



**The Cypriot Buffer zone: an obstacle or an
opportunity for inter-community
cooperation in Cyprus?**



MEDITERRANEAN SEA



CYPRUS

Occupied Territory

Republic of Cyprus

UN Buffer Zone

Sovereign Base Area

I. The Green Line: a historical, geographical and cultural barrier to intercommunal cooperation in Cyprus





A. The green line: a physical, tangible separation line between two communities ?

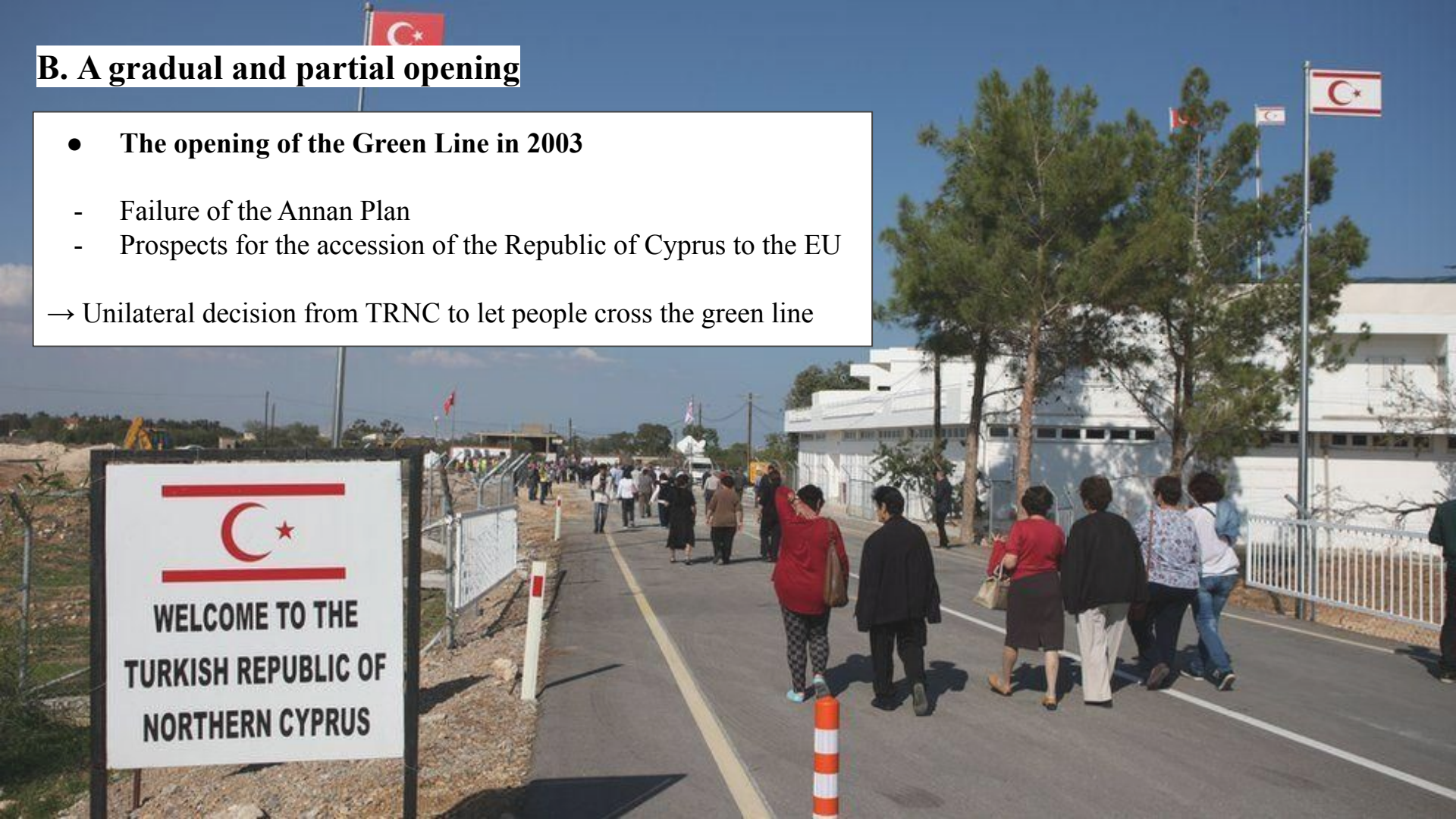
- Greek and Turk Cypriots still live on different(iated) sides of the island.
- They can only cross the buffer zone at a few **closely monitored** checkpoints.
- The tight partition witnessed in the field makes it difficult not to consider the green line as a proper border.



B. A gradual and partial opening

- The opening of the Green Line in 2003
 - Failure of the Annan Plan
 - Prospects for the accession of the Republic of Cyprus to the EU

→ Unilateral decision from TRNC to let people cross the green line





- **A slow debordering process since 2003**
 - popularity of the opening policy among the the Cypriot population
 - EU influence to soften the physical border (eg. visa policy)
 - Progressive opening of different checkpoints (9 today)
 - Not everyone is allowed to cross (Turkish Cypriots who arrived in the north after 1974 are not allowed to use the checkpoints)

= a slow and partial opening but real progress for Cypriots

- **A sudden rebordering with the covid crisis**

- Closure of checkpoints for the first time since 2003 and end of free movement
- Demonstrations of the Cypriot population that has integrated the debordering process
- Gradual reopening in 2021 but free movement remains disrupted



Cypriot demonstrators against the closure of checkpoints in Nicosia (AFP Photo)



Clashes between protesters and police at closed checkpoints in Nicosia (in-cyprus.phelenews.com)

C. Limited exchanges in practice

What are the main reasons why Turkish and Greek Cypriots do not interact with each other ?

- Spatial segregation between people and institutions
- Logistical and financial cost in order to cross the border
- Lack of intercommunity space for socialisation
- Linguistic and psychological barrier
- Consequence of an ongoing conflict
- Rejection of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus by Greek Cyprus
- Belonging to the EU for Greeks but not for Turks



Turkish and Greek Cypriots embrace during a peace demonstration (CyprusMail)

“MOVING BEYOND SOLILOQUY”

A study conducted by Cihan Dizdaroğlu

Sample : 250 Greek Cypriot and 250 Turkish Cypriot (18-35 years old)

Figure 8
Frequency of Crossing to the Other Side

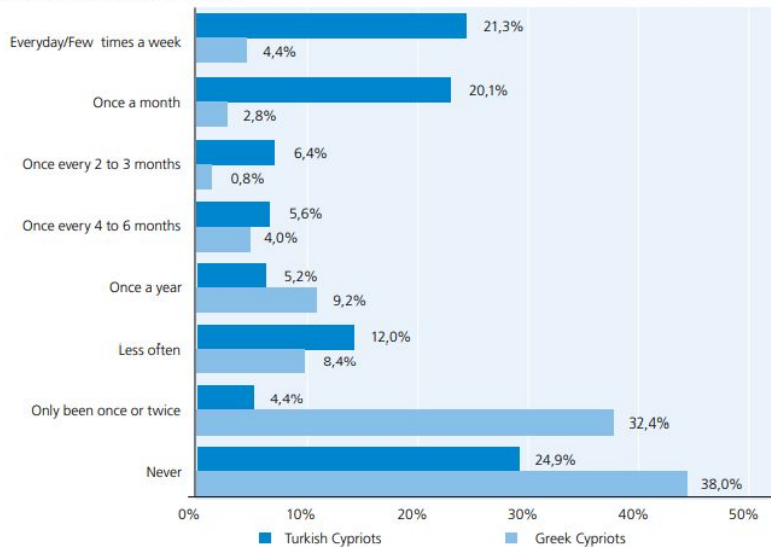
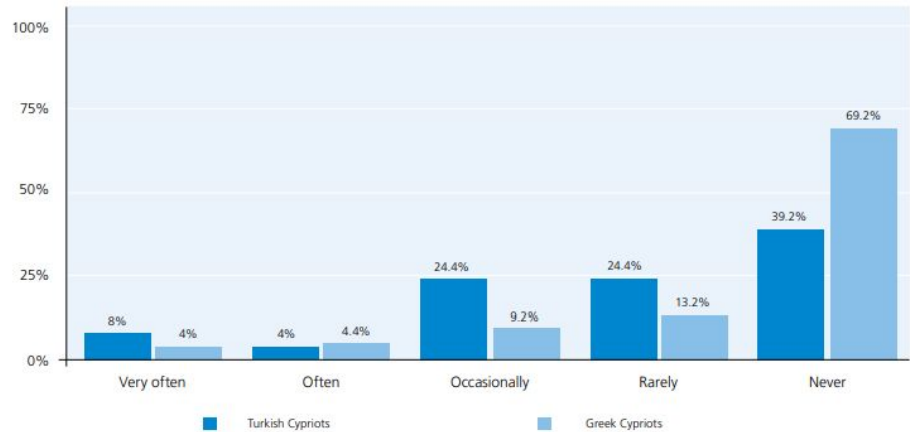


Figure 14
Frequency of Contact with Other Community



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Figure 9

Reasons for Crossing the Check-Points

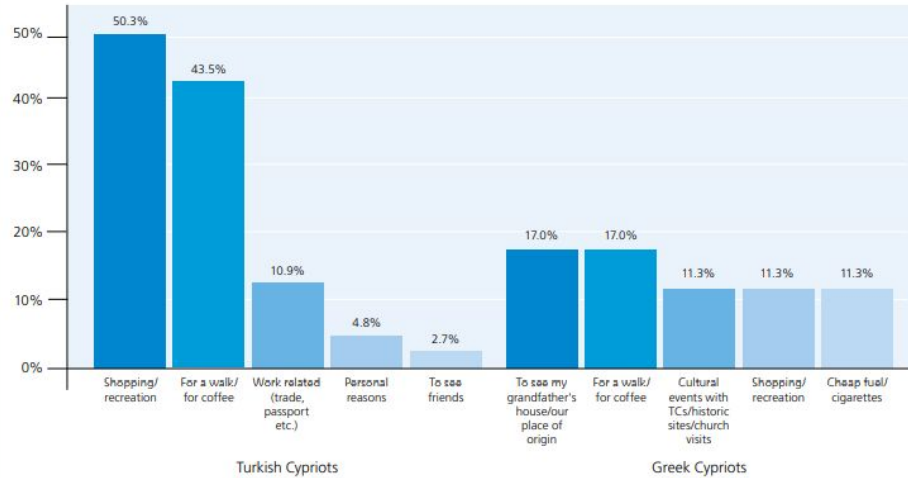
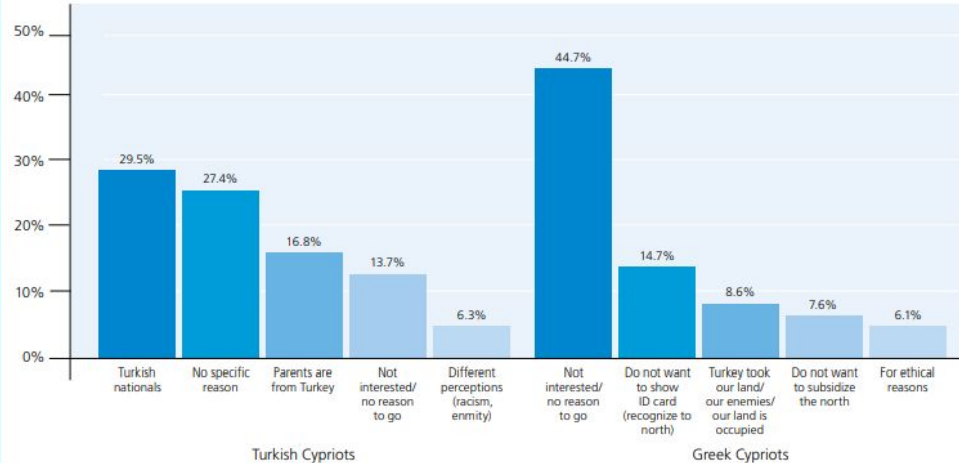


Figure 10

Reasons for NOT Crossing the Check-Points



II. The buffer zone as an opportunity for contact

A. *A NEUTRAL SPACE*

- Demilitarized zone
- United Nations mandate (UNFICYP) to control respect of the ceasefire and to administer this part of land
- A neutral line : allow to overcome the ideological barrier of not recognizing the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus by showing ID to the authorities of the North



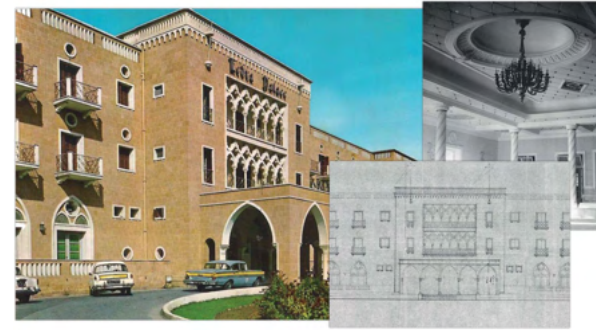
Photo taken at an event between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots in the buffer zone (Home for Cooperation website)

B. Since 1989, the mobilisation of civil society within the buffer zone:

The Ledra palace as a historic location for inter-community dialogue

Special authorisations issued by the authorities in the north and south of the island = "**windows of opportunity**" allowing **Cypriot civil society** set up inter-communal discussion groups within the buffer zone

Most of the meetings took place in the buffer zone of Nicosia, in the conference room of the **Ledra Palace**. Indeed, this former luxury hotel fell within the limits of the buffer zone in 1974 and has since been **under the control of the United Nations** (UNFICYP), which made it its **headquarters** from 1974 to 2019.



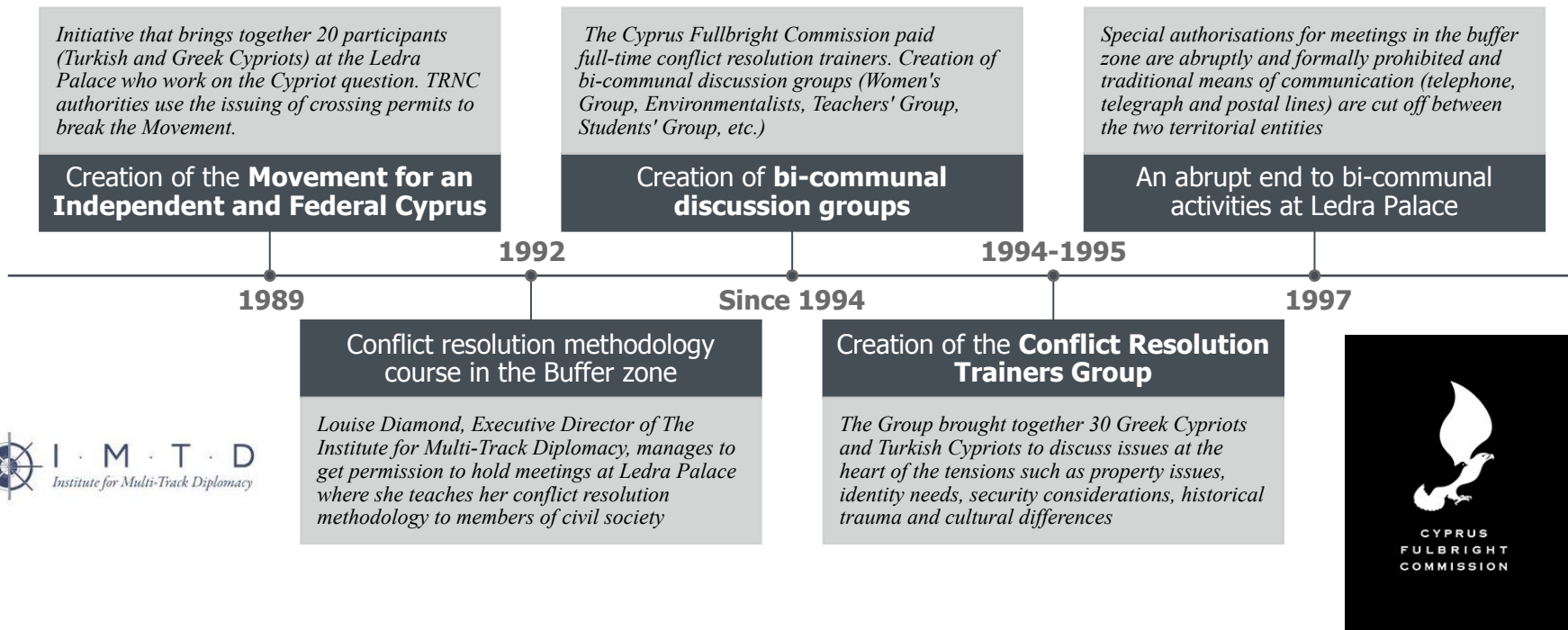
The Ledra Palace as a luxury hotel in the 1960s



Ledra Palace as the United Nations headquarters

Early Cypriot civil society peace activities held at Ledra Palace

According to Gilles Bertrand, non-state actions in favour of inter-community rapprochement in Ledra Palace involved a few thousand people from 1989 to 1997 (for an island of over 845 000 inhabitants)



C. The Home for Cooperation

Case Study

- **Community centre** located in the middle of the dividing lines, in Nicosia
- **Bridge-builder** between separated communities by means of cultural events, workshops, language courses, etc.
- **Reaching 45,000 people** through its online and physical activities in 2020

