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Trade unions and politics in Cyprus: a historical comparative analysis across the dividing line

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Abstract:
This article is the first comparative study on the historical development of trade unions in Cyprus. It assesses the impact of the historical trajectory and ethnic division on the contemporary condition of the trade unions, which substantially diverge from each other. It compares and contrasts the framework, conditions and forms of trade unionism across the dividing line, focusing on the current conjuncture and accounts for them using a historical institutionalist approach. It concludes that disparity is likely to persist although recent austerity policies have been posing similar challenges to the trade unions on boths sides of the divide.

Key words: trade unions, north Cyprus, Republic of Cyprus, economic crisis, historical institutionalism, path dependence

Introduction:

Looking at the contemporary trade union landscape of the two communities in Cyprus, one may easily get the impression that rather than forming two parts of a small island, they are worlds apart. According to a recent report on the trade unions in the island (Ioannou & Sonan 2014), Greek Cypriot trade unions are much larger and active in both the public and private sectors whereas Turkish Cypriot trade unions are small, fragmented, and operating almost exclusively in the public and semi-public sectors with a negligible level of unionization in the private sector. Furthermore, while trade unions in the south have organic or close ideological ties with political parties, in the northlinks between political parties and trade unions are more obscure with their positions in political spectrum being largely determined by their stance on the Cyprus problem. At the labour relations level, collective bargaining in the Greek Cypriot community takes place at both sectoral and workplace levels with a tendency for the latter to grow at the expense of the former, while in the Turkish Cypriot community collective bargaining is overwhelmingly a public and semi-public sector affair and takes place in the latter largely at workplace level.

What seems to be common about the two sides today is the fact that both communities are suffering from deteriorating labour rights and declining trade unions. Yet, when we scratch the surface, what we see is that once again, despite similar repurcussions on the respective communities, the nature of the crises they face widely differ from each other. While austerity measures are imposed by Ankara to 'reform' the internationally isolated and anemic Turkish Cypriot economy, which is indeed in a quagmire of political clientelism due to the Turkish Cypriot political elite's seccessionist ambitions and hence condemned to failure at any rate (Sonan 2014), the Greek Cypriot economy is feeling the heat from the Eurozone crisis.

Given the fact that the labour union movement started as a cross-ethnic affair in the 1920s, how can we explain the dramatic disparity today? This paper seeks to answer this question with a historical approach tracing the roots of their divergence in two 'critical junctures,' underlining the significant impact of the broader politico-economic context in trade union development: first in the period between the mid-1940s and early 1960s when

the ethnic conflict broke out and peaked, and the second in the 1970s when the separate paths of the trade unions were sealed along the de facto partition of the country.

The prevailing conditions in the country, marked by the ethnic conflict and division, the ideological polarisation and the overt politicisation of the Cypriot society in conjunction with political clientelism and partitocracy have had a significant formative impact on the trade unions. The ethnic tension starting in the 1950s and the ensuing divergence in economic, political and social context shaping the life of the two communities, which became even starker after the geographical division in 1974, has made the trade unions take diverging paths in terms of ideological orientation, organisational structure and political behaviour. Operating in different milieus with respect to labour markets, institutional frameworks, political dynamics and political cultures, Cypriot trade unions across the dividing line have established for themselves distinct functions, modes of operation and relationships with their broader societies.

The article proceeds as follows.The following section briefly reviews the basic relevant literature concerning the historical forms and functions of trade unionism with respect to its political and institutional setting, outlining the theoretical framework of the article. The notion of path-dependence is introduced and set in relation to the formative phase of trade unionism in Cyprus opening up the ground for a more detailed historical analysis in the subsequent section. Then Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot trade unions are examined in terms of their relationship to their respective political systems and discussed comparatively in terms of their responses to the recent global economic crisis and thecontext of austerity. The last section sums up and concludes the article outlining some implications arising for the study of trade unionism.

Theoretical framework: historical institutionalism, varieties of trade unionism and the forms of politicisation

In this study, we adopt a historical institutionalist approach and highlight the significance of historical development of trade unionism in Cyprus to explain its current state, and hence instrumentalize the notions of critical junctures and path dependence, which are widely used by historical institutionalists to show that 'what happened at an earlier point in time will affect the possible outcomes of a sequence of events occurring at a later point in time' (Sewell cited in Pierson 2000, p. 251) or to put it in a more tongue in cheek manner "outcomes during a crucial transition establish distinct trajectories within which, … 'one damn thing follows another'"(Collier &Collier 1991:27). According to this perspective, which puts a special emphasis on path dependence in the analysis of institutional stability, we need to analyze the historical development of the institution concerned and take into consideration the 'original, distinct culture and problems in which it arose,' if we are to understand how it operates today (Sanders 2006, pp. 39-40). Such formative moments in history are called 'critical junctures'.The choices made during these critical junctures have lasting impact on institutions and hence 'constitute the starting points for many path dependent processes. These choices close off alternative options and lead to the establishment of institutions that generate self-reinforcing path-dependent processes' (Capoccia and Kelemen 2007: 341-2). As Hall and Taylor put it therefore, "historical institutionalists… divide the flow of historical events into periods of continuity punctuated by 'critical junctures,' i.e., moments when substantial institutional change takes place thereby creating a 'branching point' from which historical development moves onto a new path" (1996: 942).Constructivist institutonalists go one step further and underline the 'ideational path dependence,' arguing, 'it is not just institutions, but the very ideas on which they are predicated and which inform their design and development, that exerts constraints' on the actions of political actors of later generations, who are destined to act within these predetermined parameters (Hay 2006:65).

The historical institutionalist approach has been widely used in earlier research on labour politics (see Collier &Collier 1991:28).Lipset, for instance, 'analyzes how the 'historic conditions under which the proletariat entered the political arena'shaped the subsequent emergence of reformist as opposed to revolutionary labor movements' (Cited in *ibid.*). We follow this theoreticaltradition as we consider it relevant in the case of Cyprus, a country in which ethnic conflict has shaped state–society relations and more suitable than other traditions such as rational choice or the culturalist approach in the production of a comprehensive, comparative analysis of Cypriot trade unions. We do not claim, however that the historical institutionalist approach that we adopt in this paper is the

only possible one and acknowledge that other -institutionalist-perspectives may also carry explanatory power in the case of the Cypriot trade unions.

Trade unionism, as an attempt to promote the interests of the labourer in an organised collective manner always involves a sort of mediation and political representation activity. This, however, historically has assumed different forms depending on the various settings and the multiple spheres in which trade unions operate. Hyman's (2001) typology of European unionism identifies the distinct and often contrasting roles trade unions may undertake as they may be bound by different imperatives (Offe 1985), which in turn leads them to prioritize in different ways their functions and thus their operating logics. As economic actors they are regulators of the labour market, controlling labour supply and striving for improving the material conditions of their members. As class actors they are supposed to engage in politics and contest the system, while at the same time as social partners they are supposed to deliberate and compromise with the employers and the state as stakeholders in a national quest for industrial and social peace.Having to operate within state institutions, all trade unions have to engage in one form or another with the existing political system and with its core components, that is the political parties.

Trade unionism assumes different patterns in different national settings (Frege 2007) and different historical periods (Heery & Kelly 1994; Howell 2005). The different political culture and habitual practice of trade unions at different times and places depends on multiple factors such as the state of the economy, the norms and values of society, the form and internal balances of the political system and the levels of social conflict within and without the workplace. Material and ideological conditions that are shaped by previous historical developments, determine the structure, the orientation and the practices of trade unions. Although the three distinct trade union roles outlined above in Hyman's (2001) typology are simultaneously in operation, it is possible to discern which of the three is stronger in a specific era and context. In conjunction with the logic of path dependence, identifying the predominant trade union operation mode at the moment of the 'critical juncture' may serve as an explanatory axis for their later development.

Trade unions emerged more than a century ago in parallel with social democratic parties and in most cases connected with them. In many countries, especially in Southern Europe, in addition to the left-wing oriented trade unions, other conservative unions were also formed around the middle of the 20thcentury when the Cold War conditions prevailed with a nationalist or religious ideological orientation aligned with right wing political forces. In Italy in the aftermath of the World War II, for instance, when it became obvious that the Communist Party would take the control of the National Confederation of Labour, the Catholic unionists left the confederation to establish the Italian Confederation of Workers' Unions (Tarrow 1967:154).Gradually, however, the strength of this historical party-union nexus has been weakened in many countries while the power of trade unions has also declined in the new neoliberal universe in the last decades (Heyes, Lewis & Clark 2012). In the new, more difficult conditions imposed by enhanced capital mobility, global mobility and deregulated labour markets, trade unions are forced to fracture the institutional linkage with political parties and turn to civil society in an attempt to overcome their crisis (Upchurch, Taylor & Mathers 2009). Nevertheless, this is often a complex process in which the degree to which parties, unions and states adopt neoliberal policies is vital while the historical tradition or path dependency remains significant (Taylor, Mathers & Upchurch 2011).The formative phase of the institutional arrangement between trade unions and their political context is highly significant as party ties established at the outset can crystallise with time into structures involving mutual access to resources which can sustain connections even amidst diversions in terms of policy (Allern, Aylott & Christiansen 2007).

Historical context: separate development and diverging paths

In Cyprus, the birth of trade unionism in a context of colonial constraint, rendered it from the outset a locus for competing political allegiances and visions, and a field of political power contestation (Rappas 2009). The Greek Cypriot trade unions, which to a large extent followed the Southern European pattern, emerged as strong actors in the independence period (1960s), and although split along ideological lines since the political polarisation of the 1940s, they were able to position themselves well within the new state. Both Pancyprian Federation of Labour (PEO) and Cyprus Workers' Confederation (SEK) underwent a process of institutionalization in the

1960s and 1970s which allowed them to constitute themselves as social partners and managers of industrial peace in a rapidly developing state (Ioannou 2015). The incorporation of their leaderships into the state and their mingling with the state elite, the expansion of the trade union bureaucracies and their relative autonomisation from their rank and file members weregradual processes unfolding in parallel with broader societal transformations that accompanied a period of economic growth and uneven but generalised prosperity. By the 1980s the Greek Cypriot trade unions were at the peak of their power in terms of density and political influence and closely connected with the political parties in a consolidated political system (*ibid*.).

Being the smaller community in the island and outnumbered by the Greek Cypriot community in every field of life, the first critical juncture shaping the development of industrial relations in the Turkish Cypriot community started with the intensification of the Greek Cypriot demand for union with Greece i.e. *enosis* roughly in the mid-1940s, and came to an end when the two communities became totally segregated following the inter-communal clashes in 1963.In a similar vein, the Turkish Cypriot political system was shaped bythe Greek Cypriots' *enosis*demands. The Turkish Cypriot national or political awakening was not anti-colonial butrather anti-*enosis* (Choisi, 1993:25), and at the center stage of this national awakening has stood the ideal of partitioning of the island between Greece and Turkey i.e. *taksim*. This implied partitioning of everything from municipalities to football and naturally included trade unions as well.

It is important to note that unlike in the Greek Cypriot case, the full scale political mobilization of the Turkish Cypriot community preceded the formation of strong ideological fault lines. As a result, the Turkish nationalists, who were the first organized group in the modern sense managed to easily capture and monopolize the trade union movement, turning it from class-based into an ethnic-based one(seeSonan 2014: 53; An 2005: 271-99; Kızılyürek 2003:244-64). Unlike the pro-*enosis*Greek Cypriot National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters (EOKA), and the Greek Cypriot right in general which had to take on a well-established communist party i.e. Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL), the counter-*enosis* Turkish Resistance Organization (TMT) did not have to compete with a well-entrenched political or ideological rival.The buddingclass-oriented trade union movement was far from reaching the organizational capacity necessary to resist TMT, and therefore it did not take it long to take the full control ofthe whole movement. Like in the Greek Cypriot case (Peristianis, 2006) neither existed a liberal challenger. Therefore, the TMT and Turkish Cypriot right, which was at the same time anti-communist, single-handedly shaped the political landscape during the period of political modernization, and emerged with a political monopoly, effectively and sometimes violently crowding out any contender in the decades to come. In this context, the role of trade unions was reduced to 'being the voice of workers in the national cause' and thereforethey lost their credibility as a genuine trade union movement in the eyes of workers (Sarica 2014).

It is worth noting that the first group that was targeted by the TMT violencewas the Turkish Cypriot trade unionists who did not resign from common trade unions defying the orders of the TMT. As a resultin the early 1960s, the Turkish Cypriot trade unions were lagging behind (Slocum, 1972); one account describes them as insufficient, inefficient, passive and narrow compared to their Greek Cypriot counterparts, and in the absence of effective trade union protectiona big majority of Turkish Cypriot workers had to work longer hours to receive lower wages – with the exception of those working in the ports, mines, government and military facilities (Cumhuriyet cited in An 2005: 298-9). Although the grip of the TMT on the Turkish society eased after 1968, it did las until 1974. As a result, while the Greek Cypriot trade unionsfollowed the wider Southern European pattern in the period up to 1974 where they found a place in the political structure, the Turkish Cypriot trade unions were reduced to a subservient role in a military regime.

Historically, trade unionism in Cyprus emerged in the 1920s and 1930s out of the committees that sprang out of spontaneous strikes in the mines and construction sites and the labour centres that were founded in the major towns. Communist militants played a key role in these developments and by the early 1940s when trade union membership expanded exponentially, they became union leaders. These initial struggles were common involving both Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot workers organised in ethnically mixed trade unions (Varnava 2004 [1997]). However the ethnic conflict at the local level and the political polarisation and antagonism between the left and the right, peaking at the time of the onset of the Cold War led into the splitting of the labour movement

along ideological and ethnic lines. In addition to the "old unions" under the leadership of the Pancyprian Trade Union Committee (PSE) (named PEO after 1945) – the trade union committee affiliated to AKEL, the heir of the Communist party of Cyprus –, new trade unions emerged in 1944 along nationalist (both Greek and Turkish) and anti-communist lines (Moustaka 2010; Gregoriadis 1994; PEO 1991).

Although, Turkish Cypriots started to establish their separate trade unions in as early as 1943 and subsequently formed an umbrella organisation called the Association of Turkish Cypriot Workers Unions (KTİBK)in 1945, which was under the control of the Turkish nationalists, this did not lead to the immediate termination of cooperation between trade unions of the two communities, particularly given the fact that 'the fulfilment of Turkish workers' demands could not be realised if they were not included in a wider trade union forum' (Ktoris 2013: 24). Indeed, PEO continued to attract the majority of the Turkish Cypriot workers thanks to its success in 'securing labour rights for all Cypriot workers, in a time when …[particularly Turkish Cypriots] faced gruelling economic conditions' (*ibid*.:24-25). The real rupturein the Cypriot labor movement took place after the beginning of the EOKA's revolt to achieve *enosis* and the establishment of Turkish Cypriot counter-*enosis*TMT. The EOKA revolt pushed the number of KTİBK members from 470 in 1953 to 2,214 in 1955 (*ibid*.:35). Though this figure declined to 1,137 in 1958 again after the TMT's terror campaign against the Turkish Cypriot workers affiliated with the Greek Cypriot trade unions, the figure shot up to 4,829 in 1959 (For the figures see Dedeçay 1981:29; for more on the transition from class-based to ethnic trade unionism in the Turkish Cypriot community see An 2005 and Kızılyürek 2003:253-64) marking the divide within the Cypriot labour movement, which still continues today.

By the 1950s the trade unions became well-established social and political forces in the Cypriot society as a whole with total membership rising to 42,928 in 1956 (Slocum 1972). Moreover they were able to secure for their members and the workers in general some basic rights and benefits, which were institutionalized in the form of collective agreements allowing a general improvement in the standard of living (Christodoulou 1992). At the time of the transition to independence the colonial authorities acknowledged the trade unions as important actors in the labour and social policy field and the trade union leaders were invited to consult the new ministry of Labour and Social Insurance on the upgrading of labour legislation, the social security and the industrial relations systems. International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions were ratified, the Basic Agreement set up the framework for dispute resolution and the trade union law was liberalized in the first years after independence. The constitution of the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) guaranteed the previous gains of the trade union movement, recognizing officially in articles 21, 26 and 27 the right to peaceful assembly, combination with others and the right to strike. The Labour Ministry assumed the role of overseeing industrial relations and the social insurance system.

The atmosphere of stability and peace following the conclusion of the agreements establishing the RoC in 1960 rendered cooperation between trade unions possible again for a short period. In 1962, for instance, Turkish and Greek Cypriot trade unions signed a protocol with employer associations from both communities (Türk-Sen n.a.). However, this did not last long and in 1963 inter-communal clashes broke out. As a result, the Turkish Cypriot community withdrew into ghettos, which covered roughly three per cent of the island. 'These areas were basically disconnected enclaves, dispersed all around the island. Overall, there were, some large and some very small, no less than 73 different administrative units' (Sonan 2014:60). The Greek Cypriots responded by imposing an economic blockade against this move, which they perceived as a revolt. As a result, economic life in the Turkish Cypriot enclaves practically ground to a halt and the community relied to a large extent on Turkish handouts for its survival. 'In the 1964-74 period, "total budget expenditure of the Turkish Community amounted to 2,690 million Turkish Liras of which 2,417 million was met by aid from" Turkey' (*ibid*.:83).This was a period when the economic disparity between the two communities grew considerably (Ayres 2003). Political situation was not better. As the Civicus report put it 'civil society nearly disappeared and the community authorities penetrated almost all social activities. The demands and actions of social organizations at this time were redesigned by nationalist doctrines' (2005:113). Even the civilian politicians were to a large extent sidelined and the leader of the TMT, a colonel from Turkey, who was only 'accountable to the Turkish Joint Chief of Staff, became the holder of "absolute power," not only in military but also in political

matters'*(*Konuk cited in Sonan 2014:61). Not surprisingly,in its history, Cyprus Turkish Trade Unions Federation (Türk-Sen) describes the period as a 'period of major stagnation in union activities'.

Following the easing of the tension between the two communities in 1968, some 10,000 Turkish Cypriots started to work outside the Turkish Cypriot-controlled enclaves (Sonan 2014: 84), and therefore it can be said that some of those in this group, at least, could benefit from favourable working conditions, which the Greek Cypriot trade unions had secured. This relatively positive atmosphere also paved the way for the establishment of Cyprus Turkish Primary School Teachers' Union (KTÖS), a dissident organization, which is considered as one of the strongest trade unions today. This was the first trade union, which managed to go beyond acting as a 'guardian of national cause' (Sarica 2014). The first trade unions law was also passed in 1971. Still, overall, the economic and political conditions in this period were not conducive to meaningful class-based trade union activities (see for instance Süreç 2014:26–30).

The crisis conditions prevailing after the war of 1974 led to a second critical juncture in the historical evolution of trade unions in Cyprus.In the Greek Cypriot community, the tripartite system – the institutionalized consultation between workers' and employers' representatives under the auspices of the state – already in operation in rudimentary form since the late colonial era and in the process of consolidation in the first years of the RoC, was further strengthened and formalized (Ioannou 2002). The trade unions accepted wage cuts and a series of temporary freezing of benefits in the context of the broader effort of national reconstruction. In 1977, the establishment of the Industrial Relations Code, negotiated and agreed by the main trade unions and employers' associations under the auspices of the state, governed in letter as well as in spirit the conduct of the labour relations for more than three decades. The Greek Cypriot trade unions effectively consolidated their position in the RoC in the years after 1974 exchanging the organized retreat of the labour movement for an enhanced role in the elaborate industrial relations system that had been set up. Their participation in a series of tripartite committees in the 1980s and 1990s (Sparsis 1998) allowed them on the one hand to have a say on many policy issues but undoubtedly also pushed them to a largely conciliatory stance. Trade union participation in policy making, however, has never extended to include economic policy.

While the war and geographical division of the island led to a huge upheaval in the Greek Cypriot community, it marked the beginning of a new era in the Turkish Cypriot one. In the relatively democratic conditions of the post-1974 period, the Turkish Cypriot trade union movement gained momentum, and newtrade unions started to emerge one after another challenging the government policies (Sarıca 2014; Felek 2014), which was -and still is- in the absence of a big private sector, the biggest employer at the same time. This was a time when the Republican People's Party leader Bülent Ecevit's left of center discourse was at the peak of its popularity in Turkey. As the prime minister, who took the decision to intervene in Cyprus following the Greek-led coup d'etat toppling Makarios, Ecevit was seen as a savior and hence had a huge air of gravitas among Turkish Cypriots. Therefore, Turkish Cypriot leadership as well as the wider public was receptive to his ideas. Moreover, young university graduates who completed their education in Turkey at a time when the left in general was on the rise in Turkey became instrumental in transferring these ideas to Cyprus. Indeed, all parties represented in the first multi-party parliament had remarkably social democratic programs including the ruling National Unity Party (UBP) (Sonan 2014:124). Partly due to the Ecevit effect and partly thanks to the struggle of the trade unions, the parliament, which was still dominated by nationalists in the 1970s, passed many working-class–friendly legislations empowering the trade unions (Süreç 2011 and Sarıca 2014). A Minimum Wage Law, for instance, was passed in 1975. In a similar vein, referendum and collective bargaining rights were gained in practice in the early post-1974 period though they became part of the law only in 1996 (Felek 2014).

Despite these developments, unlike in the south, tripartism in the north has been conspicuous by its absence. This was also partly a result of the very small scale of industrial production in private sector during this critical juncture, which rendered unionization impossible. Still today, there is almost no unionization in the private sector and to a large extent those working in the private sector are left to the mercy of the employers given the fact that the Labor Law is also not enforced effectively (Felek 2014). According to Felek, the secretary general of Dev-İş, the conditions of workers in the private sector cannot be compared with those in the public sector; particularly, he likens the conditions in the construction and tourism sectors to 'slavery' (*ibid*.).

Table 1: Trade union density and membership in the Republic of Cyprus

Year	1959	1970	1981	1991	2001	2011
Trade union membership	65381	73500	124299	154049	174577	204475
Trade union density	n.a (estimated around 50)	59	80.8	77	63.4	50

The 1959 and 1970 are mixed figures involving both communities (Slocum, 1972:49). The rest refer only to the Greek Cypriot community, taken from Trade Union Registrar archive. Further decline in trade union density took place after 2011 as well as a decline in membership according to the trade unions but there are no specific available figures (Soumeli, 2015).

Table 2: Trade union density and membership in the northern part of Cyprus

Year	1986	1996	2006	2014
Trade union membership	20409	20154	21485	25610
Trade union density	53	41	33	30.4

Trade union density figures are calculated by authors.The number of employees came from census figures (1996) and Household Labor Force Surveys (2006 and 2014); the figure for 1986 is estimated by subtracting the number of people working in the agricultural sector and self-employed from the total employment figure. Membership figures (1986, 1996, 2006, 2014) came from Statistical Yearbooks.

Trade unions in different political systems

As the political realm in the RoC had stabilized by the late 1970s, taking the shape of a multi-party system, the trade unions grew substantially in membership, financial resources and apparatuses while politically remaining under the shadow of their respective parties for which they constituted 'transmission belts' (Ierodiakonou 2003; Ioannou 2015). In addition to PEO aligned to AKEL and SEK aligned to Democratic Rally (DISY) and Democratic Party (DIKO), another small union emerged, breaking away from SEK: the Democratic Labour Federation of Cyprus (DEOK) aligned with the social democratic party of Unified Democratic Union of Centre (EDEK).

The gradual but substantial expansion of the broader public sector allowed the right wing SEK to catch up with PEO in terms of membership as it organized the overwhelming majority of employees in the public services and municipalities while the Pancyprian Union of Civil Servants (PASIDI) representing the civil servants proper also gained strength, expanding in membership and acquiring a series of wage increases and benefits for its members

(Iakovou 1986). PASIDI is not aligned to any particular party, yet as the majority of its members are DIKO and DISY supporters it is usually leaning politically towards the right. There are party members and party officials active within the civil service and within PASIDI although this does not take the form of formalized internal fractions such as those operating in the public sector education trade unions.[1]The Union of Bank Employees of Cyprus (ETYK) has been, like PASIDI formally not aligned to any political party, and able to benefit from the substantial expansion of the banking system and its strong labour market position, gaining for its members substantial wage raises, benefits and privileges in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s.

Trade unions in the northern part of Cyprus have over the years managed to develop more independent positions from political parties compared to their counterparts in the south. Although political orientations of trade unions are not secret, and from time to time, their leaders run for the parliament on various political party tickets, strictly speaking, currently it is difficult to talk about organic ties between political parties and trade unions (Cf. Civicus 2005:115). This was not always the case. KTÖS, for instance, played an important role in the setting up and success of the Communal Liberation Party (TKP) in 1976, which became the main opposition party following the general election made in the same year. By the early 1980s, however, the organic ties between the party and the union were already severed. In a similar vein, Revolutionary Trade Unions Federation (Dev-İş)refused to follow the drift of Republican Turkish Party (CTP) to the right after the collapse of the Soviet Unionand openly expressed its opposition to its participation in a coalition government with the right-wing Democratic Party (DP) in 1994, and eventually in 2004, when CTP became the senior coalition partner in the government, it broke its link with it (Ioannou 2011).

Dev-İş; the Cyprus Turkish Civil Servants Trade Union (KTAMS), which is the biggest civil servant union; KTÖS; Türk-Sen since the late-1980s; and KTOEÖS since 1993, are left leaning, while the Federation of Free Labor Unions (Hür-İş), which is the biggest workers federation; and the Public Officials Trade Union (Kamu-Sen) have right-leaning orientations. Still, the trade unions which maintainclose relationswith specific political parties do not hesitate to clash with them, sometimes quite openly and intensely. Kamu-Sen did not hesitate to publicly confront the UBP's austerity policies in the 2009-2013 period, and KTAMS and KTOEÖSwere among the most vocal critics of the CTP-led government in the 2004-2009 perioddespite the fac that their presidents wereelected to the parliament on the CTP ticket.

Turkish Cypriot left-wing trade unions are playing an active role in the pro-reunification movement while the right-wing ones opt for the continuation of the breakaway Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Indeed, the left-right distinction in the northern part of Cyprus lies to a large extent on this basis. The Turkish nationalists who favor the current state of affairs or division are considered right-wing, and those who favor the reunification of the island on the basis of a federation are considered left-wing. In this context, left-wing trade unions are often vehicles of popular mobilisation and trade union leaders are political agents outside the state and some of them frequently against it. KTÖS, for example, views the TRNC regime as nothing buta puppet of Ankara.It is not a coincidence, therefore, that leftist trade unions have played a major role in the mass rallies of the Turkish Cypriot community particularly in 2002-2004 in favor of the reunification of the islandand in 2011against the austerity measures imposed by Ankara. However, the strength of the public service unions is often overestimated and it should be kept in mind that 'the demonstrations they can easily organize have some political impact … but do not have a lasting effect' (Dodd 1993: 178).

PEO in the Greek Cypriot community, on the other hand, although also active in the pro-reunification movement is much more integrated into the political system of the RoC and although enormous in terms of membership has demonstrated over the last two decades decreasing willingness and capacity to mobilize and challenge statepolicy.In comparison to the northern part of Cyprus, the left-right distinction among Greek Cypriots is much less influenced by positioning on the reunification process. Although the Cypro-centrism vs Hellenocentrism axes havealways been significant coordinates of political identity, these do not readily translate into pro and anti reunification positions. SEK, although very Hellenocentric in its rhetoric maintains for example a moderate and often friendly stance vis-à-vis Turkish Cypriots and a neutral stance vis-à-vis the prospect of reunification.

In the north, the absence of a developed tripartite system as a consequence of the trade union powerlessness in the private sector, on the one hand, and the more general exceptional political condition of the TRNCi.e. its contested nature and failure to induce loyalty among leftists, on the other, precluded the trade unions from assuming a consistent social partnership role and acting as stakeholders and forces of integration in the system. Since negotiation is usually blocked and mediation often impossible, trade unions resort to a more confrontational role, acting as an agency of expression of popular discontent.

Thus trade unions in the two communities in Cyprus went through different formative phases and experienced in different ways the critical junctures determined by the ethnic conflict and division, but also consolidated themselves in political systems with different characteristics. The fact that trade unions had to operate in different politico-economic contexts has shaped them in different ways. Turkish Cypriot unions learned to function in an economy with a disproportionally large public sector and a right wing clientelistic state that excluded them as social partners but was generous to their members. This has handicaped them from recruiting members in the gradually expanding private sector but has allowed them sufficient distance from the centres of power which they could utilise to contest the system as a whole. Greek Cypriot trade unions on the other hand, were from the beginning social partners in the more internationalised and institutionalised RoC, well established in the private sector and close to the centres of power. This in turnleft them limited space to act as vehicles of contestation. At the same time, although they do face increasing difficulties to recruit members in the private and service sectors, their historical and social roots allow themto manifest relative organisational resiliance in a volatile globalised economy (Tombazos 2013; Argirides 2014).

Different dynamics, similar results: a comparative discussion on the economic crisis

The economic crisis was not felt in all its severity until 2011 in the RoC. Soon however, wage freezes and cuts in the broader public sector amidst rising unemployment and a constant pressure on the collective agreements in the private sector set the pace of developments (Soumeli 2014a). Public and semi-public sector workers have suffered significant wage decreases in the last years in the form of total freezes, special contributions, horizontal as well as scaled cuts amounting to 10–15 per cent while newcomers in the public sector begin in addition with 10 per cent lower wage rates and without the special pension benefits of their predecessors. In the private sector, wages have decreased even further as a result of the depression and the high unemployment as well as the deterioration of the terms of employment in the public sector which acts as a sort of informal comparative framework. Thus the pay gap between the public and the private sector, an argument used repetitively and monotonously in the attempt to pit private sector against public sector workers, has remained and in some cases has even widened in the context of the current crisis. Unemployment climbed to above 15 per cent exerting significant pressure on wages and resulting in 13 per cent decrease in purchasing power (INEK-PEO 2014). Trade unions began to feel the heat since 2012 in multiple ways. They were unable to protect their members, sustain their apparatuses and win the publicity battle amidst cumulative employer aggressiveness.Loss of income from subscription fees as many of their members entered unemployment led them to reduce the size and costs of their apparatuses (Tombazos 2013; Argirides 2014).

Effectively the crisis revealed the political limits and the structural weakness of the trade unions,whichcame to share the blame and the political cost of austerity.Despite their polemics against austerity, at the critical moment PEO and SEK declared that ‘there was no other way except from the Memorandum of Understanding with the Troika’ (Stockwatch 2012) while PASIDI despite its opposite statements essentially remained inactive throughout the period from mid-2012 to mid-2014. There was limited protest by Greek Cypriot trade unions, despite the watershed in the socio-economic domain effected from above and through the external agency of the Troika which was able to do things that local capitalists wanted but did not dare to implement (Meardi 2014). The fact the left happened to head the government at the time was of key significance in this (Charalambous & Ioannou 2015). Trade unions took a defensive stance and essentially restricted themselves to verbal protests while attempting to make their retreat as organised and as institutionalised as possible, signing interim agreements and securing written statements where possible that the cuts would be temporary and a product of agreement rather than an outright imposition (Ioannou 2014).

The priority of Greek Cypriot trade unions did not change during the crisis – protecting at all costs the existing industrial relations system in general and the institution of collective bargaining and collective agreements as the chief regulating mechanism in the labour market (Soumeli 2014b). However trade unions face now in both communitiesan increasing difficulty to persuade that they are able and willing to protect the interests of the workers in general and their vulnerable members in particular. The minimum wage is currently under direct threat (Ioannou & Sonan 2014) not only in terms of labour market actual practices but also as a legal decree, as the pressures to formally abolish it or substantially reduce it are piling. The collective agreements already undermined in various ways prior to the crisis (Ioannou 2011) face additional pressures today.Welfare spending by the state is reduced at a time when it is most needed and a housing crisis is expected in the coming years as banks begin to foreclose. Trade unions have limited capacity to offer a social safety net to their unemployed members, have difficulties in restricting the losses suffered by their working members and prevent the overt exploitation of peripheral workers working under precarious conditions(Tombazos 2013; Argirides 2014).

Greek Cypriot trade unions have also limited power to influence policy at the central level –for example with respect to the privatization of public services which is currently under way. Although all of them are opposed to this, they do not do so in the same way, to the same extent and with the same determination. The more centre-right unions which are dominant among the semi-governmental and municipal employees are more reluctant to clash with the ruling party DISY and the government (Charalambous & Ioannou 2017 forthcoming) and attempt to secure some concesions or promises from the government concerning the future of their members in exchange for tolerance or mild protest rather than directly oppose the privatization policy and engage in militant action to prevent it, such as has been the case in several occasions in the north.

Not surprisingly, it is possible to observe important divergences between the two communitiesin terms of depth and implications of the on-goingeconomic crisis,yet in both cases the working class and thetrade unions are among the hardest hit and in that respect, we can even talk about a sort of convergence, albeit not of structural kind. In the northern part of Cyprus, unemployment rate seems to be stabilized around 10 percent and compared to the south, wages are also more stable. Although, business circles have been complaining about the high level of minimum wage and floating the idea of introducing multiple minimum wages at sectoral levels to depress it, its abolition has not been seriously discussed. There is no sign of a mortgage/foreclosure crisis either. Yet this does not necessarily mean that the situation in the north is any better.

The economic crisis that Turkish Cypriots have been suffering from, stems from different and more structural reasons. The root cause of the problem is, in the absence of a legal international status, TRNC's overreliance on Turkey, and the current Turkish government's resolve to overhaul the politico-economic landscape in the northern part of Cyprus in line with a neoliberal approach. Following the de facto division of the island in 1974, by and large Turkish governments kept pumping money to the northern part of the island to prop up the regime, which over years led to the emergene of a politico-economic structure based on political clientelism-or rather bureaucratic clientelism (Sonan 2014). This policy has changed after the Justice and Development Party (AKP)'s coming to power in Ankara. The AKP does no longer want to transfer funds unconditionally, which not only led to an oversized and well-compensated public sector but also as a side-effect, seemingly strong public sector trade unions, at least in Turkish standards. Ankara's perception can be clearly seen in the former Turkish ambassador Halil İbrahim Akça's statements. In an interview, when he was in a different post, he was reported as saying: 'The basic problem in the TRNC is that [public sector] employees earn too much and that their number is too high. There are very strong trade unions, which block all the measures that will save money … The way trade unions exercise their power is destructive … there is a need to narrow the union rights while regulating the exercise of these rights.' (Milliyet 2011). Despite the uproar provoked bt these statements and the trade unions declaring him persona non grata, rather than withdrawing, the Turkish government promotedAkça to ambassadorship confirming that what Akça said reflected not only his personal opinion but also the position of the Turkish government.

As a consequence of the Turkish government's new policy, in the last seven years, three economic protocols were signed between Turkish and Turkish Cypriot governments, which envisaged serious cuts in public spending; not least in personnel expenditures, as well as privatization of public utilities. In line with the

protocols, the Turkish Cypriot government passed the 'Law Regulating the Monthly Salary, Wage and Other Allowances of the Public Employees', which substantially reduced the entry-level salaries as well as other benefits of those who were employed in the public sector after its entry into force, and also undermined the collective bargaining power of the trade unions. In a similar vein, a privatization law was passed in 2012. Though these two laws were brought to the Constitutional Court, to the disappointment of the unions, the Court upheld both of them. An earlier legislation in2008 had created a common social security system for public and private sector employees, which in effect reduced the benefits of those that started working in the public sector after 2008. After the amendment of the relevant law in 2009, the Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA), which used to be applied every two months, applies every six months, again affecting negatively the public sector employees.

As for privatization, so far, only the operation of the Ercan (Tymbou) Airport and Turkish Cypriot Petroleum Enterprises havebeen privatized and both did not lead to mass layoffs. Yet, the closing down of two other public economic enterprises, the Cyprus Turkish Airlines and ETI enterprises (specialised in imports) left many employees jobless. Though most of those who lost their jobs have been eventually employed in the public sector in line with the Privatization Law of 2012, their salaries and benefitswere substantially cut. The future looks bleak as the privatization of electricity and water utilities isconstantly and hotly debated.

As a result of the growing determination of the Turkish government to impose its will and socio-economic policies on the northern part of Cyprus, a resistance movement emerged, originally led by the leftist trade unions but not limited to them, and reached its peak in early 2011 with the two massive rallies of 'communal existence'. However, these efforts failed to deliver any concrete results beyond infuriating the Turkish government, which flatly refused to back down. Consequently, this movement lost steam and almost disappeared. Yet, the growing mistrust between the political parties and trade unions has remained intact.

Conclusion:

This article is the first comparative study on the historical trajectory of trade unionism in Cyprus explaining the political orientation and linkages of the Cypriot trade unions with broader forces with which they have been interacting for many decades. The considerable disparity observed today in the state of industrial relations among the two sides in the island is a consequence of their different development paths. Although the trade union movement began as a bi-communal affair, the ethnic conflict from the mid-1940sto the mid-1970s has not only divided the labour movement along with the country, but has positioned the trade unions in different places vis-à-vis each community's political system. The article, following a historical institutionalist approach, stresses the importance of critical junctures and path dependence, and argues that the current operation of trade unions, cannot be understood without considering the circumstances at their formative period. Accordingly, the significance of the initial socio-political and socio-economic context in the subsequent development of trade unions is underlined.

The article accounts for the historical development of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot labour movements with special emphasis on two critical junctures in the 1950s and 1970s, which have marked the emergence of the conflict between the two communities and the de facto division of the island respectively. It is shown howthe broader circumstances led to the consolidation of class-based Greek Cypriot trade unions as important social partners following the broader South European model,while the Turkish Cypriot trade union movement'sdevelopment was arrested by the growing ethnic tension relegating them to a more limited role.Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot trade unions are examined in terms of their relationship with their respective political systems, and it is shown that while trade unions in the north managed to retain their independence from political parties, the Greek Cypriot ones remained more subordinate vis-à-vis political parties. This, to a large extent explains the more active resistance of Turkish Cypriot trade unions against recent austerity policies compared to their counterparts in the south.In the last section of the article, the dynamics of the recent economic crisisare discussed in a comparative perspective, and its consequences on the working class in general and the trade unions in particular are outlined. The upshot is that despite their diverging historical paths

and the differences in the root causes of economic crisis,the challenges faced by the trade unions across the divide are similar and converging though the overall disparity at the broader structural level tends to persist. Thus while the prevailing neoliberalism tends to homogenise the policy framework and worsen the context and conditions in the labour market in all places and settings, the movements and institution of labour that can resist to this, do not manifest an analogous unified tendency. The forces of capital and the forces of labour do not seem to be moving in a comparable way, speed and direction.

Thus, from the analysis above, although the current crisis brings along similar negative effects and poses common challenges for the trade unions across the divide in Cyprus, it does not seem to constitute a critical juncture capable of producing new dynamics in the Cypriot trade union landscape. Trade unions in Cyprus across the divide remain subject to their divergent historical trajectories based on their respective critical junctures at the time of the ethnic conflict and the conditions prevailing in their formative phases. The implications for the study of trade unionsmore generally arising from this article, is on the one hand the need to treat them as historical institutions whose current condition is largely determined by their past, and on the other as institutions embedded in political systems and subjected to their dynamics. Path dependence isthus affecting institutions in multiple ways and constitutes a strong factor that can shape trade unions' character and prospects.

Notes:

[1] These are the Pancyprian Organisation of Greek [-Cypriot] Teachers (POED), the Organisation of Greek [-Cypriot] Secondary Education Teachers (OELMEK) and the Organisation of Greek [-Cypriot] Secondary Technical Education Teachers (OLTEK) representing the primary, secondary and the technical secondary education respectively.

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