Survey on national identity, relations between the two communities, and the solution to the Cyprus Problem

Introduction

Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots strongly identify with being "Cypriot", indicating that it would be beneficial to foster a Cypriot identity as a consensual element that would more closely unite the inhabitants of the divided island. However, in practice, the realization of such an aspiration may not be easy. Firstly, a collective identity, a sense of "Cypriotness" on both sides, is currently not based on shared elements but rather on the specific characteristics of each community (bloodline/origin, religion, ethnicity, etc.). Secondly, since the two communities do not have any substantial contact with each other, it is impossible to collectively develop a common identity. Thirdly, because Cypriots find it difficult to imagine ways of building a "common roof", as well as a shared future. There is some hope in the fact that, for Greek-Cypriots in particular, there has been a strengthening in citizenship and consequently an emphasis on common rights and interests – which could form the basis of a common "political" identity in the future. This, however, is neither obvious nor easy and can only be achieved through arduous political efforts.

These, in summary, were the main findings of a survey conducted across both communities by IMR / University of Nicosia, which was commissioned by the New Cyprus Association (*Neokypriakos Syndesmos*).
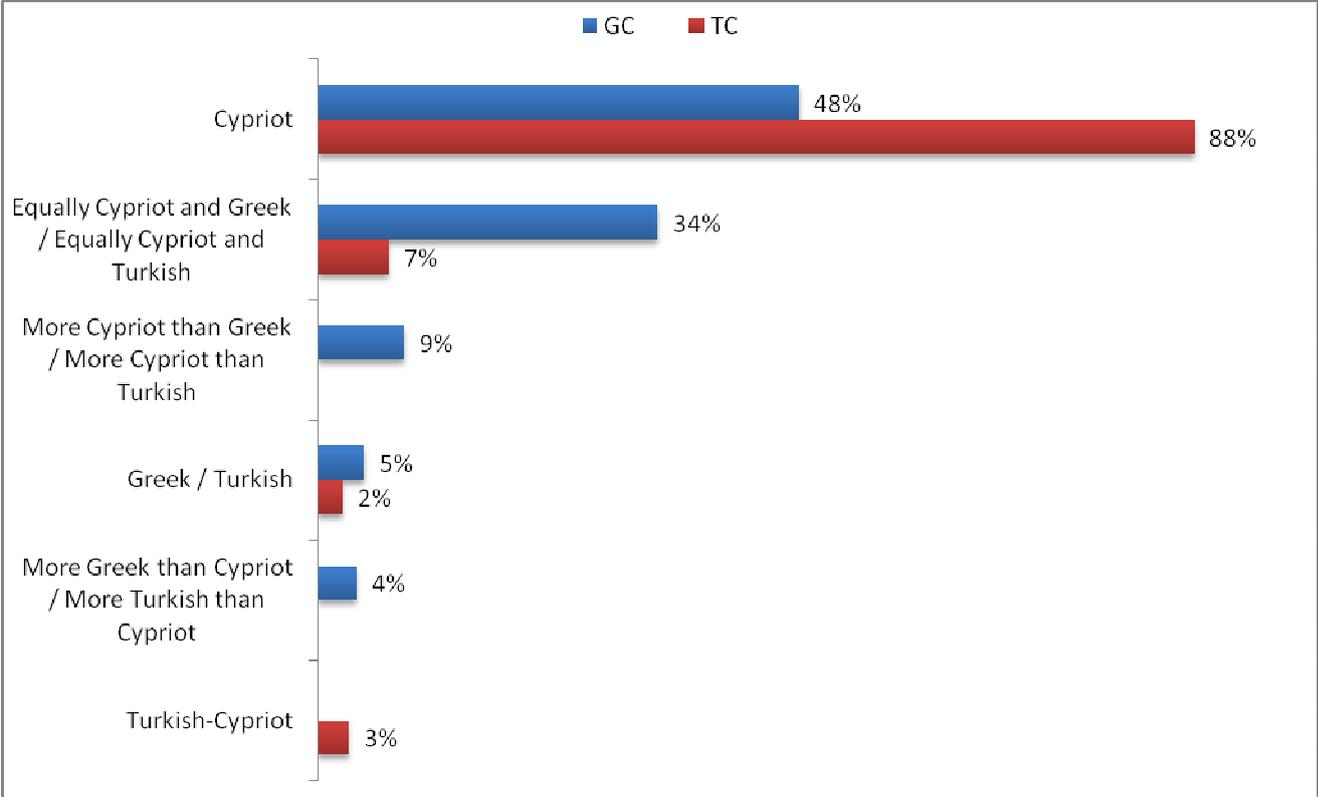
The Collective Identity of Cypriots

In order to measure the attitudes that relate to a collective identity among Cypriots, the "Moreno Scale" was utilized, which has been established in the social sciences as a tool to measure various multi-ethnic and multi-national societies, where the population is not characterized by homogeneity, and therefore collective identity consists of two components: one relating to an ethnic/national dimension and the other to a political/public dimension. For example, the scale was used to "measure" how Scottish / Welsh / English and how "British" residents of Great Britain felt.[1] High rates of association with the "whole" / country / state are regarded as an indication of the predominance of a political (civic) identity with an emphasis on citizenship: citizens feel united under a commonly accepted constitution, common laws that guarantee equality and a common will, with the aim of promoting common problems and interests. Conversely, high rates of association with entities / nationalities / nations that constitute a country, indicate the predominance of an ethno-national identity, which focuses on common characteristics (biological origin, religion, language, etc.) that distinguish one group or community from the others that make up the country. In the case of the latter, excessive emphasis on difference, rather than a focus on what unites, is considered to result in these states being unstable and prone to internal tensions and conflict.

Interestingly, in both communities, the main identification selected is "Cypriot". Among Greek-Cypriots, almost half (48%) identify as "Cypriot", while 34% state that they feel "both Cypriot and Greek". Among Turkish-Cypriots, the vast majority (88%) identifies as "Cypriot"; very few identify with any other option.

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[1] Similarly, how "Catalan / Basque" and how "Spanish" the residents of a specific region of Spain felt, etc. and for other countries where individuals with different ethnic/national origins cohabit under one state/roof.

Personally, how do you identify yourself?

GC **TC**

Identity	GC	TC
Cypriot	48%	88%
Equally Cypriot and Greek / Equally Cypriot and Turkish	34%	7%
More Cypriot than Greek / More Cypriot than Turkish	9%	
Greek / Turkish	5%	2%
More Greek than Cypriot / More Turkish than Cypriot	4%	
Turkish-Cypriot		3%

Can we assume, therefore, that the emphasis on the "Cypriot" identity indicates the prevalence of a common civic identity, in accordance to the typology of the Moreno scale mentioned earlier? Probably not, given that in the case of Cyprus, the term "Cypriot" seems to be identified with ethno-national characteristics, i.e. with the individual communities / ethnic groups rather than with the whole. Thus, when asked what characteristics they consider necessary for an individual to be "Cypriot", the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot responses are shown below:

Which of the following characteristics do you consider necessary for an individual to be considered "Cypriot"?
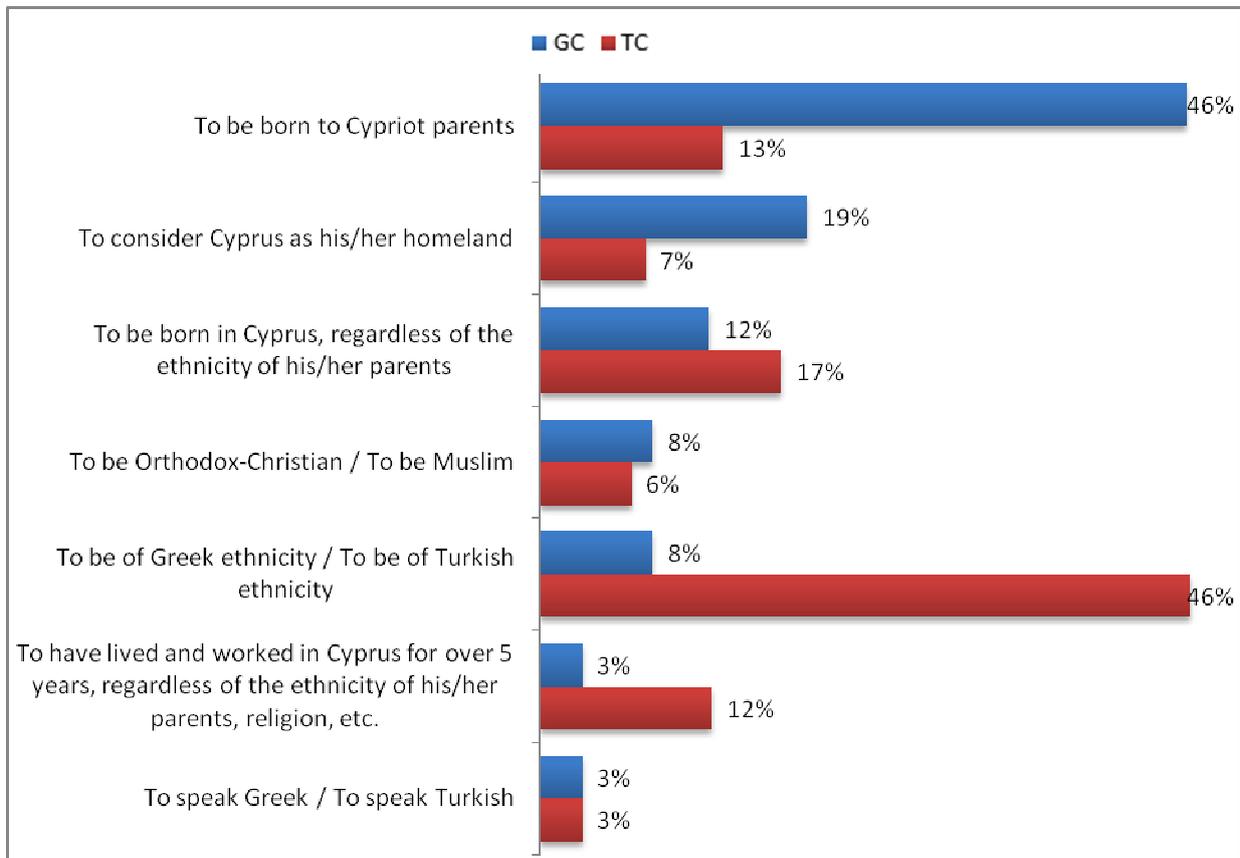

In other words, for the majority of Greek-Cypriots (46%), the most important factor for a person to be considered "Cypriot" is their biological origin (to be born to Cypriot parents), and to a smaller extent, to consider Cyprus as their homeland/country (19%), to have been born in Cyprus (12%), as well as being an Orthodox Christian (8%) and to be of Greek ethnicity/descent (8%). Among Turkish-Cypriots, the main feature is Turkish ethnicity/descent (46%), to a smaller degree for an individual to have been born in Cyprus (17%), and to have been born to Cypriot parents (13%).

Despite this, it is interesting that, among both communities, the vast majority positively regard the case of a common Cypriot identity that would "bind" Cypriots together, thereby contributing to unity. The largest supporters of this sentiment are Turkish-Cypriots, 80% of whom believe that fostering a common identity would be beneficial (56% very useful and 24% somewhat useful). Among Greek-Cypriots, 67% are positive about a common identity (42% very useful and 25% somewhat useful). It should not be overlooked that a significant minority from both sides view the prospect of a common "Cypriot identity" with suspicion or even hostility, considering it either as "useless" (16% Greek-Cypriots, 15% Turkish-Cypriots), or "unnecessary, but also harmful to [their] national interests" (17% Greek-Cypriots, 5% Turkish-Cypriots).[2]

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[2] This negative stance is a remnant of British colonial policy and British attempts to use the idea of a Cypriot identity (instead of an ethno-national identity) to fight the rising Greek-Cypriot nationalist movement for *Enosis*, and to a lesser extent Turkish-Cypriot ethnicism.

How useful would you consider the fostering of a common "Cypriot identity" that would bind Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots / bring them closer together?
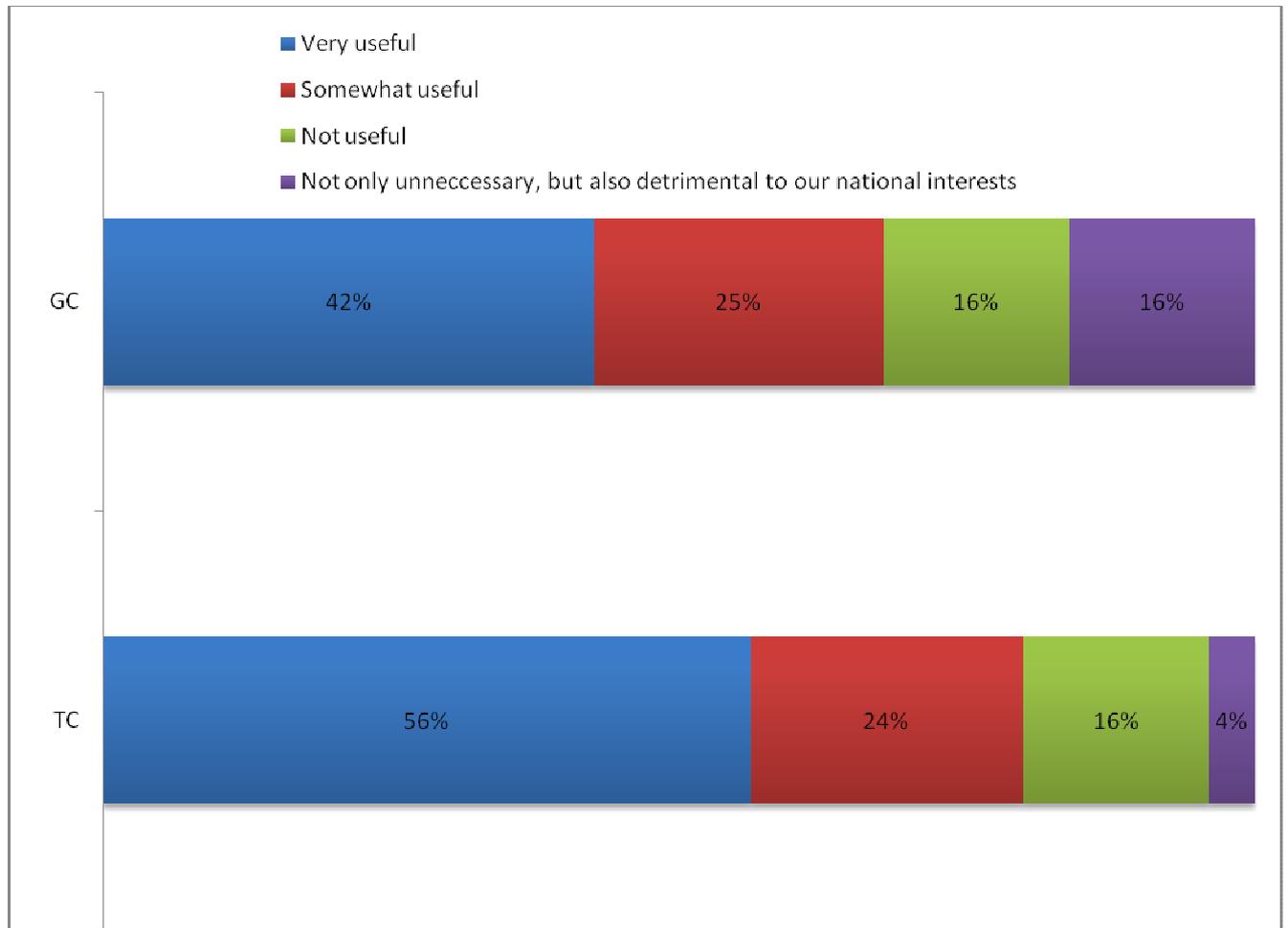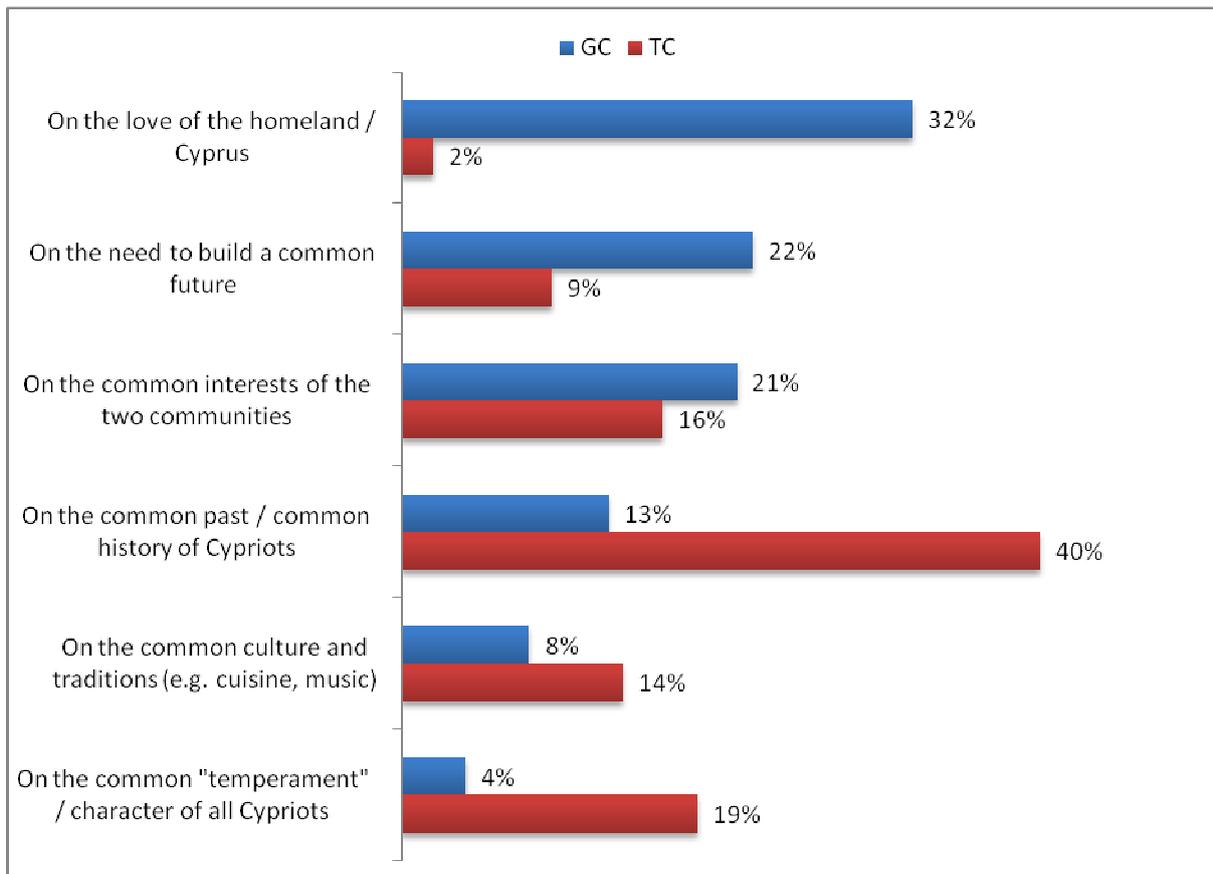

It is interesting to note that in a break down according to age, the younger respondents (18-24) seem to consider the cultivation of a common identity as very useful / somewhat useful, in much higher numbers than the mean ratio indicated by the above table.
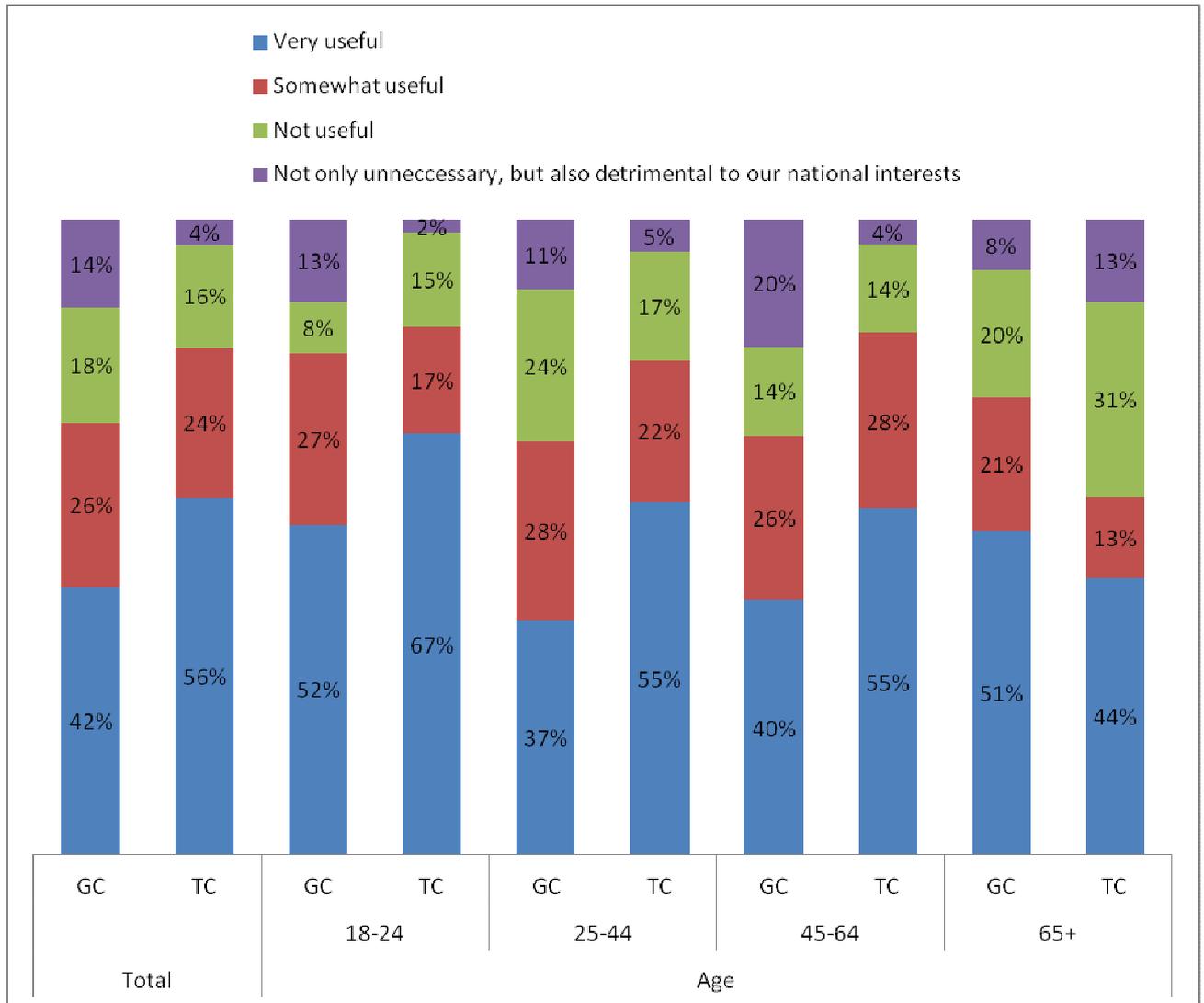
Those who view a common Cypriot identity more positively were asked "on what should such an identity be based"? In response to this question, Greek-Cypriots seem to be more ready and clearer than Turkish-Cypriots. Thirty-two percent (32%) answered "on the love for the homeland/for Cyprus", while a further 22% stated "on the need to build a common future" and another 21% indicated "on the shared interests of both communities". Interestingly, Turkish-Cypriots placed a different emphasis, since the largest group (40%) noted that the basis of a common identity could consist of shared experiences and a common Cypriot history – a choice selected by quite a smaller number (13%) of Greek-Cypriots (we do know that many Greek-Cypriots consider that the history of the two communities has been quite varied, if not entirely contrary).[3]

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[3] It should be noted that when Greek-Cypriots question the common Cypriot history, they largely have in mind recent history and the role of Turkish-Cypriots during British Colonial rule. Turkish-Cypriots, on the other hand, usually stress the Ottoman period, during which common folk indeed shared a lot of commonalities and common experiences (and any tensions related mainly to the elite of the two communities).

What should a common identity be based on?

Legend: ■ GC ■ TC

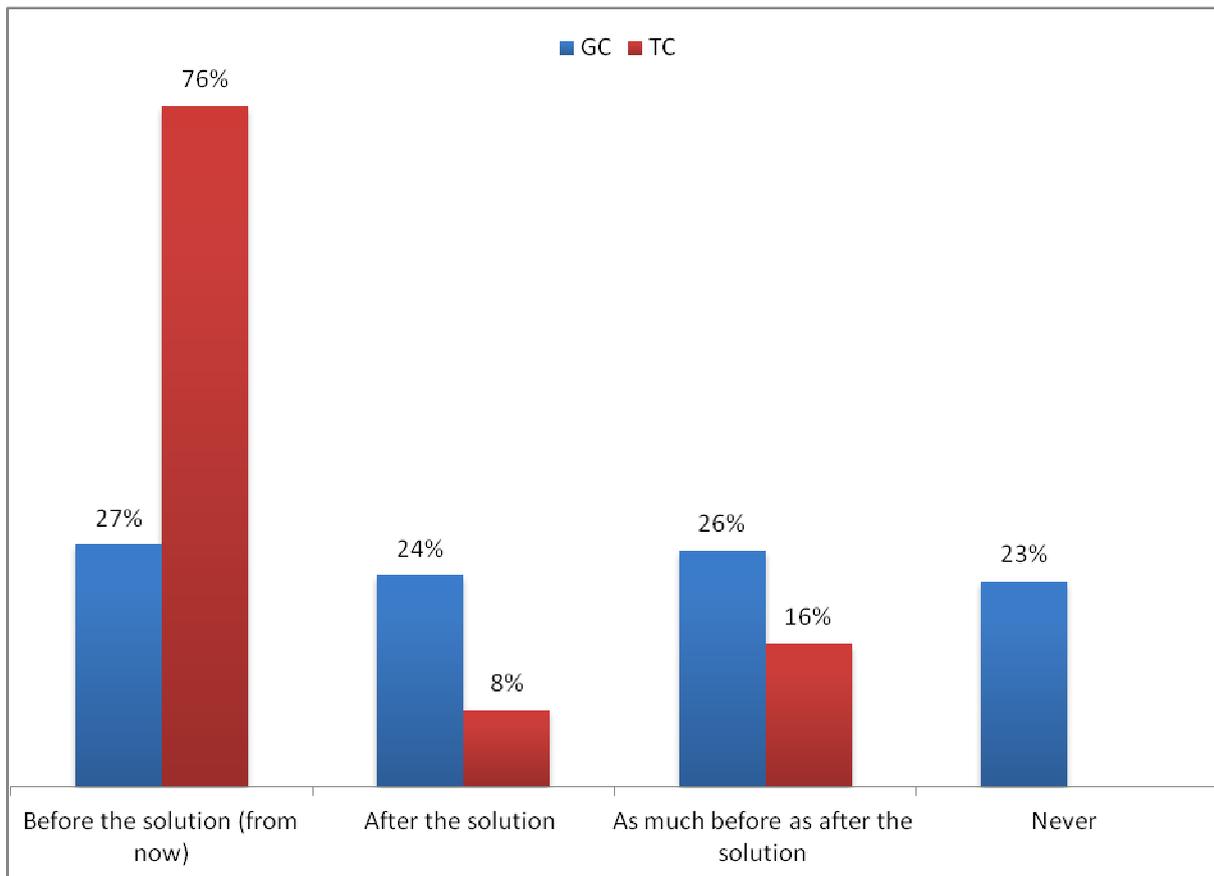| Category	GC	TC
On the love of the homeland / Cyprus	32%	2%
On the need to build a common future	22%	9%
On the common interests of the two communities	21%	16%
On the common past / common history of Cypriots	13%	40%
On the common culture and traditions (e.g. cuisine, music)	8%	14%
On the common "temperament" / character of all Cypriots	4%	19%

Very often within public debate, the question arises as to when it would be more appropriate or desirable to cultivate a common Cypriot identity. Greek-Cypriots are divided: approximately one quarter (27%) want the effort to commence now, prior to a solution; a slightly smaller proportion (24%) after the solution; another similar proportion (26%) either before or after a solution; and a significant minority (23%) does not believe that a common identity is either necessary or desirable.

Turkish-Cypriots, on the other hand, appear much more positive: in fact, a large majority (76%) wants to start the effort now. It is clear that the Turkish-Cypriot community's response is driven by a sense of urgency, which comes from their realization that their margins of improving their situation are diminishing (given their continuous dependence on Turkey, the increase in numbers of Turkish mainland settlers, the increasing number of mosques and the strengthening religious influence, etc.), with the danger of this leading to the loss of their identity, or even their complete marginalization or extinction. Thus, it is probable that they consider it more imperative to make peace with Greek-Cypriots and forge a common identity that would enable their survival in their country of birth.[4]

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[4] Interestingly, no Turkish-Cypriot selected the option "never" (that is, it would never be a good time to cultivate a common Cypriot identity), while in the previous question as to how useful a common Cypriot identity would be, 15% stated that they do not consider it useful, while 5% consider it harmful.

When would be a good time to cultivate a common Cypriot identity?

GC TC

76%

27%   24%   26%
                                      16%   23%
                    8%

Before the solution (from   After the solution   As much before as after the   Never
        now)   solution

Relations between the Two Communities

Further to the issue of a common identity among Cypriots, what are the relations between the citizens of the two communities like at this point in time? Living in separate territories, under different and competing political regimes, with varying economic, social and cultural conditions, contact between citizens at this time is minimal. The vast majority of Greek-Cypriots (74%) as well as Turkish-Cypriots (76%) state that they do not maintain any relations and/or contact with members of the other community.[5] Of the few who do maintain some relations and/or contact, the majority of Greek-Cypriots (62%) declare that these consist of friendly visits and conversations with Turkish-Cypriots, while another significant amount (38%) pertains to professional/business interactions. Turkish-Cypriots seem to place more importance on cultural activities, friendly encounters, as well as shopping.

At this point in time, do you maintain any relations / contact with Turkish-Cypriots / Greek-Cypriots?

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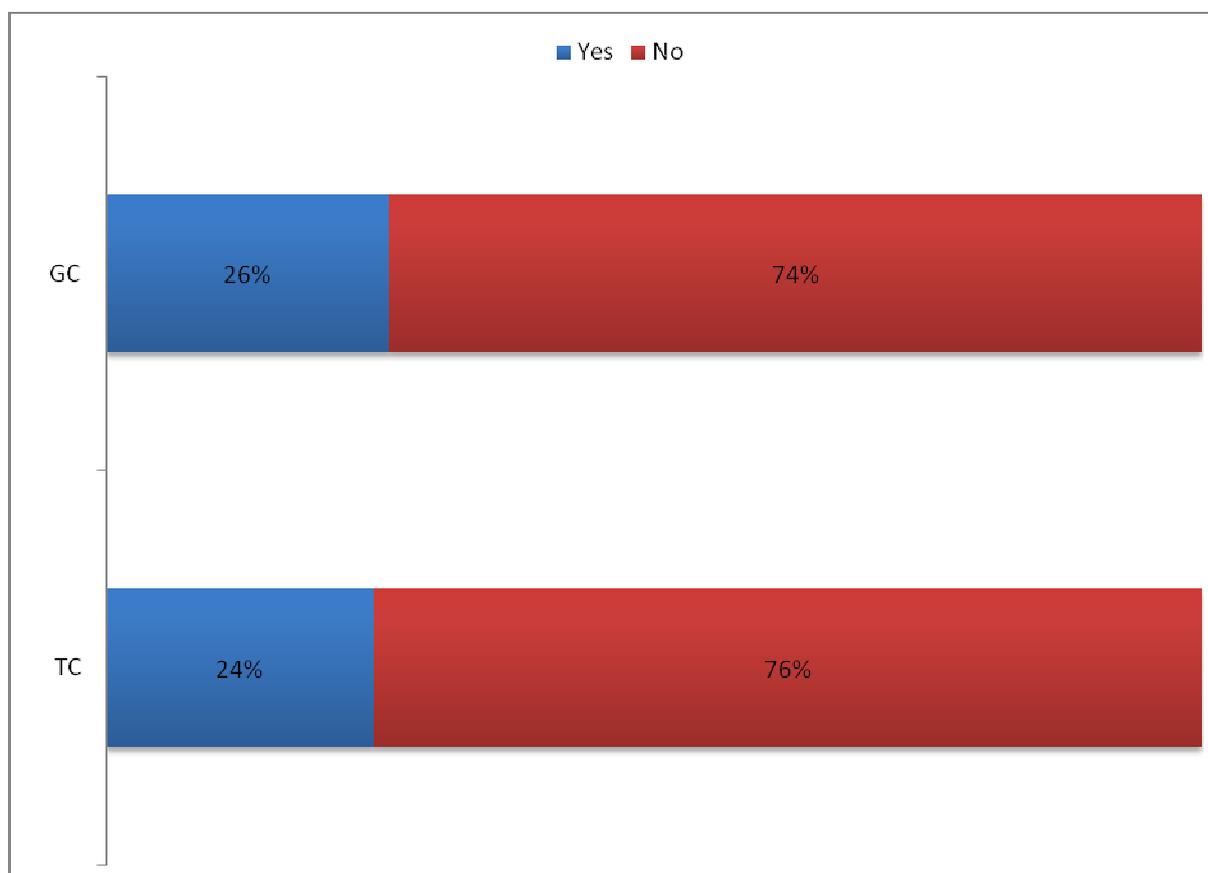
[5] Of the limited number of those who do have some contact, most are young people aged 18-24 years (for example, among Greek-Cypriots, only 26% of the total sample maintain such relationships or contact - among the 18-24 age group, this figure rises to 43%).

Why is it then that the majority does not have any contact or relations with members of the other community? The main reasons are because "the opportunity did not present itself" or "they did not attempt to" (72% of Greek-Cypriots and 55% of Turkish-Cypriots) – results that once again relate to the fact that the two communities live in two "parallel" societies, two separate, divergent worlds, with few or no points of contact and with different realities, problems and interests. A smaller percentage does not believe in the need for contact with members of the other community (19% of Greek-Cypriots and 22% of Turkish-Cypriots). An even smaller percentage (7% of Greek-Cypriots and 16% of Turkish-Cypriots) avoids any contact as they fear the other community; while others (2% of Greek-Cypriots and 5% of Turkish-Cypriots) avoid contact due to fear of their own community (i.e. the risk of stigma/criticism).

What prevents you from having such relations?
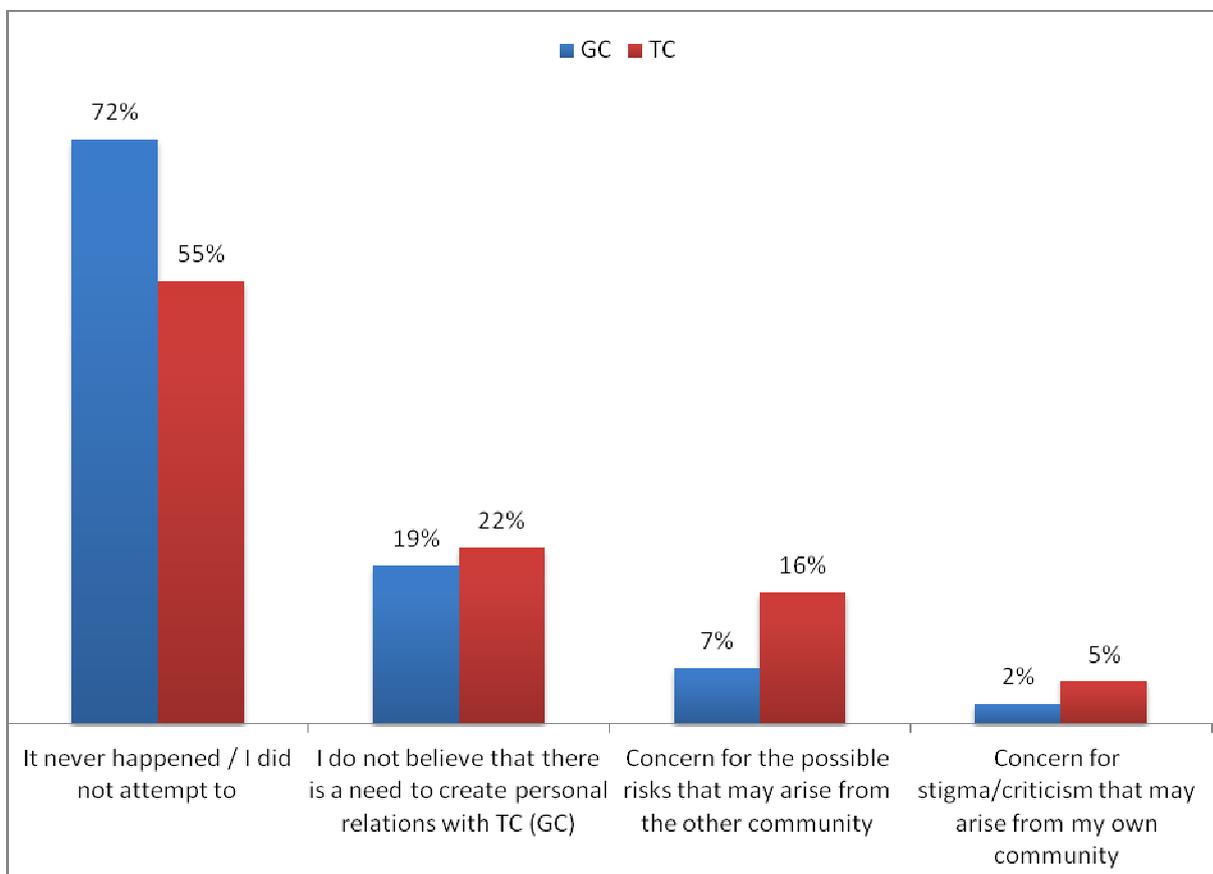
A series of other questions were posed whereby Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot respondents were asked how they would feel if they had a member of the other community as a neighbour, friend, business partner, spouse and, finally, as President of a common state. The answers to this series of questions are presented in the figure below:

How would you feel if you had a (Greek-Cypriot or Turkish-Cypriot)...
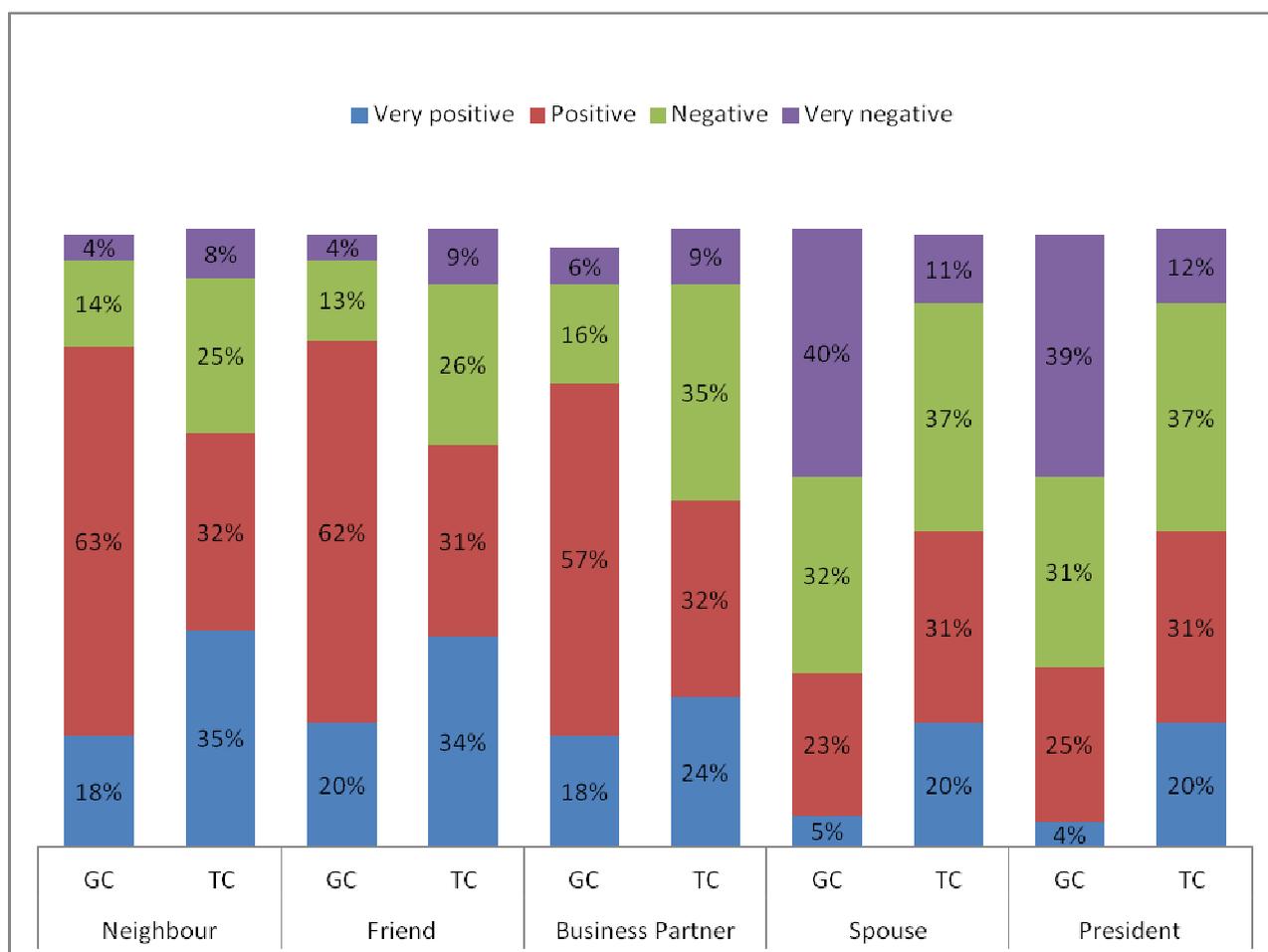
Simply put, we see that Greek-Cypriots display enough willingness to have a Turkish-Cypriot as a neighbour or friend (81% and 82%, respectively, are "positive" or "very positive" about this). This willingness is somewhat more restrained when it comes to having a Turkish-Cypriot business partner (75%); while it is considerably more negative to have a Turkish-Cypriot spouse or President (28% and 29%, respectively, are "positive" or "very positive" about this). As regards Turkish-Cypriots, they are more reserved than Greek-Cypriots when it comes to having a neighbour or friend from the Greek-Cypriot community (67% and 65%, respectively, as compared to 81% and 82% of Greek-Cypriots). In contrast, Turkish-Cypriots appear more receptive to having a spouse or President from the Greek-Cypriot community (51% in both cases, compared to 28% and 29%, respectively, among Greek-Cypriots).

For those who feel negative about maintaining any relationship with the other community, we asked why this was the case. Interestingly, among this group of respondents, only a small percentage (17% of Greek-Cypriots and 10% of Turkish-Cypriots) considers that the other community is the "enemy".

What they view as the reason for this problem is the issue of difference: Among Greek-Cypriots the main problem is the different religions (44%) and different ethnic origin (27%). On the contrary, for Turkish-Cypriots, the biggest problem is the different ethnicity (67%), followed by the different religion (15%).[6]

What would you say is the main reason that causes you to feel negative?
Mainly because Turkish-Cypriots / Greek-Cypriots…
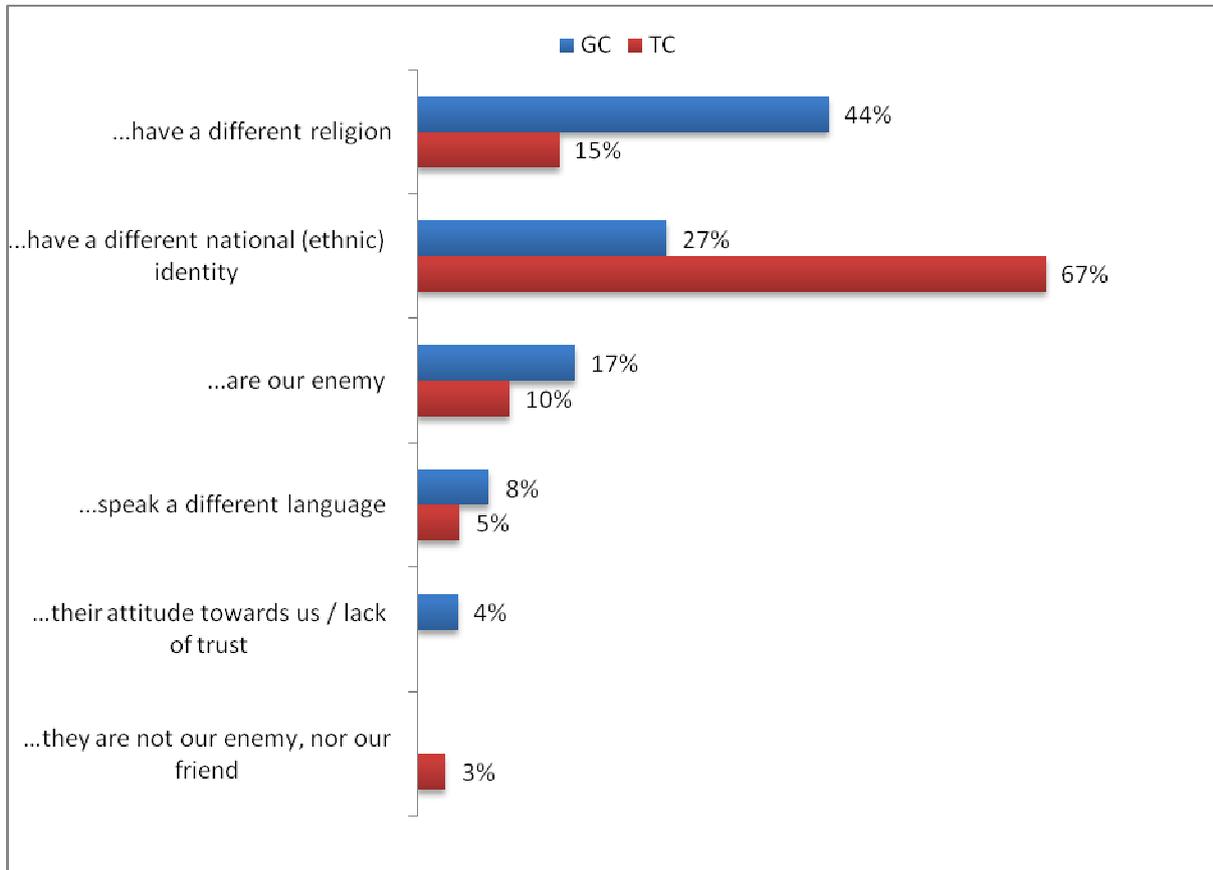
What conclusions can be drawn from these findings? Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots appear comfortable enough to have neighbours or friends from the other community (with Turkish-Cypriots somewhat more reserved about this). These findings are consistent with the widely held belief in cordial/friendly relations at the level of ordinary people and everyday interactions/relations. Or the belief that "Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots do not have any differences between them" or *"we have nothing to divide amongst ourselves"* (frequently supplemented with the comment/conclusion: "it is the foreigners who divided us or who have created the problem").

However, equally important, is that this acceptance decreases when it comes to having a spouse or President from the other community, with Greek-Cypriots being more reserved or negative (in the case of the spouse, this is attributed to the greater importance that religion has for them; and in the case of the President because, due to their majority status, they consider it their democratic right that the President of a common state would be Greek-Cypriot). While the responses to the latter two factors may seem like "commonsense" – so much so that you may not notice or pay attention to

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[6] It is known that over the course of time Turkish-Cypriots have never been particularly attached to religion / Islam, since, historically, they were strongly influenced by Kemalism.

them because the answers seem "reasonable" or "understandable" – the responses provide important clues as to the problem between the two communities. On the one hand, the few mixed marriages remind us how "ingrained" the cultural boundaries are that divide the two communities[7]; on the other hand, the immense difficulty in accepting a President from the other community goes to show that the problem between the two communities does not relate to the ordinary level of human relations (which is actually somewhat to very cordial) but to the level of sharing (political) power.

This, once more, reaffirms the fact that the two communities live in different parallel worlds, with different political and social institutions, and find it difficult to trust one another (when it comes to intimate/close relations and the sharing of political power). These differences have been transformed into "deep division".

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[7] While, for example, marriages between Caucasians and African-Americans in the US are much more common; indicating how much more "porous" the cultural boundaries between these two groups are in the US.

The Solution to the Cyprus Problem

A subsequent series of questions related to political issues and the solution to the Cyprus Problem. The first question asked what would be the best solution to the political problem facing Cyprus? With options relating to relations between the two communities, the majority of Greek-Cypriots prefer those which relate as much as possible to a closer union/integration or closer relations between the two communities. On their part, Turkish-Cypriots appeared torn between the option of a close integration between the two communities and for things to remain as they are.

The best solution to the political problem facing Cyprus is…

The responses to the question concerning the preferred statehood of Cyprus were quite similar. The majority (44%) of Greek-Cypriots prefer a single state, with a much smaller proportion (24%) choosing a federation; while Turkish-Cypriots were almost equally divided over their preference for either two states (29%) or a federation (30%).
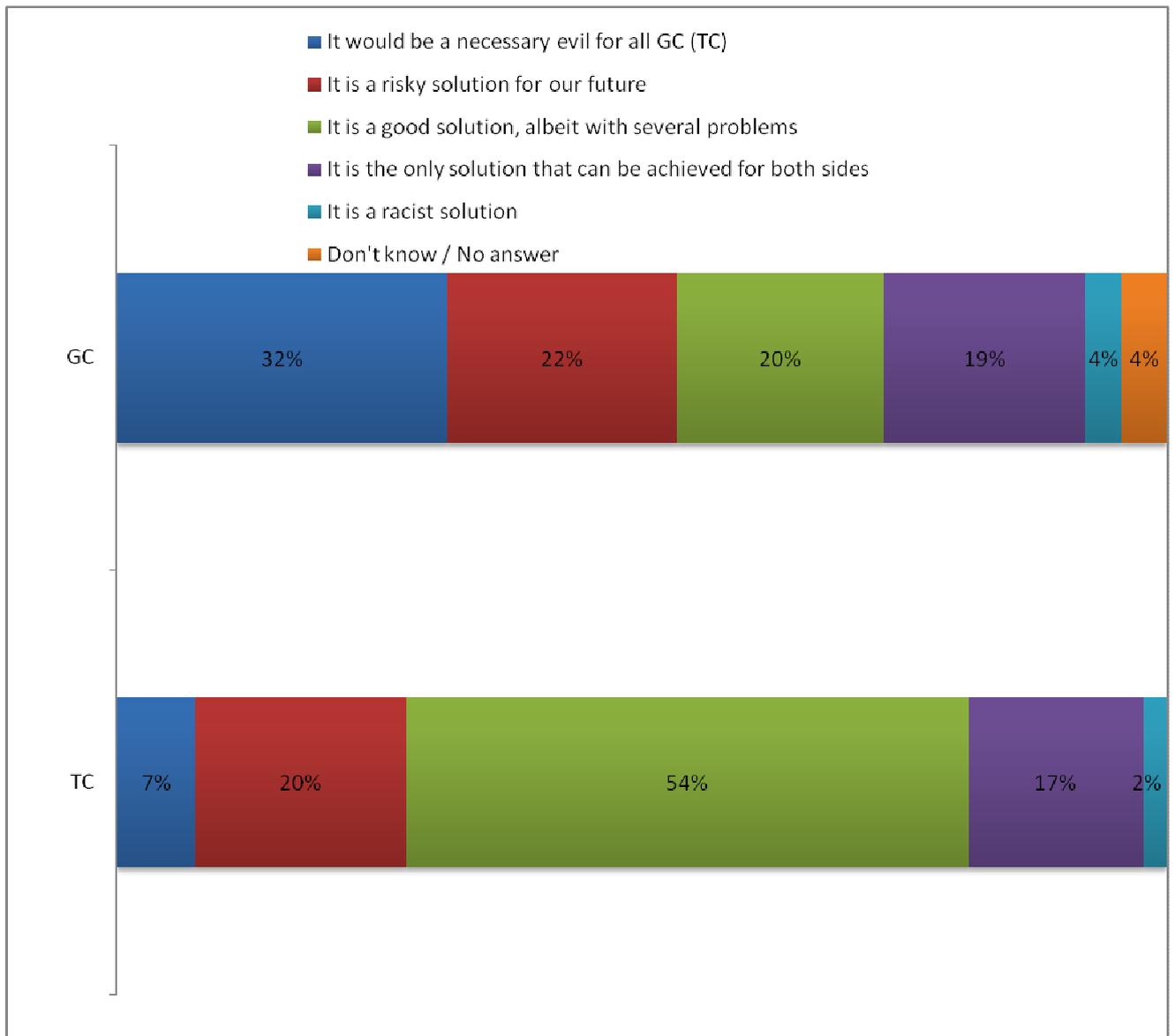
What do you think is the best solution to the political problem of Cyprus?
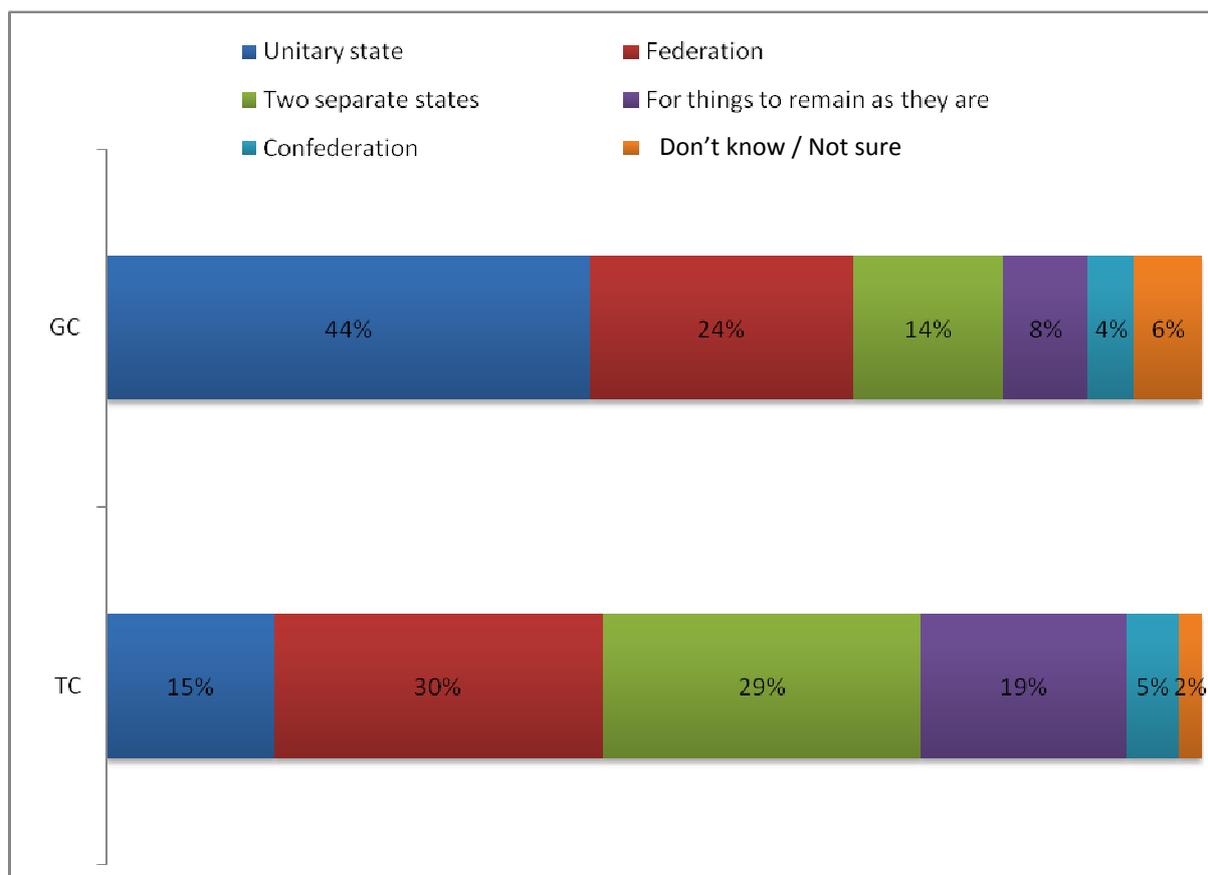
One of the factors that help better understand the different attitudes of the two sides regarding these issues is their perception of the essence of the problem. The Greek-Cypriot side emphasizes that a modern democracy is based on individual citizens and the principle of "one person – one vote" (the model which Lijphart termed "majoritarian democracy"). Thus, the ideal state would be a unitary state that would safeguard the human rights of Turkish-Cypriots. If this solution is not an option, then the next alternative is that of a federal system, with a strong central government (which is as close as possible to the model of a unitary state). In contrast, the Turkish-Cypriot side emphasizes the fact that it is a separate, autonomous community that does not want to be overshadowed by the majority population; thus, democracy is considered to be the equality of the two communities (one vote in each community). The ideal political solution for Turkish-Cypriots would be the peaceful coexistence of two independent states. In the event that these options are not available, then a federation is acceptable – however, with as much decentralization / autonomy of the two parts as possible.

However, how do the two sides feel about a federal solution, which both communities have long accepted as the future system of government of a reunified Cyprus? The largest group of Greek-Cypriots (32%) regards a federation as a "necessary evil", while the majority of Turkish-Cypriots (54%) see it as "a good solution, albeit with several problems".

In general, how do you view / regard the federal solution, which we have come to accept as our future system of government?
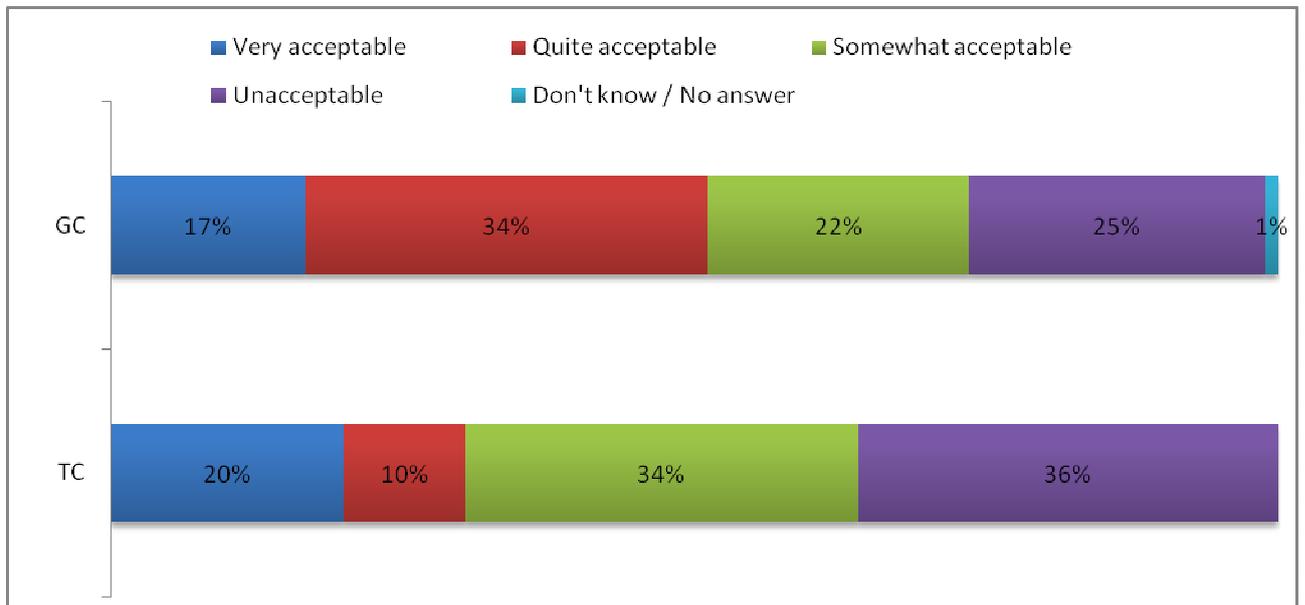

Legend:
- It would be a necessary evil for all GC (TC)
- It is a risky solution for our future
- It is a good solution, albeit with several problems
- It is the only solution that can be achieved for both sides
- It is a racist solution
- Don't know / No answer

GC: 32% | 22% | 20% | 19% | 4% | 4%

TC: 7% | 20% | 54% | 17% | 2%

NB: Very few Greek-Cypriots (4%) and even fewer Turkish-Cypriots (2%) consider a federation as "racist".
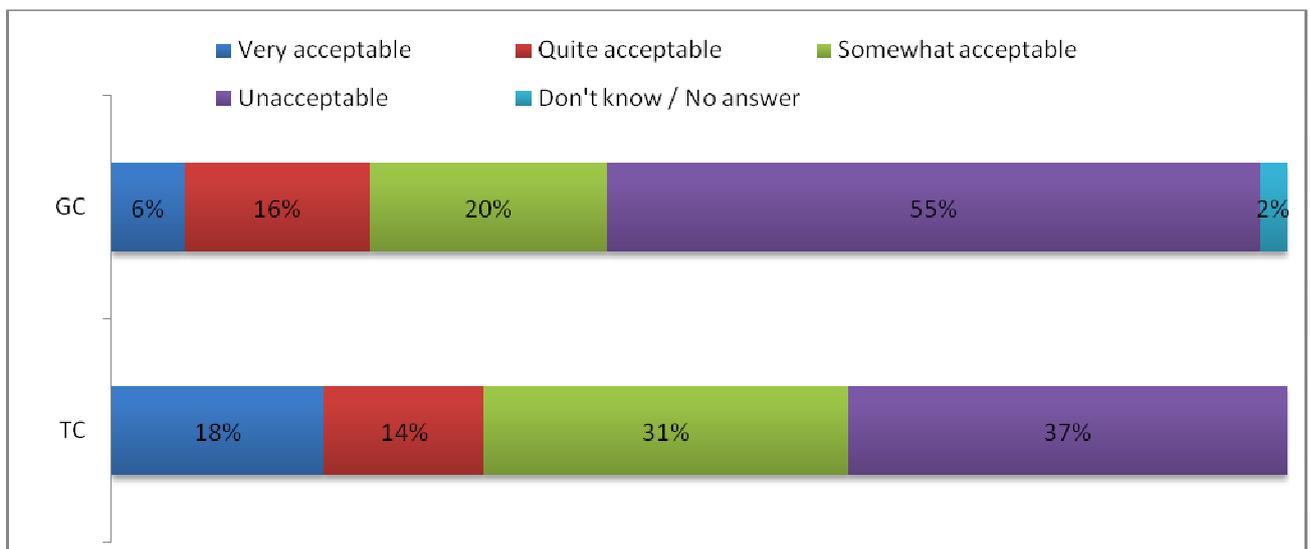
In the case of a compromise solution, what is it that would be most bothersome? Would it perhaps be power sharing / the co-ruling between Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot officials? Probably not so much, since 73% of Greek-Cypriots would find this "necessary evil" (somewhat, fairly or very) acceptable. With somewhat greater hesitation, most Turkish-Cypriots (63%) would accept this. What appears to be more difficult for Greek-Cypriots to accept would be an "alternating" Presidency, since 55% reject this option (the corresponding rate among Turkish-Cypriots is 37%). Once more, as the majority population, Greek-Cypriots feel this would be a great injustice and, even, an imposition to have a President from the minority community.

How acceptable would it be for you…

The co-ruling of Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot political officials in a future, federal Cyprus?

	Very acceptable	Quite acceptable	Somewhat acceptable	Unacceptable	Don't know / No answer
GC	17%	34%	22%	25%	1%
TC	20%	10%	34%	36%	

To have an alternating President and Vice President (Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot)?

|	Very acceptable	Quite acceptable	Somewhat acceptable	Unacceptable	Don't know / No answer
GC	6%	16%	20%	55%	2%
TC	18%	14%	31%	37%	

How much confidence would citizens have in the new institutions? How objective do they think state officials would be in their work – would they cater to all, regardless of ethnicity, or would they perhaps look out for the interests of the members of their own community? Strangely enough, Cypriots are quite positive in their responses; with only 15% of both communities believing in the certainty that officials of a united state would be biased. Turkish-Cypriots are somewhat more pessimistic as 67% consider that officials would be "somewhat" objective in performing their duties (compared to 33% of Greek-Cypriots who share the same sentiment; another 35% of whom believe that these officials will be "sufficiently" objective).

How objective do you think the various state officials would be in serving all citizens and not only members of their own community?
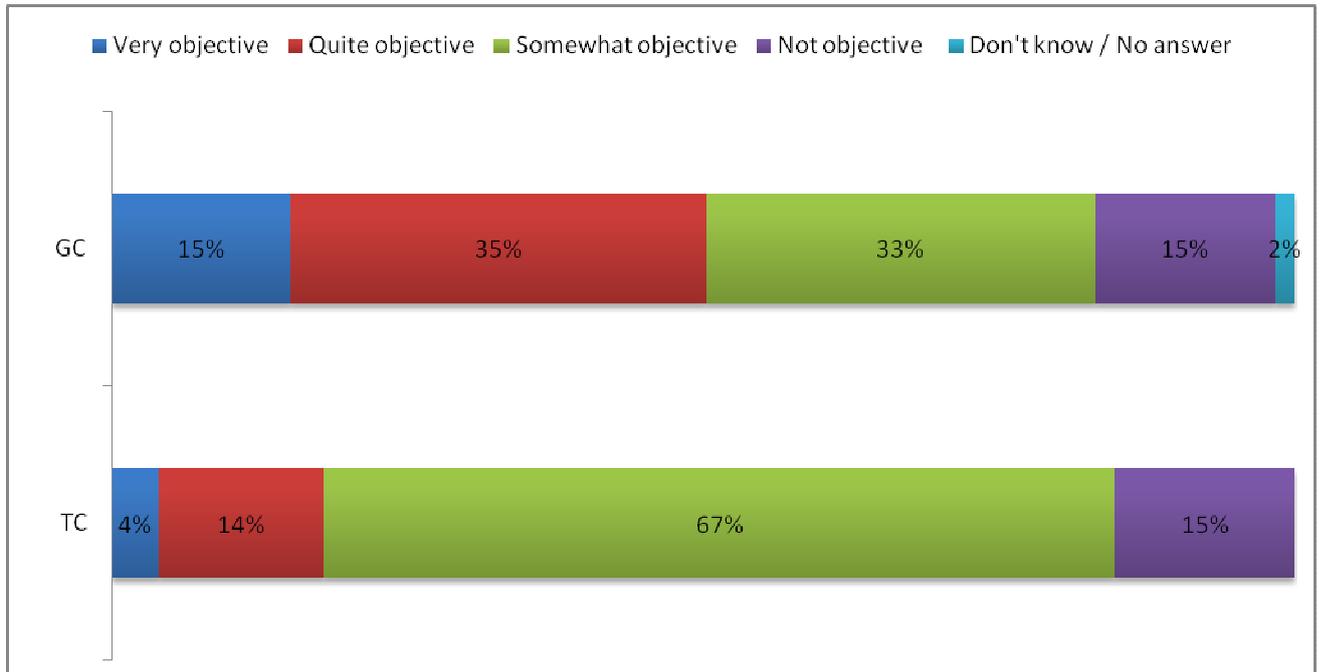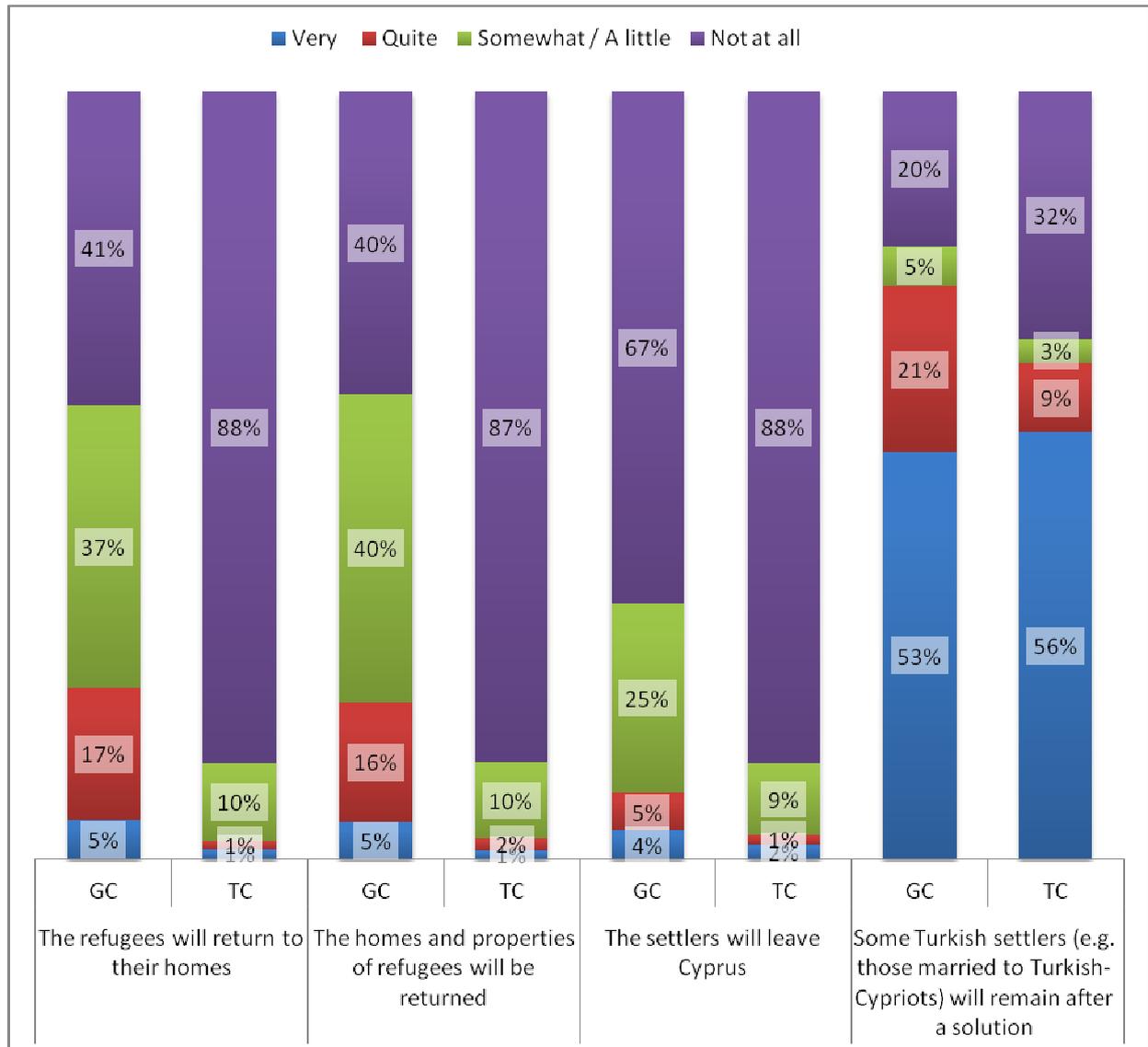
A related question concerns "external intervention". How independent would the government of a future common state be, from any intervention from the "motherlands" (Greece and Turkey), which, historically, interfered with politics on the island? Turkish-Cypriots are more pessimistic in their evaluations as only 17% believe that the politics of a common state would be "very" or "fairly" independent (3% and 14%, respectively) from the motherland – compared to 31% of Greek-Cypriots who shared this view (14% and 17%, respectively).

How independent do you think common governmental politics would be from Greek / Turkish interference?
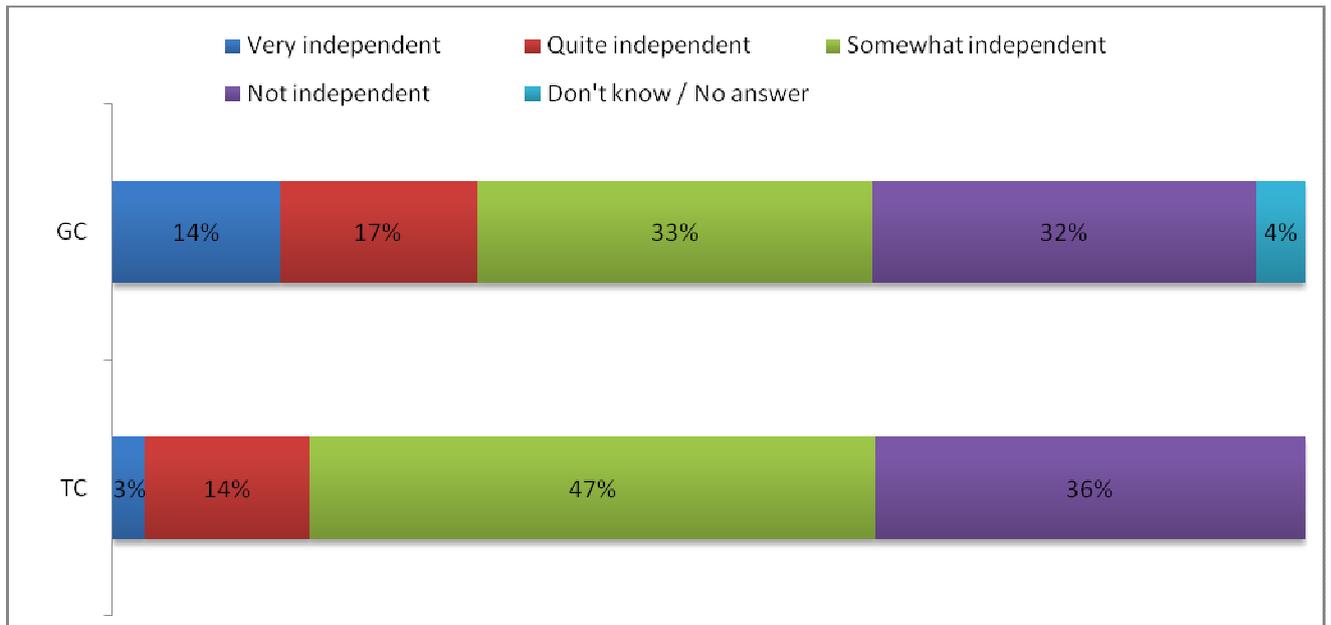
The areas in which the difference in opinion among the two communities is particularly large, relates to issues concerning the future "settlement" of the Cyprus Problem and how these relate to some of the "realities" brought about following 1974 – the return of refugees, the return of the property of displaced persons and the departure of Turkish mainland settlers. Despite the fact that both communities are quite pessimistic (or perhaps realistic?) about how feasible it is to alter any of these factors, Greek-Cypriots certainly have higher expectations compared to Turkish-Cypriots.

To what extent do you consider the following possible or feasible?

	Very	Quite	Somewhat / A little	Not at all

	GC	TC	GC	TC	GC	TC	GC	TC
Not at all	41%	88%	40%	87%	67%	88%	20%	32%
Somewhat / A little	37%	10%	40%	10%	25%	9%	5%	3%
Quite	17%	1%	16%	2%	5%	1%	21%	9%
Very	5%	1%	5%	1%	4%	2%	53%	56%

| The refugees will return to their homes | The homes and properties of refugees will be returned | The settlers will leave Cyprus | Some Turkish settlers (e.g. those married to Turkish-Cypriots) will remain after a solution |

The Emergence of a Political Identity?

The prevalence of ethno-national identities makes it difficult to near impossible to find a basis of common elements that may unite Cypriots and which can form the basis of a common state. Nevertheless, some of the research findings leave room for the possibility of the emergence of such components that could contribute to the foundations of a common identity in the future. More specifically, to the question of what it is that must bring together the citizens of a state, Greek-Cypriots mainly stressed the "feeling of a common country" (27%), the common rights and equality of citizens before the law (25 %), and the sense of "common problems and interests, together with the fight for a common future" (24%). Only a much smaller percentage (17%) highlighted ethnic elements (origin, religion, language).

Unfortunately, the same does not apply for Turkish-Cypriots, most of whom (31%) once again stressed a common ethnicity. On the other hand, the percentage that reported "the rights of citizens" (26%) or the percentage that noted "common problems and interests| (23%) were certainly not negligible in size. Most likely, the isolation of Turkish-Cypriots, their dependence on Turkey and the fact that they live in an illegal, vulnerable, clientelistic state, fails to leave much room for the development of an identity based on citizenship and adherence to the rule of law.

What is it that you think should unite the citizens of a state?
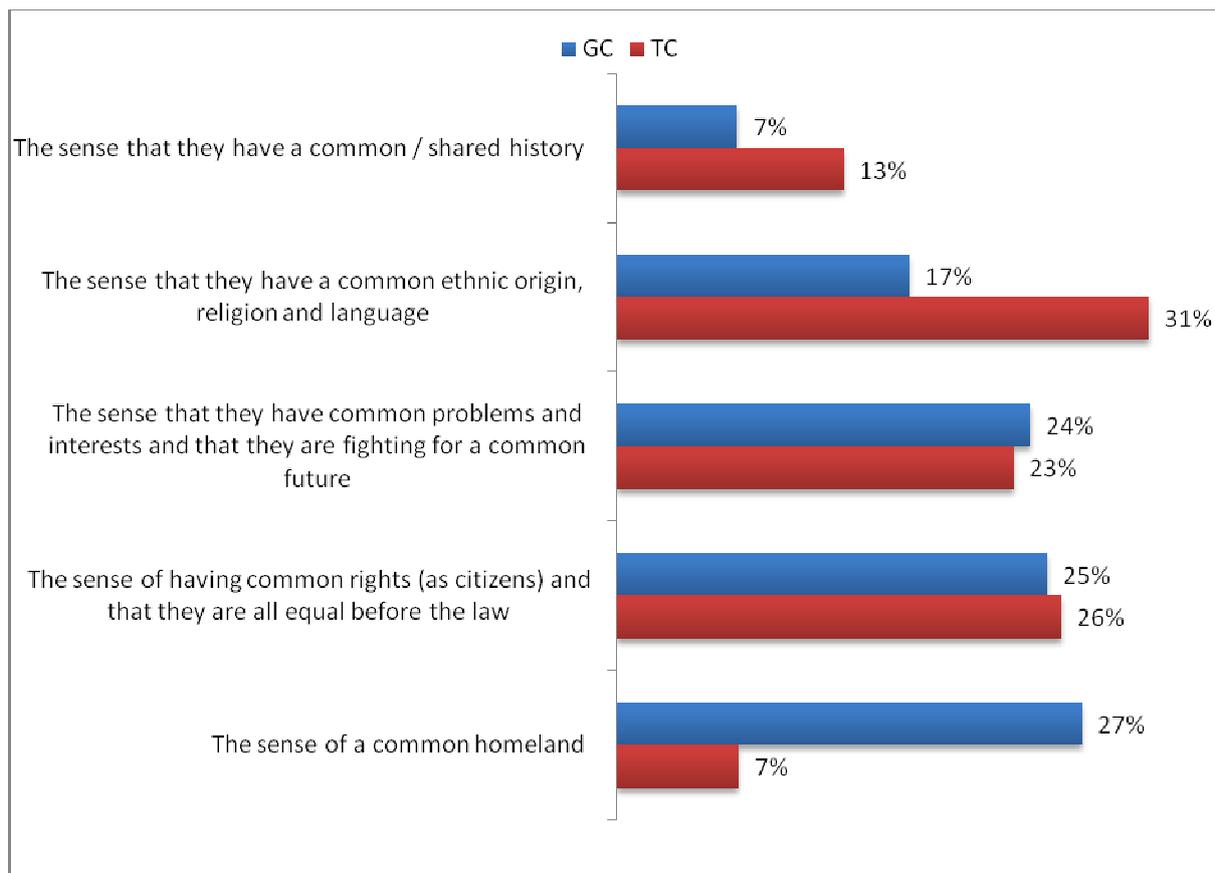
In case the elements that relate to forging a political identity (common rights, equality before the law, common interests, a common future) continue to assume greater importance in the future and among both communities, these could potentially form the basis for a new symbiosis, in a common Cypriot state.