

ONTOLOGICAL (IN) SECURITY IN THE EU: THE CASE OF CYPRUS

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Research Article

Abstract

Ontological (in)security concept has been recently introduced to the security studies and gained popularity. Individuals and states instinctively pursue their physical security, but they never feel completely safe in an environment which stability and security of self's existence cannot be guaranteed. They're in a search for attaining ontological security through narratives, habits, and routines to generate a sense of trust in an uncertainty environment. In this regard, this article tries to answer a key question: how ongoing Cyprus conflict be explained through ontological (in)security considering the EU's failure to unravel security dilemmas between Turkish and Greek communities on the island? The findings of the article will contribute to the existing literature and open up new debates concerning the role of ontological (in)security in ongoing conflicts.

Keywords: Cyprus, Ontological Security, Conflict, Self-narrative, European Union

Avrupa Birliğinde Ontolojik Güven(siz)lik: Kıbrıs Örneği

Öz

Ontolojik güven(siz)lik kavramı son yıllarda güvenlik çalışmalarına dahil edilmiş ve popülerlik kazanmıştır. Bireyler ve devletler içgüdüsel olarak fiziksel güvenliklerini sağlamaya çalışırlar, ancak varlığın istikrarının ve güvenliğinin garanti edilemeyeceği bir ortamda kendilerini tamamen güvende hissetmezler. Belirsizlik ortamında devletler ve bireyler güven duygusu oluşturmak için anlatılar,

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alışkanlıklar ve rutinler yoluyla ontolojik güvenliğe ulaşma arayışındadırlar. Bu bağlamda, bu makale temel bir soruyu yanıtlamaya çalışmaktadır: AB'nin adadaki Türk ve Rum toplulukları arasındaki güvenlik ikilemlerini çözmedeki başarısızlığı göz önüne alındığında, devam eden Kıbrıs ihtilafı ontolojik güven(siz)lik üzerinden nasıl açıklanabilir? Makalenin bulguları mevcut literatüre katkıda bulunacak ve devam eden çatışmalarda ontolojik güvenliğin rolüne ilişkin yeni tartışmalara yol açacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kıbrıs, Ontolojik Güvenlik, Çatışma, Öz anlatı, Avrupa Birliği

Introduction

The European Union (EU), which was established about seventy years ago to contribute to the European peace by strengthening economic, social, and security cooperation among its member states, has never been faced in the past with such a multifaceted political, social and economic transnational crises and risks. These transnational crisis and risks in and around Europe are collective traumas triggered by terrorist attacks, economic disruptions, influx of refugees emanating from multiple conflicts in various parts of the Middle East, Asia, and Africa as well as the rise of populist far right parties across Europe. Although few of these risks are directly threaten the lives of EU citizens, they still create an invisible threat environment that give rise to fear and anxiety affecting psychologically the future of many people in Europe. Thus, a widespread belief in Europe is emerging that failure of the EU to meet local and global crises of the twenty-first century steadily leading to the rise of a sense of ontological insecurity.

The concept of ontological (in)security has been recently introduced to the security studies in international relations and quickly gained some popularity. Ontological security basically refers to attempts of an actor to protect his/her own sense of being against a recurrent uncertainty.¹ According to Catarina Kinnvall, Jennifer Mitzen, and Ian Manners who introduced the concept of ontological security in security studies, it refers not only to the security of the physical existence, but also to the security of self-being.² Individuals and states instinctively pursue their physical security, but they will never feel completely safe in an environment which

¹ Elisabeth Johansson-Noges, "The EU's Ontological (in)Security: Stabilising the Enp Area... and the EU-self?" *Cooperation and Conflict*, 53/2 (2018), p.529.

² Catarina Kinnvall, Ian Manners and Jennifer Mitzen, "Introduction to 2018 special issue of European Security: "ontological (in)security in the European Union"", *European Security*, 27/3 (2018), p.250.

stability and security of self's existence cannot be guaranteed. However, they are still in a search for attaining ontological security through narratives, habits and routines in order to generate a sense of stability, certainty and trust between states and individuals in an environment of uncertainty. Similar to states and individuals, EU is also, searching for ontological security in order to generate a sense of certainty and trust for itself among the member states' citizens. Consequently, this would help member states to "routinize" an effective and continuous communication process among themselves, and citizens would begin to consider the EU as their "home" and "safe area".³ The EU is also very important for constructing and sustaining self-identity of the member states since ontological security is also shaping states' foreign policy actions.

In general, narratives can provide a sense of stability and certainty during the time of crisis and, in particular, biographical narratives can be used by decision-makers in order to reduce the fears and anxieties between the parties. In addition to states, the EU is one of the important actors of the international system that use narratives quite a lot, especially, during the time of crises. The speech of President of the European Commission, Ursula Von Der Leyen, regarding the Covid-19 pandemic⁴ in September 2021 can be a good example of this. She said that "In the biggest global health crisis for a century, we chose to go it together so that every part of Europe got the same access to a life-saving vaccine. [...] We did that together as Commission, as Parliament, as 27 Member States. As one Europe. And we can be proud of it".⁵ By her statement she put emphasis on showing solidarity in the EU and stimulating ontological security during this health crisis among the citizens' of the member states. However, it should also bear in mind that narratives can also create ontological insecurity. In other words, an actor's self-narratives – aimed at creating basic trust and certainty – may increase uncertainty in others that could cause an ontological security dilemma. This ontological security dilemma situation is quite related to the case the Cyprus dispute as well. Narrative discourses of the two sides' officials are leading to ontological insecurity on the island. The statement of

³ "Renzi, Avrupa Bizim Evimiz, Bizim Geleceğimiz", <https://www.gundemkibris.com/dunya/renzi-avrupa-bizim-evimiz-bizim-gelecegimiz-h179480.html> (21.11.2021)

⁴ COVID-19 pandemic broke out in late 2019 in the Wuhan city of China and it has caused a big crises across the World.

⁵ 2021 The State of The Union Address by President Von Der Leyen, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/ov/SPEECH_21_4701 (21.11.2021)

the Archbishop of the Greek Cypriot Orthodox Church Chrysostomos II in the *Kathimerini* newspaper can be considered as an example. In his statement, Chrysostomos II said that “Turkish Cypriots cannot have the same rights as the Greek Cypriot majority”.⁶ This is creating an ontological insecurity for the Turkish Cypriots as they would be put in a “secondary class” status contrary to their equal political rights mentioned in the 1960 Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus. On the other hand, speeches of Turkish Cypriots’ officials leading to ontological insecurity for Greek Cypriots. The following statement on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is: “It should be noted that EU solidarity cannot act as a justification for overlooking the rights of the Turkish Cypriot People. The half-state that is the Greek Cypriot administration of Southern Cyprus, which was admitted as a full member of the EU before a settlement on the island and despite its violation of the Copenhagen criteria, is neither legitimate nor the bearer of all rights over the island”.⁷ Furthermore, the ontological security perception of Greek Cypriots after their membership to the EU is becoming ontological insecurity for Turkish Cypriots, who left outside the EU with their own/self-anxiety and fears. The following phrase of the Turkish Cypriot officials’ are the manifestation of this self-anxiety as: “The support afforded blindly by the European Union (EU) to the Greek Cypriot administration, which it has illegally accepted as a member due to purely political considerations, has turned into an unjust situation of usurpation of the rights of the Turkish Cypriots. While the EU should also uphold a position of acknowledging and respecting the rights of the Turkish Cypriots, the fact that it has gradually assumed the position of patron of the Greek Cypriots gravely shakes the foundations upon which the EU is founded. This stance of the European Union has, once again, demonstrated that the EU will not be impartial and fair regarding the resolution of the Cyprus problem, thus confirming the legitimacy of our mistrust of the EU”.⁸ In view of these debates and the key question on how the ongoing Cyprus conflict be explained through

⁶ Regarding the statement of the Greek Cypriot Archbishop Chrysostomos II, <https://mfa.gov.ct.tr/regarding-the-statement-of-the-greek-cypriot-archbishop-chrysostomos-ii/> (30.11.2021).

⁷ “Regarding European Union’s continuation to spoil the Greek Cypriot Administration”, <https://mfa.gov.ct.tr/regarding-european-unions-continuation-to-spoil-the-greek-cypriot-administration/> (30.11.2021).

⁸ “Regarding The Unjust Stance of the European Union”, <https://mfa.gov.ct.tr/member-state-solidarity-has-turned-into-horse-blindness/> (02.12.2021)

ontological (in)security in view of the EU's failure to unravel security dilemmas between Turkish and Greek communities on the island will be analysed in this article. It will be first analysed that while the EU's foundational and unity in diversity narratives help reducing uncertainties between the member states, it could become menacing for others at the same time. Ontological insecurity in the EU is also very much related with Turkey-EU relations, Islamophobia and rising hatred against Turks and Muslims which are causing prejudices that all negatively affect the Cyprus impasse.

In any conflict-ridden situations, the need for ontological security is as important as the need for physical security. In this regard, this article analyses ontological (in)security in the EU by focusing on the case of Cyprus. This study is divided into three sections: Firstly, the main features and assumptions of the ontological security perspective will be re-visited. In this part, narratives are examined specifically as a useful instrument to construct ontological (in)security for conceptualising how narrative discourses make sense of social and political conflicts. Secondly, the EU's foundational narratives that are related with its normative features could be seen as a threat by others and might also lead to a sort of ontological security dilemma will be explored. Thirdly, the EU's relationships with North and South Cyprus will be analysed in order to reveal how each side may feel threatened by other's narratives.

I. The Concept of Ontological (In)security and Re-visiting Theory

Security itself is one of the most important and arguable concepts in international relations due to various meanings attributed to it throughout different periods. From the 1940s until the 1980s, it was described and analysed in the context of military and defence issues with regard to the states. However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the beginning of 1990s, security has begun to be analysed from a multidimensional perspective. In other words, security studies began to focus on security issues at social, economic, environmental, cultural, and political levels as well. Especially, as the nuclear tension between two superpowers – the Soviet Union and the United States of America – of the Cold War era disappeared toward the 1980s, it also marked the beginning of an era that security has begun to broaden and deepen its scope to threats such as poverty, environmental problems, disease, and migration. These kind of threats to security creates not only physical insecurity, but also leads to a

sense of ontological insecurity. Therefore, it will be precise to argue that the multidimensional meaning of security also includes a new approach to it namely as ontological security, which is specifically referring to ‘security-of-being’.⁹ The main course of action of ontological security is to problematise the positivist meaning of security that while the realist and liberal notions of security are concerned with security dilemma and physical security by way of ‘security-as-survival’, ontological security is concerned more with ‘security-of-being’.

The orthodox positivist theories such as realism and liberalism are all trying to shape their arguments on rational knowledge and tend to exaggerate the importance of exact definitions. For this reason, they are not only restricted in scope, but also carry within them a particular bias. As what James Rosenau argue that ‘much of the writing in the field suffers from loose and ambiguous conceptions of theory’.¹⁰ As it is widely quoted from Max Weber, theories are abstract mental frameworks or conceptual constructs (*Gedankenbilder*) helping us with nurturing knowledge about the world.¹¹ The idea here is to conceive the theories as not a kind of solid argumentations, but different perspectives that provide a room of manoeuvre for interactions between different paradigms. These are different perspectives on the same ontological events that assist in understanding and explaining through constitutive theorising. All theories of international relations and ontological events in the world have important empirical and normative dimensions that help generating knowledge through thinking as every international relations theory is simultaneously about what the world is like and about what it ought to be like.¹²

Ontological security takes its source from psychoanalysis, sociology, and political psychology. This notion was first used by psychoanalyst Ronald Laing during the 1960s and sociologist Anthony Giddens during the

⁹ Bahar Rumelili, ‘Breaking with Europe’s pasts: memory, reconciliation, and ontological (In)security’, *European Security*, 27/3 (2018), p. 281.

¹⁰ James Rosenau quoted in Felix Berenskötter, “Deep Theorising in International Relations”, *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol.24, No.4 (2018), p.815.

¹¹ Richard Swedberg, *The Max Weber Dictionary*, (California: Stanford University Press, 2005), p.120.

¹² Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal, “Overview of International Relations: Between Utopia and Reality” in Robert E. Goodin (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Science*, (2013), p.3. URL: <<https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199604456.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199604456-e-032?print=pdf>> (23.02.2020)

1980s and the 1990s. Laing asserts that anxieties and dangers cause ontological insecurity and the fact that actors may feel secure ontologically depends largely on the absence of a threat to their identity and autonomy.¹³ Similarly, Anthony Giddens argues that ontological security refers to a person's principal sense of safety in the world and also it expresses a protection against future dangers and threats that allows individuals to maintain hope and courage in the face of whatever stiff circumstances he or she may later confront.¹⁴

According to Giddens, the concept of ontological security can be understood better through a case similar to the relationship between a new-born baby and his/her babysitter.¹⁵ A new-born baby gradually develops a basic sense of confidence through routines and habits about what's going on around him/her. This is also a process that identity of a new-born baby is developed after gaining a basic sense of what is happening around. Giddens identifies ontological security on the basis of routines and habits and, for him, individuals seek ontological security for creating some certain behavioural patterns.¹⁶ By means of these routinised behavioural patterns, individuals aim to contend with threats and overcome their fears and anxieties. Individuals also need to write a self-narrative in order to maintain their own being in their relations with others. Self-narratives are the 'meaning structures' that reveal who we are, where we come from and where we are heading to.¹⁷ 'Meaning structures' are very important since they are related to answering questions about self's existence. Therefore, meaning structures can be defined as the structures that exist in the human mind and constructed through both genetic features and individual experiences that derives from thinking, feeling, and perceiving.¹⁸ In short, self-narratives, habits and routines help individuals to create a sense of confidence for the continuity of their existential integrity.

¹³ R.D. Laing, *The Divided Self: an existential study in sanity and madness*, (London: Pelican, 1964), p.39 and 41.

¹⁴ Giddens, A., *Modernity and Self-identity: self and society in the late modern age*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), pp.38-39.

¹⁵ Giddens, p.3.

¹⁶ Giddens, p.36.

¹⁷ Kenneth J Gergen, and Mary M Gergen, 'Narratives of the Self' in Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman (ed) *Memory, Identity, Community the Idea of Narrative in the Human Sciences*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), p.20.

¹⁸ Lars-Gunnar Lundh, 'Meaning Structures and Mental Representations', *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 36/4 (1994), p.363.

Laing and Giddens dwell on the concept of ontological (in)security at the individual level.¹⁹ This is mostly known as exogenous approach related with considering ontological security as intersubjective where states are concerned with maintaining a consistent notion of ‘self’. On the other hand, Catarina Kinnvall, Jennifer Mitzen and Brent J Steele concentrate on this concept from sociological and psychological point of views and applied it to the state level in international relations.²⁰ Therefore, studies of these scholars contributed to the shift of the concept of ontological (in)security from the individual level to the social and state levels. This is mostly known as endogenous approach that emphasises on the state as an intra-subjective provider of ontological security for its citizens. As it is stated in her famous work titled ‘Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and Security Dilemma’, Jennifer Mitzen argues that ‘in addition to physical security, states also seek ontological security, or security of the self’.²¹ Similar to individuals, states also have their self-narratives which have been constituted through social and normative processes between them. By constructing these self-narratives, states try to establish and maintain their own ontological security. In other words, narratives are the product of these social and normative cognitive preferences. From a positivist point of view, narratives of past practices, memories and symbols are used as tools by most of political leaders with the aim of reaching and keeping order, seeking coherence and rational unity of thought, constructing collective identities, and gaining loyalty. The focus on the narrative construction of ontological security is also related with designing the mythology of a particular society.²² That is seeking order and coherence in order to attain security in the same way as realist and liberal notions of security. In a situation like instability and disorder, state’s existential anxiety soars and their foreign policy actions in the international system are affected. In contrast to

¹⁹ Ronald Laing *The Divided Self: an existential study in sanity and madness* (London: Pelican, 1964), pp.41-39; Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity: self and society in the late modern age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p.38.

²⁰ Catarina Kinnvall, and Jennifer Mitzen ‘An introduction to the special issue: Ontological securities in World politics’, *Cooperation and Conflict*, 52/1 (2017), p.4.; Steele, Brent J, *Ontological security in international relations: Self-Identity and IR State*, (New York: Routledge, 2008), p.3.

²¹ Jennifer Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and Security Dilemma”, *European Journal of International Relations*, 12/3, 2006), p.2.

²² Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: programme, myth, reality*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p.172); Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

positivism, the post-positivist stance on knowledge and security criticises solid epistemological foundations and put emphasis on ontological approaches through identifying and eradicating unnecessary social confinements and constraints of a state apparatus.

It is also worth mentioning here that constructing self-narratives could cause ontological security dilemmas. While a state is trying to ensure its own ontological security, this could lead to ontological insecurity for another. That is, self-narratives aimed at generating stability, trust and certainty for a state may cause instability, distrust, and uncertainty for another. For example, EU membership of South Cyprus is becoming ontological security for the Greek Cypriots, but North Cyprus's remaining outside the EU is becoming ontological insecurity for the Turkish Cypriots. This is a security dilemma that Cyprus's EU membership could not create an environment relatively safer and more stable for routinising the two communities' relationship with each other.

Paradoxically, according to Jennifer Mitzen some states prefer to maintain security dilemmas and instabilities in order to reach ontological security.²³ The security of the state self-identity does not only related with physical security, but also ontological security. In other words, ontological security might conflict with the physical security, and states might risk physical insecurity for ontological security. In order to defend her argument, she uses the Israel-Palestine conflict as an example. In this long-lasting conflict, there is both a physical insecurity and an ontological security. The physical integrity of parties is threatened by the conflict, but at the same time during the period of conflict self-narratives and routines are developed to identify and create the image of enemy for the ontological security purpose.

The recent studies on ontological security in international relations have put emphasis on that there is a strong link between the post-conflict reconciliation process and the notion of ontological security. While physical security of individuals, states and social groups are threatened by conflicts and wars, it is the ontological security approach that helps developing self-narratives, routines and habits through the socialisation process that constructs the image of enemy and friend in any security environments. Individuals, states, and social groups in international relations develop their behavioural patterns and so feel safe through identifying their enemies and

²³ Jennifer Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and Security Dilemma", *European Journal of International Relations*, (Vol.12, No.3, 2006), pp.24-25.

friends during any conflict situations. Conflicts and wars paradoxically create insecurity for any actors' physical integrity, but at the same time actors also could feel themselves ontologically secure.

Even though it may be seen as positive for states, individuals, and social groups to give an effort for ending disputes and conflicts in reaching peace and stability, any conflict resolution efforts for peace and stability may also have negative consequences on actors' ontological security. As argued by Bahar Rumelili, 'while the resolution or transformation of conflict promises to end violence, fear, and deprivation, it also threatens to unsettle the stability and consistency of self-narratives, and their associated routines and habits at the individual, societal and state levels'.²⁴ In the post-conflict reconciliation process, it may be necessary for individuals, states and societies to live together and cooperate with each other who defined themselves before as enemies. Living together and establishing cooperative relationship is very difficult for the opposing parties since conflict resolution efforts can also damage the 'meaning structures', which are constructed during conflict, and create fear and uncertainty leading to ontological insecurity. The presence of fear, uncertainty and ontological insecurity always creates a risk of returning to conflict. Therefore, political elites should always seek ways to construct ontological security during the peace process in order to deal with these fears and uncertainties. Constructing new routines and self-narratives may also be helpful in reducing the probability of returning to conflict period.²⁵

Concisely, security that is often related with being away from or elimination of threats is one of the most difficult and controversial issues in international relations. It is widely accepted that the concept of security is often perceived as the physical safety of a state. However, it is emphasised in this study that security does not only refer to the absence of threats to physical integrity, but also refer to the absence of threats to mental and psychological being. As a result, the ontological (in)security approach helps us to understand better the 'security of being' found in feelings of fear, anxiety, and suspicion. Moreover, analysing ontological (in)security reveals how fears and anxieties at individual, state and the EU levels cause psychosocio-political effects that shape the foreign policy behaviours of actors' in

²⁴ Bahar Rumelili, 'Breaking with Europe's pasts: memory, reconciliation, and ontological (In)security', *European Security*, 27/3 (2018), pp. 283.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 284.

the European and world security affairs.²⁶ Within the purview of this theoretical framework, next section will examine the meaning of ontological (in)security in the EU by focusing on its foundational narratives and the normative map it tries to set out.

II. Ontological (In)Security Approach in the EU

As it is stated above, the ontological security approach refers to attempts of an actor to protect its own being and it is closely related to emotions, fears, and anxieties. When it comes to ontological (in)security that the EU is facing with defined by Catarina Kinnvall, Ian Manners and Jennifer Mitzen as: ‘greatest security challenge facing people across Europe is not physical, despite the threats of Putin and ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria], but is a sense of fear and anxiety over their daily lives’.²⁷ These fears and anxieties of people about their daily lives generate a constant state of mistrust among people, social groups and states both in and outside of Europe. Due to sociological and psychological factors associated with ontological (in)security, it can be considered as a useful tool for understanding how fears and anxieties might lead to mistrust and instability. Thus, it is convenient to look at the EU integration process from the ontological (in)security approach and evaluate how narratives might be effective in generating security and threat to the others’ fears, anxieties, and existence.

The earlier structures and institutions of the EU were established after the Second World War in order to prevent another war between European states. While physical security issues like coal and steel productions were the raw materials of conducting war, they are converted to be the main tools for institutionalising societal matters such as peace, security, and mutual trust between the European countries. This initiative, launched by six European states – Belgium, the Federal Republic of Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands – in order to ensure peace through transferring the management of coal and steel production to a supranational structure, consists of twenty-eight members today and constitutes a primary

²⁶ Catarina Kinnvall, Ian Manners and Jennifer Mitzen, “Introduction to 2018 special issue of European Security: “ontological (in)security in the European Union””, *European Security*, 27/3 (2018), p.250.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p.249.

example of the ‘security community’.²⁸ In this ‘security community’, war has been unthinkable due to using methods such as peaceful settlement of disputes including diplomacy and negotiation. Therefore, the EU as one of the unique and long-lasting supranational structure could be considered as an ontological security community model in the international system economically, socially, and politically. While the EU since its foundation is widely depicted as a physical security community, the present fundamental question is what and which features make the EU an ontological security community. It is argued in many normative studies that the EU presumed the role of a security provider as a ‘security community’– a peace project onto which various myths, symbols and imaginations are being projected.²⁹ The absence of a threat to physical integrity of individuals, social groups and states at present is not sufficient to ensure a truly safe environment. In other words, the EU can be successful with providing physical security to its members; but if the EU is unable to provide ontological security to its citizens, it would not be possible to provide a completely safe environment.

Ontological (in)security can easily be applied to the EU since it is considered as a ‘security union’ in the same way as it is argued as a ‘pluralistic security community’. Thus, in the light of the attribution of these two concepts to the EU, ‘security of being’ is becoming very relevant to the European integration process due to the liberalisation efforts may lead to economic and social dislocation and generate insecurity and uncertainty for individuals in member states.³⁰ To be more precise, economic and social dislocation such as increasing unemployment, poverty, refugee influx, environmental degradation, drug trafficking and crime unrefutably generate an ontological insecurity. Vincent Della Sala argues in his work titled ‘Narrating Europe: the EU’s ontological security dilemma’ that although the EU may not seek to be an only security provider for Europeans, it tries to

²⁸ Karl W. Deutsch (et al.), *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area: International Organization in the Light of Historical Experience*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

²⁹ Catarina Kinnvall, Ian Manners and Jennifer Mitzen, “Introduction to 2018 special issue of European Security: “ontological (in)security in the European Union””, *European Security*, 27/3 (2018), p.251; Ian Manners, “Global Europa: mythology of the European Union in world politics”, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 48/1 (2010), p.83; Ian Manners, “European communion: political theory of European union”, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 20/4, (2013), p.475.

³⁰ Ian Manners, “European [Security] Union: Bordering and Governing a Secure Europe in a Better World?”, *Global Society*, 27/3 (2013), p.412.

develop and protect its own ontological security through narratives.³¹ The EU's foundational narratives are fundamentally based on ontological values that provide security such as liberal democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights. The foundational narratives based on such values can be observed in the speech of President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, during the Munich Security Council meeting in February 2014. He said that 'economies based on rules, societies based on values – this is who we are, this is what we embody to so many, and what – together – we must stand for in the world'.³² In contrast, Ian Manners argued that '[a]cross Europe the EU is fast becoming a convincing reason for groups to mobilise in protest and action – from Copenhagen to Nice to Gothenburg the EU has become a synonym for "threat"'.³³ It is argued that since the securitisation of the EU has begun, it represented in narratives as a threat to ontological security and eventually existential security in the lives of Europeans and non-Europeans. Instead of exercising its normative power as a provider of ontological security, the EU is duplicating the violent narrative of the state as a provider of ontological insecurity. This can best be seen in the EU member states' violent policies against non-European refugees who are coming from various directions into the EU.

Narrativizing 'collective identity' for the EU to develop ontological security among the Europeans is unavoidably generates the 'other' and its own narratives. Narratives, symbols and memories of the past have been used by the EU as a tool for linking individuals and member states to each other with the aim of developing a sense of 'us'.³⁴ These are also being used by political elites in the EU to construct a 'collective identity'. Both states and individuals feel themselves more confident and secure among their counterparts who share a common language, religion, culture, or ethnicity. Therefore, similar to individuals and states, the EU as an institutional whole generates much safer environment for itself through constructing 'collective

³¹ Vincent Della Sala, "Narrating Europe: the EU's ontological security dilemma", *European Security*, 27/3 (2018), p.266.

³² Herman van Rompuy quoted in Vincent Della Sala, "Narrating Europe: the EU's ontological security dilemma", *European Security*, 27/3 (2018), p.271.

³³ Ian Manners, *European [security] Union: from existential threat to ontological security* (Copenhagen: Copenhagen Peace Research Institute, 2002), p.3.

³⁴ Rita Ribeiro, "Narratives of Redemption: Memory and Identity in Europe" in Cabecinhas, R. and Abadia, L. (eds.), *Narratives and social memory: theoretical and methodological approaches*, (Braga: Communication and Society Research Centre Publication, University of Minho, 2013), p.226; Vincent Della Sala, "Narrating Europe: the EU's ontological security dilemma", *European Security*, 27/3 (2018), p.266.

identity'. However, 'collective identities' are defined on the basis of differences since 'self' and 'others' are the two main elements of the identity construction process. In this process, while 'self' is identified as the representative of 'order' and 'stability', 'other' is also seen as the symbol of 'threat', 'disorder' and 'uncertainty'. Constructing the 'other' helps the EU to predict the 'other's' action and thereby uncertainties might be eliminated. However, 'the other's' ontological security might be threatened from this kind of 'collective identity' construction. Since each identity is created by constructing the 'other', 'collective identity' constructed by the EU might cause ontological insecurity for the non-Europeans who do not share the same memories, practices, and habits. However, when looking at the EU's foundational and unity in diversity narratives, generating the sense of 'self' for the EU is derived from a reflection that is largely inward looking – often looking to its past as its internal 'Other'.³⁵

Ontological security helps going beyond state-centric thinking and looking at security issues not just from local, state, and supranational levels, but also from social, economic, and political security perspectives. Beside 'collective identity' perspective of ontological (in)security, the 'identity groups' is another perspective that could be analysed both inside and outside of the EU. Identity groups, including particularly religious, minority and nationalist groups, could easily be affected from rapid social changes caused by either globalisation or postcolonialism.³⁶ In other words, although globalisation has made it easier for different identities to come together and share their views with each other, these identities may also feel their ontological security under threat due to uncertainty, social and economic dislocation and insecurity created by those differences. In such a situation, these affected groups try to stick to their identity traits and group loyalties in order to cope with uncertainties and insecurities. That is, individuals often feel safe among similar identities and insecure among different identities.

Any economic and social transformations can also threaten ontological security of the EU itself as well as its identity groups. In the meantime, it would not be wrong to claim that the EU is now in trouble with protecting its own ontological security against the threats derive from migration, Covid-19

³⁵ Diez, T., "Europe's others and the return of geopolitics", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 17, 2004), p.322; Vincent Della Sala, "Narrating Europe: the EU's ontological security dilemma", *European Security*, (27/3, 2018), p.269.

³⁶ Kinnvall, C., 2002. Nationalism, religion and the search for chosen traumas: comparing Sikh and Hindu identity constructions. *Ethnicities*, 2 (1), 79–106. p. 80

pandemic, terrorist attacks, global economic crises, economic disruptions and also from the 'Brexit' process.³⁷ In particular, the excessive refugee influx emanating from multiple conflicts in various parts of the Middle East, Asia and Africa in recent years has triggered social and economic changes that would threaten the EU's ontological security. The inexorable migration towards Europe has triggered the securitisation of subjectivity such as xenophobia and paved the way for the rise of the populist far-right parties within the EU member states. As a result of the increase in xenophobia and of the far right, uncertainties and fears in the EU sharply increased. Despite all the efforts, it seems the EU is unable to deal with these challenges since it has not yet adopted a common policy on migration and refugee problems. Some of the EU member states, especially the Hungarian and the Polish governments, prefer to set and implement their own migration and refugee policies. At the same time, Bulgaria and Hungary assert that the measures taken against the refugee crisis should be within the framework of national sovereignty.³⁸ It is depicted here that the inability to develop a common policy on migration and refugee issues deepens the current crisis and increases ontological insecurity in the EU.

The ontological security perspective also examines the EU member states' habits, practices and routines in their relations with each other. Habits, practices, and routines are the key determinants in the process of attaining ontological security. Since ontological security creates an environment of trust and predictability between states, it also enables individuals to continue their daily lives safely. When routines and habits are broken, individuals may experience indecision, confusion or anger which may trigger conflict and violence in the EU member states. Therefore, the EU member states try to provide and protect their ontological security by sustaining their routines based on especially multilateral security cooperation and negotiation culture. Habits, practices, and routines are at the same time closely related with the notion of identity as they determine the structure of

³⁷ 'Brexit' is an acronym for the words 'Britain' and 'exit'. It is referring to the departure of the UK from the EU. The process initiated by the Conservative Party in 2013 with the demand for reform in relations with the EU and resulted in a decision to leave it in a referendum (51.9%) held on June 23, 2016. The UK officially left the EU on February 1, 2020. ("Brexit: all you need to know about the UK leaving the EU", *BBC News*, (February 17, 2020). URL: <<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-32810887>> (04.03.2020).

³⁸ Tatiana P. Rizova, "The Securitization of the European Migrant Crisis - Evidence From Bulgaria and Hungary (2015-2017)", *Review of European Studies*, 11/4 (2019), pp.87-78.

it. Especially, routinising relations between the Europeans contribute to the formation of a ‘collective identity’ in the EU. As Mitzen argued:

‘Identities are anchored in routines with significant others, and actors – even corporate actors such as states – become attached to or invested in these routines. This is because routines give individuals an important form of security, which, following Anthony Giddens, I call “ontological security”.’³⁹

Once the EU develops its own ‘collective identity’, it would generate a sense of agency – an ability to make choices and pursue favourable outcomes. In order to act in the name of ‘collective identity’, the EU needs not only institutional and legal instruments to act as a single and purposive actor, but also routines, habits and practices for developing an understanding about in whose name it acts and why in times of a possible external action.

In a nutshell, ontological security is broadly a useful approach in analysing the EU integration process and finding out connection between (in)securities and identity constructions. It specifically allows to examine the EU from a critical perspective by concentrating on ‘self’, ‘other’ and ‘identity’. Through the construction of insecurity by focusing on the role of anxiety and fears, ontological security allows to go beyond institutional and policy-oriented analysis of the EU studies. In the next section, the concept of ontological security would be applied to the case of Cyprus. The nuts and bolts of the conflict in Cyprus threaten not only the physical security of the parties, but also generate basic ‘existential’ questions about ‘being’ and ‘identity’ which deepens the solutionlessness. To be more precise, psychological situations such as feelings of having or not having, prejudices, mutual perceptions, and insecurities in Cyprus conflict lead to ontological insecurity and prevent the efforts of any kind of solutions.

III. The Ontology of Cyprus Conflict

There is no doubt that a strong link exists between the concept of ontological (in)security and the post-conflict reconciliation efforts. In order to reach an ontological security situation, a peace process should be initiated through political and social transitions in parties that involved in conflict with each other. The peace and security studies, which highlights the importance of post-conflict reconciliation between the societies, put

³⁹ Jennifer Mitzen, “Anchoring Europe’s civilizing identity: habits, capabilities and ontological security”, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 13/2, (2006), p.271.

emphasis on reinstating new narratives and routines for reaching a kind of ontological security. Ontological security occurs when societies are exempted from ‘anxieties and dangers’ where ‘identity and autonomy are never in danger’. In contrast, ontological insecurity arises ‘with the consequent attempts to deal with...anxieties and dangers’ where ‘identity and autonomy are always in question’.⁴⁰ In any intractable conflicts, telling and re-telling of stories create a situation of constancy for the shaping of cognitive and normative routines that could control the behaviour of actors. The case of Cyprus and relations between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots on the island are trapped in a conflict that the physical security of the two communities not only threatened, but also their certain ‘existential’ issues are also endangered including basic parameters of life, being, identity and ‘self’ in relation to the EU, relevant states – namely, the UK, Turkey, and Greece – and the world.

From an ontological security perspective, the two communities’ physical security in Cyprus are threatened by demands either to take under control the lost sovereignty or claims about power-sharing in governing a state. The Greek Cypriots demand to integrate Turkish Cypriots into the existing state of the Republic of Cyprus⁴¹ is related with the Greek Cypriots reclaim to restore the lost sovereignty in the northern part of the island. The existence of a separate state of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is an ontological insecurity for the Greek Cypriots and the Republic of Cyprus. The UN-led Annan Plan, which was prepared in 2004, was seen by Greek Cypriots as a threat to the sovereignty of the Republic of Cyprus since the plan was preparing a ‘virgin birth’ of a ‘new’ Cyprus as a ‘politically new but not legally new Cyprus’.⁴² On the other side, the Greek Cypriots demand of considering a more homogeneous national identity with Turkish Cypriots integrated into it as a national minority considered as ontological insecurity by Turkish Cypriots. This is seen as a threat by Turkish Cypriots to their state of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus since national homogeneity is undermining their security, identity and history of power-

⁴⁰ Laing quoted in Catarina Kinnvall, Ian Manners & Jennifer Mitzen, “Introduction to 2018 special issue of European Security: “ontological (in)security in the European Union””, *European Security*, 27/3 (2018), p.251.

⁴¹ All states in the world officially recognises it, except Turkish Cypriots and Turkey officially recognises the state in the Southern part of Cyprus as the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus.

⁴² Alvaro de Soto, “The Chess Master -Cyprus” in Harriet Martin, *Kings of Peace, Pawns of War*, (New York: Continuum, 2006), p.39.

sharing rights. It can be recognized in the recent speech of Ersin Tatar, President of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, in October 2021 that: “The President of the Greek Cypriot Administration, Nikos Anastasiadis, has once again revealed that their goal is to patch our people into this republic that has turned into a Greek state, while calling for us to return to the 1960 Republic of Cyprus, which they even changed the date of establishment, before and after New York. It is obvious and it is not possible to go back to 1960. The only way to reach an agreement is our proposal based on the existence of two separate sovereign equal states. We will not back down from this proposal either”.⁴³ On the other side, since plebiscite in 1950 on the question of union of Cyprus with Greece, the Greek Cypriot administration and church officials are constantly telling and re-telling of stories that the island is Greek and there should be a unitary nation-state.⁴⁴ Greek Cypriot administration’s long-lasting aim to convert the “functional federal state” of the Republic of Cyprus into a unitary state can be observed in the decision of Greek Cypriot Parliament on "Celebrating the 1950 Enosis referendum in Greek schools"⁴⁵, in February 2017. This can also be observed in the speeches of Greek officials from Greece. For example, after Cyprus become the member of the EU, the former Greek Prime Minister Kostas Simitis said that “Enosis has been achieved with Cyprus' membership in the European Union”⁴⁶. Other example is the statement of Charalambos Petrides, Defence Minister of the Greek Cypriot, during a meeting with Chrysostomos II in 2020. He said that “We will do our part and move forward for a better future

⁴³ “KKTC Cumhurbaşkanı Tatar: Kıbrıs'ta 1960'a dönmek mümkün değildir” <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/kktc-cumhurbaskani-tatar-kibris-ta-1960a-donmek-mumkun-degildir/2380507>, <https://www.kibrismanset.com/guncel/tatar-dan-1960-anayasasi-na-donus-onerisi-ret-h335958.html> (01.12.2021).

⁴⁴ The Committee on National Council, which was including Greek Cypriot political and religious leaders, held the plebiscite on 15 January 1950 and approximately 96% of Greek Cypriot population was in favour of *Enosis* (union of Cyprus with Greece). Dimitris Kalantzopoulos, “Cyprus in the 1940s: The Nationalisation of Greek Cypriot Politics” in Thekla Kyritsi and Nikos Christofis (ed.), *Cypriot Nationalisms in Context – History, Identity and Politics*, (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p.128.

⁴⁵ No:47, 14 February 2017, Press Release Regarding the Decision by the Greek Cypriot Parliament to Introduce A Commemoration in Schools of The 1950 Plebiscite on “Enosis”, https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_47_-14-february-2017_-press-release-regarding-the-decision-by-the-greek-cypriot-parliament-to-introduce-a-commemoration-in-schools-of-the-1950-plebiscite-on_enosis_en.mfa (15.12.2021).

⁴⁶ The Statement of President Ersin Tatar, <https://kktcb.org/en/the-statement-of-president-ersin-tatar-8018>, (28.11.2021)

for Cypriot Hellenism tomorrow”⁴⁷. These statements are clearly revealing that the island of Cyprus is seen by Greeks as a part of Hellenism and thus undoubtedly creates ontological insecurity for the Turkish Cypriots.

Although multitude of factors such as political and economic or domestic and international play a role in political transitions and peace processes, the key concern from an ontological security perspective is to rewrite the post-conflict narratives. However, the lack of reconciliation dynamics and creating a new memory politics in managing social tensions and anxieties, which are triggered by transformations between the two communities on the island, results in the failure of suppressing conflicts and disciplining internal battles over memory politics. For example, securitising the concept of identity through constructing ‘self’ vis-à-vis ‘other’ is such a hurdle that ‘other’ is defined as radically different and threatening. Such a securitisation of the concept of identity does not help in transforming the identities of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot people into a ‘Cypriot’ identity. An ontological remedy to such identity conflicts on the island is to de-securitise and link it to the EU values, norms and institutions in order to develop a superior European identity upon national identities. De-securitisation leads to politicisation and socialisation of a common identity, but the lack of mechanisms in the EU for handling intractable conflicts and political transitions not only raise doubts about the EU as being a normative power, but also lost its credibility as being a neutral third party. The transformation of political conflict situations also unavoidably threatens to disrupt the stability and consistency of self-narratives that include routines and habits. Unfortunately, the EU lost its legitimate position in order to be considered as a neutral party to the Cyprus conflict since the Greek Cypriots ontological security after their membership to the EU become ontological insecurity for the Turkish Cypriots. While EU asserts that it encourages an agreement to be reached on the Cyprus issue, it also disregards the existence of one side on the island and it opposes the Turkish Cypriots’ solution based on the existence of two sovereign equal states. It is clearly understood from the following statements of Ersin Tatar that Turkish Cypriots’ supports such a solution. Ersin Tatar said that “While the solution based on the federal basis remains a dream that will not come true, the only realistic solution is the solution based on the existence of two sovereign equal states supported

⁴⁷ Başpiskopos II. Chrysostomos: Türkiye Doğu Akdeniz’de baş belası olmayı bırakmalı, https://www.kibrispostasi.com/c58-GUNEY_KIBRIS/n336389-baspiskopos-ii-chrysostomos-turkiye-dogu-akdenizde-bas-belasi-ol, (30.11.2021).

by Turkey, the largest and most powerful country in the region. There is never any turning back from this”.⁴⁸ On the other hand, The EU’s prejudicial position to the Cyprus conflict can be observed in the recent expressions of the EU officials. For instance, Ursula Von Der Leyen has made a statement on 8 July 2021. She stated in her statement that "I want to repeat that we will never, ever accept a two state solution. We are firm on that and very united"⁴⁹ Similar to Leyen’s statement, Joseph Borrell, the Vice President of the European Commission and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security of the EU, said that “EU had rejected the “two-state solution model in Cyprus”, following the EU Foreign Affairs Council dated 12 July 2021.⁵⁰ EU officials’ such statements obviously undermines its legitimate position. Instead of trying to understand the reasons why the Turkish Cypriots are claiming a two state solution, the EU officials are rejecting without even thinking over it. On the other hand, the efforts of reconciliation have always included in itself the risk of creating more conflict than it resolves, if ontological insecurities are not thoroughly understood. The EU can be seen from this perspective as an obstacle and made the Cyprus conflict more complex to resolve after Greek Cypriots became the full member of the EU as being the only representative of the Republic of Cyprus.

In addition, transformation of conflicts or post-conflict reconciliation efforts to end anxieties and dangers also threatens to disrupt the stability and consistency of self-narratives, including associated routines and habits of the two communities. Such a dramatic change and transformation inevitably unleashes the emergence of spoilers who are constantly aiming to damage post-conflict reconciliation efforts and peace processes. Ontological insecurity provides a favourable ground for spoilers and opposing politicians to impede the conciliatory actors through upholding conflict and promising

⁴⁸ “President Ersin Tatar made statements regarding the solution proposal based on two sovereign equal states: “The arrow has come out of the bow”, <https://kktcb.org/tr/cumhurbaskani-ersin-tatar-egemen-esit-iki-devlete-dayali-cozum-onerisiyle-8641>, (16.12.2021).

⁴⁹ “EU will 'never, ever' accept two-state deal on Cyprus”, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/eu-will-never-ever-accept-two-state-deal-cyprus-2021-07-08/>, (16.12.2021).

⁵⁰ “Regarding the press release of Josep Borrell, The Vice- President of The European Commission and The High Representative of The European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, <https://mfa.gov.ct.tr/regarding-the-press-release-of-josep-borrell-the-vice-president-of-the-european-commission-and-the-high-representative-of-the-european-union-for-foreign-affairs-and-security-policy/>, (16.12.2021).

to return to established routines and habits. Due to ontological insecurity between Turkish and Greek communities in Cyprus, radicals, far-right nationalists and opposing politicians on both side of the island are successfully spoiling any peace efforts.

Several key insights can be drawn from the Cyprus conflict that could be considered relevant for ontological security: Firstly, the steady construction of a security community in the EU through the European integration process is the result of series of ontological insecurities in the European history. It has been learned that imposing homogeneity on the opposing parties or assuming one state's domination in Europe generated further insecurities which routinely disrupted peace and led to violence. The conflict in Cyprus since 1950s is also having a long historical past that encountered periods of ontological insecurities between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots. The foundational narrative of the birth of the EU is closely related with the decline of the nation, the state, and the nation-state in the Western Europe. Therefore, attaining the idea of so-called 'Cypriotness' would mean not just the retreat of the state and weakening the centralised state authority, but also new heterogenous approaches should be developed about nation, citizenship and patriotism that would protect the identities of the two communities. The idea of 'Cypriotness' should be developed around the Grotian-type of cosmopolitanism and rationalism which could be similar to the perception that all human beings belong to a moral security community.

Secondly, any ontological shifts from insecurity to security through radical domestic political, social, and economic transformations might render conflict narratives obsolete and irrelevant and thus paves the way for the construction of new narratives. The dilemma of narratives and counter-narratives between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots led to the rise of mutual ontological insecurity. It is expected that the membership of the Greek part of Cyprus to the EU would at least facilitate radical domestic political and social transformations that would bring conflict narratives among Greek Cypriots against Turkish Cypriots into a positive change. At the same time, increasing the EU's political, social and economic interactions with Turkish Cypriots freed from the pressure of Greek Cypriots could also prepare the Turkish part of Cyprus for a possible political, social and economic transformation or to a post-conflict reconciliation.

Thirdly, for any 'ideal' degree of political transformation from conflict to peace or social and cultural convergence in both communities' narratives

require the diffusion of a shared historical narrative and collective memory in the joint (non-) governmental textbooks and tales in order to protect the reconciliation process from any political impediments. The realisation of a shared historical narrative and collective memory are the result of a social construction process whose function is to make sense of the social evolution of both communities successively. Writing a shared historical narrative and developing a collective memory in post-conflict reconciliation requires the negotiation on a shared history politically and convergence of collective memories culturally between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots. The interaction between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots has much to do with how they view each other as much as how this interaction relates to shared and conflicting interests. In the light of this understanding, those young Turkish Cypriot people in the streets of North Cyprus were writing a new narrative by demonstrating their willingness that they are ready for writing a shared historical narrative and developing a collective memory with Greek Cypriots by voting overwhelmingly in favour of the Annan Plan. Unfortunately, the Greek Cypriot people on the other side of the island frustrated all post-conflict reconciliation efforts and demonstrated their unwillingness that they are not ready for writing a shared historical narrative and developing a collective memory with Turkish Cypriots by voting overwhelmingly against the Annan Plan.⁵¹

Conclusion

There are several issues that could be highlighted from an ontological security approach viewpoint regarding the Cyprus issue. Successfully writing a shared historical narrative and developing a collective memory in post-conflict reconciliation efforts require narrators that are seen as credible and reliable. There has yet to emerge a 'Cypriot story' that is politically narrated and widely understood by the society without it being filtered through the national lenses of narrators on both sides of the island. Neither Turkish Cypriots nor Greek Cypriots see each other's negotiators as credible and reliable. A successful foundational narrative is largely rooted in efforts

⁵¹ A referendum on the Annan Plan was voted on both the Southern and the Northern parts of Cyprus separately on 24 April 2004. The two communities were asked to approve the United Nations led proposal for reuniting the island. While it was approved by 65% of Turkish Cypriots, it was rejected by 76% of Greek Cypriots. 'Cyprus "spurns historic chance", (*BBC News*, (April 25, 2004). URL: <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3656753.stm>> (19.03.2020).

of reconciliation and reconstruction of national stories. The Annan Plan was the closest proposal for at least beginning to write a common history and developing a collective memory for the future Greek and Turkish generations. There must also be a change in the mindset of political leaders on both sides of the island. Instead of generating and re-generating the story of diversity and differences through narrativising the history on opposing identities and then watching how a solution to the Cyprus problem is being crafted and imposed by outside actors, political leaders on both sides of the island should have the will of initiating an ontological security process from inside for reaching a sustainable peace. Similar to regional and systemic factors and actors that were determinant in ending wars and conflicts in Europe during the World War II (namely allied powers), they also play an important role in a possible resolution of the Cyprus conflict (namely Turkey, Greece, UK, USA and Russian Federation). In addition, ontological (in)security between regional and systemic actors causing ontological (in)security in Cyprus as well. Therefore, post-conflict reconciliation between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots in Cyprus would also require the harmonisation of societal and political transformations between the narratives of regional and systemic actors regarding the Cyprus question and the Eastern Mediterranean.

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