

## **The four different stances of Greek Cypriots on the solution of the Cyprus problem**

29 November 2018

Charis Psaltis, Associate Professor of Social and Developmental Psychology, Department of Psychology, University of Cyprus

An interdisciplinary perspective on the Cyprus issue is now more necessary than ever, given various speculations about the current state of public opinion around the Cyprus issue. A previous social-psychological analysis from 2007 which had identified the profile of different "logics", "profiles" or "positions in the representational field" (Psaltis, 2008) towards the solution of the Cyprus problem is now outdated and there is a need for revision due to the following factors: 1) The passing of 15 years of intergroup contact between the two communities after the opening of checkpoints in 2003, 2) significant change of the political narratives of various parties over the last 10 years; 3) A significant reduction in the number of first-generation internally displaced persons in combination with the relevant discourse in the educational system and specifically history teaching (Psaltis et al. 2017).

The data on which this more updated analysis is premised were collected in the context of an interdisciplinary project funded by the A.G Leventis Foundation. Data were collected between 23rd November 2017 and 28th December 2017. The sample size comprised 811 Greek Cypriots 18 and over who had voting rights and it was collected after two stage, stratified random sampling from the University of Cyprus Centre for Field Studies. Interviews were face to face on the basis of a structured Questionnaire designed by Charis Psaltis (University of Cyprus) Huseyin Cakal (University of Keele), Neophytos Loizides (University of Kent), Djordje Stefanovic (St. Mary's University) and Miles Hewstone (Oxford University). On the basis of a number of variables covering two dimensions (quality of bi-communal relations and attitude towards different forms of solution of the Cyprus problem) four distinct positions / groups have emerged through clustering of the cases as follows:

- 1) Pro-rapprochement /Pro federation
- 2) Neutral towards Turkish Cypriots (TCs) – Favouring a Unitary State / Against partition
- 3) Ambivalent/Polarised attitude towards TCs – Partitionist
- 4) Xenophobic/ Hellenocentric – Anti federation

First of all, it should be said that all four groups in their majority would agree that the Cyprus problem should be solved through compromise and reject the idea of armed struggle. Some extreme perceptions that do not reject armed confrontation can only be found in the hard core (a very small percentage) of the Xenophobic / Hellenocentric-Anti federal bloc most of whom bear a grudge about the past and want revenge. Also it should be noted that 58% (see Figure 1 below) of the whole sample would accept BBF either as a satisfactory solution or as a solution of necessity and that about 70% (see Figure 2 below) clearly rejects a two state solution to the problem.

Figure 1. Bizonal-Bicommunal Federation

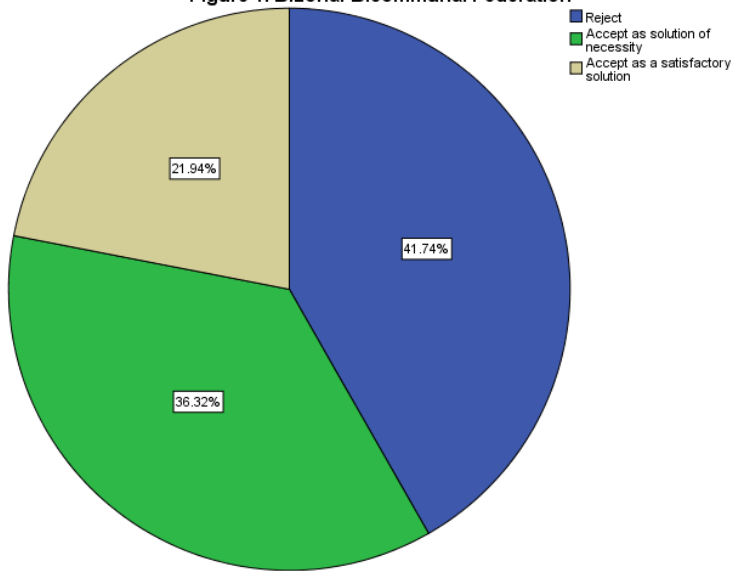
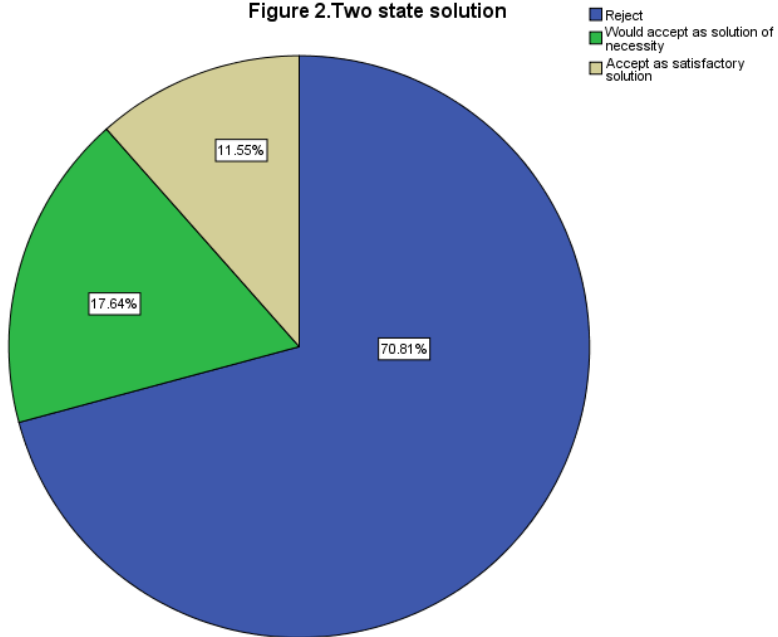


Figure 2. Two state solution



The first group is the traditional position (18.8%) in favour of bi-communal reconciliation through federation. This position has the following characteristics: Very positive attitude towards the other community, high level of trust and quality contact with the Turkish Cypriot community and low levels of perception of realistic and symbolic threats. Identity issues are distinguished by a more Cypriot-centric approach. These individuals consider federation and the single state to be a satisfactory solution, and reject both the two state solution and the status quo. The majority of people in this group believe that the church should not interfere in educational matters. The group mostly consists of educated people, more men than women, and people with steadfast views as regards the need for reconciliation and forgiveness. Regarding the possible solution of the Cyprus problem on the basis of BBF, compared to the other three groups, this group has the lowest levels of anxiety about the functionality of the future BBF state, Turkey's intervention in the federal Cyprus or problems with Turkish settlers who will acquire citizenship of the new state. They also present, together with the second grouping, the lowest levels of fear that Greek Cypriots are not ready to coexist with Turkish Cypriots. On the contrary, they have the highest degree of hope that in the event of a solution, relations with Turkey will be normalized and economic development and free movement will take place throughout Cyprus.

The second group (Neutral towards TCs – Favoring a Unitary State / Against partition), which is also the dominant group (43.1%), maintains a neutral attitude towards the Turkish Cypriots and has neutral levels of qualitative contact and trust towards Turkish Cypriots, but has a particularly negative attitude towards Turkish settlers. Although they maintain high levels of perception of realistic and symbolic threats, their position in the possible solutions of the Cyprus issue shows that while they view the single state as an ideal solution to the Cyprus problem, they are ready to accept federation as a compromise solution and explicitly reject the two states solution (90% of the group). Some of these people (about one-third) accept the status quo, but most reject it. Regarding the possible solution of the Cyprus problem on the basis of the BBF, compared to the other three groups, this group presents a profile similar to that of the rapprochement group, but maintains significantly higher fears for the functionality of the state, Turkey's possible intervention in the future federation and a significantly lower degree of hope that in the event of a solution, relations with Turkey will be normalized and economic growth will take place. This group can be further subdivided into some who support federation either as a satisfactory solution or as a solution of necessity (about 63% of this group). These are people estimated to be between 18% -23% of the general electorate, and they also seem to be influenced by the climate of optimism or pessimism prevailing in Cyprus at any given time. This group, according to another similar survey in April 2017, before Crans Montana, was ready to vote in favour of a plan that would ensure that Turkey would not intervene in any way in the new federal Cyprus and expressed positive feelings towards the Turkish Cypriots, feelings of trust and readiness to live together. However, after the collapse of the talks and the presentation of the collapse by the Greek Cypriot side that this was all because of Turkey not letting the Turkish Cypriots manage their own affairs together with the Greek Cypriots they are now more undecided and distrustful of the Turkish Cypriots who they view as co-responsible with Turkey for the collapse of the talks to the extent that they were not differentiated from Turkey in Crans Montana.

The third group (Mixed attitude to TCs - partitionist ) (18.6%), seems to consist mostly of the younger generation and is the result of the prolonged geographical separation for decades. It is made up of younger

and more educated people and more women than men and people with low emotional ties to the north. Although this group has on average neutral feelings towards the Turkish Cypriots, it is distinguished by a lot of mixed feelings towards the other community, since positive and negative emotions are also identified in a significant part of this grouping. However, it presents significant distrust, feelings of symbolic threat as a being different to the Turkish Cypriots, and sees the two states solution and the maintenance of the status quo as preferable to federation or even to the unitary state. However, about 50% of this grouping could accept the BBF mainly as a solution of necessity (one may assume if it took the form of a decentralized or "loose" federation as has been discussed recently).

It is worth pointing out the age differentiation and the possible role the educational curriculum in the formation of this way of thinking. A series of surveys in the Greek Cypriot community have shown a positive correlation between age and high quality bicomunal relations and readiness to live together with the Turkish Cypriots. That is, the older one is, the more positive the relationships and vice versa, the younger, the more negative the relationship. This relationship is largely due to not having experienced living together with the other community and not knowing any. Although there is a sense of Cypriotness in the historical narrative that this group accepts in relation to the older generations, it does not go beyond the official narrative of "Turkey has always wanted to conquer the whole of Cyprus" and shows great ignorance in the mistakes or atrocities committed by the Greek Cypriot community against the Turkish Cypriot community. It has a high sense of one-sided and unfair victimisation, and this is mainly due to the "I Know, I Do not Forget, I Demand" slogan and the way history is taught leading to increased perceptions of realistic and symbolic threats, bias and lack of trust. Regarding the possible solution of the Cyprus problem on the basis of BBF, compared to the previous two groups, there is a considerably higher level of concern about the functionality of the state, the intervention of Turkey in the future federation, or problems with Turkish settlers who will acquire citizenship of the new state. They also present, together with the fourth grouping, the lowest level of hope that in the event of a solution, relations with Turkey will be normalized and economic development and free movement will take place throughout Cyprus. It is worth noting that this group has the highest prevalent fear that we cannot live together because "we are unprepared as a society", "we did not grow up to live peacefully together" and "nationalists will mess things up".

The fourth and final group (Xenophobic/ Helleno-centric – Anti federation ) (19.5%) believes in the continuation of traditional Greek nationalism in Cyprus, characterized by particularly anti-Turkish and negative feelings towards the Turkish Cypriots (which they often equate with Turks), greatest mistrust, high perceptions of symbolic and realistic threat arising from difference and feelings of superiority arising from a generalized ethnocentric, Helleno-centric and xenophobic perception (also against immigrants). This group is strongly opposed to federation as a solution to the Cyprus problem and views the ideological solution to the Cyprus problem as the unitary state or "liberation", while a small sub-group still seeks enosis. However, almost half of these people see the maintenance of the status quo or even the two-state solution as the second best solution to avoid federation (about 40% of this group). It should be noted that despite the general anti-federal feelings of this group, one third could accept the federation as a solution of necessity. The average age of the group are middle aged and therefore this position, apart from its traditional Helleno-centric roots, is also being favoured by younger ages through extreme nationalist groups and fan clubs of various sports clubs. This group also identifies as the most religious and the most frequent church goers, so they may also be influenced by church preachings. Regarding the possible solution of the Cyprus problem on the basis of the BBF, it does not differ significantly from the previous partitionist group, since it is also characterized by a high degree of fear at problems with the Turkish settlers who will acquire citizenship of the new state. They also have a lower degree of hope that, in the event of a solution, relations with Turkey

will be normalized and economic development and free movement will take place throughout Cyprus. It is worth noting that this group has the highest belief in the lack of functionality of the federal state due possible interventions by Turkey.

Since data for this research were collected 11 months ago one might wonder whether there are any changing trends between now and then. Opinion polls published in early November 2018 in the Greek Cypriot community and ongoing research suggests that such discussions about confederation or even a two state solution in fact increased support for BBF even further (as an ideal or solution of necessity) now estimated to be around 70% and reduced support for a Unitary state. Such changing trends could be interpreted from the perspective of Prospect Theory. Many Greek Cypriot supporters of a Unitary state would come to realize that the real options for them are not between their ideal solution of a Unitary state and the compromise of a BBF but between, on the one hand, a costly permanent partition which would entail no UNFICYP in the buffer zone, constant tensions with Turkey over gas exploitation complete demographic change of the north, and on the other hand a compromise of a BBF. Prospect theory would predict in this case that many people faced with a dilemma of this nature would choose the compromise solution in order to avoid the costs of permanent partition.

#### References

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