

## **Incentives and disincentives for reunification and EU accession in Cyprus**

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Direct negotiations in Cyprus were re-launched in January 2002. Yet despite the publication of a comprehensive UN Plan in November, the parties failed to reach an agreement both by the December Copenhagen Council and thereafter. What explains the initiation, conduct and final outcome of the Cyprus talks in 2002-3?

Both tactical and strategic changes lie behind the re-engagement in direct talks. The approaching deadlines set by Cyprus EU accession generated important incentives for negotiations rather for a settlement. Yet new factors emerged or were appreciated by late 2001, which also created some real willingness to reach an early agreement. Many of these factors related to the internal developments in northern Cyprus and in Turkey. In southern Cyprus the appreciation that a settlement after membership could have had to wait for the uncertain day of Turkish accession may have also generated incentives for an agreement.

In terms of third party involvement the UN's role was pivotal, in particular by presenting a comprehensive settlement plan which neither side could easily dismiss (although the Turkish Cypriot side ultimately did). In presenting the substance of the plan the drafters made extensive use both of the EU framework within which to cast the new Cyprus, and of the deadlines set by the EU's enlargement timetable.

Yet the 'EU' as an actor remained largely passive throughout the process. Neither the Commission nor the Council actively engaged in the peace process in order to gain the confidence of the Turkish Cypriot and Turkish sides. Their relative passivity was justified on the grounds of the existing UN mediation and Turkish scepticism of the EU's role in Cyprus. Yet this passivity also entailed that little was done to deconstruct the logic which had motivated the hardening of Turkish Cypriot positions during the 1990s. Whether a change in the EU's policies would have facilitated or even led to a settlement cannot be ascertained. Yet there are good reasons to believe that greater pro-activeness, consistency and coherence in EU policy towards the conflict could have contributed to a positive outcome. Had this been the case the Union could have partly substantiated its expectations to have acted as a catalyst to the settlement of the conflict prior to accession.