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## **Adding fuel to the conflict: How gas reserves complicate the Cyprus question**

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## Theoretical Reflections on the findings



## 7.1 INTRODUCTION

Following the empirical analysis of the five (3 Greek-Cypriot and 2 Turkish-Cypriot) discourses in Chapter 6, I return to the theoretical expectations of Chapter 2. According to my expectations, discourses should include the logic of at least one of the three Gs (geopolitics, greed and grievance) as well as the logic of their interplay. As I will show here, the three theoretical perspectives and their interplay motivate all five discourses. In other words, some of the premises of all three of the theoretical perspectives, either in a single form or mixed form, are identified across the five discourses.

## 7.2 DISCOURSES WITH A SINGLE PERSPECTIVE

### 7.2.1 Geopolitics

In Chapter 2, I raised a geopolitics-related expectation: ‘The survival in the ‘anarchic system’ motivates the conflictual behaviour of the contending parties on the use of the natural resources’. Two discourses seem to confirm this expectation. More concretely, according to the Greek-Cypriot discourse, ‘Gas boosting our geopolitical standing’, the persistence of anarchy in the security complex of the Eastern Mediterranean compels Greek-Cypriots to formulate their military strategy by using their natural resources as assets. To paint a portrait of the ‘anarchic environment’, they illustrated the inadequacy of the law of the sea to safeguard Greek-Cypriot access to the recently discovered gas reserves, although the law of the sea allegedly supports their official positions and rights to access them. In the same discourse, they praised the importance of the Greek-Cypriot partnership with Israel and Egypt (statement 36) in implementing their energy programme. As a respondent mentioned, ‘the possession of the natural resources as military capabilities constitutes a necessary ingredient for Cypriots’ survival in their antagonistic relations against Turkey’.

In addition, a Greek-Cypriot respondent underlined how, ‘in our energy design, we prioritised security considerations. We planned to parcel out at least one block out of the 13 to every permanent member of the Security Council’. The respondents in the same discourse argued: ‘we authorised companies coming from countries with military strength to invest in our region. If we square our own interests in the region with the ones of the companies – and eventually their countries of origin – then the latter will have an extra motive in contributing to a peaceful settlement of the Cyprus conflict’. They also assigned a highly positive value to statement 32, according to which companies originating from countries with military strength would not hesitate to go through with their energy plans in spite of Turkey’s challenges. This, once again, shows how geopolitical calculations factor into this discourse.

Geopolitical perspectives apply to one of the two Turkish-Cypriot discourses. Turkish-Cypriots consider the monetization of gas reserves as an integral part of the island’s ‘future

security architecture'. Although some of the Turkish-Cypriots did not agree with Turkey's incursions into the Eastern Mediterranean, they claimed, that Turkey, in being provoked by the Greek-Cypriot partnerships with Israel and Egypt, 'has no other choice' than to perform these incursions. Without these incursions, they would let Greek-Cypriots and Israelis create a *fait accompli* in the Eastern Mediterranean. The participants in this discourse insisted on the establishment of a bi-communal committee that would grant them decision-making powers as regards any hydrocarbons management. If decisions are made by the Greek-Cypriots without their involvement, then, after the potential unification of the island, they will have to pay the consequences of Greek-Cypriots' decisions. They fear that they will become irrelevant and become even more dependent on Turkey's aid. Their understanding of sovereignty is at stake; therefore, they justify, to a certain extent, Turkey's "gunboat diplomacy" in the Eastern Mediterranean, although it may threaten their bargaining position as well.

### 7.2.2 Greed

Another theoretical expectation that I raised in Chapter 2 is that 'political opportunism' motivates the conflictual behaviour of the contending parties on the use of natural resources. From the five discourses, opportunism was clearly found in one Turkish-Cypriot discourse: 'micro-politics'. The respondents in this discourse attribute the escalation of the 2011 crises to the personal motives of Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot policymakers. For instance, they claim that the signing of the delimitation agreement with Turkey, the authorisation by TPAO to launch drilling in areas encroaching on the Exclusive Economic Zone of Cyprus and the explorations of the Turkish seismic vessel, *Piri Reis*, were all initiatives which deepened the crisis in 2011. The participants here believe that the former Turkish-Cypriot chief-negotiator, Kudret Özersay, wanted to drag Turkey into the energy security debate in order to portray himself as a valuable asset to Turkey's energy visions in the region. They claim that taking up such initiatives would help him score extra points among the Turkish-Cypriot constituents, who would envision him as a determined 'statesman', capable of including Turkish-Cypriots – initially excluded from any energy initiative – in the hydrocarbons' management. The Turkish-Cypriot negotiator was accused of 'gambling on such crises in order to lay the ground for a career in politics through Turkey's support'.

### 7.2.3 Grievance

As regards grievance, I raised the following expectation: the traumas of the past motivate the behaviour of the contending parties on the use of natural resources. This expectation is found in two discourses: the Greek-Cypriot 'resentment matters' and Turkish-Cypriot 'Gas stimulating political equality'.

The most striking sentence in 'Resentment Matters' was: 'If we had to deal with a growing number of fatalities today, the pressure to reach a sustainable settlement would have been higher' (statement 3). The sense of injustice was captured by different rhetorical questions set

by the respondents: 'Why should I show my passport to the police officers at the border line in order to cross the territory? I have to go through a passport control within my own land'. According to this discourse, Greek-Cypriots feel alone and should act as they are alone.

The Turkish-Cypriot discourse 'Gas stimulating political equality' articulates their 'obsession with political equality' (as one respondent emphasised), which they have been deprived of due to the lack of recognition of their status. The discourse expresses Turkish-Cypriot fears that Greek-Cypriots 'will make them irrelevant to the future of the island' (statement 13). Their exclusion from hydrocarbons management conjures up memories from the past, when the Greek-Cypriot call for *'enosis'* was ignoring their own security needs on the island. The fear of isolationism on the Turkish-Cypriot side articulates the Turkish-Cypriot grievances and confirms the respective expectations.

Grievance seems to apply as a theoretical perspective in the escalation of the conflict. It is clearly identified in two discourses, one Greek-Cypriot ('Resentment matters') and one Turkish-Cypriot ('Gas stimulating political equality').

7

## 7.3 DISCOURSES WITH 'MIXED PERSPECTIVES'

### 7.3.1 Geopolitics-Grievance

I set forth one expectation regarding the interplay between geopolitics and grievance on the basis of 'critical geopolitics': 'The traumas of the past in tandem with the survival in the 'anarchic system' motivate the conflictual behaviour of the contending parties on the use of the natural resources'. Two discourses confirm this assumption.

According to the Greek-Cypriot discourse, 'Gas boosting our geopolitical standing', the 'non-involvement' of Turkish-Cypriots in the management of hydrocarbons was justified on two grounds: first, the framing of the whole issue as a matter of sovereignty (statement 39), which should involve only the recognised entity of the Republic of Cyprus, and second, the portrayal of Turkish-Cypriots as 'Turkey's accessory', 'Turkey's strategic community', 'Turkey's Trojan horse', who advance Turkey's interests and support its 'bullying behaviour' (statement 23). Greek-Cypriots feel betrayed by the fact that Turkish-Cypriots 'opened the door' to Turkey's military intervention in 1974. Therefore, mistrust attributed to grievances, partially explains Greek-Cypriots' decision to exclude Turkish-Cypriots in the decision-making on such matters. However, these grievances unfold within the geopolitical perspectives, which dominate this discourse as shown above.

According to the Turkish-Cypriot discourse, 'Gas stimulating political equality', natural resources constitute a vital part of the future security architecture of the Island. Greek-Cypriots, according to this discourse, should not be left alone in making decisions because they



will unilaterally pursue their agenda and create *fais accomplis* for them. Invoking historical experience, the participants asserted that “Turkish-Cypriots are excluded because they are considered as foreigners. Not because they are Turkish-Cypriots, (but) because they are seen as foreigners. Greek-Cypriots think Cyprus belongs to them and they don’t want to share it with anyone.’

In any case, it seems that the interplay between geopolitics and grievance, as conceptualized by ‘securitization, explains the escalation of the Cyprus conflict. It is found in one Greek-Cypriot discourse, ‘Gas boosting our geopolitical standing.’

### 7.3.2 Greed- Geopolitics

With respect to the interplay between greed and geopolitics, as motivated by ‘securitization’ theory and stipulated by Christou and Adamides (2013), I had raised the following expectation: The low popularity of the leaders during domestic turmoil in tandem with the need for survival in an anarchic system motivates the conflictual behaviour of the contending parties on the use of the natural resources.

The Greek-Cypriot discourse, ‘Pipe dreams and imported nationalisms’, adheres to the opportunistic effects that gas reserves offer to policymakers in order to initiate risky policies against the ‘enemy’, especially during pre-electoral periods or times of domestic turmoil. The adoption of an ‘us versus them’ rhetoric on the eve of elections or in the face of economic downturn, such as the one Cyprus suffered between 2011 and 2013, gains political ground among ethnically divided societies, which support assertive policies. For instance, the discourse claims that the geopolitical overtones attached to the gas reserves serve the political expediencies of Greek-Cypriot policymakers and academics, who know how appealing these overtones are to the public and whose concerns are fixated on ‘balancing the Turkish threat’ (statement 12). In a similar vein, the same discourse claims that these overtones have outweighed the essential technical and economic considerations the gas industry dictates (statement 9). No Turkish-Cypriot discourse affirms this expectation.

This confirms the validity of the interplay between geopolitics and greed.

### 7.3.3 Greed-Grievance

Finally, departing from Humphreys’ (2005) mechanisms and ‘diversionary’ theories, I had formulated a theoretical expectation about how greed and grievance intertwine: ‘The low popularity of the leaders during domestic turmoil in tandem with the traumas of the past motivate the conflictual behaviour of the contending parties on the use of the natural resources.’

The Turkish-Cypriot discourse, ‘Micro-politics’, confirms that some policymakers in the face of economic crises exploit the dynamics of the energy debate by invoking the ‘grievances’ that

the two sides have suffered in the past. By reminding their constituents of the grievances they have suffered in the past, Turkish-Cypriot policymakers try to establish a ‘rally-around-the-flag-effect in order to deflect attention from the domestic challenges they are facing, which is politically expedient. By domestic challenges, they identify the lack of recognition by the international community, the economic embargo they have been suffering, as well as their unilateral economic dependence on Turkey. These challenges create grievances to the Turkish-Cypriots. These grievances are manipulated by some policy-makers who allegedly serve their political expediences. The manipulation unfolds through the launch of an ‘external crisis’ against the Greek-Cypriots, who are blamed for the challenges that Turkish-Cypriots face.

## 7.4 PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

Based on my findings, it seems that the theoretical perspectives, either in their pure or in their ‘mixed’ form, account for the escalation of the Cyprus conflict. By taking an even closer look to my findings, I observe that grievance, either in its ‘pure’ form or in combination with geopolitics or greed, dominates the five discourses. I present the findings in accordance with the explanatory power of the 3Gs and in section 7.4 I conclude it with a theoretical reflection on them.

Relying on the findings shown in Table 7.4.1a, the geopolitics-related perspectives motivate two of the five discourses, one in each side. The greed-related perspectives motivate one of the five discourses in total and one of the two Turkish-Cypriot ones. Greed in its ‘single’ form is not found in the Greek-Cypriot side. Grievance-related perspectives inspire two of the five discourses, one of the three Greek-Cypriot discourses and one of the two Turkish-Cypriot discourses. Based on this figure, it seems that from the single perspectives, grievance is prioritised as the key theoretical explanation for the impact that the discovery of the gas reserves has had on the escalation of the Cyprus conflict. The reason for this claim is that grievance, in its ‘single’ form, is found in discourses produced by both sides.

Table 7.4.1a. Single perspectives motivating discourses

	Discourses	Geopolitics	Greed	Grievance
Greek-Cypriot	Gas boosting our geopolitical standing	✓	✗	✗
	Pipe dreams and imported nationalisms	✗	✓	✗
	Resentment matters	✗	✗	✓
Turkish-Cypriot	Gas stimulating political equality	✓	✗	✓
	Micro-politics	✗	✓	✗

From the single perspectives, I move to mixed perspectives motivating the discourses. As indicated in Table 7.4.1b, the geopolitics-grievance perspectives motivate one of the five discourses in total and, particularly one of the three Greek-Cypriot discourses. The interplay between geopolitics and grievance does not seem to inspire any of the two Turkish-Cypriot discourses. With respect to the geopolitics-greed perspectives, they motivate one of the five discourses and, particularly, one of the three Greek-Cypriot discourses but none out of the two Turkish-Cypriot discourses. Finally, the interplay between greed and grievance motivates only one of the five discourses in total and on the Turkish-Cypriot side, only one out of the two discourses.

Based on this presentation and as Table 7.4.3 shows, it seems that grievance, either in a single or in a mixed form, motivates four out of five discourses in total, in particular, two of the three Greek-Cypriot discourses and both Turkish-Cypriot discourses. Geopolitics, either in a single or a mixed form, motivates three of the five discourses. Both discourses are found on the Greek-Cypriot side, while none is found on the Turkish-Cypriot side. Greed, either in a single or in a mixed form, animates two of the five discourses, one for the Greek-Cypriot side and one for the Turkish-Cypriot side

Table 7.4.1b. Mixed perspectives motivating discourses

	Discourses	Geopolitics- Grievance	Geopolitics- Greed	Greed- Grievance
Greek-Cypriot	Gas boosting our geopolitical standing	✓	✗	✗
	Pipe-dreams and imported nationalisms	✗	✓	✗
	Resentment matters	✗	✗	✗
Turkish-Cypriot	Gas stimulating Political Equality	✓	✗	✗
	Micro-politics	✗	✗	✓

Table 7.4.2. The 3Gs in a single and in a mixed form

	Discourses	Geopolitics (single or mixed)	Greed (single or mixed)	Grievance (single or mixed)
Greek-Cypriot	Gas boosting our geopolitical standing	✓	✗	✓
	Pipe-dreams and imported nationalisms	✓	✓	✗
	Resentment matters	✗	✗	✓
Turkish-Cypriot	Gas stimulating Political Equality	✓	✗	✓
	Micro-politics	✗	✓	✓

## 7.5 CONCLUSIONS: THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS

The positions of the grievance theorists seem to dominate discourses in Cyprus. Grievance theorists clearly support the idea that the exclusion of local, proximate ethnic groups is likely to amplify the conflict-increasing effects of natural resources, due to the added ability to overcome collective action and coordination problems. It becomes clear that the sense of resentment, animating both sides, motivates the escalation of the Cyprus conflict. As supported by the Greek-Cypriot discourses, ‘Gas boosting our geopolitical standing’ and ‘Resentment matters’, the mistrust vis-à-vis the Turkish-Cypriots and especially their ability to keep Turkey’s influence on check explains the decision of the Greek-Cypriots to politically exclude Turkish-Cypriots’ from the hydrocarbons’ management. This creates a sense of relative deprivation on the Turkish-Cypriot side, as evidenced in the discourse ‘Gas stimulating political equality’.

Mistrust is a key aspect that can easily be framed as a symptom of historical grievances. According to the Greek-Cypriot discourse ‘Gas boosting our geopolitical standing’, Greek-Cypriots do not trust Turkish-Cypriots, not only because of their historical experiences but because they do not believe in the latter’s capacity to disentangle themselves from Turkey’s influence. The economic and military support which Turkey provides them does not give them any other choice than to ‘blindly’ rely on Turkey. Therefore, when it comes to the energy debate, Greek-Cypriots treat Turkish-Cypriots as irrelevant. This sparks Turkish-Cypriots’ reaction. They resort to Turkey’s help in order to make themselves relevant. This mistrust is further fuelled by the absence of a concrete policy agenda. According to the Turkish-Cypriot discourse, ‘Gas stimulating political equality’, although Turkish-Cypriots want to place the energy debate on the agenda of the negotiation talks, they lack the proper know-how to deal with such an issue. When asked about how energy could contribute to their economy, they cannot provide a concrete answer. This magnifies the mistrust of Greek-Cypriots against them and may be contributing to the escalation of the conflict.

Aligned with grievance-based explanations, the findings underscore the centrality of identity and group formation for understanding the escalation of the Cyprus conflict (Murshed and Tadjoeddin 2009). The relationship between Turkish-Cypriots as an identity group and the Republic of Cyprus as an official state lies at the core of the conflict. Based on the comparison of the incompatible objectives, the Cyprus conflict has escalated due to ‘the disarticulation between state and society as a whole’. According to the discourses, it seems that grievance holds the greatest explanatory power in the escalation of the Cyprus conflict. The sense of ‘deprivation’ expressed by both sides through different discourses is the stimulus that causes the competing parties to objectify the pre-existing conflict in terms of interests, stakes and goals in the energy arena. This confirms the work of other grievance theorists such as Aspinall (2007), Azar (1985, 1986, 1990) and Bensted (2011), who have prioritized ‘grievances’ as the key factor in the eruption of conflicts.

This does not mean that grievance can be claimed to be the unipolar cause in this interpretation of the escalation of the conflict. Greed also matters but not to the extent that grievance does. The Turkish-Cypriot discourse, 'Micro-politics' enriches our understanding of how greed and grievance intertwine. Through diversionary theory, borrowed from the literature of foreign policy, readers observe how policymakers under societal and political pressure pursue risky policies in order to deflect the blame from their own responsibilities. They embark upon 'rally-around-the-flag' actions in order to divert the public's opinion from the economic or social crisis transpiring at that moment. While the benefits which policymakers or rebels reap from the continuation of the conflict are significant for greed advocates, they should also consider how and whether the timing of a domestic turmoil factors into their 'greedy' behaviour. The counter argument is that the distinction line between political survival and greedy behaviour is blurry. Nonetheless, such behaviour represents a political expediency that may be fatal for the escalation of a conflict. In the fertile ground where such behaviour can operate, the importance of pre-existing grievances is unquestionable.

Finally, geopolitics matters as well according to my discourses. Indicatively, two out of the three Greek-Cypriot discourses (Gas boosting our geopolitical standing and Pipe dreams and imported nationalisms) and one Turkish-Cypriot discourse (Gas stimulating political equality) pinpointed the sovereignty attributes of the debate either in a single or a mixed form. In the discourse 'Gas boosting our geopolitical standing', 'geopolitical perspectives' were not portrayed as purely dogmatic guidelines underpinning Greek-Cypriots' behaviour; they were inspired by the lessons and traumas distilled from the past experience and within the context of the Cyprus conflict. The same discourse implies particular historical and cultural properties represented by the grievances which Greek-Cypriots have suffered from the 1974 events. Things would have been probably different if Greek-Cypriots were not treating Turkish-Cypriots as Turkey's 'Trojan horse'. Turkish-Cypriots were portrayed as the ones 'opening' the island's doors to Turkey. Therefore, a new understanding of geopolitics as a mechanism for resource-related conflicts should include the role of grievance. On the other hand, the Turkish-Cypriot discourse, 'Gas stimulating political equality' considers natural resources as an integral part of the island's future 'security architecture' and therefore should be involved from the very beginning. A matter of survival underpins their logic: they fear that if they are excluded, their presence on the island will become irrelevant. If their demands for participation in the hydrocarbons are not satisfied, Turkey has every right to take over and protect their interests.

