becomes towards reconciliation.

"There is a need for civic action: The more that get involved the easier the process will be."