In all the years of search for a comprehensive settlement to reunify the island under a bi-communal federal government, one unchanging fact – which also constitutes the main barrier to the negotiation process – has been the deep distrust between the two sides. As part of a broader project which recognizes this fact, this thematic report on Higher Education seeks to explore possible structures of genuine cooperation that may both alleviate distrust and foster substantial collaboration across the dividing line promoting a logic of interdependence that can be constructive to peace building. This Report focuses on inter-communal contact and exchange in Cyprus’ Higher Education Institutions and its potential to build trust and cooperation. After a brief mapping of the Cyprus’ Higher Education field in the two parts of the island, the Report reviews the relevant international literature on universities as sites of cooperation, exchange and peace-culture-building in conflict ridden societies. Subsequently, some examples of past and existing academic cooperation in Cyprus are mentioned in the fields of research and teaching. The Report then discusses the obstacles, opportunities and possibilities that currently exist given the prevailing political as well as structural conditions. The Report is based on a series of anonymous interviews and focus groups with Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot academics from various disciplines currently working in several universities across the dividing line. The last section of Report specifies a series of policy recommendations.
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INTER-COMMUNAL CONTACT AND EXCHANGE IN CYPRUS’ HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: Their potential to build trust and cooperation

Gregoris Ioannou

Sertac Sonan

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INTRODUCTION AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Higher Education Institutions (HEI) play an important role in the society and economy of divided Cyprus. In the last two decades, in both north and south Cyprus, there has been a rapid increase in the size and number of universities. There are now several thousand academics employed in 40 universities and many more colleges, and a student population of over 140,000 that includes both domestic and international students. Most of these institutions are private and use English as the language of instruction for the majority of their programmes. Although their closest connections are primarily with Greece and Turkey respectively, HEIs on both sides actively cultivate an international outlook, not only in terms of attracting international students but also with respect to networking and creating alliances with other universities, sponsoring and participating in international conferences, promoting student and staff exchanges, and public image in general. At the same time, inter-communal contact and exchange within and between HEIs in the two communities remain negligible.

Historically, both in the British period and the period following the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus (RoC), cooperation and contact in education was limited. The Teacher Training College, established in 1937 during the British rule in Morphou, was the first and only bi-communal HEI in Cyprus; the college offered a two-year ‘teacher training in English both for Greeks and Turks, with graduates qualifying as primary teachers’.¹ The directors of the college were British while the teaching staff included Britons as well as Greek and Turkish Cypriots.² There was no other HEI in the British period although the idea of establishing a British university was seriously debated in the 1930s (Persianis 2003). Following the first inter-communal clashes, in 1958 the college ceased to be bi-communal, as were many other bi-communal institutions and organizations, and each community began to train its teachers in their own language³ or else imported teachers from Greece and Turkey.

In 1968, the RoC government— which was no longer bi-communal but rather solely Greek Cypriot-controlled as the last Turkish Cypriot officials in the judiciary also left / were pressured into leaving by 1967 — ‘in collaboration with the United Nations Development Program (Special Fund) and through the agency of UNESCO’, established the Higher Technical

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¹ See http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/338/Cyprus-EDUCATIONAL-SYSTEM-OVERVIEW.html
² http://www.aoa.edu.tr/tarihce.html
³ http://www.aoa.edu.tr/tarihce.html
Institute ‘to train high-level technicians and sub-engineers capable of working with an engineer’. As the Institute was envisaged to be an ‘inter-communal one’, English was chosen as the medium of instruction (Cyprus To-Day cited in Dedeçay 1993, 123). According to one account, by 1974, ‘20% of staff and its students are Turkish Cypriots’ (Sprydakis cited in Dedeçay 1993, 92). However, it is difficult to establish to what extent this Institute served as a model for truly bi-communal cooperation in higher education. Given the political balance of power between the two communities in this period, and when so many Turkish Cypriots were living in ghettos, it is likely that this was a Greek Cypriot institution dominated by a Greek Cypriot majority in which a Turkish Cypriot minority also took part. Dedeçay notes that three Turkish Cypriot professors taught in this institution (with a special permission from the Turkish Cypriot paramilitary authorities), and he quotes a letter in which a Turkish Cypriot official responsible for education says that Turkish Cypriot students by and large did not benefit much from the Institute (Dedeçay 1993).

The role of education in the development of nationalism and in fostering ethnic conflict in Cyprus is generally unquestioned in the social sciences. Education was a key realm through which the ethnic identities of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots were developed and politicized in the modern era (Bryant 2004). Intellectuals and ideologues of the nation controlled the educational systems of their respective communities and oversaw the dynamics of confrontation as they unfolded in the political sphere (Kitromilides 1977 and 1979; Pavlou 2015). Nationalism structured the Cypriot post-colonial transition and, in conjunction with the broader regional and global antagonisms including the foreign interventions, led to the de facto partition of the island by 1974 (Attalides 1979).

The two communities followed totally separate paths from 1974 onwards, with the Greek Cypriot controlled RoC focused on strengthening its economy (Christodoulou 1992). The Turkish Cypriot community, now united in the northern part of the island, in 1983 declared itself as the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). As such, the north of Cyprus was isolated and unrecognized except by Turkey, with a stagnant economy and dependent on Turkey. Although in 1977 and 1979 two high-level agreements were brokered for a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation as the framework of a future solution, there has been little progress in the negotiations since then. The idea of “Cyprus as a whole” was and largely remains weak in the central political stage of the two sides, with ethno-centrism and nationalism shaping the respective political systems (Kizilyurek 1990). The buffer zone thus operated as a “dead zone”, largely echoing back to each side its own voice and noise (Papadakis 2005). Since 2003, however, a more conciliatory discourse and a vision of reunification have gained considerable ground in the north.

The opening of a number of checkpoints since 2003 allowed controlled movement of people across the dividing line and helped boost bi-communal contacts that had already developed (in the 1990s) among a fringe section of Cypriot society. At the level of the negotiations, the most comprehensive progress made was in the form of the Annan Plan which was, however, in its last version rejected by an overwhelming Greek Cypriot majority (76%) and
accepted by the majority of Turkish Cypriots (65%) in the separate simultaneous referenda held in April 2004. The elites, especially in the Greek Cypriot community were and remain largely reluctant with respect to the prospect of a comprehensive agreement involving power sharing in a bi-communal, bi-zonal federal context (Yakinthou 2009). Some progress was made in the 2009 negotiations between Christofias and Talat and taken up in the Anastasiades – Akinci negotiations in 2015-2017, but eventually the whole process collapsed yet again in 2017 in the second Cyprus Conference in July 2017 in Crans Montana (Ioannou and Charalambous 2016, 2017; Ioannou 2017).

Public opinion remains divided on both sides, with one section desiring a peace agreement along the lines negotiated between the two leaderships, and another section opting for the continuation of the status quo. Inter-communal contacts are a regular occurrence for a small section of the Cypriot society; according to a recent study by Deniz Yucel and Charis Psaltis, ‘only 33% of Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots have contacts with the other community’ (cited in Aygin 2018). The majority of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots do not interact, as the on-going political conflict puts up barriers to cooperation at all levels. The educational systems in the two communities sustain and reproduce ethnocentric attitudes and mentalities, while the media frame the news through the lens of the political conflict and as such maintain prejudices, hostile stances and reservations toward inter-communal contacts and exchanges (Christophorou, Sahin and Pavlou 2010). Inter-communal trust levels remain relatively low, thus creating a vicious circle of mistrust, prejudice and limited contact.

This report will first map the field of Cypriot HEIs across the dividing line, and then briefly review the relevant literature on universities as sites of cooperation. Subsequently, some instances and examples of academic cooperation in Cyprus are noted, and the research questions and methodology of this report are explicitly outlined. Section 6 presents the results of this research and discusses the obstacles, the opportunities and the possibilities, while section 7 specifies a series of policy recommendations before the conclusion of the Report.
MAPPING CYPRUS’ HIGHER EDUCATION ACROSS THE DIVIDING LINE

**South**

There are three public universities and five private universities registered and licensed in the area under the control of the Republic of Cyprus (RoC,) and an estimated 50,000 student population. The first university to be established in the RoC was the University of Cyprus (UCY), founded in 1992. Although it had been approved since the late 1970s, there were several objections and concerns over weakening the link with Greece, the main destination of Greek Cypriots for tertiary education. This delayed the founding of the UCY, which eventually adopted Greek as its official language (Turkish as well, but only on paper). The UCY developed gradually, regularly increasing the number of its departments and programmes of study; moreover, in recent years it has begun to use English as a language of instruction although this remains marginal. The overwhelming majority of students are Greek Cypriots and a minority Greek, both of whom enter through a system of national exams. The UCY was founded on the basis of a classic state university, adopting elements from different systems such as the German, the Greek and the American.

Additionally, an increasing number of private colleges were founded, initially offering 2-year diplomas in technical fields but gradually—by the late 1990s—developing them into 3-year and 4-year colleges with collaborations with universities abroad. In 2006, the three biggest private colleges were officially licensed as universities. Intercollege became the University of Nicosia, Cyprus College became the European University of Cyprus and Frederick Institute of Technology became Frederick University. More aligned to the labour market, and focused on teaching rather than research and applied rather than theoretical sciences, these three private universities use English as the main language of instruction, although they also have several programmes of study in Greek, as well as some bi-lingual offerings.

Two additional public universities were founded at the beginning of the previous decade, using Greek as their primary language of instruction and staffed overwhelmingly by academics from Greece. In 2002, the Open University of Cyprus was founded, modelled on the British and Greek variants and specializing in distance learning and focusing on post graduate studies. In 2004, a third public university was established in Limassol, which enrolled its first students in the academic year 2007-2008. The Cyprus University of Technology (CUT; also referred to as Tepak after the Greek name) initially took over the staff and students of the public college ATI, which had closed down; however, it soon developed as a full-fledged
university along the lines of UCY in organizational terms and the prioritization of research. With respect to the programmes of study however, CUT is more comparable to the private universities, insofar as it is geared to the market and focuses on applied sciences.

In the beginning of the current decade, two more private universities were licensed by the RoC: NEAPOLIS in Paphos; and UCLAN in Pyla, Larnaka, as a branch campus of the UK University of Central Lancaster. These are smaller but expanding universities with fewer programmes of study and geared even more to the labour market and the specificities of the areas in which they operate. Neapolis uses both Greek and English as its languages of instruction while UCLAN uses only English. According to the Statistical Service of the RoC, by the 2015-2016 academic year, there were 32,817 students enrolled at Greek Cypriot universities while another 7,530 were studying at colleges.

North

As of the 2018-2019 academic year, there are 32 universities in the northern part of Cyprus; 19 are actively operating while another 13 have been granted licenses to establish a university and are currently in various phases of development. Two of these universities, Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU) and European University of Lefke (EUL; established in 1989) are considered public universities in the sense that the Ministry of Education appoints their boards of trustees; in practice, however, it is to a large extent student tuition fees that finance their day-to-day operations—not public funds. In a similar vein, Middle Eastern Technical University - North Cyprus Campus, and Istanbul Technical University - North Cyprus are branches of Turkish public universities. It is important to note that all universities, private and public, at some point have received or still receive funds from Turkey for their physical infrastructure, e.g., laboratories and equipment, as well as for international promotion and accreditation expenses. Furthermore, universities are subsidized in various ways, including tax exemptions.

EMU is considered the first Turkish Cypriot university because although it was officially established as a university in 1986 its roots can be traced back to the Institute of Higher Technology, which was set up in 1979 with the support of US Agency for International Development (USAID), through the office of the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees, and the Islamic Development Bank. The support was secured by Onay Fadil Demirciler (formerly a teacher at the Higher Technical Institute), who argued that Turkish Cypriots no longer had access to this institution and as this was originally a bi-communal project it would be only fair to give similar support to the Turkish Cypriot side.4 There is not much in the literature about the Greek Cypriot reaction to this proposal. However, as this was before the unilateral declaration of independence (which came on 15 November 1983), it was likely easier at that time to circumvent the status issue.

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4 The authors would like to thank Tahir Çelik, former chairperson of YÖDAK and faculty member at the Higher Technological Institute and its successor EMU, for his contribution.
This institute initially offered 3-year programs in the fields of civil engineering, electrical engineering and mechanical engineering (EMU History 2018). In 1984, these were extended to 4-year programs, and in 1985 following an agreement between the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot governments, the first steps were taken towards establishing EMU (EMU History 2018). The EMU and the other private universities, which quickly followed suit, were designed to attract university students from Turkey, where university capacity was limited and hence admission was quite competitive. Therefore, it was key to ensure from the outset that the study programs and the diplomas/degrees conferred by Turkish Cypriot higher education institutions were recognized by YÖK (Turkish Higher Education Board of Turkey) (İnanç 2007, 117). As they were geared to attract students from abroad as well, all Turkish Cypriot universities have adopted English as the medium of instruction, although they also offer programs in Turkish. For instance, the law and education faculties as well as the schools of justice and health offer most of their programs in Turkish.

According to Akile Büke, chairperson of YÖDAK (Higher Education Planning, Evaluation, Accreditation and Coordination Council), the regulator of Turkish Cypriot HEIs, as of July there were some 101,000 students enrolled in Turkish Cypriot universities of whom 55,879 were from Turkey, 13,383 from northern Cyprus, and 31,749 from 136 different countries (Büke 2018). In other words, only 13.3% of these students were from Cyprus. As a recent World Bank study put it, given the size of the international student population and the overall population of the country, the Turkish Cypriot ‘higher education system can be considered the largest and most internationalized higher education system in the world’ (Arnhold et al. 2016).

Turkish students enter Turkish Cypriot universities through a central placement exam, while universities determine their own admission criteria for Turkish Cypriot and foreign students. There are 4,529 academic staff employed in the higher education institutions in the north of whom 2,309 are PhD holders (Büke 2018). According to a report commissioned by the Chamber of Commerce, around two-thirds of the academic staff are from Turkey (Gökçekuş et al. 2016, 18).

The university scene is dominated by five major universities. In 2016-2017 (when there were 16 universities in operation and the most recent year for which data are available), more than 91% of students studying at Turkish Cypriot universities were enrolled in one of the five biggest universities; namely, Near East University (NEU, established in 1988), EMU, Girne American University (GAU, established in 1985), Cyprus International University (CIU, established in 1997) and EUL (State Planning Organization 2017). As of 2017, the overall share of universities in total employment was around 7% (Büke 2018b). The total contribution of the higher education sector to the balance of payments in the Turkish Cypriot economy was calculated as US$ 766 million in 2017— less than tourism whose contribution was US$ 865 million, but much more than exports, which stood at US$ 106 million (Kendirci et al. 2018, 37).
Not surprisingly, one of the biggest problems that Turkish Cypriot universities face is the non-recognition of the TRNC, because this means they are excluded from major European and international platforms. To get around this problem, they have developed different strategies. One of these strategies is to register via Turkey. To give a specific example, being a member of the International Association of Universities (IAU) (UNESCO’s official partner) was a priority for the Turkish Cypriot universities because in some countries where they recruit students, IAU membership is required for ‘granting equivalency and recognition of diplomas’ (Arslan and Guven 2007, 6). When they were unable to be admitted to the IAU as institutions based in Cyprus, five of them joined as institutions from Turkey.

Turkish Cypriot HEIs are also excluded from the European Education Area and the Bologna Process. To quote Arslan and Guven, ‘in January 2007, authorities in North Cyprus submitted an application for membership to the Bologna Process and demanded inclusion of its 5 universities, and the 40,000 university students studying in North Cyprus in the EHEA’ (ibid.). Needless to say, this was blocked by the RoC. The then chairperson of YÖDAK, Tahir Çelik, who orchestrated these efforts, said that they were offered the opportunity to join the Bologna process under the RoC. However, he added that ‘at a time when the two communities were negotiating a federal partnership based on political equality of the two sides, this was not an acceptable offer’. Furthermore, Çelik added that they did not expect to be accepted, as this was possible only for recognized countries, but that this attempt at least increased the visibility of Turkish Cypriot universities.

Although they are not formally part of the Bologna process, however, most Turkish Cypriot universities ‘are interested in the process and have to some extent geared their operations toward Bologna’ (Arnhold et al. 2016, 18) and, for instance, have adopted ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System). They also prioritize receiving accreditation and recognition from various independent, international bodies and have secured accreditation from institutions such as the Engineering Accreditation Commission of ABET, Edexcel, Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation (FIIBA) and the UK National Recognition Information Centre.

As noted in the above-mentioned World Bank study, Turkish Cypriot universities focus on teaching, ‘at the expense of the other two missions of universities’ and academic staff are ‘primarily expected to teach, leaving little time for other activities’ (Arnhold et al. 2016, 19). Furthermore, there is a lack of funding opportunities for research, ‘with the exception of allocations by the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey [TÜBİTAK]’ (ibid.), and a very recent project to support the universities’ scientific and technological research projects initiated by the Office of Economic Development and Cooperation under the Nicosia Embassy of Turkey in October 2018.
LITERATURE REVIEW: UNIVERISTIES AS SITES OF COOPERATION

Peace in positive terms—as not merely the co-existence and avoidance of conflict of different communities of people, which is a negative peace—involves the development of inter-communal relationships and understanding. A comprehensive and sustainable peace building effort needs to be based on system thinking, which emphasizes the inter-connectedness of the parts of the social world, recognizes the dynamics of inter-relationships and identifies the different patterns at work (Rasheed and Munoz 2016). The contribution of higher education to peace building need not await the end of conflict, the signing of a truce or a peace agreement. From a normative standpoint peace building can be seen as one of the roles of higher education and not just a reaction to conflict (Pacheco and Johnson 2014). Especially in “fragile” and “failed” states, universities have a significant role to play in the development of new discourses and in contributing to conflict abatement. As an engine of economic development and as a public good, higher education has the potential to stabilize and correct weakness in conflict-ridden areas (Tierney 2011). However, the reality in several conflict areas is to silence the conflict and leave it outside the campus.

Whereas primary and secondary education have been viewed as the main pillars of conflict resolution, the potential of higher education to contribute to peace building has only recently been considered. Especially in war-devastated countries, higher education has often been neglected and seen as a sort of luxury amidst the more urgent needs of reconstruction; and secondary when compared to the more formative role of primary education in peace building. Yet higher education, in both its research and teaching functions, has the potential to be transformative in societal terms, to promote reflexive approaches and to act as a leading voice in reconciliation. If not dominated by elites complicit in the reproduction of conflict, and if not constituting itself a factor in the conflict-sustaining horizontal inequalities, higher education can promote messages of peace and build social ties across conflict lines through mediating identities and inculcating inter-communal trust and understanding (Milton and Barakat 2016).

Higher education is largely understood as soft politics, and although the positive role of education in emergencies has begun to be recognized in the last two decades, the connection between higher education and peace building remains understudied (Beleuta 2017). Beleuta views higher education in peace building as being shaped by global education norms whereas higher education is actually largely anchored in local contexts. Often the realities of
these local contexts are not easily bridgeable with the peace building efforts (Beleuta 2017). Short-term approaches such as reconstructing societies immediately after the cessation of hostilities, and medium-term aims such as teacher training can be helpful but it is really a long-term political vision that is needed— one that very specifically and directly views higher education as a tool in peace building, rather than merely as a development project with peace building as a useful by-product. Peace education is a holistic education and as such involves not only (positive) mentality and understanding but also skills and attitudes. It is not only about knowledge but also about values, and as such can empower the youth while encouraging their active participation in peace building efforts (Chinyere 2013).

An Israeli study (Golan and Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2014) found that unlike most peace education, workshops are usually “hit or miss” efforts that remain in the margins of university life. In contrast, partnership courses or community engaged courses that last an entire academic year aim at transformative learning and have greater potential to impact a war-torn society. Besides the three models of “co-existence and tolerance”, “confrontational group identities” and “narratives in conflict” identified by Maoz (2010) [as cited in Golan and Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2014], these community engaged courses in Israel attempted to link personal experiences to the broader socio-political context with the aim of inculcating the belief that change is possible. However, despite the positive results of these courses, the depoliticized framework in which they operated —avoiding the discussion of core conflict issues— meant that the full potential of the effort went unrealized (Golan and Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2014).

With respect to peace education in general and facilitating inter-communal encounters specifically—which is the focus of this report—it is important that the emphasis is on the critical element. Encounters can not only problematise the dominant conflicting narratives, but more significantly, they can prevent their “automatic” adoption. Encounters can open up possibilities by allowing the juxtaposition of narratives and the cultivation of a reflexive stance in this regard, especially among dominant societal groups (Ross 2015). Encounters between members of opposed ethnic groups can lead participants to change their views, but it is important that participants are open to this and can let go of certain predispositions and political stances. However, inter-communal encounters cannot substitute for, but must proceed in parallel with, public policy efforts (Dessel et al. 2017).

Connecting the micro with the macro dimension is necessary in any attempt to promote peace building. The concept of “everyday peace” allows us to understand peace as a value-based praxis and examine individual-level and systemic components of everyday peace (Dutta et al. 2016). This context-based notion of peace as a result of socio-political agency and participatory culture in collaboration and cooperation is useful because it bridges the normative goal with everyday practices. It may thus facilitate a more socially diffuse conceptualization of peace, one that is not so narrowly restricted to the political realm and the political elites.
Literature Review: Universities as sites of cooperation

Overall, the literature on the relationship between HEIs and conflict or post-conflict societies is in its infancy, and the number of contributions on what HEIs can do ‘in contested and insecure environments’ is very limited (Milican 2018, 1). Furthermore, the existing literature focuses more on immediate post-conflict situations such as Iraq or Libya where the countries are recovering from a civil war or an invasion. The case of Cyprus is in many respects sui generis because it can be best described as a ‘comfortable conflict’ (Adamides and Constantinou 2012), where two completely separate higher education systems exist in a physically divided country. This makes it difficult to replicate models of cooperation that have succeeded elsewhere.
CONTACT, EXCHANGE AND COOPERATION IN CYPRUS’ HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Since the opening of the crossing points 15 years ago, there have been two remarkable initiatives to organize and bring together academics from the two communities at the individual level: Cyprus Academic Forum (CAF) and Cyprus Academic Dialogue (CAD). The first of these, CAF, was established in late 2003 on the initiative of several Turkish Cypriot academics. The original idea was to form an island-wide trade union for academics, but following a round of consultations, it was decided to instead create an umbrella organisation that would bring together all academics in Cyprus or working on Cyprus to exchange views on their areas of specialization and on educational matters in general. The intention was to create a network among various groups of academics that would, in time, lead to academic cooperation and joint projects.

As much as possible, CAF tried to engage the wider public in its activities in an attempt to disseminate information for the benefit of the whole society. In other words, CAF aimed to create a bridge between academics on the one hand, and academics and the wider society, on the other. Judging by the level of attendance at its events (30-50 people), we can say that it was somewhat successful, and by 2005 CAF had around 30 active members, mainly from EMU in the north and Intercollege in the south.

CAF was by design non-political and took no political position with regard to the Cyprus problem. Most of its events took place in the library of the Goethe Zentrum or at the Ledra Palace Hotel in the buffer zone, and a foreign academic working on and in Cyprus, Hubert Faustmann, who was involved since the beginning of the effort, was elected as its president.

CAF’s biggest success was a 2005 conference entitled ‘First All-Cyprus Social Sciences and Humanities Conference’, which took place at Intercollege and where 55 papers were given by about 70 academics from Cyprus and abroad. This was, and probably is still, the largest bi-communal academic conference held in Cyprus. The panel topics were not limited to the Cyprus conflict or the politics of Cyprus, but also included psychology, sociology, literature,

5 The authors would like to thank Hubert Faustmann for written information he has provided as well as an interview on Cyprus Academic Forum. See also: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUubrGvYYSA
education, EU studies and media studies. The conference gave the scholars an opportunity to present their research and to engage in an open dialogue and explore themes of mutual interest and cooperation. In November of the same year, CAF organized another two-day conference entitled ‘Nicosia: Past, Present and Future’. When asked whether he received any negative response to these conferences, Faustmann said, not for organizing the conferences, but ‘I got severely criticized by some faculty in an email for the capital spelling of north at the Nicosia conference … The email was sent to all faculty’. The fact that one of the co-founders of Intercollege, Nicos Peristianis, was also involved in CAF provided CAF a degree of protection from further hostile criticism of its activities and of those involved.

After this successful start, CAF began to lose steam and every year it organized fewer events. Eventually, in 2018, the board of CAF decided to dissolve the organization and join CAD, another bi-communal civil society organization set up by academics and intellectuals (see below). The main reason behind the gradual demise of CAF was not the public’s lack of interest in the activities it organised, but rather a dearth of committed individuals who could sustain the organization on a voluntary basis—something that afflicts all civil society organizations, according to Faustmann. Faustmann also stated that one of the particular challenges they faced was to reach academics working in disciplines other than the social sciences. One of the projects CAF envisaged was to create a webpage through which researchers from all academic disciplines could be easily identified and contacted. This could not be realised given the lack of both humanpower and funding.

The second formal organization, CAD, was the result of an initiative proposed by Michalis Michael, a Cypriot academic from the Centre for Dialogue of La Trobe University (Melbourne). After two meetings, in 2009 and 2010, designed to dialogically discuss and exchange ideas on the Cyprus conflict, a small working group was formed to suggest the way forward. The group chose to follow a different path than CAF, and assumed a more political role and organized itself as a pressure group working for a bi-communal, bi-zonal, federal solution of the Cyprus problem based on political equality of the two communities. It is registered in the south as an NGO, and has two co-presidents, one from each community. As of 2016, CAD had over 200 members (Anastasiou and Constanti 2016) and almost 2,500 Facebook followers.

Over time, CAD managed to engage with the leaders of the two communities, their negotiators, UN representatives, political parties and the wider civil society; they organized workshops, conferences and roundtables, produced policy papers and issued press statements. In June 2016, for instance, CAD hosted an event in the buffer zone, where the two leaders, Anastasiades and Akıncı, were invited to present their visions of daily life in a reunified federal Cyprus. CAD has also prepared policy papers on various issues addressing different dossiers of the inter-communal talks including, property, territorial adjustment, displaced persons, power-sharing and governance, and various confidence building measures (CBMs). ‘These have been shared with all stakeholders, political leaders, negotiators, advisors, the UN, the EU, political parties, diplomatic circles, … [and] have generally been linked to workshops, roundtables, panels …’ (Anastasiou and Constanti 2016). To quote Anastasiou and Constanti,
‘CAD was the first bi-communal Cypriot NGO to engage academics and other stakeholders in Turkey with the 2011 and 2013 roundtables in Istanbul and the 2015 roundtable in Ankara with the participation of Turkish Foreign Affairs officials, government representatives, as well as diplomats from many other interested countries’ (ibid.; see also Loizides 2015 and the Cyprus Mail 2015).

CAD was also one of the main organizers of the Education in Multicultural Cyprus conference, which was held in 2013 at the University of Nicosia; the conference papers were published in an edited volume that came out in 2017. CAD also held short, one-two day-long retreats around the island (Limassol, Agros, Platres, Kyrenia and Galatia) in which academics, civil society representatives and politicians discussed various dimensions of the peace process. At the close of the retreats, participants issued joint statements. Furthermore, CAD organized ‘dialogical workshops on peace and conflict in Cyprus’ with the participation of academics from different disciplines. Yücel Vural, a co-president and co-founder of the organisation, believes that one of CAD’s greatest successes is that it has shown that academics from the two communities can work and produce together. Since its establishment, CAD events have been regularly supported by the Australian High Commission, and recently Friedrich Ebert Stiftung has also become a supporter. CAD is still active, and organised a conference on ‘Alternative Models for the Federal Executive in Cyprus’ in February 2019.

The Center for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development (SeeD) is the successor of the Cyprus 2015 Initiative of the Geneva-based international organization, Interpeace. It is a think tank, and provides another different and significant model for cooperation between scholars from the two communities. The SeeD describes itself as a ‘locally owned bi-communal project,’ established ‘to create a bridge between public opinion and the policy level of the Cyprus peace process … turned into a fully-fledged independent institution’ (Interpeace 2014, 5).

PRIO Cyprus Center and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Cyprus Office are other important externally funded organizations that facilitate academic cooperation between scholars from the two communities by organizing conferences and commissioning research such as this report.

With the exception of the above-mentioned special and isolated cases and perhaps a few other examples, there has generally been little contact between academics and students, and absolutely no formal contact between HEIs on the two sides. Not only there are no academics (besides the exceptions that confirm the rule) who have in these two decades crossed the dividing line for work, but also those who have never visited a university nor met a colleague of their discipline working in the other side. There is no adequate exchange at the level of trade unions, professional associations and conferences or public engagement.

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6 In this context, it can be added that recently another book project was completed that was co-edited and contributed to by CAD members. The book entitled, ‘Cyprus and the Roadmap for Peace: A Critical Interrogation of the Conflict,’ and co-edited by Michael and Vural, features not only contributions of academics from the two communities but also chapters authored by former presidents, i.e., Christofias and Vassiliou from the south, and Talat and Eroglu from the north. Another notable book project that included scholars from both communities was co-edited by Trimikliniotis and Bozkurt (2012).
This is in contrast to the civil society field, and especially in contrast to primary and secondary education where several hundred teachers from both sides have collaborated in the last decade on a variety of projects and sponsored several student exchange visits. In fact, concerning primary and secondary education, there was also a specific effort by the Christofias government in 2008-2013 to promote reconciliation and peaceful co-existence, an effort that sparked a number of relevant discourses (Zembylas et al. 2011). The CTP-led Turkish Cypriot government adopted a similar approach in the years 2004-2009, during which time and in this context, history textbooks were revised (see Vural and Özuyanik 2008).

It is also worth noting that during the brief period when the talks were conducted between Christofias and Talat, the Greek Cypriot side proposed a way for universities to develop contacts at the formal level too. This was, however, rejected by the Turkish Cypriot side. The proposal was initially made in 2006, and in 2009 an updated and modified proposal was submitted that was initially welcomed by the Turkish Cypriot leadership. However, eventually the Turkish Cypriot leadership stated that the plan could not proceed. The author of this proposal, then RoC Minister of Education, Andreas Demetriou, stipulated that the European University Association would evaluate all the universities on the island and all those successfully accredited would then join a (to be established) Federation of Cyprus Universities. This body would be registered in the RoC prior to the solution, and then in the federal United Republic of Cyprus post-solution. Although the objections of Turkey were alleged, it is highly likely that this offer was rejected by the Turkish Cypriot side for the same reason joining the Bologna process under the RoC umbrella was rejected, i.e., accepting the Turkish Cypriot universities under the authority of the RoC would in a way mean giving up the Turkish Cypriot claim for political equality.7

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7 The authors would like to thank the former Minister of Education Andreas Demetriou for his contribution.

8 According to the constitution of the RoC, which was essentially a functional federation, education was left to the communal chambers. This is the main factor that made this cooperation possible. For more on this, please see the Policy Suggestions section of this report.
RESEARCH QUESTIONS, METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

If contact and exchange have been possible in the most objectively difficult fields of primary and secondary education (language difference, sites of heightened nationalism, students being minors) why have they not occurred in tertiary education? After all, beyond the societal benefits and the culture of peace that contact and exchange may help to build, cooperation in the inherently international (and inter-ethnic) realm of academic activity is intrinsically beneficial for education and scholarship per se. Has tertiary education been converted into a site where the classic “discourse of recognition” (Constantinou and Papadakis 2001) is being played out today? If so, how does this happen? What are the structures and agents that are producing and reproducing this? Are there alternative practices or views that oppose the current state of affairs? What could be an alternate state of affairs? How could that be achieved?

We attempted to answer these questions through a series of interviews with individuals employed in the HEIs of both communities. Most interviews were conducted with academics, although we also held some interviews with administrators and students. As the authors of this study are academics from the two different communities who have collaborated and co-authored articles and reports in the recent past, we had first-hand experience of the issue as well as relatively easy access to colleagues in both communities. Each of us conducted at first, a round of individual interviews in our respective communities and, building on these, we subsequently set up two focus groups in which we both participated. The focus groups were comprised of academics from both communities. We decided not to disclose the identity of our initial interviewees and focus group participants, to ensure they would be comfortable sharing their experiences and suggestions. With their consent, we disclose the names of a number of interviewees with whom we consulted for more specific information due to their past positions.

As a study based on qualitative methods, the quotes from the participants in the interviews and the focus groups can only be regarded as indicative and not strictly speaking representative. Participants were selected based on the criteria of relevance to the topic, availability, interest in participating, and representativeness in the general sense. We assembled a balanced sample in terms of community, gender, university and broad scholarly/academic discipline. In the initial stage of the preliminary research and through informal discussions
and university websites we compiled lists of potential candidates to be contacted. Using convenience sampling we prepared a set of general open-ended questions to be used as a guide in the semi-structured interviews.

We adopted a reflexive stance throughout the stage of data production, acknowledging our own role and inevitable contribution, while at the same time refraining from overt guiding of the discussions in an attempt to limit and control our own views and biases. We allowed our interviewees to develop their arguments, probing them to expand when their narration touched upon themes directly or indirectly related to the topics of this research project. Depending on the dynamics of each interaction we sometimes commented on what we heard so as to allow the interviewees to consider further and express their views in greater depth. Especially in the focus groups, where the discussions were much less structured and more dialogical, we were alert to any incidences of disagreement and divergence between the participants so as to grasp the alternative views, the different approaches and the plurality of ideas.
RESULTS

Non-cooperation as a default option

The research findings confirmed that there is very limited inter-communal contact and cooperation at the professional level in Cyprus’s HEIs. This was a situation that most participants on both sides of the divide took for granted, and considered the natural order of things. However, the rationale for non-cooperation differed across the divide. “Although I would have liked to, it just never happened” said one GC medical doctor who explained that he had met doctors in his specialization from Turkey in the context of international meetings, but never Turkish Cypriots (Int. 1).

When probed as to how cooperation could be achieved, the same GC doctor (Int. 1) responded by saying that this “should not be forced”. An invitation that “the doors are open” for both students and staff, provided they have the necessary qualifications should be enough. Whether cooperation follows it or not is another question, he explained, although he agreed that somebody must take the initiative and make the first move (Int. 1).

“There is definitely scope for contact and cooperation,” said another GC doctor in a different specialization who had also met colleagues from Turkey at international conferences—even some held in the RoC, but not Turkish Cypriots (Int. 2). He was also very positive and saw an academic value in meeting but was equally reserved with respect to feasibility. With respect to “genetic syndromes going back several generations, cooperation in order to pool data from the whole population of Cyprus would greatly benefit research” he said. When asked, he added, “students can also benefit from practice in hospitals on the other side. But we [academics] need to know conditions prevailing there” (Int. 2).

Turkish Cypriot educators and researchers working at universities considered the non-recognition issue as the main hurdle for their Greek Cypriot counterparts to engage in collaboration. A Turkish Cypriot environmental engineer (Int. 11) said that she had cooperated with people from the south in the civil society context as part of a bi-communal EU project, but had never engaged in academic cooperation with a Greek Cypriot scholar. When asked why, she answered that she’d “love to because it would be great to cover also the south of the island for an on-going project for the north,” yet she never tried to contact anyone from the south because she took it for granted that the recognition issue would block any cooperation. “I don’t think that they will agree to using my university affiliation” she said, adding that “I wish they would because I already have some ideas for research; the island-wide studies are much more valuable”.

Both Greek Cypriot medical doctors emphasized that any cooperation and exchange must be based on pure knowledge and educational rationales and must “avoid politics” (Int. 2) and “hidden agendas” (Int. 1). However, this view is not universally shared. A Greek Cypriot civil engineer had a different view and focused on the socio-political value of contact, exchange and cooperation, and specifically as to how this can directly facilitate a peace culture. “Let us be frank. The Turkish Cypriot community is isolated, and so are their academic institutions. If one looks for pure knowledge gains as a precondition for exchange, this can be an excuse for having no exchanges at all” (Int. 3). Analogously, both the Greek Cypriot linguist and the psychologist also focused on the socio-political value of contact both in terms of its use as a motive and with respect to its impact (Int. 5, 6).

It was generally agreed, both in the interviews and in the focus groups, that cooperation could offer academic benefits for research and teaching. But many felt that this was not enough to actualize contact and exchange. To a large extent, Turkish Cypriot interviewees prioritized the academic gains from cooperation as well.

Arguing against the idea that that the two sides might benefit unequally from cooperation, the Turkish Cypriot academic working at the faculty of medicine (Int. 12) and the Turkish Cypriot academic working at the faculty of education (Int. 7) concurred that the Turkish Cypriot universities had something to offer academics and students from the south. Int. 7 argued that in some areas the Turkish Cypriot universities had made substantial investment in laboratories and other physical infrastructure that put them ahead of the south in that respect, while Int. 12 said that the potential contribution could go beyond this: “There are so many Turkish Cypriot academics who were educated abroad with huge experience, skill sets and networks; they have potential to offer their knowledge,” she said.

From the comments above it is easy to see how the Cyprus conflict impacts social interaction and how the division becomes somehow normalized— not necessarily actively accepted, but passively tolerated. Contact, cooperation and exchange entail a degree of risk and a possible cost; these raise the threshold for those who may be willing to engage. It is about priorities, said one interviewee: “Those that need to do it, find ways to do it. But it doesn’t seem that there is much need to have this in the HEI “(Int. 3).

**Political and administrative obstacles to cooperation**

The Greek Cypriot civil engineer who had undertaken two cooperative projects with Turkish Cypriot colleagues had to use his individual professional capacity rather than his formal academic one; moreover, both projects were hindered by administrative issues of a political sort. One was due to politics in the north (preference for Turkish as opposed to EU involvement via funding) and one due to politics in the south (unwillingness to bill Turkish Cypriot companies because of possible use of Greek Cypriot properties in the north). A third attempt did not progress for various reasons and “it did not reach the stage where administrative issues could come up” (Int. 3). In focus group 2, the Greek Cypriot psychologist (Int. 6), the GC
communications academic, and the Turkish Cypriot computer engineer had all had several experiences of exchange. They all mentioned conference participation, although this was not without problems; they also expressed their disillusionment with the prevailing conditions.

The status of the universities in the north is the key obstacle to institutional as well as individual cooperation. Turkish Cypriot academics do in fact receive invitations to participate in conferences and panels and to give lectures at the universities in the south. Interviewee 8, for instance, is regularly involved in such activities. However a typical problem, and one that occurs almost every time, is the affiliation and the country of the Turkish Cypriot academics. Usually Turkish Cypriots in the south are asked not to write the name of their university, but simply state their discipline —so as to avoid “indirect recognition” of the universities in the north by having their names printed on conference programmes and in publications. Whenever Turkish Cypriot scholars participate at an academic event in the south, therefore, this takes place on strictly personal level. A common observation among the Turkish Cypriot interviewees and focus group participants was that this was often quite annoying; “in a conference room full of scholars from different countries and this and that institution, I was the only one who was there without any university affiliation,” a Turkish Cypriot scholar lamented during the focus group (2) discussion. A similar problem appears with the ending of the addresses: North Cyprus and Mersin 10 Turkey are usually highly contested – sometimes north Cyprus (lower case n) or merely Cyprus might work as a compromise solution according to the participants of Focus Group 2.

The issues of affiliation or the country to which Turkish Cypriot universities belong is likely to continue to hinder cooperation because of the relatively new directive by some Turkish Cypriot universities, which stipulates financial reward for publication in peer-reviewed journals only if the address of the university is shown as Turkey. This will make it more difficult for Turkish Cypriot scholars to compromise regarding their affiliation and country in future collaborations with their Greek Cypriot peers.

Turkish Cypriot academics today face less pressure from their university administrations, colleagues and the authorities when it comes to contacts and cooperation with their Greek Cypriot counterparts. “I don’t feel any pressure whatsoever,” Int. 9 said. This was not always the case, however. The interviewees and focus group participants who took part in the bi-communal activities in the 1990s, either in the Ledra Palace Hotel in the buffer zone or the bi-communal Pyla village where the secret police sat at the next table, said they were branded as traitors back then. “While walking past the Ledra Palace checkpoint to cross to the south on the way to the focus-group discussion, I once again remembered those days and felt the same emotions,” one participant said. The same cannot be said of the Greek Cypriot academics. “I was looked down on by my colleagues for taking part in a conference held in the north,” a focus group (2) participant said, adding that his colleagues saw this as recognition of the TRNC. The fact that almost all conference rooms in the north are decorated with at least one set of flags of the TRNC and Turkey probably does not reduce the anxiety that Greek Cypriot scholars feel when they attend activities in the north.
The two main obstacles to professional cooperation identified among the Greek Cypriot participants are: the political conflict and the issue of recognition; the expected reactions from those hostile to contact. The first can be categorized as more of an administrative barrier while the second is a social barrier. Both can be said to be more structural than agential issues, and they point to the normalization of the division (mentioned above). The obstacles are more pre-emptive than suppressive and more than that: they are more assumed than known to exist. Academics potentially interested in contact and exchanges are dissuaded even from trying, as they believe that they will have “to pay a cost” (Int. 1, Int. 2, Int. 3, Int. 6). In characteristic phrasing, the GC psychologist mentioned the Green Line regulation and talked about the hostile environment and the media—which effectively condemns acts of simple trade. In our case, “where immaterial work is involved – research, teaching and so on — it is even worse” he said, as he believes there is more suspicion (Int. 6).

Operating with a zero-sum game mentality, the (Greek) Cypriot Ministry of Foreign Affairs along with the Ministry of Education are systematically doing everything they can to undermine not only the Turkish Cypriot universities’ efforts to recruit students abroad but also to sabotage the conferences and other academic activities they organize, accreditations they try to receive and cooperation agreements they try to make. One of the Turkish Cypriot interviewees (Int. 7) who also served on the administration of his university said that wherever they went to promote the university, e.g., Africa, they were shown a letter from the embassy of the RoC telling potential students why they should not study in the northern part of Cyprus.

To give another example, when a Turkish Cypriot university organized a conference in Kyrenia, the scholars on the organizing and scientific review committees received an angry and intimidating email from the Kyrenia Refugee Association. This letter first repeated the official line about the occupation and mass displacement following 1974, and then concluded with the following sentence: ‘Reserving our legal rights against anybody who through words and actions becomes an accomplice to the crimes inflicted on us, we look forward to hear about your withdrawal from the illegal activity in the occupied area of Cyprus.’

The Greek Cypriot position on the universities in the north is based on four specific premises: first, Turkish Cypriot universities ‘are unlawfully operating “educational institutions”, since they are not in compliance with the relevant Laws and Regulations of the Republic of Cyprus on Higher Education. Therefore, they, as well as the “qualifications” they award, are not recognized by the Republic of Cyprus. Secondly, these “universities” operate under the purported “law” of the so called “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” (“TRNC”) which, according to the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions and international law, is an illegal entity not recognized by the international community with the sole exception of Turkey’. Thirdly, ‘the direct or indirect recognition of the “universities” or the “qualifications” they award is contrary to the conditions and goals of important current European initiatives on Higher Education, since a prerequisite of these initiatives is cooperation on a national level and a nationally recognised institutional framework’. Finally, ‘the “universities” were built on property
belonging mostly to Greek Cypriot displaced persons.\(^9\) As Australian Cypriot academic, Michalis Michael, who is involved in various efforts to increase contact and dialogue among academics from the two sides as well as Turkey and Greece, put it, “essentially, the RoC and its universities… do not recognise the universities in north Cyprus - private, semi-private or public. Subsequently, this means that universities in the RoC (South Cyprus) cannot legally enter into any institutional relationship with universities in the north.\(^{10}\)

Therefore, it is safe to say that the recognition issue is likely to remain as the main obstacle to more cooperation among academics from the two communities. Consequently, any initiative that aims to create an impact should be endorsed by the political leaderships of both sides. Obviously, the real challenge will be convincing the Greek Cypriot side to change its position.

Our research found no fundamental differences in practice between the public and private universities in the south. Although one might expect the private universities to theoretically be freer to engage in collaboration with private universities in the north compared to public ones, if their management agreed, this was not the case. The official Greek Cypriot position regarding Turkish Cypriot universities (as outlined above) applies in exactly the same way to all private universities in the south. Even in cases where the management of one private university was open to cooperation, there was no way to clash with or bypass the Ministry’s position. The universities’ dependency on the state for accreditation and other regulatory procedures, the stiff competition for students and, subsequently, the need to avoid bad publicity make administrations that are potentially positive to the prospects of across-the-line cooperation more hesitant and reserved (Focus group 1). To quote Michael once again “any, ‘initiative’ towards institutional cooperation would have grave political and financial implications. Private universities … obviously have more room for flexibility - however, their leaderships are careful of the political - and clientele – blowback”.

Politics and the issue of recognition are seen as huge obstacles to formal and full-fledged exchanges. “If you have formal research cooperation and have a Turkish Cypriot University as part of the consortium, this is a sort of recognition, whatever we say. I might not mind as a scientist/scholar but somebody from the University management will not see it that way” (Int. 1). Many GC academics emphasized the need for an institutional framework. “I cannot do it on my own. I will be in a difficult position if I get an invitation to go to the other side. It has to be under an umbrella: a professional association, a university, the Medical Association etc.” (Int. 2). When asked who could take the initiative, the response was that this could only come from the university hierarchy after they have devised and agreed on a procedure. The Turkish

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\(^{10}\) Authors would like to thank Michalis Michael for his contribution.
Cypriot political scientist (Int. 10) also said that he would be more than happy to take part in an exchange of academics so long as this was done through a protocol between the two universities.

**Academic and political imperatives for cooperation**

Another interesting conclusion of the participants in the second focus group was that an overwhelming majority of academics who are involved in bi-communal cooperation do this not only for academic reasons but also because of their political convictions, i.e., a commitment to rapprochement between the two communities and reunification of the island. Furthermore, we found that most often non-Cypriot faculty members, primarily those from Greece and Turkey, were less enthusiastic over cooperation with the professors across the Green line because they do not have really anything at stake, i.e., the Cyprus problem is less of a concern for them. As one participant stated, ‘I have an extra motivation for cooperation beyond academic concerns because I want my kids to grow up in a reunified island. A colleague from abroad would not be bothered’.

Overall, Turkish Cypriot scholars were not very optimistic about prospects of more cooperation with their Greek Cypriot counterparts, at least in the absence of a negotiated settlement to the Cyprus problem. Interviewee 9, for instance, argued that as long as the current state of affairs continued, any attempt to create channels of cooperation at the institutional level, even with the endorsement of the two leaders, would be doomed to failure— just like the interconnectivity of the mobile telephone networks was impossible even though the two leaders had agreed on it three years ago. He added that he expected “the Greek Cypriot side to refrain from taking steps that would legitimize the abnormal situation prevailing at the moment”. Institutional cooperation could be possible only if a political deal were struck between the two sides that would clarify the Turkish Cypriot state’s status, he concluded.

The fact that the universities are the main engines of growth for the Turkish Cypriot economy makes it more difficult for the Greek Cypriot side to accept depoliticizing the issue of cooperation between the HEIs of the two sides. From the outset, higher education was designed as an economic sector to circumvent the international isolation of the TRNC, which was imposed by the international community because of the unilateral declaration of independence (Former Turkish Ambassador Ertuğrul Kumcuoğlu cited in İnanç 2007), and the official figures show that this was a successful strategy, when judged by the number of foreign university students enrolled in Turkish Cypriot universities and the income generated by the HEI sector.

**Lost opportunities**

“I have suggested student exchange” officially to my university “but the whole thing got stuck – we need to ask the Ministry and so on”, said the GC psychologist (Int. 6). He also added that this sometimes becomes ridiculous when students are sent to Turkey to learn Turkish when
they could just cross the line (Int. 6). In a similar vein but from a different angle, the Turkish Cypriot academic (Int. 7) also pointed out the importance of taking advantage of our geographical proximity; “when we do not have someone who could teach a particular class, we fly in professors from Turkey. It would be much more efficient and cheaper if we could bring someone from the south”. The same applies to the physical infrastructure, labs and libraries as well, he added. Instead of duplicating, we should try to complement each other and use our limited resources more efficiently, he noted.

**Extra-university alternative paths for cooperation and political support**

The professional associations are more easily able to cooperate than universities, claimed a civil engineer, because some preparatory work has been done since the opening of the checkpoints. There are already relationships among people from the two sides and, there have been some common events, “it doesn’t have to start from scratch” (Int. 3).

This view was also expressed by a senior administrator (Int. 4), who said that because businesses were less tied to state structures than universities it would be easier to circumvent institutional barriers. However, since most professional TC associations were established post-1964 and post-1974 they could also face the recognition problem in the south. The arts have been very successful in establishing contacts, and a bi-communal Cypriot group participated in Turkey in the context of Istanbul as European Capital of Culture 2010. Yet, as the GC artist in focus group 1 said, connections in the art world go largely unnoticed: “art only becomes visible when there is a scandal, like with the Manifesta”. This very prestigious international art exhibition scheduled to take place in Cyprus in 2006 collapsed and was cancelled after the RoC Ministry of Education objected to the organizers’ intention to extend it to the northern part of Cyprus.

When the hypothetical scenario of an exchange programme set up by the university management was suggested, both doctors were positive although both expected hesitation in the beginning. Colleagues and students would be reluctant to participate, because they might worry that “people will call them traitors”. But if there is a useful experience to be gained from it, it will succeed, said one doctor (Int. 1). It will not be easy in the beginning as some people will inevitably “criticize the move using political arguments”, but in the long run it is possible to overcome this said, the other (Int. 2).

Most academics we interviewed felt that a joint statement from the leaders encouraging student and academic exchange and cooperation could help, as would a positive stance from university managements. However, lacking structural changes, even these would not be enough to counter the barriers and reactions. But Greek Cypriot academics were confident that such measures would provide sufficient support to those who were interested in exchange (Int. 5, Int. 6). The Turkish Cypriot academics were also supportive of such schemes. They said that the university administrations would be supportive and students who are already studying in internationally mixed groups would not mind having Greek Cypriot professors or classmates. When asked whether having a Greek Cypriot would be a problem for the university
administration or the students, Interviewee 11 said “we already have had Greek Cypriot academics giving seminars on cancer research or pharmaceuticals, and there was absolutely no problem”. Only Interviewee 10 expressed the reservation that some nationalist Turkish students might object to having Greek Cypriot professors/classmates.

All Greek Cypriot academics emphasized that it was critical to establish contacts and exchanges between academics before involving the students (Int. 1-6). This view was also expressed in the two focus groups. The inevitably voluntary nature of any activity involving Greek Cypriots crossing to the north was mentioned as another obstacle to more comprehensive contacts/exchanges. A Greek Cypriot sociologist in focus group 1 said that he has sometimes taken his students to the Home for Cooperation for seminars in which they interacted with Turkish Cypriot colleagues and students. “But I cannot ask them to go to a university in the north. Some have never crossed the checkpoints”. Turkish Cypriot Interviewee 8 also said that he and a Greek Cypriot colleague had co-organized panels at the Home for Cooperation, with the specific intent of providing a space for interaction among students from both sides.

Crossing to the south to visit a university is less problematic for most Turkish Cypriot students. Indeed, in the 15 years that have passed since the easing of the crossing between the two sides, some Turkish Cypriots have chosen to study at Greek Cypriot universities. Currently, there are 30 Turkish Cypriot students studying at the University of Nicosia and 9 enrolled at the University of Cyprus. Given the fact that in the 2017-2018 academic year there were around 13,000 students studying at Turkish Cypriot universities (Büke 2018a), however, this is a negligible figure.

**Competition**

The two GC doctors referred to the competitive private context as inhibiting cooperation both intra- and inter-communally. They both emphasized that the profit-making character of private universities shapes their priorities and that research is not really their primary focus (Int. 1 and Int. 2). The fact that the medical schools are newly created and that they still have a long way to go to become established was also mentioned as an obstacle; as a result they tend to be more conservative and less willing to take risks with uncertain benefits and potential high costs (Int. 2). In focus group 1, the GC sociologist spoke more to the point over the issue of competition, noting that private universities in the south have a vested interest in keeping the private universities in the north non-recognised, as they are competing for international students.
POLICY SUGGESTIONS

In this section we will propose a number of recommendations that might improve the current cold-war-like atmosphere and create linkages between scholars and the HEIs of the two communities. The least politically ambitious suggestions can promote collaboration at the individual level without rocking the boat at the institutional and government level. More comprehensive efforts require strong political will and engagement at the leadership level, as they will challenge deeply entrenched government policies—particularly in the south.

1. Against this backdrop, our first policy proposal is to promote interaction and cooperation among individual academics. Our interviews and focus group discussions revealed that academics across the divide are to a large degree uninformed of each other, and in the absence of institutional cooperation, cannot easily identify academics working in similar fields and topic areas in the other community. A database/website or an online platform—one that catalogues all researchers working at Cypriot HEIs, including their publication records and fields of research interest—will make it easier for scholars to contact each other for possible cooperation. Indeed, this was a CAF project, which unfortunately never materialized due to lack of funding.

Other networking activities can be organized in the buffer zone. CAD (Cyprus Academic Dialogue) was born out of such a gathering, initiated by and held under the auspices of the Australian High Commission. These kinds of social/professional networking activities that take place in a relatively friendly and neutral atmosphere can make the first contact easier. As Interviewee 12 pointed out, “annual scientific meetings as well as purely social gatherings such as wine-tasting events particularly organized for the scholarly community, can help to make the first bridge between the academics and can be even better than creating an online platform. This is how it is done in normal countries. Why shouldn’t it work in our case?”

2. A possible second or parallel step would be to promote bi-communal research projects by offering financial grants. In 2018, teams that collaborated in the area of science won five of the Stelios Bi-communal Awards, which aim ‘to encourage bi-communal cooperation between Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots in order to promote lasting peace on the island.’ Similar grants, ones specifically targeting scholarly collaboration, could promote more cooperation among academics and researchers. Michael suggests “any cooperation of this ilk needs to have a real impact on the everyday lives of Cypriots. This may
mean to conduct joint research in areas that are not overtly political - away from the social sciences - such as environmental problems, health, cultural restoration, water usage, etc.”. Turkish Cypriot scholars would be especially keen to take part in these schemes, as their funding opportunities are very limited. It would be attractive for Greek Cypriot scholars as well given the fact that securing such a grant would be less competitive than trying to secure funding from EU programs such as Horizon 2020.

3. As mentioned above, at the formal level, one of the main obstacles preventing cooperation is the fact that many Turkish Cypriot HEIs have been built on land that belonged to Greek Cypriots pre-1974. One way to solve this problem is to *pay compensation to the legal owner of the property* through the Turkish Cypriot Immoveable Property Commission, as some hoteliers have done, thus clearing the title deeds of their hotels.\(^\text{11}\) The Turkish Cypriot side can prioritize paying the compensation for the land on which universities operate as a gesture of good will. In return, long-term loans can be provided by international lenders to facilitate the process.

4. A financially more demanding move would be to *establish research institutes and laboratories in the buffer zone*, following in the footsteps of such success stories as the Association for Historical Dialogue and Research (AHDR), and the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus’s Anthropological Laboratory. Other successful operations are those of PRIO, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and SeeD, which provide opportunities to researchers from both communities to meet and cooperate in their personal capacity. Such a venture could be achieved by following one of two alternative paths, which are not mutually exclusive: (1) take the model of the AHDR etc., and create a new independent organization that will provide a platform for scholars to take part in their personal capacity; (2) set up an “umbrella organization” to bring together HEIs from the two communities.

All the above-mentioned organizations include the involvement of external actors, which can at least offer initial funding and expertise. Because cooperation on an institution-to-institution level seems almost impossible, third-party involvement seems crucial. What we are suggesting is not an entirely novel idea. Two of our interviewees (Int. 8 and Michalis Michael) offered anecdotal information about such attempts. According to Michael, an “idea was floated of establishing a Centre for Dialogue in Cyprus. This would be an autonomous research institute and think tank that would enter into arrangements / partnerships with universities and scholars on a project-by-project basis. While they would not have a direct bilateral relationship - they would participate in a multilateral arrangement. Both the University of Cyprus and the EMU leadership were interested.

in this proposition - but alas the initiative failed due to lack of resources and funding (as well as being perceived as competing against other endeavours). Interviewee 8, on the other hand, took part in projects aimed at creating more institutionalized partnerships between HEIs. With colleagues in the south he was actively involved in different initiatives and attempts at establishing cooperation between the two communities’ HEIs: “Since 2004, we’ve developed various models; if the universities of the two communities cannot have direct contact, we said, then let’s get them under the umbrella of a third party such as an American university, two municipalities [of Nicosia where there is no recognition issue], or the UN University. Unfortunately, we did not succeed”. The main obstacle was the recognition issue— for both private and public universities, Interviewee 8 added.

Past failures notwithstanding, this model has the potential to succeed if political leaders are willing to work for it. Such an institution would allow cooperation not only for research but also for teaching. A model for this already exists: “[a] Masters’ program in peace-building which was set up by three universities and at three locations in the Balkans’ (see Millican 2018). A pan-island language centre, specialised in teaching Greek and Turkish and providing recognized credentials for completed courses could also be considered in this respect. This would require setting up a special language qualification mechanism along the lines of the Green Line Regulation so that the recognition issue does not become a stumbling block yet again.

The natural end point of this initiative would be to establish a truly bi-communal and/or international university in the buffer zone. While a university located in the buffer zone could create many positive spill-over effects, not least by bringing physically together a considerable number of students and academics from both communities, it also has some obvious drawbacks. Foremost, it could easily draw resistance from the existing institutions, as it will create competition. After all, higher education on both sides of the divide is more than anything else, a for-profit-business. Second, it will be difficult to raise the necessary funds to start a full-fledged university.

5. Probably the most cost-efficient and far-reaching option would be to open the institutional channels of cooperation between the existing universities across the divide. A conclusion that surfaced both in our focus group discussions and in the personal interviews was that such a collaboration would require strong political will, which initially appears difficult given the stalemate in the negotiation process and the strong rhetoric used, particularly by the Greek Cypriot side. Nevertheless, there is an important and successful precedent: the Imagine Project, developed and implemented by the ADHR (Association of Historical Dialogue and Research). The project, which addresses primary, lower and upper secondary and vocational schools, managed to bring together 2,000 students and 194 teachers from 40 Turkish Cypriot and 40 Greek Cypriot schools from all areas of
Cyprus during the educational year 2017-2018’ (AHDR 2018). This unprecedented example of collaboration became possible, in the words of one of the teachers involved in the project ‘only because of the involvement of the Bi-Communal Technical Committee on Education’. The committee was established after the agreement between the two leaders, Nicos Anastasiades and Mustafa Akinci, in December 2015. The committee ‘continues its efforts to implement confidence-building measures in schools of the two educational systems and promote contact and co-operation between students and educators from the two communities’. The successful project, which is supported by the Federal Foreign Office of Germany and the UN Peacekeeping Forces in Cyprus, was mentioned by the UN Secretary General in his latest report to the members of the Security Council on his good offices mission in Cyprus. Setting up a similar technical committee on HEIs would give the necessary political signal and endorsement for initiating collaboration between universities of the two communities. Admittedly, cooperation at the primary and secondary school level is relatively less problematic because of the communal character of education as stipulated in the 1960 Constitution. However, it is important to note that Article 20 of the RoC Constitution authorizes communal chambers to provide primary education as well as ‘education, other than primary education,’ an expression which does not explicitly exclude higher education.

6. One suggestion made in our focus groups was to organize student study/field trips to universities across the Green Line. The visa issue could be seen as a potential hurdle. That so many foreign students in the north are mainly from Turkey, Africa and Central Asia may be seen as a major problem complicating such visits. However, there are precedents where Turkish and other third-country citizens who are usually not allowed to cross to the south are given such permission, and with no formalities. Such visits take place in the context of inter-faith dialogue or the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process under the auspices of the Embassy of Sweden (RTCYPP). Since late 2014, during the three major Muslim holidays of Eid Al Fitr (Ramazan Bayramı), Eid Ul Adha (Kurban Bayramı) and Mawlid ul-Nabi (Mevlit), worshippers are allowed to visit the Hala Sultan Tekke in Larnaca. Reportedly, this was made possible upon the intervention of the Archbishop, who ‘had spoken with Foreign Minister Ioannis Kasoulides “giving his blessing to a visit to the Hala Sultan Tekke”’, and receiving the minister’s approval (Andreou 2014). Later, Foreign Minister Kasoulides stated, “We have been handling the pilgrimage to Hala Sultan Tekke as a pilgrimage of Muslims, irrelevant of their status, legal or illegal in the occupied areas, as we always did;” honouring a decision taken during the inter-communal religious dialogue (Cyprus Mail 2017). This shows that when there is political will, laws can be bent and even long-term policies on matters as sensitive and contested as the Turkish migrants or settlers can be pushed aside.
CONCLUSION AND STEPS AHEAD

Like their peers elsewhere, academics—particularly those working in private institutions—are under pressure to publish, teach, and handle administrative tasks, which leaves them very little time for voluntary work and political activism. The pressure on early career academics is even greater. Thus, even those academics who are interested in exchange and cooperation with their peers across the dividing line often have neither the time and nor the energy to do so. The numerous obstacles to formal and institutional collaboration (a cooperation and exchange that should be part of their ordinary work), mean that in practice extra effort, risk and possible cost emerge as factors dissuading otherwise willing academics from pursuing it.

Obviously, in the absence of a solution to the Cyprus problem, and in the conditions of the current quasi “Cold War” between the two sides, contacts, exchange and cooperation between the HEIs of Cyprus are bound to remain difficult and limited. In addition to the structural and institutional barriers in place, the prevailing political climate in inter-communal relations and its ups and downs are also important and create both opportunities and some further barriers. Nevertheless there is room for measures that could circumvent some barriers, make cooperation more attractive and also an easier, more efficient and less risky endeavour.

Besides the general benefits that would result from academic collaboration across the dividing line – e.g., peace building, improved scholarship and education, there are specific fields where cooperation is especially necessary. Research in the fields of genetics for example, as well as in medicine, epidemiology and the environment must not be restricted to the population of one side as it will inevitably be partial and less insightful. Establishing the structures and processes whereby pan-island research can take place will contribute both to the promotion of scientific knowledge and a culture of peace.
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Int. 1: Medical doctor (private university)
Int. 2: Medical doctor (private university)
Int. 3: Civil Engineer (public university)
Int. 4: Senior Administrator (private university)
Int. 5: Linguist (public university)
Int. 6: Psychologist (public university)

List of interviews conducted (north):
Int. 7: Education (private university)
Int. 8: Political Science (public university)
Int. 9: Political Science (public university)
Int. 10: Political Science (private university)
Int. 11: Environmental Engineering (private university)
Int. 12: Medicine/Microbiology (private university)

Focus group 1 (mixed):
TC Participant 1 (Energy Engineering, private university)
TC Participant 2 (Political Science, public university)
GC Participant 3 (Pre-primary Education, private university)
GC Participant 4 (Sociology, private university)
GC Participant 5 (Fine Arts, private university)

Focus group 2 (mixed):
TC Participant 1 (Computer Engineering, public university)
TC Participant 2 (Communications, private university)
GC Participant 3 (Computer Engineering, private university)
GC Participant 4 (Communications, private university)
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In all the years of search for a comprehensive settlement to reunify the island under a bi-communal federal government, one unchanging fact – which also constitutes the main barrier to the negotiation process – has been the deep distrust between the two sides. As part of a broader project which recognizes this fact, this thematic report on Higher Education seeks to explore possible structures of genuine cooperation that may both alleviate distrust and foster substantial collaboration across the dividing line promoting a logic of interdependence that can be constructive to peace building. This Report focuses on inter-communal contact and exchange in Cyprus’ Higher Education Institutions and its potential to build trust and cooperation. After a brief mapping of the Cyprus’ Higher Education field in the two parts of the island, the Report reviews the relevant international literature on universities as sites of cooperation, exchange and peace-culture-building in conflict ridden societies. Subsequently, some examples of past and existing academic cooperation in Cyprus are mentioned in the fields of research and teaching. The Report then discusses the obstacles, opportunities and possibilities that currently exist given the prevailing political as well as structural conditions. The Report is based on a series of anonymous interviews and focus groups with Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot academics from various disciplines currently working in several universities across the dividing line. The last section of Report specifies a series of policy recommendations.