

Erdoğan's Authoritarian Neoliberalism Goes to Cyprus. What are the Chances of Success of The Imported Authoritarian Neoliberal Model?

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ABSTRACT

The study seeks to advance the notion of authoritarian neoliberalism by discussing how the exportation of the authoritarian neoliberal model interacts with a closed society experiencing socio-economic upheaval. The paper follows the efforts made by a foreign power, such as Turkey, to assure the survival of an internationally non-recognised entity, such as the 'TRNC', via the neoliberal transformation of its economy and the imposition of alien political strategies and social values. The paper intends to argue that the authoritarian imposition of conservative and neoliberal policies on a society by a foreign actor doesn't necessarily produce the desired outcome. Instead, by leaving behind accumulated unsolved problems and by reproducing social and political inequalities it can raise concerns about the sustainability of the structure that the neoliberal policies were designed to support.

Keywords: Turkish Cypriots, Turkey, authoritarianism, neoliberalism, conservatism

INTRODUCTION: THE TURKISH GOVERNMENT'S AUTHORITARIAN NEOLIBERALISM MEETS THE TURKISH CYPRIOTS

In early 2011, Cemil Çiçek, the Turkish government's deputy prime minister in charge of the Turkish Cypriot affairs stated that the internationally non-recognised 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC)' which was founded in the northern part of Cyprus in 1983 with the help of his country was at risk of bankruptcy. A few years earlier, the attempts to solve the Cyprus Issue based on a bizonal, bi-communal federation failed when the majority of the Greek Cypriot community rejected the Annan Plan in 2004. Had the Annan Plan been approved, and the reunification of the island realised, it would probably have led to the influx of funds and investments from abroad thus helping to solve some of the Turkish Cypriot community's chronic economic issues. However, in 2011 having no other alternative stream of funds, the "TRNC" was, according to Çiçek, on the verge of economic collapse. The Turkish politician argued the necessity for extensive reforms in Cyprus' second-largest community to reduce the risk of an impending economic catastrophe (Cemil Çiçek'ten şok açıklama, 2022).

Turkey's Deputy Prime Minister asserted in the same statement that the strategy Turkey had previously employed to address its own economic problems was the appropriate one for the Turkish Cypriot community also. Çiçek claimed that the Turkish Cypriots should enact neoliberal policies that would allow for the shrinkage of the public sector and the expansion of private capital in Northern Cyprus. Regardless of how the endeavour to resolve the Cyprus Problem would progress, Çiçek and Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (JDP) asserted that the 'TRNC' required fundamental reforms like those previously applied in Turkey.

The JDP, which had been raising concerns about the future of the 'TRNC' since the early 21st century, took over the Turkish government in 2002 under the charismatic leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan with the promise of evading the economic crisis. The previous Turkish governments worked with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to avert the looming economic collapse of the 1990s and the early 2000s. The JDP followed in the same vein during the initial phase of its governance by employing neoliberal strategies aiming on the one hand to tackle the ongoing economic issues and on the other to democratise the country. Having secured the backing of the IMF and other international actors, JDP moved on to change its country by implementing its own governance formula which combined neoliberalism, conservatism, and authoritarianism in equal parts. Nevertheless, when Çicek was arguing for fundamental reforms in the 'TRNC' in 2011, the neoliberal authoritarian traits of the JDP governments had not only increased significantly but also begun being exported to the 'TRNC'.

This paper aims to discuss these developments which have had minimal impact in most of the scientific studies focusing on the Turkish-Turkish Cypriot relations. The study seeks to advance the notion of authoritarian neoliberalism by discussing how the exportation of the authoritarian neoliberal model interacts with a closed society experiencing socio-economic upheaval. The paper follows the efforts made by a foreign power, such as Turkey, to assure the survival of an internationally non-recognised entity, such as the 'TRNC', via the neoliberal transformation of its economy and the imposition of alien political strategies and social values. The paper intends to argue that the authoritarian imposition of conservative and neoliberal policies on a society by a foreign actor doesn't necessarily produce the desired outcome. Instead, by leaving behind accumulated unsolved problems and by reproducing social and political inequalities it can raise concerns about the sustainability of the structure that the neoliberal policies were designed to support.

TURKEY'S AUTHORITARIAN NEOLIBERAL MODEL

The implementation of authoritarian neoliberalism in Turkey has attracted the attention of many researchers. As it is well established in academic literature, after the military coup in 1980 Turkish governments focused on the reconstruction of the Turkish economy based on the Western neoliberal model (Şenses, 2012). Starting from the rise of the Motherland Party in power up until the Justice and Development Party's era, Turkish governments focused on the goal of rebuilding the Turkish economy by pushing for the establishment of a free market economy. Indeed, they promoted a free market economy with limited state intervention in both the economic and social affairs. Also, they committed to the freedom of trade and capital both within the Turkish economy and in the country's trade and economic relations with the rest of the world (Stelgias, 2020). As maintained by Tansel, neoliberal policies such as restraining the welfare state, restricting labour rights, giving priority to capital interests, and a wave of privatisations were implemented by the JDP governments throughout their time in power (Tansel, 2018). In fact, 'authoritarian institutional structures, practices with neoliberal ideology, powerful political alliances, Islamic values, and repressive practices' were frequent in the history of modern Turkey according to Özkiziltan (Özkiziltan, 2019).

The neoliberal reconstruction of the Turkish economy has been accompanied by the imposition of conservative values in Turkish society. From the period of the military coup in 1980 to the years of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's rule, Turkish governments have put an emphasis on religion and the conservative values that bind society in order to legitimise their decisions and to

counter the side-effects of the neoliberal reconstruction of the economy and society. As Acar and Altunok argue, in modern Turkey there is an 'interaction between neoliberalism and neoconservatism, two political rationalities that play key roles in the structuring or control of public and private domains, and the connections within these domains (Acar & Altunok, 2013)'. Öniş adds that once in power the JDP gradually 'transformed toward a typical conservative party in the tradition of the centre-right parties which have been a dominant feature of the Turkish party system ever since the inception of the multi-party era in 1950 (Öniş, 2009)'. Kaya (Kaya, 2015) and Uzer (Uzer, 2020) confirm the emergence of the conservative identity of the AKP throughout time. According to them, the JDP, which started off having a democratic outlook, gradually became an anti-democratic, authoritarian, conservative party.

In the search for popular legitimacy, Turkish governments also resorted to the adoption of an authoritarian model of governance. As Bruff maintains, neoliberal policies 'have proven increasingly difficult to earn the (society's) assent (Bruff, 2012)'. To curve the societies' hostile reaction to the new policies, especially during the post-1945 era, neoliberals, instead of seeking the cooperation of the people, chose to develop a more explicit authoritarianism. As Kiely argues this explicit authoritarianism that was developed to resist the demand for democracy 'was designed to de-democratizing the liberal democratic political order (Kiely, 2017)'. Once the political order is de-democratized it becomes vital to 'build legitimacy' again. To do this, as Chacko mentions, the supporters of neoliberal economics attempt to apply non-democratic reinterpretations of the state (Chacko, 2018). According to Bruff the process followed is the reshaping of the state into a less democratic entity by enacting constitutional amendments that aim to protect it against social and political unrest (Bruff & Tansel, 2019).

In case of Turkey, since the beginning of the last decade, especially after the Gezi Protests, Erdoğan governments have taken undemocratic initiatives in terms of individual freedoms and liberal constitutional values (Kaygusuz, 2018). After the change of the constitution in 2018, Erdoğan and his allies not only concentrated power in their hands but also, they overshadowed established principles such as the separation of powers. Adaman and Akbulut interpret this development as the intensification of the 'interdependent functioning of authoritarianism, populism and developmentalism (Adaman & Akbulut, 2021)'. Kaygusuz adds that '(under the JDP government) Turkey has witnessed a steady rise and consolidation of a neoliberal security state. (In the aftermath of) the 15 June 2016 coup attempt, the post-liberal state weakened, and the party/state symbiosis has become stronger and more intertwined (Kaygusuz, 2018)'.

Nevertheless, the mixture of neoliberalism, conservatism, and authoritarianism did not yield the promised outcomes. For instance, the Turkish economy failed to achieve a performance equal to that under the previous import-substitution strategy or to that of other comparable countries (Şenses, 2012). In the same vein, as Navarro stresses the reconfiguration of the state into a less democratic institution not only implies that it is becoming more vulnerable to the problems of the contemporary era but, in many modern societies, reproduces the social and political inequalities (Navarro, 2007). The said inequalities, the literature argues, have been exacerbated in the previous 20 years as income and wealth disparity within countries has grown due to neoliberal policies which are one of the reasons for the recent global financial crisis along with the financial globalisation (Fiorentini, 2015). In Turkey, as Şenses emphasises, the authoritarian neoliberal strategy in addition to causing a democratic deficit resulted also in

a number of issues such as budget deficits, difficulties in the labour market, problematic industrial advancement, unequal income distribution, poverty, and inflation.

THE 'TRNC' MEETS THE AUTHORITARIAN NEOLIBERAL MODEL

The 'TRNC' is a product of the unsolved Cyprus Problem and Ankara's choices that has been festering since the middle of the previous century. During Cyprus' decolonization process in the 1950s, the Turkish Cypriots rejected the Greek Cypriot demand for the union with Greece, proposing instead that the island be divided between Turkey and Greece (Hill, 2010). Towards the end of the second half of the 1950s in close collaboration with Turkey, they organised their armed response to the Greek Cypriot demand for union with Greece and clashed both with them and the colonial government (Stelgias & Antreou, 2019). The short-lived bicomunal republic failed to bridge the gap in relations between the island's two largest communities. Thus, between 1963 and 1974, the Turkish Cypriots withdrew to several ghettos dispersed over Cyprus and with Turkey's help created alternative state institutions. Then in 1974, Turkey invaded Cyprus after a military takeover toppled the island's legitimately elected government. 36% of the Republic of Cyprus's territory was de facto under Turkish Cypriot rule at the end of the second wave of the invasion (Ker-Lindsay, 2011). Having concentrated in Cyprus' northern territories, in 1983 the Turkish Cypriot community proclaimed the establishment of the 'TRNC', which is not recognised by the international community, except for Turkey. Between 1983 and 2017, the leaders of the two communities negotiated the solution of the Cyprus problem based on the bizonal, bicomunal federal model. In the early 2000s, discussions on the establishment of a bizonal, bicomunal federation gained considerable momentum. Indeed, between 2002 and 2017, the two communities engaged in negotiations under the supervision of the UN and with the support of the three guarantor countries of Cyprus. However, the negotiations did not yield a positive result. First at the Annan Plan process in 2004 and then at the Crans-Montana Summit in 2017, the negotiations broke down since the two parties could not agree on crucial issues such as power-sharing and security (Ergüven & Köprülü, 2023).

As the negotiations for the Cyprus Federation were underway, the Turkish Cypriots faced international isolation which led to economic bottleneck and increased their multifaceted dependence on Turkey. The 'TRNC' budget, which is mainly sustained by the assets the Greek Cypriots forcibly abandoned in the northern part of Cyprus in 1974 and the service sector -the agricultural and industrial sectors play a supporting role (Economy, n.d.) -, does not cover even the salary costs of the public civil servants. Therefore, the salaries -the 'TRNC' uses the Turkish national currency- are paid by both local resources and financial support of Turkey which, since 1974, controls 'TRNC's' security forces, coast guard, fire department, and civil defence. The literature emphasises that the 'TRNC' has been on the verge of financial collapse since the early 2000s (Moudouros, 2020), a fact that even its representatives acknowledge (Politik İflas [Political Bankruptcy], 2022). In the face of the unsurmountable economic problems, two conflicting schools of thought were formed in Turkish Cypriot society. The nationalist segments of the society and the Turkish citizens who settled in the northern part of Cyprus after 1974, put forward the view that the only way out of the problems the community is facing are the guidelines imposed by Ankara. On the contrary, the Turkish Cypriot Left and the supporters of the reunification of Cyprus put forward the view that the solution of the Cyprus problem is a one-way street. In the same vein, Masarogullari stresses that 'while the Turkish Cypriot right and most settlers adopt the nationalist narrative of the Turkish government, another segment

of the community insists on the significance of a 'separate Turkish Cypriot identity' within a unified and European federal Cyprus' (Masarogullari, 2011).

In the mid 2000s, Turkey decided to set certain requirements for continuing to offer the much-needed financial aid to the Turkish Cypriot community. With the Cyprus issue still unresolved the community had no choice than to follow Turkey's lead. Relying on the cooperation of its local allies coming from the first school of thought Ankara imposed its authoritarian governance style in 'TRNC'. Moreover, as we will see below the primary requirement set by the Turkish government was the neoliberal reconstruction of the Turkish Cypriot economy, whilst the secondary was the adoption of Ankara's conservative social values.

THE NEOLIBERAL RECONSTRUCTION OF 'TRNC'S' ECONOMY

At the end of the 2000s, the JDP government warned the leaders of the 'TRNC' that the period of easy financing had come to an end. As the Turkish deputy prime minister explained, Ankara would in future make strict demands for offering its financial support. In this framework, Turkey started channelling to the 'TRNC' not only money but also its neo-liberal strategies.

The first economic agreements and protocols signed in the late 2000s featured key measures for the Turkish Cypriot economy, which served as the catalyst for transferring neoliberal policies from Turkey to the 'TRNC'. An innovative system that handles the delivery of Turkish aid was established by the economic agreements for the years between 2007 and 2022. Neoliberal policies that call for the shrinking of the public sector and the expansion of the private sector in the northern part of Cyprus were imposed by Turkey's Vice Presidency (before the constitutional change in Turkey in 2018, the Deputy Prime Minister), which oversees Turkish Cypriot affairs, in exchange for financial support. The Turkish Embassy in Nicosia, the Cyprus Affairs Coordination Office of the Republic of Turkey, and the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot Technical Delegations worked with the Development and Economic Cooperation Office (DECO) to implement these agreements. The Office which was established to advise the Vice President was chaired by the Deputy Minister of Treasury and Finance and included members from various Turkish ministries (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Lefkoşa Büyükelçiliği Kei Ofisi'nin Genel Çerçeve İçindeki Yeri (The Place of the Office of the Embassy of the Republic of Turkey of the Embassy of the Republic of Turkey in Lefkosia in the General Framework), 2022). In reality, the DECO was acting as a shadow government under the chairmanship of the Ambassador of the Turkish Republic in 'TRNC' tasked to carry out the implementation and monitoring of the decisions made in Ankara. 'TRNC's' shadow government launched a series of projects to enhance the community's financial capacity, such as the development of the road network and the transfer of water and electricity from Anatolia to Cyprus via a submarine pipeline and electric cable ("Asrın Projesi" Askılı Boru Sistemiyle Anadolu'dan KKTC'ye Su Taşıyor ['Project of the Century' Carries Water from Anatolia to TRNC with Suspended Pipe System], n.d.). It also attempted the neoliberal reconstruction of the Turkish Cypriot economy.

All the financial agreements made between Ankara and the 'TRNC' for the years 2007–2021 aimed at restructuring the public sector, the social security system, and the local government whilst at the same time supporting 'TRNC's' private sector based on the neoliberal model. Beginning with the first agreement, which covered the period 2007-2009, financial aid of 1.875 billion Turkish Liras (TL) in the form of grants and loans were released to the Turkish Cypriot community on the condition of lowering public spending and fostering the private sector

(Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Hükümeti ile Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti Arasında Ekonomik ve Mali İşbirliği Protokolü (2007-2009) [Protocol on Economic and Financial Cooperation between the Government of the Republic of Turkey and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus], 2022). Moving on to 15 years later, the financial aid of 2022 skyrocket to the amount of 4.25 billion TL (grants and loans) despite the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the growing economic crisis which Turkey was also experiencing (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Hükümeti ile Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti Arasında Ekonomik ve Mali İşbirliği Protokolü (2022) [Protocol on Economic and Financial Cooperation between the Government of the Republic of Turkey and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus], 2022).

In the 2022 agreement the JDP government's neoliberal policies are evident in several important clauses. For instance, the agreement calls for the completion of a series of analyses in which, with the goal of reducing its size, 'the public personnel and the pension system will be examined, and any required legislative measures will be implemented'. Also, after a review of the 'TRNC' pension system, a Pension Reform Plan should be created for sustainability, whereas all salary payments would be subject to tax and insurance cuts. Moreover, applications for positions in the public sector should be sent to the Turkish Embassy in Nicosia, where the opinion of the Turkish Cypriot Affairs Coordination Office would be sought. In the private sector, alterations would be made in the collective bargaining agreements so that they won't be automatically renewed at the end of their terms. Furthermore, the operation of worker's unions should be limited to their original scope and the spilling over to any political activities would be barred. At the same time, investments were to be encouraged. For this, the privatisation of the ports and the National Lottery would be assessed whilst the limitations on Turkish nationals buying property in the 'TRNC' must be loosened.

In line with the provisions of the economic agreements signed by the Turkish Cypriot side with Ankara, by mid 2022 the number of 'TRNC's' municipalities were reduced from 28 to 18 (KKTC'de belediye sayısı 28'den 18'e düşürüldü [The number of municipalities in the TRNC was reduced from 28 to 18], 2022). This, according to Turkish Cypriot analysts, signalled the beginning of the 2022 agreement terms being put into practice (Şafaklı, 2022). In their opinion, the downsizing of local government was only to be followed by a fresh round of privatisations which would include the ports and the 'TRNC' telecommunication authority (Özadam, 2022). After all, the privatisation of the ports and the electricity and telecommunication authorities were promised by the 'TRNC's' coalition government. Specifically, at the time of the signing of the economic agreements between Turkey and the 'TRNC' the two parties of the Turkish Cypriot right that maintain close cooperation with Ankara stated that: Efforts for privatisation must be expedited, and government interference with the economy and the existence of a free market must be minimised. By reducing its size, the state will become more effective. Principles like boosting output and efficiency, preventing monopolies, fostering competition, and distributing ownership to the grassroots by giving preference to employees and producers must be observed during privatisation. It will be intended to boost economic productivity and to create the ability to earn additional resources by transferring some public services that can be priced or marketed to the private sector, besides the privatisation of public companies considered necessary (UBP-DP Hükûmeti Programı [Programme of the UBP-DP Government], n.d.).

THE IMPOSITION OF THE CONSERVATIVE VALUES

Beyond the neoliberal reconstruction of the 'TRNC' economy, Ankara also intended to implement its conservative social policies on the island. As in the case of Turkey, Ankara promoted conservative ideals to gain support and justify its decisions to the Turkish Cypriot community. Acar and Altunok's observation that neoliberalism and neoconservatism can coexist is evident in what was happening in Cyprus since the mid 2000s.

In the most recent economic agreement of 2022 provisions were made to promote the notion of the inextricable link between the 'TRNC' citizens and the Muslim Turkish identity (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Hükümeti ile Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti Arasında Ekonomik ve Mali İşbirliği Protokolü (2022) [Protocol on Economic and Financial Cooperation between the Government of the Republic of Turkey and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus], 2022). The 'further strengthening and sustaining of the links deriving from common history, origin, culture, language, religion, and spiritual values in all areas' were key elements of 'TRNC's' neoliberal reconstruction as envisioned by Ankara. In the context of the agreement, the cooperative efforts for the restoration and preservation of common cultural and social relations would be deepened whilst the operations of the religious services would be reinforced. As it is clearly stated in the agreement's 'Social Policies' section:

(The agreement) aims to strengthen intercultural and social ties while preserving and advancing cultural values. It (also ensures) that the TRNC's past is maintained and passed onto future generations by undertaking studies to uncover traditional and cultural values. The physical and intangible cultural assets of the Turkish-Islamic era shall be identified and promoted through scientific research. Restoration work will be undertaken to reveal the remnants of the Ottoman Empire on the island and to strengthen the Turkish presence there.

The mention of the Ottoman Empire and the emphasis given to the Turkish-Islamic past of the island appear to have a dual purpose. First, to stress the ties between Turkey and the 'TRNC' which according to Ankara share not only the same past through culture and religion but also the same present through the shared conservative values. In this framework, other historical periods such as Cyprus' British colonial era or the Greek Cypriot heritage are being ignored. Second, to disregard the Turkish Cypriots' devotion to secularism which has been deeply rooted in the collective identity of the community since its widespread across the island at the beginning of the 20th century.

Furthermore, Ankara's conservative social policy for the 'TRNC' was implemented in the 2010s mainly by the reinforcement of local religious institutions, the building of new mosques (Massive Turkey-Funded Mosque Stirs Unease in Secular North Cyprus, n.d.) and the opening of the first religious educational institution in the country (KKTC'nin ilk İmam-Hatip Lisesi açıldı - Yeni Akit [TRNC's first Imam-Hatip High School opened], 2022). During this time, many Turkish religious organisations in the 'TRNC' amplified their activities, and there was a rise in the distribution of material endorsing traditionalist principles (Bu Kitaplar Tarikat Propagandası İçeriyor [These Books Contain Cult Propaganda], 2012). Ambassador Ali Murat Başçeri, the highest-ranking official of the Turkish government in the 'TRNC', claimed that these initiatives were an effort to reconnect the Turkish Cypriots with their 'Turkish' and 'Muslim' roots:

Think about the years before 1958. No national hymn, national poetry, flags, portraits of Turkish heroes, national holidays, or commemoration of national days were allowed! Besides images of the British royal family hanging on the walls, schools used to fly British flags. The day of the king's coronation was a holiday. Celebrating national holidays, flying the Turkish flag, and singing the national anthem were considered the worst offences. Even in those circumstances, (Turkish Cypriots) held a firm belief in the value of history education for the maintenance of national identity. Regrettably, the historical knowledge gap that has existed in the TRNC since the early 2000s has alienated younger generations from traditional spiritual and cultural values (Ali Murat Başçeri, 2022).

In the same speech, the Turkish diplomat looked beyond the past and into the future by suggesting the framing of the neoliberal reconstruction of the 'TRNC' with the conservative remodelling of the social fabric. Accordingly, the Turkish Cypriots were expected to return to their 'Turkish' roots.

Following the same spirit, the President of Religious Affairs, Ahmet Ünsal stated that the modern Turkish Cypriot women have 'the obligation to marry and reproduce since women serve men and religion tells us to marry and multiply and the Islamic community must be kept numerous ('Marry and Multiply' Women in the North Reportedly Told, n.d.)'. A few days later, he responded to the public criticism by saying, 'those were not my thoughts, but the teachings of Islam which are stated in the Quran'. Continuing, Ünsal who is a conservative Turkish official, said that a religious association connected to Turkey was the organiser of the contentious seminar in which his recommendation was given (Religious Affairs Head Says Controversial Seminar Was Not His Idea, n.d.). In addition to the debate over the place of Turkish Cypriot women in contemporary society, other questionable efforts were made by Islamic brotherhoods in Northern Cyprus. These initiatives include controversial activities like the evangelization of kids and the promotion of 'jihad (holy war)' by Islamic brotherhoods in Northern Cyprus.

THE AUTHORITARIAN APPROACH TOWARDS THE TURKISH CYPRIOTS

Ankara's policies towards the Turkish Cypriots, which aimed both at the reconstruction of 'TRNC's' economy based on neoliberal parameters and at the reframing of the society within a conservative context, also touched upon the internal affairs of the community. Indeed, the context and future of the negotiations for the Cyprus issue, the community's political affairs, and the fundamental liberties of its citizens were all affected by Turkey's meddling in the political life of the 'TRNC'.

Ankara's interventions to Turkish Cypriot politics and especially to the talks for the solution of the Cyprus issue intensified after the latest negotiation effort collapsed in 2017. Just before the negotiations were suspended, the Turkish Cypriot leader, Mustafa Akinci, was discussing with the Greek Cypriot side the return of territory when the Turkish President interfered with his work by putting forward proposals that provoked the negative reaction Greek Cypriots (Erdoğan, 2017). A few months later, Ankara advocated changing the basis of the solution of the Cyprus problem, from a federal model to a two-state model and launched the effort to reopen the closed town of Varosha under Turkish Cypriot control (Akıncı, 2020). These decisions were taken despite the contrary view of the Turkish Cypriot leadership. The Turkish Cypriot leader's firm stance in favour of solving the Cyprus issue based on the bi-zonal bi-

communal federation model was an insurmountable obstacle for Turkey. Consequently, during the period 2020-2021, the need to replace the Turkish Cypriot leader with someone who would be willing to embrace Turkey's plans for Cyprus was growing more urgent. In the 2020 presidential elections (scheduled in October 2021 due to the pandemic), Ankara chose to support the candidacy of then 'Prime Minister' and leader of the National Unity Party (NUP). Ersin Tatar had previously shared Ankara's two-state solution vision and supported the neoliberal and conservative policies claiming that the economic agreements signed between Turkey and the 'TRNC' included provisions that would benefit 'the private sector (KKTC Başbakanı Tatar: Türkiye İle İmzalanan Mali Protokol Ekonomiye Olumlu Yansıyacak [TRNC Prime Minister Tatar: The Financial Protocol Signed with Turkey Will Have a Positive Impact on the Economy], n.d.)'. A report published immediately after his election to the Presidency of the 'TRNC' focused on Ankara's meddling in the voting process:

The examples of Turkish influence on different levels and in different ways in Turkish Cypriot political life are numerous. The interventions and irregularities in the 2020 presidential election received a lot of attention. The creation of a democratic electoral atmosphere and the representation of the will of the Turkish Cypriot community at the polls were thwarted by (Ankara's) interventions and by irregularities, which were experienced in many forms and degrees during the election process (Yücel et al., 2022).

Following Tatar's rise to the 'TRNC' presidency Ankara continued to meddle in Turkish Cypriots' political life this time at the level of the ruling party. After Tatar's election, the National Unity Party (NUP) had to find his replacement at the party's presidency. This task proved to be challenging for the largest Turkish Cypriot political party. According to the Turkish Cypriot press, the NUP's election process reached an impasse due to Ankara's meddling. Specifically, Ankara placed a veto to the candidacy of Faiz Sucuoğlu, who was a senior party official with connections to the Turkish opposition (Ankara, Sucuoğlu'nu İstemiyor Mu? [Ankara Doesn't Want Sucuoğlu?], n.d.). The instability within the NUP endangered the precarious balances inside the coalition government and led to widespread political uncertainty. Despite eventually emerging as the NUP's leader by a significant margin, Faiz Sucuoğlu was eventually forced to step down as prime minister owing to developments such as the signing of the new Turkey-'TRNC' economic agreement of 2022 (KKTC Başbakanı Sucuoğlu, Hükümetin İstifasını Cumhurbaşkanı Tatar'a Sundu [TRNC Prime Minister Sucuoğlu Submitted the Resignation of the Government to President Tatar], 2022). A few months later, Ankara's continuous interventions led to Sucuoğlu's resignation from NUP's leadership as well (KKTC'de UBP Genel Başkanı Sucuoğlu Görevinden İstifa Etti [NUP President Sucuoğlu Resigned from His Post], n.d.).

Shortly before these developments, Turkey's interference in Turkish Cypriot politics had similarly spread to the justice system. The Turkish President publicly criticised the 'TRNC's' Supreme Court decision regarding the operation of religious schools (Kuzey Kıbrıs'ta 'Kur'an Kursları' Tartışması Nasıl Başladı, Türkiye Neden Tepkili? [How Did the Debate on 'Quran Courses' Start in Northern Cyprus, Why Is Turkey Reacting?], n.d.). On top of this blatant intervention in Turkish Cypriot community's judicial processes, the Turkish government also announced during the same period its unilateral decision to build a new presidential complex in Nicosia despite the opposition of local public opinion (Erdoğan 'Müjde'Yi Açıkladı: Kuzey Kıbrıs'a Külliye [Erdoğan Announced the 'Good News': Complex in Northern Cyprus], n.d.). Moreover, without securing the consent of the Turkish Cypriot side, Turkey's vice-president

started the public debate on changing the name of 'TRNC' (Oktaç: "Artık 'Kuzey' Demek İstemiyoruz; Kıbrıs Türk Devleti" [Oktaç: 'We Don't Want to Use (the Term) "North" Anymore; Turkish Cypriot State'], 2023). Early in 2023, the Turkish Vice President proposed the idea of replacing the title 'TRNC' with 'Turkish Cypriot State' under which the Turkish Cypriot side participates as an observer in the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (Relations with The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), 2023). The Turkish official spoke before the Turkish Cypriot community had the chance to begin its public consultation on the name change and before the constitutional reform had received the support of 2/3 of the members of parliament.

The projection of the authoritarian style of rule by the Turkish government to the Turkish Cypriot community coincided with other anti-democratic interventions. The 'Avrupa', a Turkish Cypriot newspaper that stands firmly against the partition of Cyprus and Ankara's policy towards the island, in 2017 published a caricature criticising Turkey's invasion of northern Syria by comparing it with Turkey's military actions in Cyprus in 1974 (Afrika gazetesi protesto edildi [Afrika newspaper protested], 2022). The Turkish President took offence and responded accordingly by stating that a newspaper 'in the TRNC immorally published a headline. I urge my brothers in the TRNC to speak out and express their anger. It claims that the Turkish army invaded another country after Cyprus. This is offensive and immoral. Particularly, I need my brothers in the TRNC to take a stand and give the required response (Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan'dan KKTC'deki gazeteye çok sert tepki [President Erdoğan reacts very harshly to TRNC newspaper], 2022).' Erdoğan's call to action was followed by a day of havoc with enraged mobs attacking the newspaper's offices (KKTC'de Afrika gazetesine saldırı [Attack on Afrika newspaper in TRNC], 2018). In 2022 the editor-in-chief Şener Levent was given a one-year prison term for insulting Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, in a lawsuit brought by the Turkish judiciary in Ankara over the said caricature (Şener Levent Ankara'da 1 yıl hapis cezasına mahkum edildi [Şener Levent Ankara'da 1 yıl hapis cezasına mahkum edildi], 2022).

During the same period came the persecution of Barbaros Şansal. The Turkish fashion designer and LGBTQI+ activist who was at the time a resident of 'TRNC' is well known for his criticism of the Turkish conservative government. In 2017 Şansal posted a video on social media in which he criticised Turkish society. The government in Turkey took offence once again and the Turkish government-controlled media poured oil on fire inciting Şansal's snap deportation from the 'TRNC' to Turkey. The artist was first lynched while he was being escorted by police to Istanbul's Sabiha Gökçen International Airport and then put in prison (Modacı Barbaros Şansal'a Havalimanında Linç Girişimi [Lynching Attempt Against Fashion Designer Barbaros Şansal at the Airport], 2022).

Shortly after a ban was introduced targeting those who supported the former Turkish Cypriot leader, and the idea of reunifying Cyprus. Several Turkish Cypriots who had supported Akinci's bid for the presidency and were well known for backing the bi-zonal, bi-communal federal solution to the Cyprus issue were barred from entering Turkey in 2021–2022. Ali Bizden, a Turkish Cypriot who was once Akinci's special advisor, was expelled from Turkey. Following this event, Turkey blocked the entry of many more Turkish Cypriot dissidents (Ali Bizden Türkiye'ye alınmadı KKTC'ye geri gönderiliyor [Ali Bizden was not allowed into Turkey but is being sent back to TRNC], 2021).

CONCLUSION: THE LIMITATIONS OF THE IMPOSED AUTHORITARIAN NEOLIBERAL MODEL. UNSOLVED PROBLEMS AND SOCIAL RESISTANCE

The social, economic, and political transformation of the 'TRNC' during these past two decades confirms the shortcomings which an imposed authoritarian neoliberal model may experience especially if it is imported from one country to another. First off, as the 'TRNC' example shows, there is no guarantee that enforced economic recipes adopted overseas would be successful. On the contrary, the imposition of the foreign neoliberal paradigm would amplify the local society's resistance in addition to failing to accomplish the initial goals.

Although the authoritarian neoliberalism of the JDP aimed to rebuild the economy of the internationally isolated 'TRNC', the experiment's outcomes remain problematic. As a matter of fact, the 'TRNC' case study is a textbook case of Navarro and Fiorentini's theory. The imposed authoritarianism not only could not address the 'TRNC's' financial difficulties, but it additionally increased the inequalities and deepened the social and political instability in the Turkish Cypriot community. On the political front, Ankara's interference in the internal affairs of the community and its imposition of authoritarian neoliberalism not only failed to solve the existing accumulated problems, but also led to political instability with short-lived coalition governments (Meclis'in Karnesi Kırık 1 Döneme 5 Hükümet [Parliament's Record Is Broken 5 Governments in 1 Term], n.d.). Indeed, in recent years one weak government has been succeeding another in Northern Cyprus. As the economy goes, after two decades and billions of Turkish Liras spent, 'TRNC's' both the economy and the society are yet to be reconstructed on a neoliberal basis. In terms of the neoliberal economic reconstruction several elements of the two-part agreements remain unrealised due to disagreements on the Ankara-Turkish Cypriot axis ("İktisadi ve Mali İş Birliği" Mi, Devir Sözleşmesi Mi? ['Economic and Financial Cooperation' or Transfer Agreement?], n.d.). For instance, as of 2022, the planned privatisations have not yet begun, the overall interest in investing in the TRNC remains low, and inflation in Northern Cyprus has exceeded 100 points (KKTC'de Enflasyon Yüzde 116,56 Seviyesine Yükseldi [Inflation in the TRNC Rose to 116.56 per Cent], 2022). In the northern part of the island many households are unable to meet their basic needs (Krizin Tam Merkezinde, Derinindeyiz ['We Are at the Very Center of the Crisis, Deep in It'], n.d.). The 'TRNC' itself is unable to meet the increased energy needs of its people, with long power cuts becoming part of everyday life (KKTC'de Elektrik Krizi: Saatler Süren Kesintiler Halkı Bezdi [Electricity Crisis in TRNC: Hours-Long Interruptions Have Harassed the Public], n.d.). In these circumstances, Turkish Cypriots have amplified their quest for employment and a better future overseas as the crisis worsened (60 Kıbrıslı Türk, Güney Kıbrıs'ta turizm alanında iş buldu [60 Turkish Cypriots found jobs in tourism in Southern Cyprus], 2022). These cases show that the attempt to rebuild the isolated 'TRNC' economy prior to the solution of the Cyprus problem and the reintegration of Turkish Cypriots into the world economy didn't produce the desired results. The failure of the neoliberal model in the TRNC can be attributed to several factors, one of which is the difficulty of imposing it on a remote alien society. Another factor is the growing popular opposition to the imposition of an outsiders' plans. The literature places an emphasis on the Turkish Cypriot community's powerful opposition movement, which in the latter half of the 20th century gained notoriety on a variety of topics (Moudouros, 2020). Today, the Turkish Cypriot opposition is stepping up its resistance to Ankara's neo-liberal authoritarianism, insisting on the argument that the problems the community is facing must be addressed through a mutually accepted solution to the Cyprus problem which would be recognised by the

international community. At the same time, Turkish Cypriot society proved difficult to win over despite Ankara's attempts to curb its resistance by de-democratizing Turkish Cypriot politics and imposing conservative norms on society. The opposition's protest is spilling over the walls of parliamentary life and ending up in the streets where is fuelling dynamic demonstrations (Lefkoşa'da Protesto Yürüyüşü Düzenlendi [Protest March Organised in Nicosia], n.d.). In recent years, Turkish Cypriots have organised mass marches and protest rallies opposing Turkey's interference in their socio-political life. By the end of 2022, the society's opposition to Turkey's policies had an impact on the Turkish Cypriot political scene. During the municipal elections the opposition won control of three of the biggest municipalities in Northern Cyprus despite the opportunities that were open to the unified Ankara-Turkish Cypriot right front (Mehmet, 2023). On the social front, the imposed authoritarian neoliberalism has deepened the social rifts within the community causing a large unbridgeable gap separating both politically and socio-economically those parts of the Turkish Cypriot community that cooperate with Ankara from those segments that resist authoritarian neoliberalism (Konuk, 2018). The latter reject all of Turkey's conservative ideals and neoliberal agenda. Conversely, Ankara's political and economic assistance is crucial to the Turkish Cypriot nationalist right and its supporters, who take a moderate attitude towards imported authoritarian capitalism. Hence, as recent research argues 'Cypriot Turks and Turkish migrants remain unable to develop a shared understanding of crucial problems' even after four decades since the establishment of the 'TRNC' (Arkonaç et al., 2011).

In conclusion, the recent developments show that, as in the case of modern Turkey and so in the case of the Turkish Cypriot community, the mixture of neoliberalism with conservatism and authoritarianism has failed to deliver what it promised. This approach has made the Turkish Cypriots more vulnerable to the problems of the present day. As Turkish Cypriot politicians admit, the internal affairs of the community are turning into a 'jigsaw puzzle (Yurt hakkımız gasp ediliyor [Our right to a country is being usurped], 2022)' while Turkish Cypriots remain in a state of acute socio-political instability. At the same time, authoritarian neoliberalism reproduces and even exacerbates social and political inequalities raising concerns about the sustainability of the 'TRNC' which the neoliberal policies were designed to support.

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