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And Now? Cyprus' failed talks and Turkey-North Cyprus relations.

Cyprus' reunification talks have collapsed again. But this time, Cyprus' dysfunctional and consolidated balances could enter a phase of unknown changes, especially looking at relations between Turkey and the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" ("TRNC"). Scheduled gas drillings in Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) can bolster inter-Cypriot and regional tensions. As a matter of fact, the Eastern Mediterranean has become a fundamental sub-region for local and international players: notwithstanding the frozen conflict, Cyprus is a beacon of stability so far, in a highly-unstable environment.

Guided by two pro-reunification leaders, Nicos Anastasiades and Mustafa Akinçi, Cypriots made remarkable efforts to achieve a federal solution. For the first time, Greek-Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots exchanged territorial maps last January, at Crans-Montana, dealing directly with sensitive issues as territory, property and refugees.

But security and guarantees remain a huge obstacle to reunification attempts: today, this is still more evident than before. Two multilateral conferences, rallying Cyprus' status quo guarantor states (Greece, Turkey and United Kingdom) were convened (January and June 2017). Turkey refuses to clearly engage not only on troops' withdrawal from North Cyprus, but also regarding the end of intervention rights, established by the Treaty of Guarantee (Zurich-London, 1959). Greece claims for the abolition of the Treaty and the total withdrawal of foreign troops from the island, a request supported by the European Union, who attended Crans-Montana conference and talks as observer.

Beyond the enduring "state of art" in Cyprus, there's a subtle, but potentially game-changer trend: the relations between the self-proclaimed TRNC and Turkey live a challenging moment, as some signals put in evidence: the security field and the religious one are the most delicate dimensions in this unequal relationship.

After the failed coup against president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in July 2016, Ankara's crackdown on suspected putschists and Fetullah Gülen's wire sympathizers involved also the "TRNC". Since the beginning, the Turkish Cypriot "government" declared its willingness to repress Gülenist activities on the territory.

According to multiple media reports, several top-rank officers who serve/served in "TRNC" were arrested and about 200 policemen are under investigation in North Cyprus (both Turkish and Turkish-Cypriots), due to alleged ties with Gülen's network. On July 2017, North Cyprus' Mufti, Talip Atalay, was arrested, for three days, while he was in Diyarbakir, Turkey, in the framework of a post-attempted coup police operation.

In North Cyprus, only 41% of allowed voters went at the polls on the occasion of Turkey's presidential referendum to give stronger powers to the president: among them, 56% voted against the constitutional project.

Now that Cyprus's federal chances are far and Turkey has been opting for a "sovereign democracy path", out of EU membership aspirations, Turkey-"TRNC" relations enter a sensitive phase. North Cyprus depends from Turkey for economy and security; but Turkish Cypriots are increasingly concerned about Cypriot culture and identity's protection.

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