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DENMARK

The De Facto Condition of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus as a Driver of Migration for Cameroonian Asylum Seekers

by

Moritz Dietrich Reinbach

Student-Number: 20181010

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Under Supervision & Examination of Bjørn Møller, PhD & MA

Under Co-examination of Lars Buur, PhD

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Abstract:

Cyprus, as a divided Mediterranean island, with its distinctive structural features, has the highest number of asylum seekers per capita in the European Union (EU). Since its division in 1974, the Republic of Cyprus (RoC), inhabited primarily by Greek Cypriots, has been located in the South and is part of the EU since 2004. The North, where primarily Turkish Cypriots live, is called Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) after a unilateral state declaration in the year 1983. The TRNC is classified as a de facto state, as it is not recognized by any other country except by its patron state Turkey. The de facto status means that the country cannot be a signatory to international agreements such as the Geneva Refugee Convention and hence no asylum can be sought. Furthermore, the country has looser entry regulations, so that for many countries no visa obligation exists and, therefore, i.e. international students can register comparatively easily at numerous universities.

Since around 60% of all asylum seekers enter the RoC through crossing the dividing Green Line from the TRNC, it is examined whether the structural conditions in the TRNC are deliberately seen by asylum seekers as a driver to choose this route into the EU. By applying the Push-Pull Plus concept, statements of asylum seekers from Cameroon, the empirical example, are analyzed. It is found that the situation of the TRNC did not play a conscious role in the decision-making process for the individuals. However, it became clear that the respective escapes were organized by smugglers, which suggests that smugglers have recognized and offered the structural loophole as a driver in form of a pull factor. According to the concept, a driver alone does not initiate an escape, but only in interaction with others, both push and pull factors. Further drivers that triggered the flight of the respondents were identified through the analysis. The smuggling industry, corruption and the ethnic conflict in Cameroon as few of the further drivers had an decisive influence on the migration. Drivers do not work for everybody as a given, but rather depending on specific dimensions, showing that the discussed driver could only be activated for those who could afford the comparatively expensive escape and possessed the necessary papers.

Ultimately, it is assumed that Turkey's attitude, by deliberately allowing migrants to enter the EU via the TRNC, may be a separate driver for migration decisions, which is also noticeable at the border with Greece. Although the structural condition of the TRNC may not be a main driver, but in combination with other drivers, it results in a driver complex which has an influence on the increasing number of asylum applications from Cameroon in the RoC.

Keywords: Drivers of Migration; Push-Pull Plus; Cameroon; Republic of Cyprus; Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus; De Facto State; Cyprus Problem; Asylum Seekers; Smuggler

List of Abbreviations:

AKP:	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi; eng. :Justice and Development Party
CTP:	Cumhuriyetçi Türk Partisi; eng.: Republican Turkish Party (CTP)
ECO:	Organization of Economic Cooperation
EOKA:	Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston
EU:	European Union
ICC:	International Criminal Court
NGO:	Non-governmental organization
OIC:	The Organization of Islamic Cooperation
RoC:	Republic of Cyprus
RRA:	Refugee Rights Association
SBA:	Sovereign Base Areas
TRNC:	Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus
UN:	United Nations
UNFICYP:	United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus,
UNHCR:	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USA:	United States of America
USD:	United States Dollar

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Interview Questions

Appendix 2 – Recording of the interview with Rodney

Appendix 3 – Recording of the interview with Michael

Appendix 4 – Recording of the interview with Kizito

Appendix 5 – Recording of the interview with Kizito (2nd part)

Appendix 6 – Recording of Brian’s answers via WhatsApp

Table of Figures:

Figure 1 (Page 15):

Quantity of Green Line crossings and its share of asylum applications as well as the total number of asylum applications in the RoC for the period 2011 until 2018

Figure 2 (Page 16):

Information on measures taken against irregular migration (Provided by Turkish Cypriot Community)

Figure 3 (Page 17):

Number of Cameroonians crossing the Green Line irregularly per reporting period

Table of Content

1. Introduction	1
2. Research interest & State of research	2
3. Positionality	4
4. Context	4
A. <i>Cyprus Problem</i>	4
i. Precursors of the island division	4
ii. Unilateral Declaration of Independence of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus	5
iii. Precursors of EU Accession of the Republic of Cyprus	6
iv. The time after EU Accession	8
B. <i>The TRNC as a de facto state</i>	9
i. What made the TRNC a de facto State?	9
ii. The TRNC as an isolated state	10
iii. The influence of the de facto status on asylum matters in the TRNC	11
C. <i>Review of EU reports monitoring the Green Line Regulation</i>	13
i. Methodological considerations for the review	13
ii. Green Line Regulation	14
iii. Review of annual reports	14
1. Numerical statistics on irregular border crossings	14
2. Statements about TRNC and Turkey	15
3. Countries of origin of detected persons	16
iv. <i>Sub-Conclusion</i>	18
5. Determinants of Migration in form of Push-Pull factors	18
A. <i>Push-Pull: Scholarly debate on why people migrate</i>	18
B. <i>Push-Pull Plus</i>	21
i. Four different drivers of migration	22
ii. Dimensions of drivers of migration	23
C. <i>Sub-Conclusion</i>	24
6. Preliminary considerations regarding the interviews with Cameroonian asylum seekers	24
A. <i>Cameroonian asylum seekers as an empirical example</i>	25
B. <i>The use of interviews for researching on migration routes</i>	26
C. <i>Methodological design of the interviews</i>	28
7. Analysis of Interviews	30
A. <i>The interview partners and their motives to flee</i>	30
B. <i>The desired destination</i>	31
C. <i>Choosing Cyprus as a destination</i>	32
D. <i>Mode of travel to the TRNC</i>	33
E. <i>Mode of travel to the RoC</i>	34
F. <i>Documents needed to enter the TRNC</i>	35
G. <i>Involvement of smugglers</i>	36
H. <i>(Non-)Recommendation of this route</i>	38

1.	<i>Incorporation of the findings in the conceptual framework Push-Pull Plus</i>	39
8.	Conclusion & Outlook	42
9.	Bibliography	45
10.	Endnotes.....	53

1. Introduction

The Republic of Cyprus (RoC) is the country in the European Union (EU) with the highest number of refugees in relation to its population.¹ The urgency of researching about migration to the RoC is evident from the demands for help from the government, which claims not to be able anymore to cope with the increasing numbers.²

The island state with Greek-Cypriots in the southern RoC and the Turkish Republic Northern Cyprus (TRNC) is in a special situation, also referred to as the Cyprus Problem.³ Since 1974 the island has been divided. The division goes back to longstanding ethnic conflicts that culminated in a war involving Greek paramilitary groups and the Turkish military in 1974. As a result, the island was marked by internal mass displacement by resettlement of the populations. The South became an EU member in 2004. The TRNC, not a member of the EU, is labelled as a de facto state and not recognized by the international community except of Turkey. Despite the “Comfortable Conflict” nowadays, the United Nations (UN) peace mission United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) still remains as a watchdog.⁴

Given that around 60% of all asylum-seekers enter the RoC via the Northern part⁵, it is relevant to examine this route of flight more closely. Since the TRNC has structural features that distinguish it from other states, the aim is to find out whether and to what extent these characteristics affect individual migration decisions. Accordingly, the following question is decisive for this research:

Does the structural de facto condition in the TRNC act as driver of migration for asylum-seekers from Cameroon to choose the route via the TRNC to the RoC?

Asylum-seekers from Cameroon, the empirical example, were questioned to reveal whether the structural condition of the TRNC provided incentives for their route choice.

Drivers that determine and facilitate migration decisions can be divided into push factors and pull factors. In the conventional variants of this approach, solely economic considerations were seen as relevant, Migration was therefore understood as a static, linear movement and not as a social process characterized by various driving forces accounting for more complexity in the matter.⁶

More recent push-pull approaches, in contrast, distinguish themselves from this static character, so that various aspects relevant to migration are included. The conceptual framework Push-Pull

Plus from to Nicholas Van Hear, Oliver Bakewell and Katy Long will be applied to analyze the interviews conducted.⁷ The authors primarily reveal drivers which cannot be influenced directly by migrants but can affect the access to it by e.g. their social position. Dependent on their effect, they distinguish among four different types. Consequently, it will be examined whether the de facto condition of Cyprus can be identified as one of such drivers.

In the beginning, the research interest is outlined before a brief discussion on the state of literature on the subject is given and the positionality of the researcher receives attention. To introduce the topic, the context chapter first deals with the Cyprus problem and then explains the structural de facto condition of the TRNC. Further, an analysis of EU Commission Reports gives insights into irregular border crossing developments between the two Cypriot parts. The next step is a theoretical discussion of the conventional push-pull approaches, before the conceptual framework Push-Pull Plus is described more detailed. After methodological considerations on the usefulness of qualitative interviews for this research, the statements of the interviewees will be analyzed. Finally, the analysis is embedded in the Push-Pull Plus framework to answer the research question. It is assumed that the structural conditions on the island represent a driver in the individual decision-making process of the interviewees. Therefore, the Push-Pull Plus model investigates how and why the driver affects their migration process. This thesis ends with a conclusion and an outlook for further research.

2. Research interest & State of research

The research interest developed when I completed an internship in the Greek Cypriot part of Nicosia from September 2019 to February 2020. I worked for the human rights Non-governmental organization (NGO) "KISA", which offers practical support for migrants.

During this time, I met many asylum seekers, including Cameroonians, who told me about their escape. Thus, I discovered that some of them arrived in the Northern part of the country by plane and then crossed into the RoC via the Green Line. This represented a new form of escape route to the EU for me. I also witnessed through my work many stories of asylum seekers who complained about the situation in Cyprus. This was partly due to the comparatively high number of asylum seekers on the island. Accordingly, I intended to investigate in more detail whether the availability of this particular route via the TRNC has had a certain influence on the increasing numbers and whether it offers special incentives for asylum seekers.

By consulting existing literature on this topic, I noticed that there were besides numerous media reports also several scientific contributions on migration to and within Cyprus. First and

foremost, scientific research is devoted to the Cyprus problem and the resulting internal refugee movements of Greek and Turkish Cypriots.ⁱ Other works looked at The Green Line , the dividing border of the island, from a philosophical perspective by framing it as “a space of exception”.ⁱⁱ Furthermore, a number of research projects focused on the impact of the Cypriot EU accession on migrationⁱⁱⁱ or the integration of asylum seekers in the RoC.^{iv} Finally, analyses of migration policies adopted by the Greek Cypriot government^v could be found, whereas some serve as advices for policy makers^{vi}.

About the current irregular cross-border movements from the TRNC into RoC, only a few contributions could be found. While Çolak, Tekin & Aydin researched in 2014 on transit migration flows of migrant workers or potential refugees, they focused on push factors that bring migrants into the TRNC and government policies to curb irregular migration.⁸ The recent publication "Cyprus as a new refugee "hotspot" in Europe?" by Trimikliniotis in 2020 recognizes the urgent problem in Cyprus and examines refugee and migration situation in Cyprus. He primarily addresses the government's policy responses and gives estimates of how migration flows will develop for the island in the future. Although he mentions the frequently used route via the TRNC, the structural conditions that allow for this kind of migration are not discussed.⁹

Accordingly, I discovered a gap of research on the relationship of the structural condition of the island and the increase of asylum seekers arriving. I considered it relevant to include the voices of asylum seekers themselves as their perspective has not been taken into account yet in other researches on this topic. With the help of interviews, I want to determine whether the structural condition of Cyprus plays a role in the individual decision-making process of the migration route.

ⁱ See e.g. Klot and Mansfeld (1994); Loizos (2008); Demetriou (2018)

ⁱⁱ See e.g. Odenthal (2013); Antonsich (2012)

ⁱⁱⁱ See e.g. Trimikliniotis and Demetriou (2006); King and Thomson (2008); Phuong (2003); Mainwaring (2012); Mainwaring (2008)

^{iv} See e.g. Angeli (2019); Cochliou and Spaneas (2009)

^v See e.g. Trimikliniotis and Fulas-Souroulla (2006); Trimikliniotis and Demetriou (2011); Norredam, Mygind and Krasnik (2005)

^{vi} See e.g. Trimikliniotis and Demetriou (2018); Spaneas and Cochliou (2013)

3. Positionality

Since I got to know the interviewees through my work and generally through my role as an employee of a human rights NGO in Nicosia, it is essential to position my role as a researcher here. Thus, my interpretations, especially in the analysis part of this work, may be influenced by the previous experience I have gained through my job. My role as a researcher in relation to the interview partners is discussed in more detail in chapter 6.C.

By describing the origins of the structural de facto condition in Cyprus, an attempt is made to draw a balanced picture. This can cause tensions when considering the history of a conflict region through the different historical interpretations of the involved actors. Accordingly, when it comes to the Cyprus Problem, it is tried to refer as little as possible to sources of the respective administrations of the two sides, but to use secondary literature, to avoid biased assessments.

4. Context

This chapter provides insights into, first, the historical background of the Cyprus problem and, second, the long-standing structural phenomena of the TRNC as a de facto state and their implications. Thirdly, reports of the EU Commission monitoring the Green Line Regulation will be analyzed to draw a picture of the situation regarding irregular border crossings from the North to the South of the island. By explaining the deep-rooted distortions in the context of the division, the aim is to better understand the causes of the de facto condition in Cyprus, the current situation as well as its implications on asylum matters and irregular migration movements.

A. Cyprus Problem

This chapter focuses on the time before and after the division, the unilateral declaration of independence by the Turkish Cypriots, as well as the long-standing attempts to unite the country. Finally, the implications of the EU accession of the RoC receive attention.

i. Precursors of the island division

Cyprus, the third largest island in the Mediterranean Sea, has in the recent past frequently been involved in international linkages of larger players. For centuries, the island, inhabited mainly by Greek- and Turkish Cypriots, was a strategic base of different civilizations. After Great

Britain formed an alliance with the Sultan of Cyprus in 1878, Cyprus became a colony of the English Crown in 1925.¹⁰

From the 1930s onwards, the voices of the Greek Cypriots became louder, calling for the annexation into Greece.¹¹ This movement was called *Enosis* under the lead of the later president Archbishop Makarios in the 1950s. While Great Britain unsuccessfully tried to conclude governmental contracts for the time after the colonial occupation, the armed resistance of the Greek Cypriot nationalist organization EOKA began in 1955.¹² At the same time, Turkish Cypriot leaders formed the Turkish Resistance Movement so that tensions were kept on a high level.¹³ In 1960, with the participation of Greece and Turkey, as the patron states, Great Britain negotiated a treaty of independence for the island, which aimed for integrity of Cyprus. Thus, the independent Republic of Cyprus was created by dividing the power between the two ethnic communities¹⁴ in a functional federalist system with equal and immutable partnership between the two sides. Cyprus became a member of the Commonwealth¹⁵, and Britain retained a presence on the island by establishing two Sovereign Base Areas (SBA) as military bases.¹⁶

As the conflict continued, Britain developed at the end of 1963 a ceasefire plan, known as the Green Line Agreement. Accordingly, Nicosia was divided into a Greek and a Turkish part.¹⁷ Despite the start of the UN peace mission UNFICYP in 1964 as a successor of the British troops, the fighting continued over years, with Turkish and Greek military participating in the conflict.¹⁸

Disagreements between Makarios and EOKA resulted in a military coup against the Greek Cypriot government initiated by EOKA with the support of the Greek military junta on July 15, 1974¹⁹ Despite the direct announcement of the coup government that Makarios had been deposed, he managed to return to Cyprus as president after several months.²⁰

During his absence, as a direct consequence of the coup, the situation between the two Cypriot sides worsened and the conflict took a decisive turn. Turkish military invaded and occupied the Northern region of the country, bringing approximately 36% of the island under its control.²¹ As a result from the heavy fighting, around 180,000 Greek Cypriots fled from the North and arrived as refugees in the South; at the same time, around 50,000 Turkish Cypriots moved to the North.²²

ii. Unilateral Declaration of Independence of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus

As John Hughes-Wilson, a former UNFICYP officer, puts it "*[t]he irony is that the Turks' intervention or invasion – call it what you will – has brought peace to Cyprus*".²³ This peace, however, entailed many sacrifices. Not only the many deaths on both sides, but also a border

that has been present ever since, which now finally divided the whole country. In the following years, the UN emerged as the only actor with real ambition to find a solution.

Due to an unexpected move in 1975, the Turkish Cypriots, first, proclaimed the Turkish Federated State of Northern Cyprus and in 1983 the Turkish Cypriot administration under the leadership of Rauf Denktaş declared independence of the newly constituted Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.²⁴ Led by the UN Security Council, the declaration was condemned and considered illegal by the international community. Nevertheless, Turkey quickly announced that it would recognize the TRNC. Until today, Turkey remains the only state that did so²⁵ whereas in turn, Turkey still refuses to recognize the RoC to date.²⁶ The Greek Cypriots considered that the unilateral declaration of independence as a direct consequence of the Turkish occupation of 1974. It was said that any recognition of the Turkish Cypriot independence act would violate UN principles.²⁷

The independence of the TRNC was followed by numerous unsuccessful attempts by the UN to revive negotiations, “[...] *turning the island into a ‘graveyard of diplomats’*”²⁸. The goal was to create an independent, nonaligned, bicomunal, bizonal state in Cyprus based on equality and indivisible sovereignty. However, it was not possible for both parties to agree on a common line.²⁹

iii. Precursors of EU Accession of the Republic of Cyprus

Negotiations were further complicated by the announcement that the Republic of Cyprus had submitted a formal application for EU membership on July 04, 1990.^{vii} Cyprus' application was welcomed by the EU with confidence, as it was considered that Cyprus represented European values and that the economic conditions were met to fulfil challenges of integration.³⁰ The application came at a time when the EU was keen to accelerate its enlargement process anyway. After the end of the Cold War, the EU's main focus was on improving the political and economic systems of former communist countries in Eastern Europe in order to prepare them for EU membership. This process was seen “[...] *as fulfilling a historic pledge to further the integration of the continent by peaceful means, overcome decades of artificial division [...]*”³¹

^{vii} However, this date does not reflect the beginning of relations between Cyprus and the European Community (replaced with the European Union in 1993). As early as the 1960s, Cyprus applied for an association agreement with the European Community. Despite the failure of this attempt, a two-stage procedure was initiated in 1972, which first reduced customs tariffs on trade of certain products and then led to a full customs union between Cyprus and the European Community by 1982. (Cyprus Problem – WENTK p. 56f)

Despite the difficulties in structurally transforming those countries, the EU celebrated the road to European unity as a victory for freedom and democracy.³²

Above all, it was hoped that EU accession could be a catalyst to give a new chance to resolve the deadlocked settlement problem³³, although in 1994 the European Council already stated that the RoC would become part of EU enlargement even without a solution to the Cyprus problem.³⁴ The fronts of the two conflicting parties could not be dismantled as a result. The leadership of the Turkish Cypriot community was angered by the RoC's unilateral decision to apply for EU membership.³⁵ This anger was also caused by the fact that the application was on behalf of the whole island, although the RoC effectively only had legal authority over the southern part. However, if they had only acted for their side, it would have been a recognition of the existing de facto condition on the island.³⁶

Furthermore, the relations between the two Cypriot parts were negatively affected by the embargo on Turkish Cypriot exports to the EU imposed by the European Court of Justice in 1994 upon insistence of the RoC. New military agreements between the two parts with their respective protecting powers, Greece and Turkey, did not simplify the situation either.³⁷

It seemed that the EU could not provide incentives to pacify the conflict in order for both sides to effectively join the EU.

In 2002, the Turkish parliamentary elections were won by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan. His primary election promise was Turkey's accession to the EU. To achieve this goal, he could not avoid solving the Cyprus problem, or at least not stand in the way of a solution as the RoC could block Turkey's admission when being EU member.³⁸ Turkey's more flexible position led UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to bring up the so-called Annan Plan. The plan envisaged a unified island state as a loose federation with two constituent states, whereby the presidency would rotate. Among other issues, it was intended to pave the way for the return of displaced Greek Cypriots to the Northern part and to remove large parts of the Turkish military. In this way, the whole part of the island could effectively become part of the EU.³⁹ Despite opposite signals from his population, which original Euro-skepticism was replaced by hopes of the benefits of EU integration⁴⁰, Denktash continued to show resistance to reach a settlement.

In an extremely unexpected move in April 2003, after more than 30 years of existence, the Green Line was opened by the Turkish Cypriot administration, allowing Greek Cypriots to travel to the North again without any evidence of conflict among both Cypriot communities. After it became clear for many Turkish Cypriots for the first time that the South was much more developed, large demonstrations by Turkish Cypriot civil society happened demanding both

conflict resolution and EU accession. This pro-EU trend was strengthened by the outcome of the election in the end of 2003 in the TRNC in which for the first time the pro-solution party Republican Turkish Party (CTP) won. After the second round of talks on the basis of the Annan Plan, it was finally decided that the decision would be taken by the citizens of both sides by means of a referendum, taking place on April 24, 2004, immediately prior to the accession of the RoC to the EU. In the end, 65% of the Turkish Cypriots voted for the adoption.⁴¹

Although the Greek Cypriot leadership was initially favorable to the Annan Plan, the situation changed in the period before the referendum. President Papadopoulos, who called on the population to vote against the plan in the referendum, emphasized that EU membership was already a given and the consequences of a settlement were too uncertain. The result was clear in the end, with 76% of Greek Cypriots voting against the plan. Consequently, Cyprus entered the European Union as a divided country.⁴²

Although formally the whole island was incorporated as a new EU member on May 01, 2004, the outcome of the referendum meant that Protocol 10 of the Accession Treaty of the Republic of Cyprus to the European Union came into force, which determined “*the suspension of the application of the acquis in those areas of the Republic of Cyprus in which the Government of the Republic of Cyprus does not exercise effective control*”.⁴³

iv. The time after EU Accession

The outcome of the referendum was followed by bitter disappointment from the international community and the leadership of the Greek Cypriots was blamed primarily for the failure. The Turkish Cypriot side gained recognition in the international community through the outcome of the referendum, so that states were keen to support the TRNC. EU funds flowed to the Turkish Cypriots through the Financial Aid Regulation, which benefited the economic, social and political developments. The aim of these grants was to develop the country towards common EU standards in order to facilitate EU accession in the event of conflict resolution.⁴⁴ Progress in the negotiations on the Cyprus problem stagnated after 2004, with the result that only in 2006 substantive UN-led talks resumed without major achievements.⁴⁵ In the following years, efforts to find a solution to the conflict were again not successful.⁴⁶

As anticipated by Turkey in the 1990s, the EU accession of the RoC also had a negative impact on their EU relations and their own accession negotiations, as the RoC used its right of veto in a number of decisions concerning Turkey.⁴⁷ This, together with deteriorations in areas of democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights in Turkey, prevented a positive outcome for

Erdogan. In June 2018, the EU decided to effectively freeze the accession negotiations with Turkey.⁴⁸

B. The TRNC as a de facto state

The developments in Cyprus described above led to the emergence of a so-called de facto state, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), alongside the RoC, as a functioning state recognized by the international community. Borrowing the definition of Scott Pegg, a de facto state “[...] exists where there is an organized political leadership which has risen to power through some degree of indigenous capability; receives popular support; and has achieved sufficient capacity to provide governmental services to a given population in a specific territorial area, over which effective control is maintained for a significant period of time. The de facto state views itself as capable of entering into relations with other states and it seeks full constitutional independence and widespread international recognition as a sovereign state. It is, however, unable to achieve any degree of substantive recognition and therefore remains illegitimate in the eyes of international society”.⁴⁹

i. What made the TRNC a de facto State?

Through the unilateral declaration of statehood, steps were taken by the Turkish Cypriot administration to fulfil the conditions of a state. All Turkish Cypriots moved to the North and the strong presence of the Turkish military remained. Moreover, due to the demand for labor, thousands of settlers came from mostly peripheral regions of Turkey. Through this, the demographic balance on the island was permanently changed, so that the population in the North made up 24% of the total island population in 1996. In 1974 their proportion was 19%. In the following, in 1983, the TRNC was founded.⁵⁰

Since then, the self-proclaimed state has actually functioned similar to a regular state, with a government controlling its territory, holding free elections and providing government services to its citizens. According to the "Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States" a state must possess the following qualifications: a permanent population; a defined territory; a government; and a capacity to enter into relations with the other states.⁵¹ While the TRNC fulfils the first three requirements, it fails due to the lack of recognition of other states to be able to enter into relations and thus be a state under international law. The Turkish invasion in 1974 and the continued Turkish military presence were the decisive factors for non-recognition of the legal validity of the situation under consideration.⁵² Comparing the characteristics of the

TRNC to Pegg's aforementioned features of a de facto state shows that the TRNC can be regarded as such.

ii. The TRNC as an isolated state

After the UN Security Council passed a resolution in which on the one hand the act of the Turkish Cypriots was classified as illegal and on the other hand the RoC was promised fullest support, the international community did not recognize the Turkish Cypriot statehood.⁵³ The fact that this reaction was carried out by the UN also meant that the TRNC could not join any international organizations under UN auspices and would consequently slip into isolation. In order to join global or regional international organizations, the TRNC did not fulfil the necessary requirements.⁵⁴ The TRNC only acts as an observer in the Organization of Economic Cooperation (ECO) and The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) mainly through Turkish engagement.⁵⁵

As a mainly isolated actor, the TRNC has nevertheless legal obligations and does not remain unpunished for violations against international law: First, to prosecute crimes in a de facto state, it is possible to hold its patron state responsible, provided that he is a signatory to relevant international conventions and thus subject to international law. If he is still militarily present in the de facto state and it is possible to prove the crimes directly to him, a criminal prosecution can be successful. Thus, Turkey was held liable for specific offences in the TRNC.⁵⁶ Second, criminal prosecution is based on international criminal justice, which is applied, for example, to human rights violations committed by the de facto state itself. Although de facto states do not belong to the "treaty regime designed to protect human rights", they can be punished by the International Criminal Court (ICC), which also prosecutes non-state actors.⁵⁷ Ultimately, customary law can put the de facto state under political pressure from the UN to guarantee human rights protection. This pressure can be regarded as effective in so far as de facto states such as the TRNC strive for international recognition and thus adhere as far as possible to applicable standards.⁵⁸

Besides having no membership in international organizations, the TRNC, unlike recognized states, does not have consulates or embassies in other countries except in Turkey. However, as other countries do not want to abandon diplomatic relations with the TRNC, with the primary aim of solving the Cyprus problem, representative offices are located in places such as Brussels, Washington, London or Abu Dhabi.⁵⁹ But also issues other than reunification, such as "prognosis for its university sector", are keeping the TRNC in constant contact with important international players such as the USA.⁶⁰ This shows a strong contrast from the maintained

position of the RoC which considers any Turkish Cypriot institution to be illegitimate so that there is little exchange between the two parties on issues at the political level other than conflict resolution or unification.⁶¹

Concluding, the lack of recognition by the international community is the crucial structural factor for the TRNC for not being a proper state. Despite its isolation, the TRNC has its place in world affairs through diplomatic negotiations. While there are ways to enforce a de facto state to respect e.g. human rights, the lack of membership in international organizations and the non-signature of international conventions is decisive for effective political action by the TRNC and is an obstacle i.e. to the protection of human rights.

iii. The influence of the de facto status on asylum matters in the TRNC

There are several ways for potential asylum seekers to enter the TRNC: Those from Middle Eastern countries mainly come with boats or ferries from Turkey or Syria. Others arrive in the TRNC with a plane at Ercan airport.⁶² For the TRNC, only citizens of Syria, Nigeria or Armenia need to apply for a visa before travelling. People of other nationalities can do this on arrival at the airport and can enter the country by providing proof of sufficient financial resources and stating the purpose for the visit through work- or study enrollment or personal invitation letters. However, it is important to have a transit allowance for Turkey, as all flights to the TRNC go through its patron state.⁶³

After having arrived in the TRNC through one of the mentioned ways, the majority of potential asylum seekers try to cross the border to the RoC. This is mainly because of the RoC's EU membership and due to the lack of an existing legal structure ensuring protection rights for asylum seekers in the North due to its de facto condition. Despite the fact that various international conventions, including the 1951 Refugee Convention, have been transposed into national legislation (though the TRNC has not or could not ratify them), there is a lack of adequate implementation of necessary measures.⁶⁴ This can be observed in a review of the "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Cyprus" from 2009 to 2019 issued from the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor of the United States, in which the situation of the area administered by Turkish Cypriots is explicitly addressed.

Throughout all reports it can be noted that, according to Turkish Cypriot authorities, there is *"no "law" or system in place for dealing with asylum seekers or the protection of refugees and [...] that they systematically rejected asylum applications"*. Many of the arriving asylum-seekers were either denied entry or directly arrested, taken to court and deported after serving a prison sentence. Nor was the non-refoulement principle respected, so that no attention was

paid to whether asylum seekers were deported to areas where their life or freedom is threatened. Furthermore, no legal assistance in the form of lawyers was provided to the detained asylum-seekers. Existing NGOs such as the Refugee Rights Association (RRA) have also faced difficulties and often complete blockages in gaining access to asylum seekers to represent or advise them. The role of the RRA is to trace persons who wish to apply for asylum, to direct them to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and to lobby the authorities not to deport these persons, but instead to provide them with protection and facilitate their accommodation and employment. The UNHCR office in the RoC is the only institution that could determine whether a person was in need of protection under the Refugee Convention. If a need of protection could be determined, persons were either brought legally to the RoC via the Green Line or to Turkey to have their case processed there. However, even persons registered by the UN Office who had cases in progress and under examination were systematically deported by authorities. The asylum-seekers registered with them who stayed in the TRNC for the duration of the determination process did not have access to basic services and worked for below-minimum wages and sometimes in exchange for food. This exposed them to exploitation and put them at risk of falling into distress. In 2014, under pressure from human rights organizations, the Ministry of Health agreed to guarantee asylum seekers free access to health care. Only in exceptional cases the UNHCR provided financial assistance to people affected.^{65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75}

In sum, clear limitations on the rights of asylum-seekers have been identified, as there is no legal infrastructure to process asylum applications or to protect their rights. It became evident that the implementation of the standards laid down in the Refugee Convention are not sufficiently guaranteed by international bodies. As these obligations are not binding for the TRNC, there has been little progress on asylum protection issues, which shows that diplomatic pressure from customary international law does not work in the area addressed. In order to escape the difficult conditions in the North and apply for asylum in the European Union, migrants try to cross the Green Line to the Greek Cypriot part.

C. Review of EU reports monitoring the Green Line Regulation

To better understand the current situation in Cyprus with regard to irregular immigration into the RoC, the consequences of the Green Line Regulation are examined. Therefore, data on irregular border crossings will be reviewed.

After the EU accession, border monitoring was in the focus of EU Commission which issued annual reports on the "Implementation of Council Regulation (EC) 866/2004 of 29 April 2004 and the situation resulting from its application". Those are reviewed, to obtain, certainly limited but informative, insights on the perspective of the EU over a considerably long period.

i. Methodological considerations for the review

For a systematic review, a uniform procedure is applied. Potential risks and pitfalls are outlined in order to be aware of the use of the sources. Inspired by Bowen's qualitative "Document Analysis", the reports are examined for developments with regard to irregular migration via the Green Line in Cyprus. Although this method is not fully applied, Bowen's methodological notes nevertheless provide useful references for a systematic review.

By examining and interpreting the data it is aimed to elicit meaning, gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge.⁷⁶ Firstly, the documents are skimmed superficially before a thorough reading follows including the first interpretation of the texts. Secondly, the text is re-read and categories are then created out of the data's characteristics to derive themes relevant to the research phenomenon.⁷⁷ In this research, a general interpretation of the documents with regard to relevant themes is given. Not only text is analyzed qualitatively, but also quantitative statistics are examined in order to present numerical developments over time.

The benefits of the reviewing the reports lie in various dimensions, as they provide historical background information that condition the research phenomenon and generate further research data.⁷⁸ The annual reports rely on statistics and evaluations of Cypriot authorities and therefore serve as secondary sources within this study. Thus, the findings of the analysis mirror the view of authorities in relation to the subject matter.⁷⁹ The review of the reports does not generate arguments for the analysis, rather, they are seen as a contextual addition. Also, it is worth underlining that statistics on irregular migration should be treated with caution, as they can usually not be complete due to unrecorded cases.

ii. Green Line Regulation

The Green Line Regulation, or formally known as the Council Regulation (EC) 866/2004 of 29 April 2004 sets the conditions of EU accession for Cyprus. The annual reports by the Commission are designed to monitor the single provisions agreed in this regulation. Article 2 is concerned of the “Check on Persons” stating “1. *The Republic of Cyprus shall carry out checks on all persons crossing the line with the aim to combat illegal immigration of third-country nationals [...]*”. Article 3 on “Surveillance of the line” aims “[...] *to discourage people from circumventing checks at the crossing points [...]*.”⁸⁰

Consequently, the following review is looking into relevant statements and statistics within the reports about irregular migration.

iii. Review of annual reports

The scope of the reports to be examined covers the period from 2004 to 2018. The first six reports, i.e. up to April 30, 2010, cover the period from May 01 of a given year to April 30 of the following year. For practical reasons, it was then decided to align the reporting period with the calendar year.⁸¹ Therefore, the seventh report covers the period from May 10, 2010 to December 3, 2010 only and the subsequent annual reports cover each entire calendar year. The following analysis is split into detected themes emerging out of the first skimming of the documents. Those themes are displayed in the following in separated sub-chapters. In some parts of the following analysis, additional sources are incorporated in order to put the findings from the reports in relation.

1. Numerical statistics on irregular border crossings

Figure 1 shows how the situation with regard to irregular border crossings has evolved over the years. For this purpose, data on irregular Green Line crossings and their proportions for subsequent asylum applications, which were filtered out of the reports, are presented. In addition, the graph reflects the development of the total number of asylum applications in the RoC in order to put the data from the reports into relation. The data on the total asylum applications is derived from the RoC Asylum Service via its website.⁸² For the sake of consistency, the graph shows the development since 2011 only, as the EU reports examined were not previously aligned with the calendar year. Therefore, the data from the years 2004 until 2010 are not displayed.

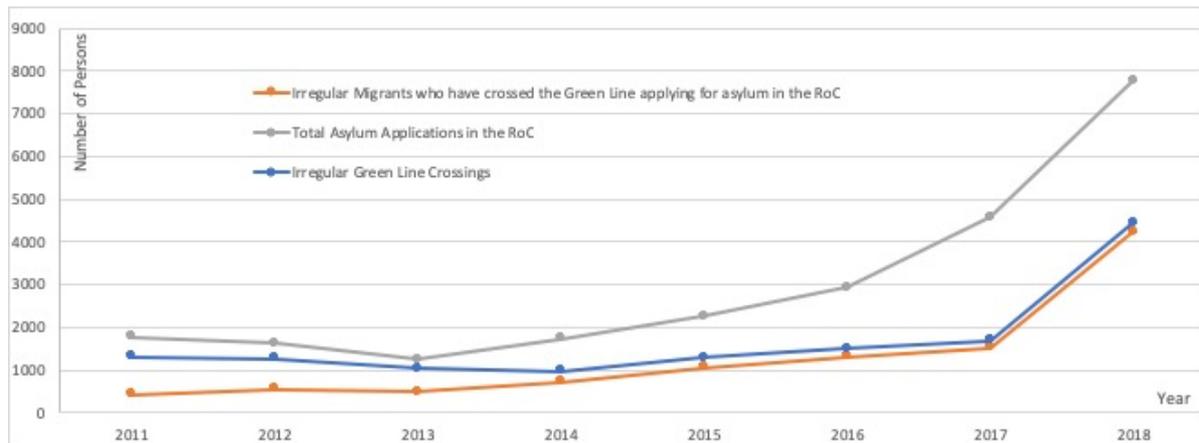


Figure 1: Quantity of Green Line crossings and its share of asylum applications as well as the total number of asylum applications in the RoC for the period 2011 until 2018^{viii}

As Figure 1 shows, the Green Line border crossings since 2011 take the same path as the general trend of the total asylum applications in Cyprus. Also, it becomes obvious that the recorded cases of persons who irregularly cross the Green Line represent a high share of the total asylum applicants in the RoC throughout the years. In the year 2018, the crossings reached the highest frequency. Finally, the graph shows that over the years since 2011 the share of those persons crossing the Green Line and later applying for asylum in the RoC increased constantly.

2. Statements about TRNC and Turkey

It is clear that the EU attaches great importance to the role TRNC and Turkey. References can be found throughout the reports showing how many of the Green Line crossers had stamps or visas from the TRNC or Turkey in their passports.

The fifth report speaks of a "worrying trend", as 65% of all Green Line crossers had a Turkish or Turkish Cypriot entry or exit stamp. In contrast, the proportion of those in the previous reporting period was 47%.⁸³ In the sixth report, it is stated that "[m]ost illegal migrants arrive in government-controlled areas via Turkey and the Northern part of Cyprus (four airlines from eleven airports in Turkey; ferries from four ports in Turkey to Kyrenia and Famagusta)".⁸⁴ From the eleventh report onwards it is mentioned that "almost all" of those migrants came through one of those routes.⁸⁵

With regard to the behavior of the Turkish Cypriot authorities, it is consistently that there is no direct cooperation between police and immigration departments of both Cypriot parts.⁸⁶ From

^{viii} Graph created by the author of this paper based on the data from observed EU reports (blue and orange curve) and from RoC Asylum Service (grey curve)

the twelfth report onwards, it is stated that the Turkish-Cypriot community assures the EU Commission that it will continue its efforts to prevent irregular migration.⁸⁷ To give an insight into the number of people affected by the measures taken by TRNC authorities, numbers from the reports of 2015 until 2018 are presented in the following table.

Year	Migrants who got refused entry into TRNC	Migrants apprehended in the TRNC deported back to Turkey
2015	3181	642
2016	2482	616
2017	2858	645
2018	3773	870

Figure 2: Information on measures taken against irregular migration (Provided by Turkish Cypriot Community)^{88 89 90 91}

Although the figures do not show how relatively effective the TRNC's measures are in preventing irregular migration, they indicate that, compared to the numbers of asylum applications in the RoC (Figure 1), the numbers of those rejected by the TRNC are considerably high. It can therefore be assumed that without the intervention of the authorities of the TRNC, many more people would try to enter the RoC.

3. Countries of origin of detected persons

Although not all reports address the countries of origin of people who have irregularly crossed the Green Line, information can be found at least in some.

From the third report onwards, it becomes apparent that the majority of all irregular migrants crossing the Green Line are Syrians, Iranians and Palestinians. In later reporting periods, countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iraq or India as well as Eastern European countries such as Georgia, Moldova are among the main countries of origin.⁹²

The number of Cameroonians crossing the Green Line irregularly is displayed in figure 4. The graph starts from the reporting period May 2008 to April 2009 as in foregoing reports no numbers of Cameroonians were published. In the last three Green Line reports, Cameroonians were among the top three countries of origin (2016: 60; 2017: 98; 2018: 472). To put these figures into proportion, the figures of these three years are compared with the total number of asylum applications from Cameroonians in Cyprus to see how high the share of Green Line crossers is. Thus, in 2016, 83% of a total of 72 asylum seekers crossed the Green Line. In 2017, 88% of the total of 111 asylum seekers from Cameroon were Green Line crossers. In 2018, 93% of the total of 507 Cameroonian asylum seekers came from the TRNC to the RoC.

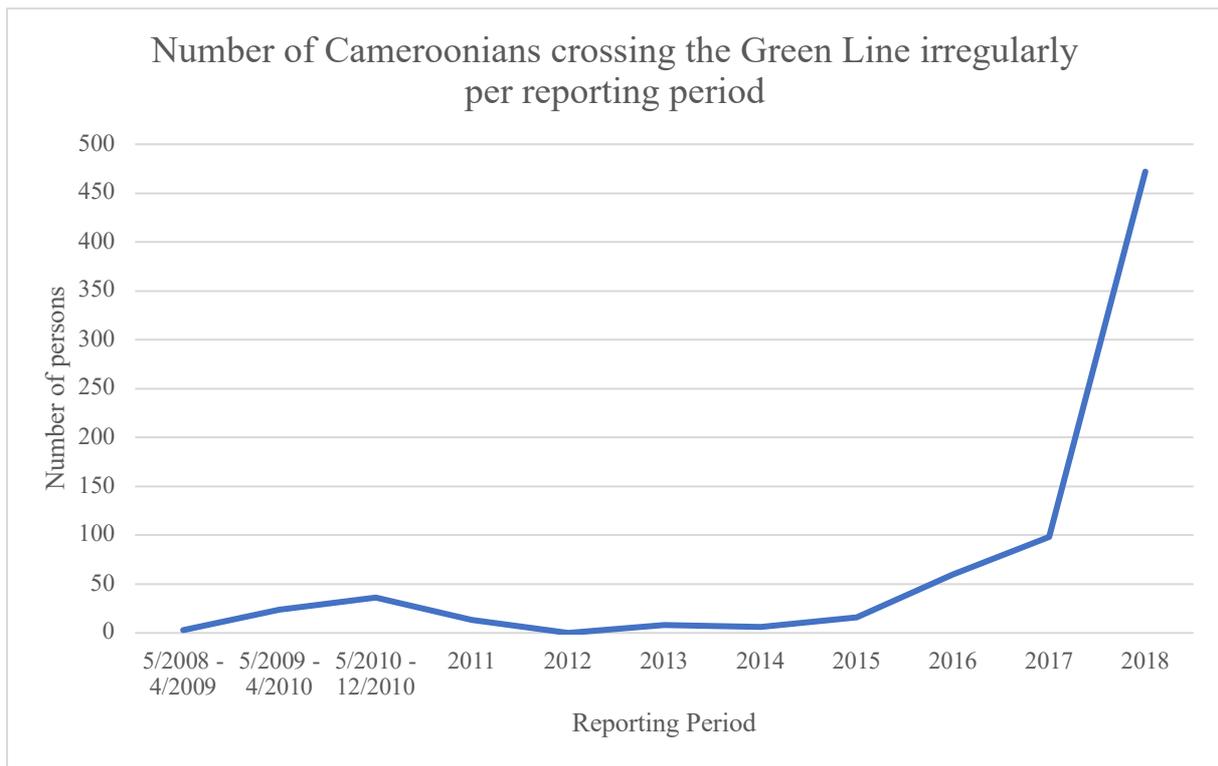


Figure 3: Number of Cameroonians crossing the Green Line irregularly per reporting period⁹³

There is no Green Line report on the year 2019 yet, but figures on the total amount of asylum applications by country of origin can be found, according to which Cyprus has seen a sharp increase in asylum seekers from Cameroon.^{ix} A total of 1135 migrants applied for asylum in 2019.⁹⁴ A cautious estimate can be made based on the relations of recent years. Accordingly, it is assumed that the numbers of Cameroonians who reached the RoC via the North in 2019 must lie around 1000 persons. This means that Cameroonians are increasingly choosing no other escape route to the RoC than through the Green Line. By comparing this finding to the other main countries of origin, it becomes evident that this trend is only shared by Somalia but not by Syria or Pakistan.^x

Another interesting insight is detected when comparing the share of Cameroonian asylum seekers of the total number of asylum seekers in Cyprus to the rest of the European Union. According to figures from Eurostat listing the five main citizenships of (non-EU) asylum applicants for each member state, among the years 2016 until 2019 Cameroon was not ranked for any country except for Cyprus.^{95 96 97 98}

^{ix} As Cameroonian asylum seekers are the empirical example of this research, chapter X looks more detailed into the conflict situation in Cameroon which also explains the increase in the discussed figures.

^x The share of GL crossers of the total number of Asylum Seekers: Syria: 2016: 56%; 2017: 42%; 2018: 78%; Pakistan: 2016: 64%; 2017: 62%; 2018: 75%; Somalia: 2016: 97%; 2017: 94%; 2018: no figures found

Thus, the findings lead to a relevant question for the subsequent interviews with Cameroonians, asking why Cyprus is particularly chosen as a specific refugee destination.

iv. Sub-Conclusion

The three subchapters above aimed to contextualize the research topic by giving insights into the structural condition of Cyprus relating to the de facto state TRNC, its root causes and the status quo. Further, the implications on asylum matters in the TRNC as well as on irregular border crossing through the Green Line were presented.

This provides a comprehensible base for the forthcoming analysis turning to the actual research question by asking whether the discussed de facto condition can be understood as a migration driver.

5. Determinants of Migration in form of Push-Pull factors

Having introduced the field of research through the context chapter, the following section is now turning to the theoretical part of the paper which is located in the field of push and pull factors as determinants of migration. This research field will be discussed from a historical perspective in the next chapter, where the developments and different approaches in this area of migration research will be discussed. Subsequently, a concept which originated from this research field, will be introduced to reveal whether the structural de facto condition is a driver of migration in form of a pull factor for Cameroonian asylum seekers. The framework Push-Pull Plus serves as a theoretical basis for the subsequent micro level analysis, which seeks to give a “[...] *nuanced account of the fluid and shifting driver complexes that shape migration*” of the interview partners.⁹⁹

A. Push-Pull: Scholarly debate on why people migrate

Finding explanations for why and how migratory movements occur, how they are maintained or why they no longer occur is one of the main concerns of migration research for more than a century. Ravenstein's functionalist theoretical approach, namely the Seven Laws of Migration from the years 1885 and 1887¹⁰⁰, is considered to be the basis for the later popular push-pull model. This was introduced by Lee in 1966 with his migration theory¹⁰¹ which is still significant today. He concluded that four factors are decisive for mobility: 1) factors related to the area of

origin, 2) factors related to the area of destination, 3) intermediate obstacles, and 4) personal factors. He labelled the first as push factors, the second as pull factors and the third and fourth form can act as both.¹⁰² The push-pull model was inspired by Newton's law of gravity and its rules of attraction. It essentially assumes that migrants move from low-income and populous to more prosperous and less populous areas, regions or countries until economic and demographic stability between the two poles is achieved. This can happen through internal migration, i.e. migrating towards urban centers, or through international migration, i.e. moving to prosperous countries.¹⁰³

The responsibility of finding explanations for the migration phenomenon of mobility has been taken over to a large extent by economists. Neoclassical macro-economic approaches explained labor migration mainly by salary differences between the place of origin and the place of destination.^{xi} The neoclassical micro-economic approaches added that based on a cost-benefit calculation of the individuals it has to be determined whether it is worth migrating despite higher salaries.^{xii} The New Economics of Migration theory in turn redirected the focus from individual to collective behavior.^{xiii} The decision for a family member to move away was therefore intended to maximize the income for the family in monetary terms, on the one hand, and to minimize the risk of impoverishment for the family, on the other hand, by distributing the family members as sources of income to different places.¹⁰⁴

However, these theoretical approaches failed in explaining observed patterns of international mobility such as circular migration, i.e. return migration, or processes of selectivity of migrants, i.e. why some migrate and others not. Subsequently, the complexity of a globalized interdependent world was increasingly taken into account.^{xiv} Therefore, it was observed that the influence of capitalist structures in peripheral regions made people migrate towards urban centers. They moved towards the opposite direction of the flows of capital and goods by being influenced and attracted through i.e. advertisements producing images of better living conditions in the capitalist epicenters.^{xv} The existence of structural links between home and destination countries based on colonization, political influence, trade, investment or cultural ties reinforces this phenomenon.^{xvi} Continuing and self-reinforcing migratory flows, which

^{xi} See e.g. Ranis and Fei, 1961; Harris and Todaro, 1970; Todaro, 1976; Massey et al., 1993

^{xii} See e.g. Sjaastad, 1962; Todaro, 1976, 1989; Burda, 1993

^{xiii} See e.g. Stark, 1984, 1991; Katz and Stark, 1986; Taylor, 1986; Ghatak and Levine, 1993

^{xiv} See e.g. Wallerstein 1974; Zelinsky 1971

^{xv} See e.g. Sassen 1988; Skeldon 1997

^{xvi} See e.g. Castles and Miller 2014

continued even when the original reason for migration no longer applied, were explained, for example, by the emergence of diaspora networks and a migration culture.^{xvii} 105

Although a dividing line is often drawn between people who migrate for economic reasons and those who have to leave their home country for political reasons, in practice it is difficult to separate them from each other completely. Since political and economic reasons for migration are often interwoven, they cannot automatically be divided into voluntary and forced migration.^{xviii} This is illustrated by the fact that economic circumstances^{xix} alongside violence^{xx} are among the primary factors for forced migration.¹⁰⁶

The academic differentiation of migration into categories of motives led to the assumption that distinctive theories had to be developed for them, although these categorizations are ultimately more applicable legally than sociologically. Potential migrants, as rational actors¹⁰⁷, make their decision to migrate dependent on legal labels resulting from factors such as immigration policies that are either positive or negative for them. Consequently, this blurs the original reasons for migration and challenges the rigid categorization into forced and voluntary migration.¹⁰⁸ As the process of mobility for voluntary and forced migrants is both a conscious choice and a constraint at the same time, both experience a similar decision-making process despite different motivations and drivers.¹⁰⁹

Criticizing the push-pull model, Hein de Haas misses particularly the focus on the migration process as well as the recognition that migrants are not passive actors without any agency. According to him, “[h]aving choice to stay or to go, and where to go, captures the very essence of agency”.¹¹⁰ He conceives the classical model as too static in its original sense and criticizes that it fails to capture migration as a social process. The fact that the original model does not take sufficient account of changing motivations or circumstances results in the failure to adequately explain, for example, return migration or the role of institutions that structure migration.¹¹¹ Thus a clear reference to the individual agency is missing in conventional push-pull models, which assume that migrants are defenseless victims of macro-forces of the economy. On the other hand, it is crucial not to neglect the role of structure, since, despite sufficient agency in the form of individual choice, migration routes are more accessible to some social groups than to others.¹¹² Structure can constrain or facilitate migration behavior by structurally determined resource and information limitations.¹¹³

^{xvii} See e.g. Massey 1990

^{xviii} See e.g. Kunz, 1981; Zolberg et al., 1989; Suhrke, 1995

^{xix} See Schmeidl 1997; Neumayer 2005; Van Hear 2006

^{xx} See Weiner 1996; Moore and Shellman 2006, 2007; Steele 2009

As de Haas emphasizes, combining structure and agency is essential for understanding migration decisions. Structure can limit and at the same time facilitate the capacity to act. Factors such as policies, power relations, or networks can have a strong structuring effect, which means that they are inclusive and exclusive for individuals, depending on the social cleavage of the person, i.e. gender or origin. Constellations of structural conditions impacting on capabilities can influence the decision of potential migrants at the end. In other words, the degree to which migrants can exercise their agency is determined by structural conditions that shape their scope of action.¹¹⁴

B. Push-Pull Plus

The conceptual framework Push-Pull Plus was introduced by Van Hear, Bakewell and Long in 2017. It acknowledges and confirms the importance of agency underlined above. However, this component is mainly neglected in this concept, as it looks mainly at external drivers that lie outside the individual agency and thus belong to the spectrum of structure.¹¹⁵

The framework aims at breaking down the factors that lead to the migration decision, which the authors call drivers, into individual mechanisms to better investigate them. The key assumption here is that drivers work in combination and act and interact differently in different contexts. Drivers are primarily seen as external structural factors that influence the exercise of agency, in this case, migration mobility.¹¹⁶ But, according to the authors, the concept is not only trying to explain forces "that cannot be influenced by migrants or other social actors" such as structuralist approaches. Rather, they emphasize the merging of structure and agency.¹¹⁷

Agency is seen as the capability to transform aspirations into reality, either socially e.g. aiming for better job opportunities or geographically e.g. by moving to different places. But such agency is either enabled or restricted by structural conditions that are beyond the reach of each individual's capacity to act. However, it is acknowledged that structural conditions don't simply arise from the outside, but are manifested through individual characteristics such as gender, race, age, or educational level which are understood as internal ascribed features.

Consequently, the concept considers mainly those factors as driving forces which, together with their external structural elements, lead to the decision to migrate and form the larger context in which aspirations arise. It thus delimits the structural character of the driving forces from migrant agency, desires and aspirations.¹¹⁸

Push-Pull Plus operates at a transnational level by looking at the relationships of drivers working in the countries of origin and destination as well as on the journey in between.

Therefore, drivers in different places can act simultaneously, influence each other and are not bound by borders.¹¹⁹

i. Four different drivers of migration

According to the concept, drivers can act as push and pull factors. These are regarded as migration-activating factors, which can be divided into four types. These will be briefly explained in the following:

The first of its kind, the predisposing driver, forms a context in which the probability of people migrating increases. They are created by structural inequalities resulting from the global macro-political economy between origin and destination. These inequalities can appear in different ways. Economically, they can manifest themselves in unequal livelihoods or standards of living, and politically, in different human rights or social security standards. Environmental differences such as water scarcity or infertile soil are also predisposing drivers. Finally, the authors include geographical factors, such as proximity to the destination country, among the first type of drivers.¹²⁰

The second kind, the proximate driver, is derived from the fixed structural predisposing driver but reinforces it through acute circumstances. Here, too, they act as push and pull factors in both the home country and the destination country. In home countries, such situations include economic crises, changes of political power with a negative influence on the people concerned or (development) projects that result in displacement. In the destination countries, on the other hand, economic boom and rising employment prospects, as well as new educational opportunities may be among such drivers. Since the examples mentioned above are rooted in structural inequalities, thus the predisposing driver, it can be seen that concrete acute phenomena can turn them into proximate drivers.¹²¹

In contrast to the proximate drivers described above, to which potential migrants can prepare themselves with a little time, the third type, the precipitating driver, confronts people with an urgent decision to leave their home through a concrete event. This urgency may be economically linked to the disintegration of health, education, or other welfare services or a drastic increase in unemployment. Politically, an escalation of conflict, the outbreak of war or individual persecution, and environmentally, for example, an earthquake or a flood can act as such a driver. On the side of the destination, location a precipitating driver occurs when immigration controls are suddenly and temporarily suspended, or family reunification laws are relaxed. Despite the similarity to the driver described above, precipitating drivers can be more

accurately attributed to an event or development and, according to the authors, are more likely to occur in the home country than in the destination country.¹²²

The last form of the different drivers, the mediating driver, cannot be considered in isolation, just like the above-mentioned drivers, and should not be treated as the sole determining factor in the decision-making process to migrate. If the decision is taken to leave one's home for reasons arising from the drivers discussed above, mediating drivers can ultimately enable, facilitate, restrict, accelerate, or consolidate the start of the journey. Thus, these can include "[...] *the presence and quality of transport, communication, information and resources needed for the journey and the transit period*"¹²³. In addition to the choice between means of transport, similar to precipitating drivers, (inter)national policies that are intended to facilitate or restrict migration also apply to mediating drivers. The difference to the aforementioned drivers, however, can be seen here in the fact that certain policies provide a longer and not just short-lived window of opportunity for migration. Migrant networks that mediate and facilitate migration, as well as the habits of a special group that traditionally tends to migrate, can also be subsumed under the type of mediating drivers. Following Xiang and Lindquist¹²⁴, the authors consider such drivers as contributing to the migration infrastructure and, by facilitating movement, playing a crucial role in determining the scope, forms, timing, and direction of migration. As part of the migration infrastructure, the smuggling and trafficking sector can also be seen as a mediating driver by sustaining and organizing migration movements.¹²⁵

It is important to emphasize again that the four drivers mentioned above do not act in isolation, but only as an interplay that creates structural conditions in which people come to decide whether and how to migrate. Also, it is not only the external factors embodied by the aforementioned drivers that bring about the decision, since these ultimately depend on the respective agency that reflects the individual and collective capabilities. These, in turn, are attributable to social cleavages such as gender, generation, class, and ethnicity. The individual's capability to act can, however, be increased by drivers working externally and thus can lead to the initiation of migration.¹²⁶

ii. Dimensions of drivers of migration

According to the conceptual framework, the drivers mentioned also have different dimensions along which they operate. In combination, leading to a functional and dimensional interdependence, they create a driver complex. They can thus form clusters to act "[...] *as more than the sum of the single drivers that constitute them*" so that different driving complexes can

be linked together in a migration flow. Only the combination of driver complexes shapes the specific form and structure of migratory movements.¹²⁷

By adding dimensions such as scale or selectivity, it can be better understood what exactly the driver does and how it works.^{xxi} When considering the dimension scale, there are two types: On the one hand, spatial scales indicate whether the driver works locally, nationally, regionally and globally, meaning that, a migration factor affecting an entire country needs to be assessed differently than one influencing only one region of the country. On the other hand, the scale dimension can be understood at the social level, so that the driver can be relevant for an individual, the household, the family, the community or the wider society.¹²⁸ The selectivity dimension, in turn, addresses the question of whether drivers are exclusive to certain groups of the population since drivers have varying effects on different social cleavages. For example, opportunities to study at a foreign university are likely to be reserved for younger people or for those who have the educational background and financial resources to do so.¹²⁹

C. Sub-Conclusion

By providing an insight into the development of the scholarly debate on factors that induce migration, it was possible to convey the basis of the concept applied in the following analysis. By adding critical views on the push-pull model, deemed to be too static, the Push-Pull Plus model, due to its further developed character, is nonetheless seen as a useful tool for addressing the research question.

Accordingly, by adding the conceptual framework it is intended to find out which drivers affects the underlying research subject and how and to what extent the dimensions scale and selectivity can be applied. Even if not all drivers and dimensions mentioned in Push-Pull Plus are dealt with in the following analysis, the clear focus on one subject can ultimately lead to other working drivers being recognized and thus driver complexes being perceived.

6. Preliminary considerations regarding the interviews with Cameroonian asylum seekers

To identify whether the structural conditions on Cyprus can be considered as a pull factor for asylum seekers, the paper is using the findings of four interviews with Cameroonian asylum

^{xxi} The authors included in their concept also dimensions such as locality, duration, and tractability which are not described in this part as they are not considered to be relevant for the research concern.

seekers who migrated via the TRNC to the RoC. Before analyzing the assessments of the interviewees, this chapter aims to give some preliminary considerations. First, the reasons why in particular Cameroonians were chosen as respondents are discussed in the next subchapter. Then, a discussion is opened about the use of qualitative interviews when researching on migration journeys. Finally, the concrete methodological design of the conducted interviews is presented.

A. Cameroonian asylum seekers as an empirical example

The interview partners were selected through a theoretical sampling strategy to ensure that they meet the analytical criteria relevant to this research.¹³⁰

Four Cameroonians who have applied for asylum in the RoC were interviewed. All of them came to the TRNC by plane and then entered the RoC by crossing the Green Line which was one of the main reasons why to use them as a research sample. Further, it was decided for various other reasons to take this particular group as an empirical example: The aim was to interview people with the same origin, possessing certain similarities, such as distance to Cyprus, possibly similar reasons for fleeing or same attachments to desired destination countries due to a common linguistic and cultural background resulting from the colonial period. Further, personal acquaintance with the interviewees contributed to the fact that access to the group of Cameroonians constituted a low barrier.

Keeping the figures from the reviewed reports in mind, it can be asked why no people from the Middle East were used as empirical examples because over a long period they have represented the highest proportion of all asylum seekers in Cyprus. This can be answered by the observation described that regular ferries from Syria or Turkey with potential asylum seekers reached Cyprus. Otherwise (often) the well-known rubber dinghies or fishing boats were used for the relatively short crossing. It was therefore decided to interview people from a region further away from Cyprus.

The statistics show a rapid increase in asylum applications, particularly noticeable among Cameroonians. This gave reason to examine this group in more detail, whereby it must be recalled that this is not intended to claim that the analyzed de facto condition in Cyprus can be the sole or even decisive reason for the increasing numbers.

It is also important to point out that the assessments of the interviewees are not representative of all Cameroonian asylum seekers who travelled this route to Cyprus or generally Cameroonians in flight. This can be seen from the fact that large parts of the refugee population

do not even move to Europe, but i.e. flee to neighboring Nigeria. As statistics of the UNHCR show, there are a total of 51,864 Cameroonians in the country, of which 19,122 came only in 2019.¹³¹

The push factors which make Cameroonians flee in the first place can be found in their home country Cameroon which was long regarded as an anchor of stability in an unstable region. But since 2016, the Central African country has been facing growing conflicts and increasing political and social tensions. First, in the English-speaking North-West and South-West regions, separatist groups are fighting for a separation from Cameroon and the foundation of the "Republic of Ambazonia". Second, in the North of the country, the Islamist terrorist organization Boko Haram is terrorizing the civilian population.¹³² In the English-speaking part, the conflict began in late 2016 through peaceful protests after French-speaking judges and teachers were to be appointed by the government in the region. The protests escalated into a violent conflict between the state military and non-state armed groups.¹³³

The UN estimates that more than 679,000 people in the North-Western and South-Western regions of Cameroon are currently internally displaced. In addition, there are around 60,000 asylum seekers in the neighbor country Nigeria.¹³⁴ Since 1961 Cameroon has been governed by the same party and since 1982 Paul Biya, a member of the Francophone community, has been president. Under his leadership there have been numerous signs of human rights violations by his security forces, which primarily affect the Anglophone population.¹³⁵

The interview partners all belong to the Anglophone minority and come from the south-western region of Cameroon.

B. The use of interviews for researching on migration routes

To determine the motivations and rationales of people for their past decisions, in this case choosing to migrate from Cameroon to Cyprus, this research uses the form of open-ended interviews. The advantages and disadvantages of such a method are discussed in the following part.

To understand the meaning of the experiences described by the interviewees¹³⁶, it is crucial to give the respondent the freedom to consider his answers carefully, to give answers without interruption, and to provide independent answers. According to Benezet and Zetter, narrative accounts of refugee journeys are an obvious and at the same time powerful tool, which offers the possibility to come closest to the participants' lived refugee experience.¹³⁷

By including interviews, the aim is to provide a decisive lens on the subject matter to best understand the interpretation of the central actors in the research field under concern. However, possible pitfalls in the interpretation of the answers as well as limitations in the generalization and truthfulness of the answers must also be taken into account. Thus, it needs to be considered that the answers, which refer to historical experiences, are 'here and now products' and are influenced by the context in which the people live today. Although this limits the original validity of statements about past decisions, it can also be seen as an advantage, since it allows us to recognize the current meaning for the respondents on their completed journey.¹³⁸ It should, therefore, be borne in mind that on the one hand the statements are influenced by the experiences made on the journey and in Cyprus. On the other hand, also due to the time passed, the statements about the decision-making process before the journey may not fully reflect the reality at that time. Because of this, as well as due to the emotional attachment interview responses of asylum seekers shouldn't be considered as facts per se. Rather, the answers may subsequently be contextualized by consulting further literature.

Furthermore, it must also be taken into account that smuggled migrants, in particular, have often internalized traumatic experiences, which may originate from their home country, their journey, or the destination country. Thus, these experiences as well as structural conditions from the present time, e.g. as in the case of this research, when the interviewees are still in the asylum procedure, can influence on how the interviewees behave and respond.¹³⁹ Assuring that the names could be replaced with an alias and that the research would only be carried out for internal university purposes made it possible to address such concerns in this research. However, it cannot be ruled out that the interview as a recorder-based interrogation could nevertheless have had negative effects. By not using a formal letter of consent, the oral information provided ensured that participants fully understood the implications of their participation in the research.¹⁴⁰

Eventually, the role of the researcher as well as the interview partner and their relationship with each other remains to be determined. The latter can be regarded as an insider for the research objective, since having experienced the migration themselves. Thus, the motives of the interview partner are central for the analysis, which are used by the researcher, as an outsider of the topic, for the analysis. It seems enriching that the interview should be flexible, situational, and dynamic and should influence the research design and data interpretation.¹⁴¹ While describing the specifically experienced situations, the migrant thus plays an insider role. In the interpretation and utilization of the answers, however, it becomes the task of the interviewer to

also act as an insider by embedding the answers in the research through interdisciplinary perspectives.

Critical self-reflection about the relationship between the two parties should not prevent the researcher from looking at the answers with his own eyes or with the help of theory during or after the situational encounter of the interview. It is crucial to keep the research context in mind, which is not necessarily taken into account by the interview partner. This contextual subjectivity, which is situational in the course of the research and is represented on both sides, thus requires a special sensitivity and reflexivity of the respective positioning and distribution of power.¹⁴²

C. Methodological design of the interviews

Drawing on the contribution "Qualitative Interviewing" by Carol A.B. Warren, a research design for conducting the interviews was developed. After the research topic had been defined, the focus of the interviews was determined on the basis of the reviewed literature and the theoretical framework. This focus centered on participants' decision-making, which migration route they have chosen, whether they have been aware of the de facto condition in Cyprus and whether this might have influenced their decision. Respondents were made attentive to the focus before the interview by pointing out that the research is dedicated to this particular element of their migration journey. At the same time, it was made clear that they were free to address other issues that were not directly in focus so that there were no limits to their flow of speech in advance. This should also leave open the possibility of drawing conclusions from the participants' assessments which they consider as relevant, but which are not directly related to the previously defined questions.

To ensure this freedom of the participants in the interview, qualitative open-ended questions were used: The main questions start and guide the interview by trying to get direct answers. The follow-up questions are asked, if necessary, to clarify the meaning and implications of the answers. Some of those have already been noted in the questionnaire. Finally, it has been decided in advance that the questions will not be rigidly worked through, but that the possibility will be kept open to ask new questions that only arise in the course of the conversation. At the same time, this means that previously determined questions can lose their relevance while interviewing and are therefore no longer asked.¹⁴³

The interview questions^{xxii} differed slightly depending on the course of the interviews, but they all covered the same topics, which were considered relevant for answering the research question. The thematic focus areas resulted from the discussion of the aspects pointed out in the context chapter and serve as a basis for the categorization implemented in the forthcoming analysis to present the answers comparably and coherently. Starting with personal facts such as (changed) name, age, origin, current official status, and time of migration, a brief answer was then asked to describe the reasons for leaving Cameroon. With the expectation that this latter topic could easily be discussed in excessive detail, it was pointed out in advance that this was not the primary focus of research and should, therefore, be kept short. At the same time, however, the explanations were not interrupted.

The next thematic focus was on the decision to migrate to Cyprus, asking why this destination was chosen, what means of transport were used to get there, what stopovers were made and how long the journey took. Furthermore, it was asked how expensive the journey was overall and whether it was cheap or expensive compared to other migration routes. The questions then turned to the situation in Cyprus, first asking whether the de facto condition in the North of Cyprus was known and whether the original plan was to seek asylum in the TRNC or the RoC. Furthermore, it was asked whether papers such as visas were necessary to enter the TRNC and if so, whether it was difficult to obtain them. Then, it was tried to find out if and to what extent the de facto condition on Cyprus in Cameroon is advertised as a good escape route to the EU and if the interviewees themselves promoted the route as a good route among their friends in their home country. It was also clarified whether the significance of Schengen was known and whether it was clear that Cyprus was not represented in the Schengen zone. Finally, it was questioned whether the interviewees would like to stay in Cyprus after the settlement of their asylum procedure or whether they would like to go to another country if possible.

In addition to communicating the thematic focus, the interviewees were informed before the interviews about the purpose of the interviews and that in case of any doubts, questions could be asked or, in the outermost case, the recorded interview could be discarded if requested.¹⁴⁴ They were assured that there would be the possibility to change their clear names to guarantee their anonymity. Two of the four interviewees made use of this possibility. Particularly for persons fleeing from persecution, anonymity is an important component when it comes to making public appearances because of the fear of getting themselves or their relatives into trouble.¹⁴⁵

^{xxii} The interview question can be found in Appendix 1

Originally it was planned to hold the interviews in Cyprus in April 2020^{xxiii}, but due to the global state of emergency by Covid-19, it was not possible to travel there. As an alternative, the interviews were conducted via Skype. Another digital solution had to be found for one of the interviewees, as his Internet connection was turned off at home and due to the lockdown in Cyprus, he could not go to places with a stable connection. Since, according to him, his mobile internet would not provide the stable connection required for an internet call, it was decided that he would send back individual voice messages via the messenger service WhatsApp in response to the questions sent. Thus, this made it difficult for this interviewee to follow the above-described course of an interview involving the three types of open-ended questions. The resulting difficulties, such as technical difficulties or limited access to additional interview partners, therefore had to be accepted.

7. Analysis of Interviews

As noted above, the analysis is divided into different categories so that the answers are presented in a comparable and coherent way. Instead of discussing the answers of each interviewee in a separate portraying chapter, the analysis is structured thematically. The answers of the participants are assessed by adding relevant literature to contextualize the given answers. The inclusion of other sources aims to strengthen and underpin the analysis of the interviews. It should be noted that the respondents' statements are retrospectively influenced by their experiences of the trip, so that the answers are influenced by their current context. The framework Push-Pull Plus is then used in the end to embed the findings conceptually.

A. The interview partners and their motives to flee

^{xxiii} By going to Cyprus, it was planned to interview up to fifteen asylum seekers from Cameroon including women. This sample would have consisted, besides the four persons included in this study, out of people who were unknown to the researcher and would have been selected through a snowball selection. Due to the researcher's non-ability to travel, it was difficult to get a hold on the unknown persons why it was decided subsequently only to interview people known to the researcher.

A total of four male persons from Cameroon who fled to Cyprus were interviewed for this research. The interviews took place in May 2020. At that time Rodney^{xxiv} was 25, Michael 26, Kizito 28 and Brian^{xxv} 46 years old.

They all originate from the western region of Cameroon, which is primarily inhabited by the English-speaking minority to which the interviewees also belong. All of them pointed to the fact that Cameroon is a bilingual country and that the resulting conflict was the reason for their flight. The marginalization of the English-speaking minority led to the formation of separatist movements to fight against the government troops of the Francophone majority.¹⁴⁶ Although none of the interviewees were involved in fighting, standing up for peaceful coexistence led even the separatist groups from their own ethnic group to persecute them, as it was the case with Michael and Brian.^{147 148} Kizito in turn took part in demonstrations against the government's policy of undermining the Anglophone population and was subsequently imprisoned for four months.¹⁴⁹ For him, there was no other alternative to leave the country to regain his security.¹⁵⁰

Rodney described that houses in his village were burnt down and people were killed regularly.¹⁵¹ Accordingly, everyone claimed to have left the country for political reasons and because of fearing persecution and of losing their own lives. Therefore, the motives for the four to flee reflect the situation of the Anglophone population in western Cameroon, which was briefly described in Chapter 6.A.

B. The desired destination

In the beginning, the interview partners were asked whether they had a preferred or desired destination in mind when they first thought about migrating.

Kizito clearly emphasized that his favorite place to escape to was the EU, especially Germany.¹⁵² While Rodney admitted that the EU is always a place to have in mind, he stressed that when being under pressure there is no time to think about options, just to think “*Go away and be safe*”.¹⁵³ His only concern was to go to a place where the risk of being persecuted and dying is lower. It was just a matter of getting out quickly before it was no longer possible.¹⁵⁴

Michael also shared this perception, saying “*when your live is at stake, you think very less about your dreamland [and] at that time I was just running for my life and when running for your life you are just seeking for the next available peaceful place*”.¹⁵⁵ For Brian there was no concrete

^{xxiv} Name changed

^{xxv} Name changed

dreamland either. For him it was also only a matter of leaving Cameroon as quickly as possible.¹⁵⁶

The opinion that it was not so much a question of where to go, but rather of getting out of the country quickly can therefore be explained by the given urgency. This reflects Crawley's and Hagen-Zanker's findings saying that “[t]hose leaving under acute conditions are often unable to prepare for their journey including considering particular destinations [...]”.¹⁵⁷

This shows that, due to the urgent situation, certain considerations regarding desired countries played no role in the effective decision-making process and the only priority was to leave as swiftly as possible in order to be able to live in safety again.

C. Choosing Cyprus as a destination

Apart from Brian, all the other participants described that the choice of destination was not made by themselves and that they did not know the destination until boarding the plane.

In the case of Rodney, it was his mother who paid and arranged the trip through the help of smugglers.¹⁵⁸ The decision for Michael and Kizito was made by their uncles who also were in touch with smugglers. Both uncles worked for the government which had a decisive influence on the escape. Kizito was released from prison through the contacts of his uncle, who then with the help of smugglers decided for him where to go and how to get there.¹⁵⁹ He emphasized that it was only possible to get out of prison and thus out of the country through corruption and bribery which, according to him, put him in a privileged position.¹⁶⁰ Michael’s uncle only told him at the airport that from now on he would study Business Administration in Northern Cyprus and provided him with various documents.¹⁶¹ All three only knew about the destination when the travel documents were handed over to them. Rodney, for example, had never heard of a country called Cyprus before.¹⁶²

In contrast, Brian was aware that he would travel to Cyprus since he was the only one of the participants who negotiated his mode of travel himself. Cyprus was the first option proposed to him by smugglers^{xxvi} and as it seemed feasible, he took it.¹⁶³

The fact that Kizito, Michael and Rodney themselves did not play a role in the decision-making process seems to be no exception and corresponds with the assessment from Hagen-Zanker and Mallett. They write, “[t]he decision is taken for them by others, often without consultation. The decision-makers are frequently those who pay for the trip”.¹⁶⁴ Accordingly, migrants give up part of their own agency in the decision-making process and let others determine for them.

^{xxvi} The role of smugglers is dealt in more detail in subchapter G below

Furthermore, the statements of Kizito and Michael show that only the relations of their uncles as governmental officials made their escape possible. That corruption by such officials and smugglers serves as a driver and facilitator of migration for potential refugees in the form of a push factor is not uncommon but rather the norm.¹⁶⁵ However, it should be borne in mind that a driver is not solely responsible for migration, but only in interaction with others. Nevertheless, corruption is seen on the one hand as one of the main causes of instability in the home countries and on the other hand as a facilitator of mass migration.¹⁶⁶

Thus, except for Brian, the decision to choose Cyprus as a destination country was taken over by smugglers on behalf of respective relatives, so that this choice did not take into account the aspirations of the interviewees themselves. Only Brian had a say in the negotiations.

D. Mode of travel to the TRNC

All four interviewees reached Cyprus by plane, either directly from Cameroon or in one case from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Kizito, Michael and Brian took a plane directly from Douala airport in Cameroon to Ercan Airport in Northern Cyprus via Istanbul, in Michael's case with a stopover in Yaounde, the capital of Cameroon.^{167 168 169} Their travel time was approximately ten hours. Kizito described this way "*as the easiest and accessible way for me to get to Europe*".¹⁷⁰ In contrast to the other three interviewees, Rodney first took a shared car from Buea. After a car change, he crossed the border to the Republic of Congo regularly without any incidents. After crossing another border, he took a plane from Ndjili International Airport of Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo via Istanbul to Ercan airport. His total travel time was about five days.¹⁷¹ All four reached the TRNC legally with their documents.

Besides Michael, who could not give any information about the price, the other interviewees reported that their trip cost between 3500 €¹⁷² and 3800 €^{173 174}. When asked whether this route was more expensive than others, Rodney pointed out that generally not only the price but also a cost-benefit analysis plays into the calculation. This route may have been more expensive financially, but the risk was lower because he did not have to take the dangerous route via Libya to Italy or via Morocco to Spain. Accordingly, from his point of view, it was more cost-effective to reach his destination this way.¹⁷⁵

Although it is difficult to make generalizations about the financial costs of irregular migration, a study from 2017 is consulted at this point for comparison to contextualize the statements made. A quantitative study, which analyzed the travel costs of West Africans coming to Italy,

shows an average price of 1.295 USD for people without visa, while people with study visa paid an average of 1.833 USD. The authors find that "[...] *although irregular migration is much more risky than migration by regular channels, it is also the cheapest way and very often the only way to enter Europe*".¹⁷⁶

This corresponds to Rodney's assessment of his cost-benefit analysis, which in turn matches the characteristics of migrants as rational actors. Furthermore, it shows that migrants thus exercise agency by weighing up arguments.

E. Mode of travel to the RoC

After arriving in the TRNC, all went on to the RoC although in different ways. While three of the interviewees made their way to the Southern part shortly after their arrival, one of them stayed in the North for a longer time.

On his arrival day Kizio was taken across the border to the RoC by a car late at night.¹⁷⁷ Rodney describes a similar procedure by stating "*When they collected me, they just drove me to the South side, so when I got to the South side, they told me 'That's it, this is from where on you make your journey alone'.*"¹⁷⁸ After having spent several days in Nicosia, Michael in turn met accidentally a guy on the streets who told him: "*We are going on a journey. I bring you somewhere where you get help*". In the dark, the man took him across the border by car on a forest road, while he had turned off the headlights to avoid attracting attention.¹⁷⁹

Brian in contrast stayed in the TRNC for two years and studied Political Science at a university before moving to the RoC.^{xxvii} After he obtained his degree, but could not return to Cameroon due to the ongoing conflict, he decided to seek for asylum. Realizing that this was not possible in the north, he decided to cross to the south. According to him, he managed to do this in a legal way by passing one of the official checkpoints called Ledra Gate. At the Greek Cypriot passport control he made explicit that he wanted to seek asylum in the RoC.¹⁸⁰ Without being stopped by the Turkish Cypriot border guards, the Greek Cypriot officials seem to have followed here the non-refoulement principle, so that he could no longer be turned away at the moment he entered Greek Cypriot territory. However, this type of entry does not seem to be the norm, as passage through an official checkpoint is normally not possible for unauthorized persons. Thus, people have already failed trying and have been arrested afterwards.¹⁸¹

The statements about the border crossing from the TRNC to the RoC of the other four interviewees in turn confirm that the Green Line, as described in the context chapter, does not

^{xxvii} Sub-Chapter F looks more closely at the subject of studying in the TRNC

function as a proper but just as a soft or quasi border leading to a “[...] *rather peculiar and blurred regime, particularly with regards to migration, free movement and asylum*”.¹⁸² It can be crossed uncontrolled without much effort in particular outside of the cities in the porous areas of the buffer zone where UNFICYP sees no way to fully monitor or address irregular crossings due missing legal and logistical capacity.¹⁸³

F. Documents needed to enter the TRNC

Although Michael¹⁸⁴, Rodney¹⁸⁵ and Kizito¹⁸⁶ said that the TRNC is visa free for Cameroonians, this does not mean that no documentation is needed when passing through the airport control. All of the four possessed a valid passport as well as a flight ticket. Additionally, they were provided with other documents that allowed them a smooth entry into the TRNC: While Rodney had a personal letter of invitation¹⁸⁷, the other three entered with a document confirming their enrollment at a Turkish Cypriot university.^{188 189 190}

Michael and Kizito only used the way of enrolment to get into the country, but never studied.^{191 192} Brian in turn completed his studies in two years. Meanwhile he hoped in vain that the conflict in Cameroon would level off during this time.¹⁹³

According to Kizito and Brian it is not difficult to get accepted at a Turkish Cypriot university in order to obtain the necessary documents to enter the TRNC. The only challenge is to pay the tuition fee once, which amounts to 1500 €. ^{194 195} The information provided on the portal “RocApply”, which informs prospective international students about Turkish Cypriot universities, confirms that Cameroonians do not need to apply for a visa in advance. An entrance document is issued for 60 USD upon arrival. Only a flight ticket from a Turkish airline, the letter of acceptance from the university, the confirmation of tuition fee payment and a copy of a return ticket are required.¹⁹⁶

Nevertheless, access to the university is not only used as an excuse to avoid visa hurdles, as many are actually studying, like Brian. People from more than 100 countries are enrolled in different universities, making education the leading sector of the national economy.¹⁹⁷ The figures show that business is booming with the admission of international students. Turkish Cypriot universities provide incentives with their academic reputation and international recognition, so that many academics from all over the world can be found there.¹⁹⁸ In the academic year 2018/2019 there were a total of 90.438 international students in the TRNC, with the majority coming from Turkey. Considering the country’s population density of around 350.000, a high percentage is made up of students. The TRNC is particularly attractive for

African students, most of whom come from Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Cameroon.¹⁹⁹ Many of them come to the TRNC from troubled regions to effectively study. However, Brian's example shows that after graduation the right to stay in the TRNC is forfeited, so, if the conflict situation in the home country persists, the step into the RoC to apply for asylum seems to be a consistent step.

In turn, the case of Rodney shows that there are also other possibilities to enter the TRNC. When he realized that he would take a plane from Congo, he was surprised that he wouldn't need a visa, but the smugglers told him not to worry. About the documents, he states that *“a lot is written about yourself but is not true but you cannot say anything because this is what you need to go through”*.²⁰⁰ He possessed a personal letter of invitation which was given to him before departure. It stated that a citizen of TRNC invited him for a visit. At the airport control he showed all the documents whereas just the letter of invitation was of interest for the immigration official. Thereupon he was allowed to pass the control.²⁰¹

The findings discussed show that there are various ways to enter the TRNC, where there are significantly lower (visa) requirements for the entry of third country nationals. On the one hand, these lower barriers are used by many international students who do not manage to get a student visa in other countries. On the other hand, the way of enrolment, or the form of a fake personal invitation letter is used to enter the TRNC for other reasons like fleeing. As James Ker-Lindsay illustrates the situation, *“[t]he simplest way is to think of the north of Cyprus is as the world’s biggest airport transit lounge”*.²⁰² As already noted, these structural loopholes are primarily utilized by agents or smugglers, so the next chapter will focus in more detail on their role.

G. Involvement of smugglers

As described above, relatives of the respondents or one respondent himself made the arrangements for the trip to Cyprus. Brian, as well as the relatives of the other interviewees turned to intermediaries who planned everything from start to finish. The role of those is examined in the following.

At Brian's request, agents, as he calls them, suggested Cyprus as a travel destination. Since he only considered to escape by plane, he regarded this option as feasible. After he paid the money, the agents *“arrange everything basically. You only get notification online and you are set to travel”*.²⁰³ The enrollment at the university and the flight booking was done solely through the agents.²⁰⁴ Apart from knowing the destination, nothing else was known to him. That he would enter as a student only became clear to him on the plane, so that his decision to study effectively

was not taken until that moment. Further, he was not aware of the particular situation in Cyprus. His only concern was to get to a foreign place quickly and safely by plane.²⁰⁵

Many of the Africans who study in the TRNC through the initiative of agents did not know what they were getting into. Above all, they had no idea that they would be travelling to a country that is internationally isolated. The agents only tell the customers that they would travel to Cyprus, a visa-free European country, without specifying it more precisely. Due to the urgent and hopeless situation, the clients often do not check the agents' statements more closely.²⁰⁶ As a rector of a Turkish Cypriot university states, “[s]ome of these students are misled by the agents who send them, believing that they can work and earn enough money to support their studies. Unfortunately, most of these students are not able to pay their university fees after a few semesters and many of them drop out”.²⁰⁷ Such agents sometimes falsely present themselves as official agents of the universities but can be considered as just another kind of human smugglers.²⁰⁸

Only knowing the destination when starting the journey, was also the case of Michael. Shortly before departure, he learned from his uncle that he would be flying to Cyprus. However, he did not know more about the people with whom his uncle was in touch: “*I was not too interested into with whom he was dealing with because I saw myself being on the run and when you are on the run, you are just very concerned about that help is coming to you, but not how or from where the help is coming to you.*”²⁰⁹

Brian doubts that the smugglers publicly advertise the route to Cyprus as a good escape route and disclose details of this route to the EU. According to him, subtleties will be kept secret from potential clients, as he believes that true information about the special de facto condition in Northern Cyprus might even deter people from choosing this route. That is why he thinks that the smugglers only refer to a quick and easy way into the EU without going into the details of how it ultimately works.²¹⁰ Thus, they don't tell their clients about crucial components of the way to their destination. According to Michael, there are many people for whom it was important to choose a legal route by plane, for which they were willing to pay more money. It was not the original intention of many of those who landed in Cyprus to come there or to seek asylum in general. But due to lack of information or lies told by the smugglers “*they all landed in the same pot of soup from different directions they came from*”.²¹¹

The fact that the decision-making power lies with the smugglers instead of with the clients, who do not know where they are going, is no exception as other research also shows.²¹² Robinson and Segrott refer to this type of smuggling as Negative Channeling, when no or false information about the destination country is given.²¹³ Other cases of Cameroonians who

consciously bought a smuggling package to Italy but ended up in Cyprus also fall under this type of smuggling.²¹⁴

In the case of Rodney, it was only when the smugglers gave him the documents that he saw that the journey would take him to Cyprus. The smugglers assured him that he should not be worried, as everything was taken care of and he would be picked up at Ercan Airport in Northern Cyprus.²¹⁵ The fact that there was no turning back in this situation and that he could no longer decide for himself was because the money had already been paid. He was at the mercy of the smugglers, and by giving out as little information as possible, the smugglers took advantage of him.²¹⁶ In this respect, he states that *“you meet the people that help you through the process. When you come to them, they promise you a lot, but nothing is really easy when it comes to practice. So, when you get to them, they will tell you that many things have changed because at that time they know that you have no other option. This is what you are left with. So, you either go with them or pay more to get to another destination of which you don't know the percentage of you getting there alive.”*²¹⁷ According to Rodney, getting more detailed information about the trip in advance ultimately depends on trust. If the smugglers have relations with relatives, for example, the chances of getting reliable information are higher.²¹⁸

Looking at the described cases and the migrant's individual role in the decision-making process, it is evident that they have exercised no or only a limited form of agency, in terms of having a say or decision-making power. Without claiming that migrants always play a completely passive role in such a process, they are deceived by the agents by concealing and lying about the actual circumstances. This highlights the unequal power structure in the relationship between smugglers and migrants, where the latter are the weak.²¹⁹ Thus, the smugglers are in a strong position in which they determine the route, destination and price without making any concrete or truthful statements. This is due on the one hand to the high demand for these services, and on the other hand to the lack of bargaining power of particularly vulnerable people willing to migrate.²²⁰

H. (Non-)Recommendation of this route

According to Rodney²²¹, Kizito²²² and Brian²²³, the situation in which they find themselves as asylum seekers in the RoC is bad resulting in a different stance on the question whether they promote this route to others.

These views on the current situation can be related to a number of examples which include long waiting times in the asylum process²²⁴, limited access to the labor market and language courses²²⁵, difficulties in accessing social welfare benefits²²⁶ or xenophobia against migrants²²⁷. Last but not least, the Covid-19 crisis has reinforced existing deficiencies, by turning a reception center into a temporary closed camp without the necessary infrastructure to keep 600 people safe and healthy. Further the RoC has unofficially stopped accepting asylum claims and pushed back a boat carrying 175 Syrian refugees including 69 children.²²⁸

Despite his experiences on the island, Kizito stated that he promotes the chosen route to other Cameroonians, especially to friends, and encourages them to travel this way. According to him it is a fast and good route and because it is extremely difficult for Cameroonians to get a visa for any European countries, this route reflects the "*easiest way to get to Europe*" for him.²²⁹ In contrast, Michael is not promoting this route to anyone, as he considers it as absolutely not safe as there are a lot of dangers i.e. by crossing the border illegally and "*it still brings you to a situation which is not good*".²³⁰

In a state of uncertainty, all four share the hope for a positive outcome of their already long pending asylum procedure. In case of a recognition, however, it would not be an option for Kizito to stay in Cyprus afterwards, but rather to travel immediately to his originally desired destination Germany.²³¹ For Rodney, it depends on how the situation for asylum seekers develops by emphasizing that "*when nothing is changing to the better you don't want to be here. This is not a place to be*".²³² Brian shares Rodney's view, saying that if there are positive changes for asylum-seekers in Cyprus, he does not preclude staying on the island as long as he can find peace. However, if the situation does not improve for him and if there is an option to go to another EU country, he would certainly use that opportunity.²³³ Only Michael sees Cyprus, despite the predicament, as a potential long-term home, provided he is going to be recognized as a refugee. To this he declares: "*This island has so far been so much the most peaceful place I ever encountered in my life and the society has done a lot to help me and others. If I am recognized, I would love to take this place as a home because my experiences show that despite some challenges and shortcomings it can be considered a home for me. Anyone who opens his door in a time when I need it the most, takes me in with nothing, gives me something and then finally establishes me as part of the family, I think this can be home honestly.*"²³⁴

I. Incorporation of the findings in the conceptual framework Push-Pull Plus

By examining whether and to what extent the de facto condition has played a role in the decision-making process, the focus of the analysis lies on the potential driver resulting from the specific structural condition. Nevertheless, not only this certain driver is dealt with due to the nature of the Push-Pull Plus concept, which emphasizes the importance of the driver combinations leading to driver complexes. But due to the mentioned focus of this study, other recognized drivers do not receive the same attention. Though, the interconnection of those forming a driver complex is highlighted.

The statements of the interviews reveal the role of the structural de facto condition of Cyprus in the respondents' migration decision-making process. While it was assumed that the de facto condition is a pull factor for people to choose this route, it is found, that the Cyprus problem with its structural subtleties consciously does not play a role for the asylum seekers in the forefront. Since they were urged to escape quickly, for them, it was rather a question whether the escape is possible and less a question of why it is possible. But despite their lack of prior knowledge about it, it is argued that by looking at the different proposed drivers in the Push-Pull Plus model, the structural condition and its consequences can be labeled as a mediating driver. This kind of driver ultimately enables migration through transport, communication, information and resources. Since the mode of travel was apparently a decisive pro-argument to take this route, and the travel was only made possible through the de facto structure, it is concluded that it can be understood as such a driver. In this case, the driver works as a pull factor established in the destination country Cyprus.

The analysis also revealed that, by entrusting the organization of the trip to smugglers, the recognition, use and activation of this driver is ultimately carried out by them. They see the structural conditions in Cyprus as a window of opportunity by which they enable people to escape. Presumably the origin of the de facto condition is not important for the smugglers either, but only the knowledge of certain aspects of the situation, which are relevant for bringing people closer to the EU.

In choosing the destination, smugglers might face a similarly complex decision as migrants themselves, who plan their own route. According to Tabor, Milfont and Ward, external limitations such as visa hurdles play an important role in the destination selection of or for migrants.²³⁵ In the case of Northern Cyprus, these hurdles are relatively low due to its de facto condition. As the four interviewees, as subjects of migration, were (partly) unaware of the destination, of the structural condition and the positive and negative aspects, was in turn used by the smugglers to offer their product in the best possible way through deception and concealment. By perceiving these facilitations, promoting opportunities and concealing traps

to the clients, the structural phenomena in Cyprus are activated as a mediating driver and then, in interaction with other drivers leading to a driving complex, which in turn result in the final migration movement.

The analysis of the interviews shows how different drivers are at work simultaneously, are conditioned by each other and thus only in combination lead to migration. This can be seen in the examples of corruption and the smuggling industry, which, also as mediating drivers, are essential factors for flight. Along with others, such as predisposing-, proximate- and precipitating drivers, the three mentioned drivers form a driver complex and thus undermine and circumvent the global *visa regime*²³⁶ to let people migrate to the EU.

Ultimately, the concept states that drivers act differently along dimensions depending on the context. By including the dimensions scale and selectivity, the answers of the respondents can be conceptually embedded more accurately leading to the understanding of how and why the drivers function individually for the respondents. Adding the dimension selectivity to the Push-Pull Plus analysis a significant overlap with the discussed driver of the interviewee's migration decision process is found. On the one hand, the driver acts selectively, as the migration of two of the respondents was only made possible by corruption and bribery by their relatives. Therefore, the use of this driver can be considered exclusive, so that the respondents were in a fortunate situation, as Kizito puts it.²³⁷ On the other hand, the driver seems selective with regard to their social class. Since all of them could afford a comparatively expensive escape, which is not an option for many other migrants as the high numbers of Cameroonians in Nigeria show. A kind of university visa, which requires certain documents for enrolment, also suggests that rather educated citizens of Cameroon can benefit from this kind of migration.

If the dimension spatial scale is added, it becomes clear that the discussed driver has an effect on a local and global level. Preparations, including negotiations with the traffickers, take place in the home country sometimes even in familiar structures. Smugglers could be among friends or family, who thereby have a small side business. But this can also be the opposite, by encountering unknown people in the home country who are deeply involved in human smuggling. The national, regional and then global level is reached by starting the journey through the various comparatively few stops including certain arrangements until the migrants are in the RoC and request for international protection.

Looking at the dimension of the social scale, it becomes evident that the driver is primarily confined to the individual and family context when it comes to deciding who will migrate and

who will pay for it. The driver then continues to have an impact on the community or even wider society when clients promote this kind of travel to their friends.

Finally, the analysis shows that the de facto condition is one of several mediating drivers for this migration route. Together with the drivers of corruption, human trafficking and certainly others, it creates a driver complex that is particularly selective only for some migrants because of the comparably expensive price and the need for certain documents that many migrants cannot provide. The smugglers, as highly relevant actors here, who are more familiar with the details and important structural conditions that make the route accessible than the migrants themselves, finally activate this driver. It is therefore concluded that the migrants thus exercise less of their own agency, but inevitably hand over the power to act to the smugglers.

8. Conclusion & Outlook

This thesis explored the question of whether the structural de facto condition in the TRNC acts as a driver of migration for Cameroonian asylum-seekers to choose this specific route of flight. The analysis of the interviews revealed the various drivers at work that triggered the migration inception. As a primary result, by applying the conceptual framework Push-Pull Plus the structural condition of the de facto state TRNC was identified as a mediating driver for the interviewees. Thus, the low barriers to enter the TRNC as a third-country national have an effect on the high numbers of arriving asylum seekers in the RoC. At the same time, it is noted that the migrants themselves do not take the structural situation into account in their decision-making process, as the journey was organized by smugglers. Consequently, smugglers actively recognize and activate this driver, but migrants do so only passively whereas they actively use it subsequently. By revealing to whom it was reserved to make decisions in the individual flight process, a low degree of individual agency of the interviewees could be determined. The finding that the smuggling industry and the interconnected corruption play a significant role in the use of this structural loophole, two additional mediating drivers were identified.

Following the Push-Pull Plus concept, the analysis of this paper shows clearly that one driver alone does not cause migration, as only the interaction of different drivers has a relevant effect on escape decisions and movements. Others, such as predisposing-, proximate- and precipitating drivers, were not analyzed in this research, which opens possibilities for further research on this subject.

By including, particularly, the dimension selectivity, it was shown that the discussed mediating driver is only accessible to certain social classes, depending on education level or wealth, and excludes many people willing to migrate. Thus, contrary to the interviewees, many Cameroonians move towards the neighbor country Nigeria, lying at the border to the troubled Western region of Cameroon. In turn, the utilization of dimension scale did not generate decisive findings which would provide arguments for this research.

Further research may open up the possibility to identify not only mediating drivers but also the many other factors that are decisive for Cameroonians migrating to Cyprus, ideally with a larger sample. It would be also interesting to look at other dimensions such as gender if female asylum seekers would be interviewed about this topic.

The context chapter demonstrated the historically grown political tensions, revealed the root causes of the discussed mediating driver and gave important insight into the nature of a de facto state. Although the historical political upheavals on the island were not a conscious factor for the asylum seeker's individual flight decision, implications can be drawn for the situation today. In particular, the structural leakage in terms of kind of visa freedom and its influence on migration can be attributed to inter-state disruptions leading to the high numbers of asylum applications. Therefore, the question arises whether the TRNC, with its patron state Turkey, could do more against this form of irregular migration.

Despite the fact that the TRNC is, sometimes illegally, pushing away arriving third country nationals by refusing them entry or by deporting back to Turkey, sufficient measures are still not being taken in order to ease the situation for the RoC. This becomes evident through the observations that many of the ones who crossed the Green Line had stamps of Turkey or the TRNC in their passports. The findings from the context chapter suggest that there will hardly be consensus on this issue. As it can be seen from the behavior of the Turkish government elsewhere at the Greek border, the passage of irregular migration is more likely to be used as a means of exerting pressure to achieve a better negotiating position vis-à-vis the EU. This deliberate waving through of migrants can create incentives for people to take their escape route via Turkey. Further, the route via Turkey to the TRNC for asylum-seekers cannot simply be curtailed under pressure from the EU as Turkey does not recognize the government of the RoC. Thus, the “EU Turkey Deal” does not affect the route via Cyprus. Accordingly, Turkey's political stance could also be understood as a driver for migration, so that people can easily enter the EU via this country or the TRNC. The analysis of this additional potential driver therefore requires further research.

It is therefore concluded that the high influx of asylum seekers in the RoC can hardly be solved through closing this channel of migration. Firstly, Turkey stands in the way and, secondly, the isolated TRNC is limited in reaching binding agreements with other government.

Accordingly, other means must be found to meet the demands of the Greek Cypriot Government. This could be done by distributing asylum seekers from Europe's peripheral countries to other EU countries in a spirit of solidarity, but this is hindered by the existing Dublin system, and by the lack of political will on the part of some EU member states. The structural problems resulting from the de facto system in the north of Cyprus thus aggravate the pressing migration issue in Cyprus. The EU is therefore needed to distribute asylum seekers more fairly and thus relieve Cyprus. Further, improvements in refugee protection on both Cypriot territories would be welcomed and necessary.

In conclusion, the discussed driver is seen as a problem by the EU and by RoC policy makers, and depending on the perspective, as an opportunity by migrants. For the latter, this route represents a comparably safe chance to move without having to risk their lives on the way to the EU. Hence, this route undermines the global visa regime, which otherwise has a significant impact on the maintenance and protection of *Fortress Europe*. The question of whether it is more important to protect the EU's external borders at all costs or to save the lives of people remains therefore a controversial one.

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10. Endnotes

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- ¹⁸⁸ 15.50min Michael, Interview.
- ¹⁸⁹ 13.55min Kizito, Interview.
- ¹⁹⁰ Answer 15 Brian, Interview.
- ¹⁹¹ 35.10min Michael, Interview.
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