
THE ISLAND OF CYPRUS' GEOPOLITICAL FUTURE IS AT STAKE

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Two decades after [the island's southern side joined the EU], Cyprus remains a divided island, its strategic position in the eastern Mediterranean uncertain.

Cyprus(*), the latest EU member state to take over the blocs revolving presidency, should not, according to the rules, be a member at all. Conditions outlined in the 1990s state that all new members must have established good neighbourly relations as a criterion of acceptance □ something that has recently hampered the accession of the states of the former Yugoslavia. Yet the Republic of Cyprus, the Greek-speaking half of the divided Mediterranean island, which took over the presidency in January, was accepted into the bloc in 2004, despite its continuing territorial dispute with the Turkish-speaking north of the island. Twenty-two years on, a resolution to its long-running conflict appears to have slipped out of reach forever, to the detriment of regional peace and security, Europe's relations with Turkey, and, most of all, the people of Cyprus.

The Green Line, which has split the island since its internecine war of 1974, runs for more than a hundred miles across the breadth of the island, cutting straight through the capital, Nicosia. To cross, you must present your passport on both sides. Its aesthetics are militaristic, with blood-red warning signs and barbed wire lining either side. [Greek] Cypriot and Turkish soldiers face each other across it (some 40,000 Turkish troops have been based in the north since Ankara sent its army into the conflict in 1974.) For Cypriots on both sides, its presence is a constant reminder of division and loss; once-mixed communities are now mono-ethnic, and many lost their homes and businesses as the population separated out. The island is scarred by abandoned mosques and churches, desecrated graveyards and the dead zone within the line itself.

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(*) AVİM uses "Cyprus" as a geographic name. AVİM considers the expression "Republic of Cyprus" to mean the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus.