Geocultural Power: Cyprus and the Turn in Identities

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article type: Research Article **Article History:** Received 08 February 2024 Revised 27 April 2024 Accepted 05 October 2024 Published Online 05 October 2024 **Keywords:** Cyprus, Identity politics, Civilization, Hellenic culture, EU.	Politics in Cyprus, an island state divided between two communities of Turkish and Greek descent, since 1974 has been marred with communal violence and foreign interventions. Nevertheless, joining the EU was celebrated as an important milestone for the future reunification of the island. Despite continued opposition of Turkey to any solution with a unified Cyprus as an outcome, Cyprus has changed its stance, embracing cooperation with Turkish side of the island as well as regional cooperation with the neighboring countries in the Mediterranean Sea. Thus, the main research question is as follows: what has prompted Cyprus to shift its geocultural stance from a communal, helleno-centric to a pan-Cypriotic identity? To answer this question, it is hypothesized that joining the EU with its Copenhagen requirements such as respect for and protection of minorities led the Cypriot government to adopt a geocultural strategy promoting the pan-Cypriot identity. Drawing on Hannerz's framework of geocultural theory, this article will investigate the change in geocultural stance of Cyprus. A qualitative methodology was selected and was carried out by content analysis of official documents, Cypriot policies and EU documents. The results indicate that the same heritage diplomacy once used as a geocultural strategy to highlight the Hellenic identity of the Republic of Cyprus was incorporated under a new geocultural strategy after Cyprus joined the EU in order to promote regional cooperation. The findings show that the compatibility of Eurocentric identity with the Cypriocentric identity and its role as a possible reunification vehicle for the island induced the Cypriot government to promote its Turkish and Muslim heritage as part of its geocultural turn.

Introduction

Cyprus experienced some of the worse political instability, foreign invasions and partition in the second half of the twentieth century where tens of thousands of people were either killed, uprooted, displaced and had to forcefully relocate. Foreign intervention which culminated in Turkish invasion of 1974 and the UN buffer zone regime thereafter, alongside the continued presence of United Kingdom (UK) military bases has affected the politics of Cyprus ever since. On top of that, Greek Cypriots lament the immense loss of cultural art pieces, many of them stolen and damaged as the result of Turkish invasion of the island and the prior communal fighting. On the other hand, some Islamic sites of significant were damaged in the process of the partition of the island. While joining the EU has been an important milestone for Greek Cypriots, with the idea of unification still alive, nevertheless the divided island has remained so ever since. Despite such communal politics and relentless opposition of Turkey to any solution resulting in a unified Cyprus, Cyprus has changed its stance, embracing cooperation with Turkish side of the island as well as regional cooperation with the neighboring states in the region. Thus, the main research question is as follows: what has prompted Cyprus to shift its geocultural stance from a communal, helleno-centric to a pan-Cypriotic identity? To answer this question, it is hypothesized that joining the EU with its Copenhagen requirements such as respect for and protection of minorities led the Cypriot government to adopt a geocultural strategy promoting the pan-Cypriot identity. Geocultural theory, drawn on Hannerz's geocultural theory, was used as the theoretical framework and a qualitative research methodology was deemed appropriate which was carried out by analyzing and assessing official documents, Cypriot policies and EU documents. In the next section, the research literature and the theoretical framework will be reviewed and presented respectively. Then, historical developments in Cyprus before and after the EU membership and discovery of gas reserves in the Mediterranean Sea within the geocultural perspective will be analyzed and finally the concluding remarks will be made.

1. Literature Review

The Cyprus Problem and the geopolitical division of the island has been subject of a rich body of research. In the article "the national question, partition and geopolitics in the 21st century: the Cyprus problem, the social question and the politics of reconciliation," Nicos Trimikliniotis examines the parameters for a resolution of the Cyprus question through establishing a bizonal bicommunal federation. The author places the "Cyprus problem" within a frame connecting the old national questions in the imperialist era to current debates over ethnic divisions/conflicts. The paper concludes by searching for the potential resolution as a transitional process connecting the internal dynamics (nationalism, class, and politics) to imperial/geopolitical ones, thus empowering social and political forces within Cyprus (Trimikliniotis, 2020). In the book "Turks and Greeks of Cyprus: Psycho-political Considerations. In Cyprus and its People," Volkan investigates the psychological foundation of the Cyprus problem in the face of conflict resolution techniques to both Cypriot Turks and Cypriot Greeks. Volkan argues that life on the island does not reflect such sovereignty bestowed upon the Greek Cypriot governed republic of Cyprus. Leaning on the psychological foundations of the Cyprus issue, Volkan traces Cyprus's status back to the historical process where the Cyprus status as a nation independent of Greece was challenged (Volkan, 2021). In the article "Makarios cultural diplomacy legacy in the republic of Cyprus," Spanou explores the cultural diplomacy initiatives undertaken by the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) during Makarios presidency (1960–1977) so as to promote a nation brand focused mainly on the helleno-centric aspect of the Greek-Cypriots' cultural identity. Spanou concludes that cultural nationalism affected the cultural diplomacy where the helleno-centric cultural identity was

promoted abroad and the 'soft power' of culture was used so as to claim state recognition in the international relations (Spanou, 2019). In "social identity in a divided Cyprus," Charis Psaltis and Huseyin Cakal investigate the social psychological dynamics of social identity relating to intergroup relations between the two communities in Cyprus and relations with the so-called motherlands, Turkey and Greece. Deeply rooted in the history of the Cyprus issue itself, it is concluded identity politics and symbolisms are of significance relevance to the prospects of a solution in Cyprus (Psaltis & cakal, 2016). While most research touch upon the Cyprus question only on the basis of identity and others point to wider geopolitical shifts in the region and find Cypriot external politics as mostly reliant on such changes of geopolitical fortunes in the region, we will investigate the manner subsequent geocultural strategies have changed the conduct of foreign policy in the island. Furthermore, this paper will contribute to the ongoing research literature through bringing forth different cultural strategies Cyprus has used to influence the politics of the Mediterranean region as a whole.

2. Theoretical Framework: Geocultural Theory

Ulf Hannerz in "geocultural scenarios, reinterprets the notion of culture as frontier. Defined as borders, "more or less contested, between areas under the more or less established control of different parties culture is likened to frontier of sociology" (Hannerz, 2009: 267). Hannerz suggests taking a bird's-eye view, a macro-view toward cultural organization and cultural processes; this brings us closer to the concept of the geocultural imagination. "Geocultural" is about a "large-scale mapmaking" where the "geo" refers to the "distribution of things cultural, somehow cultural, over territories and their human populations" and the notion of a "geocultural imagination" relates to the way we think "geoculturally, about the world and its parts, and the main features of those parts" (Hannerz, 2009: 268). Such conceptualization of geoculture leads one to take different geographical entities as fluid, prone to get changed, thus denying a fixed-in- time nature for them. They are simply constructs. Thus in contrast to Huntington where cultures and civilizations were conceptualized as timeless, sharply bounded, and mostly hostile to one another (geocultural fundamentalism), the geocultural mapmaking involves certain identifiable geocultural entrepreneurship which can be open to critique and become a contested construct (Hannerz, 2009). The resources for geocultural mapmaking is as diverse as transnational business conglomerates, NGOs, diasporas, and the media, capable of affecting the conduct of both domestic politics as well as beyond the nation-states' borders. The geo, according to Hannerz, can be understood in terms of flows and borders. While the latter comprises "sites of difference, of discontinuity in cultural distributions," the former involves "diffusion, redistributions, passages of culture" in space, including across borders (Hannerz, 2009: 273). Furthermore, the geocultural scenarios not only represent a certain number of texts but significant components in a transnational collective consciousness— a set of representations of the world— which are circulated, received and debated in a world-wide web of social relationships, thus turning them to cultural artifacts. In other words, the geocultural imagination is seen as organized through communities and networks, a "cultural apparatus" (Hannerz, 2009: 276). Thus, the geocultural theory we will use in this paper has the following components according to the Table1.

Table 1. Theoretical framework: inputs, outputs, and mechanisms

Type of inputs	Cultural artifacts
Type of players	Geo-cultural Entrepreneurship-Mostly led by state players
resources	Cultural Apparatus: communities and networks
Mechanisms	i) Cultural Borders: sites of difference, of discontinuity in cultural distributions; ii) Cultural Flow: Diffusion, Redistributions, Passages of culture

Source: (Hannerz, 2009)

Hannerz' geocultural theory offers a unique perspective as to how small island states with limited financial and human resources such as Cyprus seek to enhance their stance and status using cultural diplomacy.

3. Cyprus and Independence

Having significant strategic importance due to hosting U.S. and European forces, deep port infrastructure, being on the path of sea-lines of communication in the Mediterranean Sea as well as their proximity to the unstable North Africa and the Middle-East, Cyprus also searches for its own status as a post-colonial state (since independence from UK in 1960). Though still it does not mean that Cyprus is done with the colonialism tout court. In other words, it is impossible to draw a line between colonial era Cyprus and post-colonial one, for example. Rather post-colonial Cyprus is responding to colonial era structures —social, economic and political and UK military bases— in its attempt to move beyond colonialism. Sometimes it may even defend some colonial era practices. A good example is the continued presence of UK military bases in the island. Another one goes all the way back to the manner Cyprus was partitioned between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. Despite more than 200 hundred years Ottoman occupation of Cyprus, Greek Cypriots preserve a sense of identity and nationality, partly due to their unique status inside Empire as a special province. Thanks to the millet system —the dominant administrative unit— the Greek Orthodox Church turned to the center of political and cultural life of Greek Cypriots and the archbishop roped in both spiritual and secular leadership role (Knapp & Antoniadou, 2002: 22). The Millet system sowed the seeds for the modern-day bi-communal system of governance in Cyprus, with Greek Cypriots having their own separate educational systems, separate languages, and distinct religious cultures. On the other hand, Turkish Cypriots who saw Turkish settlers migrating to Cyprus from the mainland lacked such strong national identity (Knapp & Antoniadou, 2002). Though Cyprus gained independence, it was forbidden by the constitution to pursue the policy of enosis —reunification with Greece— and the constitutional guarantors, i.e., Britain, Greece and Turkey, each reserving their own right to take separate action to restore the status quo in case of a breach, meant that the nationalism in the form of ethnos was not possible. There are however two unique features of Cypriotic nationalism and republicanism as it is shown in Table2.

Table 2. Greek Cypriot Unique concepts of nation and republic

Nation	Ethnos (έθνος)	Ethnically defined nationalism
Republic	Dimokratia (Δημοκρατία)	Defined as the rule of the people (populism)

Source: Author(s)' adaptation of (Knapp & Antoniadou, 2002: 21)

Since the word *Ethnos* means nation in Greek language, for Greek Cypriots a nation had ethnic connotations, i.e., Hellenic roots and Greece (Knapp & Antoniadou, 2002: 21). On the other hand, in Greek the word *dimokratia* (democracy) means "republic" which points to the importance of the popular support, showing Cyprus is prone to get populist leanings. Despite such emphasis on popular support and ethnic roots to govern, the new constitution was specifically designed to separate the ethnic from national identity. On top of that, despite Greek Cypriotes making up the majority, the constitution provided Turkish Cypriot a much higher ratio of the administrative rights under the influence of pro-Turkish British policy (Jackson, 2021: 525-527). Thus, in a sense still elements of colonial divisions and powers ruling indirectly on the fate of the new nation were present. Therefore, after the independence, Greek-Cypriots were in the helm of governing the independent Cyprus and though forbidden by constitution, their main political goal was enosis. . a temporary boundary on a map drawn by a British Major in December 1963 became the Green Line, a doubled-layered partition line

cutting through the island and its capital with a 'dead zone' or 'no man's land' of variable width in between. As a result of the communal fighting between the Turks and Greek Cypriots and the division of the island, thousands of people had to move from one side of the Green line to the other and resettle there, a lengthy and painful process that took place between 1963 and 1974 (Strüver, 2020: 615). Inviting foreign delegations and showcasing island's Hellenic past is another way to inculcate the international image of Hellenic Cyprus. Even in the tumultuous years up to the Turkish invasion, touring of the Treasures of Cyprus and objects-evidences of the island's Hellenic and Orthodox origin were a common Cypriot diplomatic undertaking (Spanou, 2019: 921). Furthermore, the Helleno-centric culture was seen as an important source of international legitimation in the face of Turkish aggressive stance. This can be seen in the way Cyprus was investing to reap Greek support in the early years of independence; in fact, Greece turned to main exporting destination for local cultural production in performing arts (Spanou. 2019). Communal frictions thanks to intense emphasis on alienating the Muslim culture and communal support for the Hellenic culture led to the emergence of a popular leader among Greek Cypriots, General Grivas, who opposed the independence, aiming for enosis, attempted a coup with the support of the Greek military junta, provoking the Turkish invasion, which culminated in the military occupation of 37.2 per cent of the island, which stands the same today (Knapp & Antoniadou, 2002: 22). Post-independence, the representation of and identification with hellenocentric symbols such as goddess Aphrodite gained momentum the extent to which Cyprus is known as *nisi tis aphroditis*— island of Aphrodite (Andersson, 2022). As a consequence, a network of campaigns for tourism, archeological surveys, NGOs, governmental ministries of culture and tourism, and film industry were directed toward the Cyprus' Greek past and identity as the source of nationalism. In this, archeological survey played an important role where highlighting Greek Cypriot heritage and narrative went hand in hand with downplaying much of the Turkish heritage. Ancient Hellenic aesthetics and values were recognized as values of the new nation. Besides, small island states such as Cyprus face many hurdles for development due to their remoteness and lack of natural resources and low population. Due to physical isolation, Cyprus has embraced tourism as an important source of governmental revenue, despite the negative externalities tourism brings for local Cypriots such as high price for and availability of housing (Alola et al., 2019: 16). Highlighting the ancient Greek roots, including presenting Greek Cypriot heritage as the dawn of western civilization, was seen of great economic significance. Meanwhile, similar to the British rule era, the Greek Orthodox Church became the main cultural heritage that Cypriot governments keep emphasizing over its much smaller Muslim identity in order to build on it the national identity of Cyprus. Therefore, reclaiming the helleno-centric cultural identity of Greek-Cypriots and projecting an exclusive image of Hellenic cultural influences, origin and past has been the main pillars of Cypriot geocultural undertaking (Spanou, 2019). The imaginary mapmaking of Cyprus thus deliberately negates the Ottoman past in an effort to brand Cyprus as the island of Aphrodite and Western Civilization. Allocating funds for museums and archeological surveys which interpret the findings according to the dominant Hellenic identity and engaging in cultural exchanges with Greece and others became a geopolitical tool in order to further the cause of enosis and the return of Turkish occupied Northern territories to Cyprus. Cyprus has also a long tradition of presenting films and documentaries which echo *enosis*, unified Hellenic culture. For example, the oft-celebrated and internationally acclaimed documentary, Cyprus, the Place where God destined me to live in highlighted the Hellenic past of the island thanks to poems of the Literature Noble Prize winner George Seferis (Spanou, 2019: 927). The latter, belonging to the "Generation of 1930s" in Greece, was an important personality in the rise of the ethnocentrism and identity issues in arts. Thus, the film presented the timeless Hellenic

roots of the island, putting into spotlight the helleno-centric cultural identity of Greek-Cypriots (Spanou, 2019: 927).

4. Cyprus and the EU

Enhancing cultural ties with Greece further helped Cyprus cementing a European identity which further gave rise to Cyprus aspirations to join the EU. While Cyprus is part of the Commonwealth of Nations, the UK-Cyprus relations are complicated due to military bases in the south. The presence of the British bases is reminiscent of the colonial era with the British bases and Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs) of Akrotiri and Dhekelia, which encompass several villages of the southern part of the island, operating in a manner that exceeds their jurisdiction and "relying on decrees issued by their administrator, in accordance with the colonial model" (Stergiou, 2015: 294). While there are legal provisions (so-called mirroring legislation) issued by the United Kingdom government stipulating those laws applicable to the Cypriot population of the SBAs are 'as far as possible the same as the laws of the Republic', the Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs) have their own legal and judicial system. Despite clear provisions given by the Treaty of Establishment where it is acknowledged the right of each and every citizen of the Republic of Cyprus to access and unhindered communication on the territory of British bases where Cypriot villages lie, in reality Cypriots have been denied road access to the base areas and subject to restrictions on the use of properties located in the SBAs in the name of general security reasons (Stergiou, 2015: 294). Not only restrictions in SBAs have made life difficult for Cypriots, but also environmental and health implications of installing huge telecommunication masts in the base areas. Considering that joining NATO was impossible thanks to Turkish veto power as well as the local antipathy toward such security cooperation due to the complex issue of SBAs, joining the EU was seen as an important defense guarantor for the Cypriot state. Therefore, showcasing a European identity deeply rooted in ancient Greek civilization paved the way for enhancing status of Cyprus among Europeans and the subsequent fluctuation between Eurocentric and helleno-centric identities.

Despite Cyprus being the most heavily militarized slice of land on the face of earth which elicited more UN security resolutions than most trouble spots put together, through funding and building museums, insisting on the Christian heritage and promotion of tourism and touring of foreign diplomats around the cultural heritage of the island, Cyprus excelled in inculcating the image of a Hellenic and European Cyprus, thus paving the ground for its eventual EU membership; contrasting the border-free and supra-national EU with a nostalgic ethnically Hellenic dominant island state was to provoke an impression on the European common men and political leaders that looks and feels distinctly antique. Being a small remotely located island, technically closer to Lebanon in the Levant than any EU shores, Cyprus succeeded in influencing the wider European political scene through the promotion of decidedly Hellenic and Christian cultural heritage, putting forth a European identity, while ignoring the Turkish/Muslim heritage.

Such coherent image of Cyprus however clashes with the reality on the ground, a society deeply divided on the religious and political lines. In fact, considering ethnic and cultural heterogeneity in Cyprus, the cultural mapmaking of Cyprus as belonging to Greek Cypriots with a European cultural heritage became the main driver for the Cyprus efforts to join the EU (Hugg, 2001:1353). Moreover, joining the Non-Aligned Movement and taking side with the anti-apartheid movement were further used as putting into spotlight the Cyprus's commitment to majority rule and democracy, which were regarded as the foundations of the Cypriot argumentation vis-à-vis the Cyprus Problem (Emilianides et al., 2022: 3).

Such a move was consistent with Cypriot political machination to present abroad an image

of Cyprus belonging to Hellenic and European civilizational antiquity, and to undermine Turkish and Muslim past heritage at home, thus exacerbating the communal tensions. In fact, Cyprus orchestrated a set of cultural resources in order to gain favor among the EU public opinion and officials which can be summarized as following: i) signing multiple bilateral cultural agreements with European countries; ii) joining in international cultural forum such as UNESCO and the Council of Europe; iii) inviting European delegations to different cultural venues in Cyprus with the active participation of Greek Cypriots; iv) funding films and documentaries which promote Hellenic culture of Cyprus, and funding Greek Cypriot delegations in European cultural events such as Venice Biennale; v) the world touring of the archaeological exhibition such as Treasures of Cyprus; vi) participation in the non-alignment movement as a token for peaceful image of Cyprus.

In fact, Cyprus actively sought to engage the Council of Europe to produce report on the cultural heritage sites on the Turkish occupied northern territories as a means to legitimize its claim to the region by exposing the neglect on preserving the Greek heritage sites. For example, the 1989 Council of Europe investigation reported that "At Paphos, which is under (Greek) Government control, the main mosque has been entirely erased and the Turkish Cypriot graves have been damaged. In the Turkish held area, many Greek Orthodox Church windows have been smashed, Greek Cypriot graves have been damaged and wall paintings in the Limnia and Engomi village churches have been disfigured" (Barthel-Bouchier, 2010:37, my emphasis). Though Council of Europe investigation reports mostly painted a mixed picture exposing also the cultural neglect by the Greek Cypriots, the Republic of Cyprus highlighted the neglect of Turkish authorities to maintain heritage sites and reported massively on missing and stolen items in the Turkish controlled area as evidence to support its own rights on the northern territory as the legitimate successor of the ancient Hellenic civilization.

5. EU Membership and Post-EU Geocultural Strategy

The Buffer Zone separating the Greek from Turkish culture is felt as "temporary" for the Greek Cypriots, market by easily removable barbed wire, on the Turkish side, it felt like "permanent" marked by "a nondescript concrete wall" as commented by the social anthropologist Yiannis Papadakis (Pellapaisiotis, 2020: 136).

5-1. Eurocentric, helleno-centric and Cyprio-centric Identities

After joining the EU, there is a clear turn to safeguard helleno-centric identity with the new Cyprio-centric and Eurocentric identities. Cyprio-centric identity here refers to a pan-Cypriot identity, encompassing both Turkish and Hellenic culture in contrast with helleno-centric identity which only gives reference to the Greek culture. Naturally, Eurocentric identity as a pan-European, is much more in line with Cyprio-centric identity the extent to which the borderline between the two is mostly blurred. While in the past, the emphasis was rather on the Hellenic culture and its promotion in order to gain in economic and geopolitical fronts, after joining the EU Cyprus has brought attention to rather pan-Cypriotic identity as well as Eurocentric identity. Though the identity bi-pole are not always in harmony and there are times that the Eurocentric identity relapse to the more familiar helleno-centric approach which once dominated Cyprus's geocultural strategy. Such a turn in identity was evident in the spring of 2003 when specific points of the military zone were opened allowing for passage across the buffer zone, and the most symbolic of them was the Ledra Palace check point in Nicosia (Pellapaisiotis, 2020: 136).

5-2. Copenhagen Criteria and Respect for Minorities

In order to join the EU Cyprus needed to comply with 'The Copenhagen Criteria'. The latter are the membership criteria that must be satisfied by a country that aspires to become a member of the European Union prior to accession. The mentioned criteria, adopted at the Copenhagen European Council in 1993, were applied for Cyprus and other non-EU European countries in the Eastern Europe before joining the EU, as part of the EU's Enlargement process. Accordingly, in order to become a member of the European Union the candidate county must have achieved: i) Stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities; ii) The existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union; iii) The ability to take on the obligations of membership including adherence to the aims of political, economic & monetary union (Rezler, 2010: 392).

Thus, guaranteeing human rights and respect for and protection of minorities in the case of Cyprus meant that Cyprus had to downplay its anti-Turkish sentiments prevalent among Greek Cypriot and choose a Cypriotic identity.

5-3. Geocultural Strategy of Cyprus Post-EU Membership

With the EU membership bringing hope in the island, Leaps of Faith was the most successful art event that brought the imaginary of buffer zone closer to a symbolic bridge in the divided city of Nicosia. Supported by the participation of celebrated international artists, works were deliberately located in public spaces or typical buildings around Nicosia (Pellapaisiotis, 2020).

After joining the EU, the mission of preservation, maintaining and management of cultural heritages in both sides of the UN buffer Zone became an important geocultural means to claim Cyprus as a cultural bridge in the EU between the Muslim and Christian world. Thus, developing a network of protection of cultural heritage beyond the Green Line of UN buffer zone has been pursued by Greek Cypriots. The Nicosia Master Plan (NMP) and The Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage (TCCH) are two important Cyprio-centric initiatives. The NMP has its roots in the aftermath of the Turkish invasion of the island in 1978-9; the idea was to establish a close cooperation between the two sides of the divided city, Nicosia, in order to address the lack of infrastructures which led to the initial phase of the NMP with preparation of a common physical master plan so as to improve the existing and future living conditions of all the inhabitants of Nicosia. Cypriot government succeeded in 1981 to get the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) endorsed the plan, thus the internationalization of the Cyprus Problem. With the European turn of Cypriot politics, The NMP expanded and upgraded in 2003 under the New Vision Project by working toward reverting trends of social disintegration and building commonly accepted institutions as a token for communal harmony (Nicosia Master Plan, 2023). Thus, the NMP is now directed toward the preservation of immovable heritage and sustainability studies of places of historical heritage such as the unique walled city of Famagusta and to promote the image of communal harmony along the UN buffer zone, presenting a European endeavor for peace in the island (Goryonuva & Wei, 2021: 2). After reaching an agreement with the Turkish-Cypriot side, Cyprus set up the Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage (TCCH) in March 2008; TCCH focuses not only on cross-border preservation and management of cultural heritage, but on doing so with the intention of fostering social and diplomatic relations between the locals of the island as a whole is another type of such dense Cyprio-centric admixed with Eurocentric cultural network which seeks to promote an image of Cyprus building on communal harmony and tirelessly working for religious coherence. Furthermore, from 2009 TCCH was successful in absorbing fund from both the EU as well as UNDP-Partnership for the Future in carrying out, among others, the compilation of list of cultural

heritage sites, the preparation of inventory charts, including historical and topographical details, photographs and architectural sketches for each monument, and technical assessments, and analysis of restoration costs (Tuncay, 2016).

The trend toward claiming the Cyprio-centric identity is further underpinned by forming Technical Committees under the auspices of the United Nations and UNDP and supported by the EU which funds such projects. In fact, harking back to the initial helleno-centric project in the 70s, joining in international cultural forums has now become an important tool to promote the multicultural identity of Cyprus and its role in the EU as a bridge between the East and the West.

Greek Cypriots have initiated and shaped bi-communal Technical Committees in areas such as Crime and Criminal Matters, Culture, Humanitarian Affairs, Health, Environment, and Education. However, the most active participation of the Republic of Cyprus has been on the cultural and educational fronts, underlining the geocultural leanings of the Cypriot foreign policy. Thus projects such as Angels of Peace —a project aiming at social inclusion— and in Culture we Trust —exchange of artworks and cultural cooperation— have implemented in view of showcasing an image of cooperation and multicultural identity of Cyprus.

Cyprus President, Nicos Anastasiades, in the ceremonial exchange of artifacts, emphasized the important work and initiatives of the Technical Committee on Culture in organizing "numerous joint cultural events, such as, amongst others, at Othello's Tower and the ancient theatre of Salamis in Famagusta and at Pallas theatre and Casteliotissa in Nicosia". Technical committee on Culture achieved a milestone in the communal cooperation through the return of 219 works of art by Greek Cypriot and Greek artists found in Famagusta and the handing over of audio and visual recordings of Turkish Cypriot artists that exist in the archives of the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation " (In culture we trust, 2020).

Another important geocultural venue is organizing conferences and festivals in order to propagate an image of multicultural and harmonious Cyprus, signaling openness to collaboration with Muslim world in the neighborhood and becoming the voice of the Muslims in the region at the EU high-tables. The bi-communal Technical Committee on Education established the annual "Imagine" project in 2019 with the goal of increasing contact and collaboration among the communities in Cyprus. It also provides a platform for further interaction between students and teachers and organizes educational walks across the walled city of Nicosia and study visits to locations of historical, cultural, environmental and other significance around the island (Imagine Project receives, 2023). Imagine Project is further supported by the European Commission and has important Cyprio-centric identity associated with it.

A shift in the way festivals have been organized from helleno-centric to Cyprio-centric and Eurocentric identity is also identifiable. During the 70s, state festivals were focused mostly on enosis and Hellenic roots, with festivals such as Week of Ancient Greek Theatre, held in restored ancient theatre of Salamina or the Limassol International Festival with themes such as cultural heritage in dance and music and Greek dance, music and theatre groups (Spanou, 2020: 13). Interestingly, Limassol festival took several turns from helleno-centric to Cyprio-centric to Cosmopolitan identity when the left-wing and communist came to power (Spanou, 2020). However, with the increasing importance of the EU and in parallel with the processes of accession, crystalized through Copenhagen criteria with its emphasis on the protection of rights of minorities (Dudley, 2020), Cypriot governments encouraged a Cyprio-centric identity aligned within the broader European identity which resulted in a Eurocentric identity (see Table3).

Table 3. Cultural festivals in the Republic of Cyprus (1974–2022).

	Festival start date	National identity
Limassol international Festival	1976-1989	helleno-centric/ Cyprio-centric/ Cosmopolitan
Nicosia Festival	1976-2010	helleno-centric
Larnaca Festival	1988-	Cyprio-centric
Larnaka Classical Music Festival	1988-	Euro-centric/ Cyprio-centric
Cultural September	1991-1992	helleno-centric
Kypria	1993-	Helleno-centric/Euro-centric
European Festival of Contemporary Dance	1997-	Euro-centric
Paphos Aphrodite Festival	1999-	Euro-centric/ Cyprio-centric
Pharos Music Festival	2001-	Euro-centric
Horizons	2001-2003	Euro-centric
International Festival of Documentaries and Animation	2002-	Euro-centric/ Cyprio-centric
Dance Platform	2002-	Euro-centric/Cyprio-centric
Festival of Alternative and Underground Cinema	2002-	Euro-centric
X-perimental Festival	2002-2009	Euro-centric
the Cyprus International Film Festival (CYIFF)	2006-	Euro-centric/ Cyprio-centric/helleno-centric
Cyprus International Short Film Festival	2008-	Euro-centric/Cyprio-centric

Source: Author(s)'s adaptation of the information on festival in (Spanou, 2020: 15).

In the same vain, post-EU membership the Cyprus International Film Festival (CYIFF), funded and sponsored by deputy ministry of culture, gives prominence to Greek connection with sui generis category "Nostimon Imar" dedicated to expatriate directors of Greek origin and the GA Golden Aphrodite as the main prize, alluding to the island's exclusive Hellenic past (Cyprus film festival, 2023). In Greek, Nostimon derives from neomai (νέομαι) [to come back; return] and literally means homecoming. Thus, *nostimon imar* means homecoming day, bringing elements of Hellenocentric identity and enosis. However, there is also a new-found impetus in the Cypriotic identity through the promotion of films that touches upon the division of the island and links the segregation of families and cultures with the partition of the island. For example, the acclaimed Cypriot film, Smuggling Hendrix (2018), raises the Cyprus issue and brings forth the illegality of the crossing the UN buffer zone, thus highlighting the united fate of the island and the common culture and identity of the people of Cyprus (Evangelou, 2023: 138).

5-4. Cypriotic Identity and Gas Discovery in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea

Through highlighting its Cyprio-centric and Eurocentric identity, Cyprus has also enhanced its status as a bridge between the East and the West, the Christian world and the Muslim world. In fact, the shift away from helleno-centric identity was reinforced after the discovery of massive gas reserves in the South Eastern Mediterranean Sea. The Cypriot government confronted with debt crisis and burdened with austerity measures, pressed on its Eurocentric identity and its enhanced role as the bridge between the Turkish and Muslim world and the Greek and European World.

Therefore, Cyprus has doubled down on its policy of good neighborly relations in face of a relentless Turkey which claims part of the discovered gas reserves in the waters of Cyprus for Turkish Cypriots. However, the discovery of natural resources in the Mediterranean Sea does not automatically translate into an incentive for a conciliatory relation with Turkey and countries in the South Eastern Mediterranean shores. In fact, the discovery of the gas reserves worsened the already tensed relation between Turkey and Greece (Stratakis & Pelagidis, 2020: 15-16). Thus, this new found Euro-centric identity and its usage as a vehicle for a regional reconciliation was what made Cyprus choose a conciliatory approach to Muslim countries in the South Eastern Mediterranean Sea. The fact that Eurocentric identity is seen as

compatible with a Cyprio-centric (or pan-Cypriotic) identity, worked in favor of downplaying the once prevailing helleno-centric identity and embracing the Eurocentric identity and possible reunification of the island. Thus, the new gas discovery only acted as a catalyst for the promotion of Eurocentric identity by the Cypriot government.

Furthermore, small island states are much more open to trade due to their limited natural resources and small size and low population. In the case of Cyprus, trade with Africa figures prominently in its extra-EU relations, even beating former colonial power, France (see Figure1).
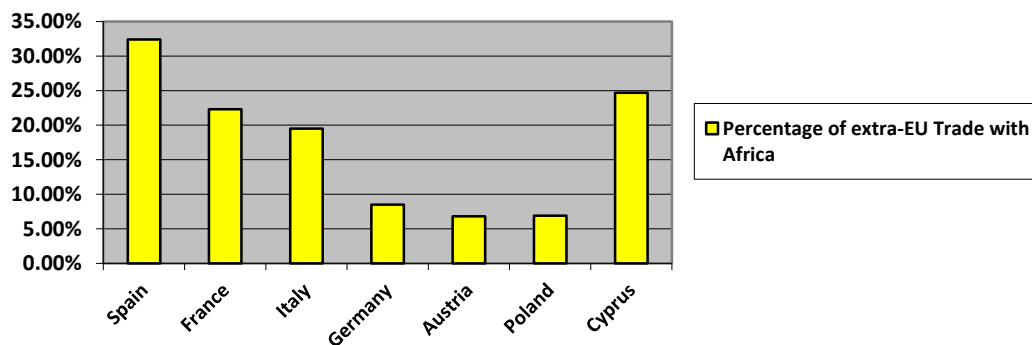

Figure 1. Percentage of Trade Volume by different EU members with African continent of overall Extra-EU Trade in 2021.
Source: Author's calculation based on (Archive:Africa-EU, 2023)

In fact, Cyprus has highlighted its multicultural aspect by participating in European and international festivals, organizing exhibitions dedicated to postmodern art and multicultural and pluralism themed exhibitions on the rise. It is important to note though that in the 50s and 60s to Cypriot artists modernity meant idolizing "Cypriot peasantry and their land as living testimonies to the island's Hellenic cultural heritage" and that Cypriot modernists had little to do with the traditions of European modernity, but instead related to a desire to connect with and search for Greekness and Hellenic roots (Stylianou & Philippou, 2018: 347). Furthermore, the Cyprus Museum that was funded by the British colonial rule was a British attempt to enhance their legitimacy by appropriating the Hellenic past as the cornerstone of Western civilization. However, with the turn of Eurocentric and Cyprio-centric identities the museums became centers of co-existing Western and Hellenic civilizations, blurring any distinction between the two. Such a turn of Eurocentric identity is evident in the trend of nominating sites that are not exclusively of Hellenic origin. In fact, one can observe a multicultural shift in the way Cyprus is using the UNESCO world heritage sites nomination to carry forward its pan-Cypriot policy as it is shown in Table4.

While there are only three world heritage sites in Cyprus —Paphos (1980), Painted Churches in the Troodos Region (1985, 2001), and Choirokoitia (1998)— all connected to either the Orthodox Church or Hellenic cultural heritage, the newest addition to the tentative list is of Islamic-Ottoman era with strong Turkish Cypriot association. Besides, the addition of natural sites, which have unifying features, to the tentative list seems to suggest an emphasis on the Cyprio-centric identity.

Table 4. List of world heritage sites and the sites on the Tentative List

World Heritage Sites	Cultural/natural Description	Tentative List	Cultural/natural Description
Paphos-1980	Hellenic and pre-Hellenic era	Church of Panayia Chrysokourdaliotissa-2002	Orthodox Church
Painted Churches in the Troodos Region (1985, 2001)	Byzantine and post-Byzantine era- Orthodox Church Heritage	The rural settlement of Fikardou-2002	Greek Cypriot Heritage
Choirokoitia (1998)	prehistoric sites in the eastern Mediterranean-pre-Hellenic era	Mathiatis South-2002	Nature
		Kionia-2002	Nature
		Khandria-2002	Nature
		Troodos, Mt. Olympus-2002	Nature/Hellenic heritage
		Malounta Bridge-2002	Nature
		Klirou Bridge-2002	Nature
		Agioi Varnavas and Ilarion at Peristerona (Five-domed churches)-2004	Orthodox Church
		Church of Panagia Aggeloktisti-2015	Orthodox Church
		Hala Sultan Tekke and the Larnaka Salt Lake Complex-2016	Islamic-Ottoman Heritage-Turkish Cypriot Heritage

Source: (Cyprus - UNESCO World Heritage, 2023).

Thus, showcasing Cyprio-centric identity further helps building a case for Cyprus to become the connecting hub, whether electricity grid or gas pipeline, between the Middle East and Levant and the EU market. In fact, Cyprus has been continuously building up on its role as a bridge between the East and West as Cyprus' Ambassador Zenon (2017) emphasized the positive role that the Republic of Cyprus plays in the region by highlighting the Republic of Cyprus's financial assistance to Jordan and Lebanon as a gesture of solidarity and covering partly the disproportionate burden of the refugee and migrant crisis (Pedi & Kouskouvelis, 2019: 157). An evidence of the success of Cypriot diplomacy can be found in words of King Abdullah II of Jordan (2016) when he claimed that Jodan "has a strong ally in Cyprus … Cyprus has supported the Kingdom and helped deliver "Jordan's voice" to the European Union, [...] especially regarding its request to simplify the EU rules of origin" (Pedi & Kouskouvelis, 2019: 162).

Despite the dominance of Cypriocentric and Eurocentric identity, still helleno-centric identity pops up here and there, and honoring General Grivas has in fact become its symbol. In 2022 Cypriot Government, was accused of falsification of history itself and historical events by allocating funds to build a museum to honor General Grivas (Peoples Dispatch, 2022: 1). General Grivas formed the notorious Greek-Cypriot paramilitary organization EOKA which launched a subversive campaign in the islands by attacking Turkish Cypriots, communists, and republican groups and was involved in the killing of Turkish Cypriots during the violent ethnic conflicts in Cyprus in 1964 and later in the 1970s (Peoples Dispatch, 2022: 1). Therefore, celebrating general Grivas as the man of peace and culture, technically putting to oblivion the political violence and the deaths of dozens of progressive innocent people by Grivas is part and parcel of such demarche.

Conclusion

While highly dynamic in its nature, the politics in Cyprus and the Cyprus problem were the main focus of this paper. The main research question touched on factors contributing to a clear shift in Cypriot political scene from a geocultural strategy from helleno-centric to a pan-

Cypriotic stance. The main hypothesis states that joining the EU with its Copenhagen requirements such as respect for and protection of minorities led the Cypriot government to adopt a geocultural strategy promoting the pan-Cypriot identity. The results indicate that joining the EU with the Copenhagen requirements of respect for minorities provided the Cypriot government with incentive to shift away from promoting exclusively Hellenic past and heritage for the tourism purposes as well as foreign policy for the united Cyprus toward a more conciliatory approach to the Turkish north and a change of geocultural strategy. After joining the EU, the claim to a pan-Cypriotic identity is further underpinned by EU funds available to Cyprus for the formation and support of Technical Committees under the auspices of the United Nations and UNDP. The protection and preservation of heritage and embracing a European identity with values such as multiculturalism were used to project Cyprus as a bridge between the East and the West. Results further show a harmonious identity construct of Pan-Cypriotic and Eurocentric identities which limits the previous communal helleno-centric identity. Can convergence and coexistence between Greeks and Turkish Cypriots be the result of the democratic constitution and the values of the republic? Though the new constitution was specifically designed to separate the ethnic from national identity, there is an inherent connection between the concept of ethnicity and notion of nation state and republic for Greek Cypriots. The nation is expressed as the word *Ethnos* in Greek language, resulting in a peculiar situation where a nation has ethnic connotations for Greek Cypriots, i.e. Hellenic roots and Greece. Even the concept of republic, expressed in Greek word *dimokratia* (democracy), has the notion of rule of the people where the latter is again conceptualized along ethnic lines. Due to such emphasis on ethnicity (being Greek) and Hellenic ancestry and ethno-popular basis for the government, such an abrupt shift away from helleno-centric identity couldn't be explained on the notions of republican values and the constitution. The general public in Cyprus has always attached to their Hellenic roots and this embedded Hellenic culture shows itself in the Hellenocentric identity. In fact, such ethno-popular leanings of the Greek Cypriots intensified the hostility and apparent incompatibility between Greek and Turkish identities. Thus, the role of EU and its requirements for membership based on a conciliatory and pan-European identity made an important impact in the shift toward a Eurocentric identity. The emphasis on Eurocentric identity is further underpinned by the discovery of gas reserve in the Mediterranean Sea and the possible role of Cyprus as a bridge between the Middle East and the EU. Though the discovery of natural resources in the Mediterranean Sea could worsen the relationship between Cyprus and Turkey and other Muslim countries in the region, the Eurocentric identity was essential to direct Cyprus toward a reconciliatory path with Turkey and the Muslim world.

The compatibility of Eurocentric identity with the Cyprio-centric (or pan-Cypriotic) identity and its role as a possible reunification vehicle for the island induced the Cypriot government to promote a pan-Cypriotic Cultural heritage, including the Turkish and Muslim one.

Projecting communal harmony, religious tolerance and multiculturalism abroad and use of Cyprus' Islamic heritage were the main undertakings of the Cypriot government as part of its geocultural endeavor. While the current world heritage sites in Cyprus are exclusively connected to either the Orthodox Church or Hellenic cultural heritage, the newest addition to the tentative list is of Islamic-Ottoman era with a strong Turkish Cypriot association. In fact, for the first time ever Cypriot government nominated a Muslim site, i.e. Hala Sultan Tekke and the Larnaka Salt Lake Complex on the Tentative List 2016 for inclusion in the world heritage sites. Despite EU funds and support and financial incentives with regard to the gas reserves in the Mediterranean Sea, this contribution also highlights the precarious nature of such Eurocentric identity for it is prone to abrupt relapse to more familiar and identifiable Hellenic culture. Such relapse to the old good days of celebratory Hellenic identity is for the

most part responsible for the continued hostility of part of the Cyprus population for a political compromise over the recognition of the Turkish and Muslim identity in the future unified Cyprus.

Disclosure statement
The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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