



Reflections on the 2015 Social Cohesion and Reconciliation (SCORE) Index findings for Cyprus

By Center for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development (SeeD)

www.seedsofpeace.eu

Certain population segments are more hesitant regarding a political compromise

The latest SCORE findings indicate that there are certain population segments within each community that are less open to the idea of a political settlement with the other community. In Greek Cypriot community, young people (age: 18-35) and women report less readiness for a political settlement. Young Greek Cypriots feel more culturally distant from Turkish Cypriots, feel more anxious to meet them and are more socially distant from them, while being low on empathy. They also tend to not consume media information and experience low economic security. In the Turkish Cypriot community, right-wingers report that they are less ready for a solution. Contributing to their hesitation, right-wing Turkish Cypriots report reduced levels of community security.

Snapshot of 2015 Cyprus Findings

In Greek Cypriot community, trust in institutions and civic engagement have positive correlations with greater information consumption and greater representativeness by institutions. In general, individuals who are more satisfied with civic life, trust institutions more and feel represented by institutions are more ready for a political compromise (as in SCORE 2014).

In the Turkish Cypriot community, there is a notable negative trend among Turkish Cypriots on Reconciliation, with deteriorating scores on multiple indicators of intergroup relations. This is reflected in entrenched support for existing Turkish Cypriot institutions and a reduced readiness for political compromise.

SCORE findings suggest that public support for a future peace plan in Cyprus can be increased through a reduction of inter-group anxiety, social threats and cultural distance between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. Therefore, it is important that all actors, including policy makers, members of the negotiating teams, local authorities and civil society organisations take such evidence into account in order to develop strategies that bring the communities closer together and inspire positive perceptions among them.

Linking SCORE Findings with the Cyprus Peace Process

Almost half of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot respondents reported that they find federation tolerable, if necessary (51% and 47% respectively). However, only 29% of Greek Cypriots and 28% of Turkish Cypriot respondents said they would vote “yes” in a future referendum, while 55% of Greek Cypriots and 32% of Turkish Cypriots remain undecided. If the public is to support the peace process in a future referendum, citizens must be kept informed about the progress of negotiations, and feel their inputs are being fully considered. This requires leaderships to develop a joint/strategic communications strategy to inform the general public on the peace process, specifically aimed at (1) overcoming decades of fear and suspicion, and (2) explaining why reaching a settlement is in the public interest. Furthermore, the leaderships should listen and attend to citizens’ expectations regarding the actual content of the peace plan, especially considering the large numbers of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots who are still undecided regarding their vote in a future referendum.

In order to build mutual trust, this should not happen just at the end of the process before a referendum, but during the peace process itself. People should be prepared for or encouraged towards a socio-political culture that promotes conditions for sustainable peace in Cyprus. More efforts by all parties in bringing the communities closer together should be made.

Policy implications of the SCORE Index

In order to formulate specific policy recommendations, the SCORE results were discussed at stakeholder focus groups consisting of women, politically affiliated youth, and human rights activists. Following this participatory dialogue process, the following policy recommendations were generated:

Greek Cypriot Community

Youth:

- In order to engage young people in the peace process, they need to be given the opportunity to voice their opinions. This could be done via the establishment of an island-wide youth assembly in order to develop a national strategy on youth policy. This assembly could also be used to bridge the gap between young people and the peace process, if the leaderships and negotiating teams consent to address the assembly and encourage the participants to voice their own opinions. The proposal to establish such an assembly should be articulated by the two leaders who should also support it by having face-to-face meetings with its representatives.

- The indifference of young people to current affairs could be due to the absence of an independent, impartial, and well-informed media. Hence, alternative means of media as well as bi-communal radio and television shows should be given a boost through the active support of the two leaders.

- Both communities are burdened by high levels of youth unemployment, a shared problem that could draw Greek and Turkish Cypriots together rather than pushing them apart. Bi-communal initiatives such as those provided by the Stelios Foundation should be given more publicity. Award winners should be encouraged to talk at universities about their experiences and showcase ways in which inter-communal collaboration can be a creative way out of unemployment.

- Universities are excellent venues for exposure to the 'other', particularly so given the large numbers of Greek and Turkish Cypriots in higher education. Academics can arrange informal academic visits and educational exchanges.

Women:

- Women's fears about the future and thoughts about the past need to be foregrounded. This can be done by giving voice to women, through for example focus group discussions in both communities involving the participation of women from all walks of life. These should be held in all towns as well as in rural areas.

- Gender mainstreaming is essential for the Cyprus Peace process – gender consultants and women's representatives should be part of all decision-making groups, instead of having only 'women committees' which focus primarily on women issues.

- Politically affiliated women or CSOs can organise events within their own communities inviting women from the other community. Topics do not have to revolve around the Cyprus problem. Politically affiliated women can also create cross party alliances to ensure that women are represented in the peace process and elsewhere.

People who find the prospect of co-existence threatening:

- The need for unthreatening, meaningful and good quality contact is greater outside Nicosia district where there are substantially fewer opportunities for contact. A key action at policy level therefore would be to establish more places such as the Home for Cooperation at other locations along the buffer zone in order to enhance contact opportunities elsewhere on the island.

- Political and civic leaders in both communities should take responsibility for articulating the strengths inherent in a multi-cultural society, demonstrating the social, economic and political benefits. The two leaders have a crucial role to play as role models of positive intergroup contact. Through joint appearances at public events, joint talks at universities, municipalities, and villages, they could further legitimize bi-communal contact and lend their authority to it.

Turkish Cypriot Community

Right-Wingers:

- There is a need for dialogue between the right-wing parties of the two communities, to facilitate the development of non-confrontational common ground between them, for instance on economic affairs. Such processes would be very helpful in re-assuring the Turkish Cypriot right-wing parties that they would still have an important role to play in post-settlement Cyprus, and need not fear such a prospect.

People who perceive Greek Cypriots as belonging to a different culture and society:

- Measures to address the problem of cultural distance should be based on policies which celebrate cultural diversity on the island. Political and civic leaders in both communities should take responsibility for articulating the strengths inherent in a multi-cultural society, demonstrating the social, economic and political benefits. This can be done in the following ways:

- 1) Encourage contact which allows members of the two communities to talk about their respective cultures, their own experiences of the conflict, and their own national identities.

- 2) Expose people to more objective information about the culture of the other community. This can be done through the media, but also via the development of educational material available online for use by teachers.

- 3) Foster knowledge of each language at an early stage, preferably at primary school level.

People who feel strongly represented by existing Turkish Cypriot institutions:

- There should be an attempt to raise awareness among Turkish Cypriots about their post settlement status, when the northern part of the island will also be subject to the EU *acquis communautaire*, a situation which will ultimately provide Turkish Cypriots with stronger and more effective institutions than what they have today.