

REGIONAL CONFLICT, EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN SECURITY AND CYPRUS¹

- **The current crisis has enhanced Cyprus’s strategic importance.** The regional upheaval that began with the war in Gaza, then expanded to Lebanon, Iran and the Gulf has made Cyprus even more strategically important.
- **The attack on one of the British bases in Cyprus has underlined the island’s proximity to regional conflict.** The targeting of the Akrotiri base with an unmanned combat aerial vehicle confirmed that Cyprus can no longer be viewed as being beyond the regional hostilities.
- **A new de facto security network is emerging in the eastern Mediterranean.** The United States (U.S.) and Israel, along with the United Kingdom (UK) which is increasingly allowing the use of its two Sovereign Base Areas in Cyprus in conflict, are taking advantage of the island’s location as an “unsinkable aircraft carrier” in the eastern Mediterranean. Similarly, Greece, which has a special military relationship with the Greek Cypriots, and France, which has access to a Cypriot base, are deepening their own security engagement with Cyprus, together with a number of other European Union (EU) countries. These engagements with the internationally recognized “Republic of Cyprus”, controlled by Greek Cypriots in the southern two thirds of the island, are drawing the island into an evolving regional security system parallel to NATO.
- **The growing U.S. security relationship with Cyprus.** The U.S. military involvement in Cyprus has its origins in the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act adopted by the U.S. Senate in 2019. The legal basis provided for U.S. engagement was then utilized by successive U.S. administrations to establish and expand a security relationship with the Greek Cypriots as well as cooperative efforts with other countries in a partnership with southern Cyprus.
- **The Greek Cypriots are moving closer to the Western security architecture.** The Greek Cypriot president Nikos Christodoulides has shown an eagerness to place the part of Cyprus he controls at the heart of the emerging security system. This strategy is clearly designed to underline the exclusion of the Turkish Cypriots from decisions relating to the future of the island while strengthening international backing against Turkey, clearly demonstrated during the recent informal EU summit in Cyprus. The decision to emphasize the long-forgotten mutual defence article of the EU Charter at the summit, along with the subsequent meeting with Arab leaders from the eastern Mediterranean was significant.

¹ This paper was prepared by the TEPAV Cyprus Working Group.

- **The main risk is the emergence of a new security asymmetry.** The integration of the Greek Cypriots in the south of the island into the emerging eastern Mediterranean security system while effectively excluding the Turkish Cypriots in the north, much like what happened during Cyprus's accession to the EU in 2004, will inevitably deepen the existing security imbalance on the island. Turkey has responded to the military build up in the south by unilaterally strengthening its defence posture in the north.
- **The security of the island should be addressed comprehensively.** It is important to recognize that lasting security can only be achieved through a framework that covers the whole of Cyprus. Turkey has a guarantor status under the 1959 Agreements leading to the creation of the Republic of Cyprus in 1960 which applies not only to the north but to the entire island. The most effective way to address this issue would be to revive the negotiations between the two Cypriot sides within the framework of the UN Secretary-General's initiative as well as the five-party talks which were organized in 2025 also involving Turkey, Greece and the UK.
- **A window of opportunity is opening on the economic front.** The role of a regional economic hub, which previously shifted from Beirut to the Gulf could move to Cyprus, especially if there is a solution to the long-running issue of Cyprus. For both sides of the island, developing a common position will be essential to benefit from this emerging economic environment. In this context, the prolonged impasse on the island should no longer be treated as a frozen status quo, but as an issue that requires timely and pragmatic resolution. At the same time, the visible facts on the ground in the TRNC should not be dismissed. Turkish Cypriots need to become more visible and included in any future economic vision for the island, so that Cyprus can fully benefit from its renewed strategic and economic relevance.