

Moving Ahead in Cyprus, Looking Back at the Failure of the Annan Plan

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While there are conflicts perceived to be much more difficult to resolve, it is the conflict in Cyprus that has earned the label “the diplomats’ graveyard.”¹ Still, there is a growing recognition that the ostensible status quo will not prevail much longer and that the island might drift into a permanent partition.² The last major effort to resolve the conflict was the plan proposed by then-secretary-general of the United Nations Kofi Annan, which was formulated between 2002 and 2004 but failed to attain the support of Greek Cypriots. To this day, four years after the failure of the Annan plan and the membership of only the Greek part of the island in the European Union, the sides have yet to return to the negotiating table. A contributing factor in the Greek Cypriot side has been the presidency of Tassos Papadopoulos, the person considered to have been a key factor in the refusal of Greek Cypriots to vote for the Annan plan in the binding referendum that was held in April 2004. Thus for example in a televised speech before the referendum, he wept when he asked Greek Cypriots not to vote for the plan.³ Since the failed referendum, Papadopoulos has claimed that without significant change in the plan, it is pointless to revisit it, but he has refused to specify what precisely needs changing.⁴ At the same time, it is not only Papadopoulos’s rule that has contributed to the stalemate, but also the fact that the international community was taken by surprise by the Greek Cypriots’ refusal to approve the referendum and was at a loss as to how to deal with that development. Thus in recent years, after a long period in which the international community viewed the Turkish side as responsible for preventing a solution to the Cypriot problem, the tables have turned somewhat, so that now it is precisely the Greek side that is deemed the obstacle to progress towards a solution. Nowadays much depends on developments following the 2008 presidential elections in the Republic of Cyprus.⁵

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The purpose of this essay is to analyze the factors that led to the current dead end in the Cyprus peace process, to examine the lessons that may be learned from this failure, and to suggest possible scenarios for future political arrangements on the island.

The Ethnic Conflict over Cyprus and the Annan Plan

The Turkish presence on Cyprus dates to the sixteenth century when the Ottoman Empire conquered the island, whose majority population was – and still is – Greek Orthodox. As a result of the weakening of the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century, Great Britain assumed the administration of the island in 1878. As British rule continued, voices from within the Greek Cypriot community calling for unification with Greece grew stronger. In response, Turkish Cypriots began demanding the partition of the island. During the 1950s, as a result of the strengthening of the opposition to British colonial rule, particularly on the part of the Greek Cypriots, talks on the future of the island began between Great Britain, Turkey, and Greece. In 1959-60, as part of the Zurich and London agreements, it was decided to grant the island independence, and extensive arrangements for cooperation between the communities in ruling the island were constructed. These arrangements also included over-representation for the Turks, who constituted only 20 percent of the population, so that the Greek side would relate to them as partners and not as a minority.

As early as 1963, violent riots broke out, a result of the country's paralysis caused by frequent vetoes cast by the Turks who claimed that the Greeks were failing to fulfill one or another of the constitutional directives, and

the counter demands of the Greeks to change the Cypriot constitution. During the crisis that continued into 1964, Turkey threatened to intervene in the conflict, and only a particularly forceful message from US president Lyndon Johnson prevented Turkish intervention. Riots erupted again in 1967 and brought the Turks yet once more to threaten intervention, but as a result of the Greeks ceding to a Turkish ultimatum to withdraw most of the illegal Greek troops from the island, the Turks finally decided not to act. In 1974, the junta in Greece instigated a coup on the island, and brought about the ascent of an extremist leader who clearly intended to work towards unifying Cyprus with Greece. As a result, Turkey did intervene on the island, and in two subsequent attacks, gained control of 40 percent of the island. During this chapter that led to Turkish intervention, some 180,000 Greeks fled to the southern part of the island, and some 45,000 Turks fled to the north. In 1983 the Turks declared the establishment of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, an entity that has not gained recognition by the international community and has even been boycotted. Over the years Turkey has infused a great deal of money into the northern part of the island, and some 35,000 Turkish soldiers are stationed there. Since the Turkish intervention, Turks have also immigrated to the island from Turkey; this has created a problem of settlers, most of whom are agricultural workers or relatives of Turkish military personnel posted at the island over the years.⁶

Because of the strategic location of Cyprus and the fears that as a result of the conflict two NATO members, Turkey and Greece, would find themselves in an armed conflict with one another, many international mediation efforts were devoted to the Cyprus is-

sue during the Cold War. Following the Cold War, the Cypriot conflict gained prominence as one of the hurdles standing in the way of Cyprus and Turkey entering the EU. In 2002, after direct talks between the sides failed, UN secretary-general Kofi Annan assumed the role of mediator in the conflict. The Annan plan was supposed to lead to a reunification of Cyprus within the framework of a loose federation, and to the entry of a unified country into the EU. The plan also included the return of lands to Greek Cypriots, so that the Turkish area would have shrunk to some 29 percent of the island's land area. In addition, the plan called for the gradual decrease in the Turkish military presence on the island, from approximately 35,000 soldiers to 650.⁷ On April 24, 2004, the fifth version of the plan was put to a referendum in both parts of the island. The reunification of the island was not achieved after a decisive majority of Greek Cypriots (76 percent) refused to support the plan, while a majority of Turkish Cypriots (65 percent) supported the agreement. As a result of the failure to reunify Cyprus, only the Greek part of the island entered the EU in May 2004.

The Failure to Garner Greek Support for the Annan Plan

A large attraction of the Annan plan was the promise of a united Cyprus joining the EU, which was to be the successful culmination of the peace process. In this respect the referendum's failure was particularly stinging. A central element in the failure of the Annan plan was that the Greek Cypriot side did not have enough incentive to approve the agreement, because it was in any case about to enter the EU. However, because the plan represented yet another failure after a long series of attempts to resolve the conflict,

there was also great significance for other issues that lay at the heart of the discussions. These in particular invite certain conclusions that may be drawn from this context.

The Problems of the Right of Return, Refugees, and Settlers

The Annan plan presented a fairly complicated model of a limited right of return, particularly to those areas that were, according to the plan, gradually supposed to be returned to the Greek side – over the course of nineteen years or until the Turks entered the EU. In part this was to prevent a situation in which the Turkish Cypriot community would lose its majority in the north of the island and its influence on both the island's national and international policies all at once. While the plan, at least seemingly, had advantages from the vantage of individuals who would be able to return to their homes, from a larger perspective there were several apparent problems with the proposal. A successful return of refugees is in any case a complex matter, because the former refugees not only have to return physically to their homes but also have to undergo a process of reintegration and conciliation with their former enemies.⁸ In the case of Cyprus, it was possible to see that the Greek Cypriots who voted in the referendum did not view the limited right of return included in the Annan plan as sufficient. A situation would have been created in which the problem was not fully resolved, and in fact would remain at the delicate center of relations between the communities for years to come because of the gradual rate of return.

Beyond the problems of a limited right of return, the Greek Cypriots also had reservations regarding the Annan plan's proposal for the Turkish settlers. The Greek Cypriots

claimed that almost all the Turkish newcomers were in the end going to remain on the Turkish side, whether as citizens or as residents, a possibility that worried the Greeks because they felt the Turkish newcomers would be more given to influence from Turkey, even after the reunification of the island.⁹ Like other cases, the Cyprus instance exemplifies the claim that relocation of settlers, though it may have elements of “historic justice,” is a complex issue with internal and economic ramifications. While in terms of international law settling in occupied territories is defined as a crime, the Turkish newcomers are a heterogeneous population,¹⁰ most of whom migrated to Cyprus as the result of hardships in the motherland. Turkish Cypriots themselves also see this population in a negative light, because it has changed the character of the original community of the northern part of the island. In these respects, while fears regarding the continued presence of the newcomers and the hostility towards them might be understood in light of the circumstances that led them to be on the island, since it is clear that they would not all be relocated, perhaps a more significant attempt at integrating them into Cypriot society ought to be undertaken.

A Binding Referendum

The Cyprus experience exemplified the problematics of binding referendums that are taken to bypass inter-party politics, and in particular the political leadership. Greek Cypriot president Papadopoulos opposed the Annan plan, as did leaders of the Greek Orthodox Church,¹¹ as well as Rauf Denktaş, the veteran leader of the Turkish side of the island.¹² In light of this opposition, and in an effort to approve the Annan plan quickly, it was determined, in the fifth and last version

of the plan, that there was no need for its approval by local leaders, and that it was to be passed as is by a referendum. While the aim of this provision was to circumvent Denktaş, in the end Papadopoulos’s lack of support for the agreement inflicted the graver damage. In this sense, it is possible to look at referendums as a limited tool that may confer greater legitimacy on a move only if it has already gained the support of the elites and a significant portion of the ruling administration.

A Negotiations Deadline and the Limitations of International Mediation

One of the achievements of Annan’s mediation efforts seen at the time as far-reaching was gaining the agreement of the parties to quick negotiations within a clear timetable, as well as an agreement on a referendum to approve the outcome. Moreover, it was also agreed that should the parties be unable to reach an agreement by the deadline, Greece and Turkey would be brought into the picture, and should they too fail to reach an agreement, Annan would resolve the remaining difference based on his own understanding, something that indeed occurred as the talks fell through.¹³ In this sense, it is possible that it was precisely the acceleration of the process that ruined the plan’s chances of success, as the final version of the plan went before the two sides only at the beginning of April, and until the last days before the April 24 referendum it was still under adjustment. This affected the outcome of the vote because proponents of the plan could put together a public campaign only at a very late stage, which made it difficult for them to affect public opinion and gain support for the final agreement.¹⁴

An additional factor in the failure of the Cyprus peace plan was that the agreement

was formulated separately by each party working jointly with the mediator, without sufficient consultations between the parties to the conflict. While it is true that Annan assumed the role of mediator after direct negotiations in 2001-2002 failed, nonetheless it is not clear if the formulation of an agreement by a third party was the right solution for the stalemate in the talks. Even though the Greek Cypriots had already been assured entrance into the EU, they felt as if they were being pressured to accept the agreement for the sake of foreign interests, and were irritated by implicit threats that should they refuse the agreement, foreign countries would start recognizing the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. The Greek Cypriots understood some of the sections of the agreement, such as the continued Turkish military presence on the island, as impinging on the sovereignty of the Cypriot state. In these respects, the later versions of the Annan plan were seen as a direct continuation of the Zurich and London agreements, in which discussions were held between Britain, Turkey, and Greece without sufficient consultation with representatives of the island's ethnic groups.¹⁵

Greater Involvement from the Region

It is difficult to separate the Cyprus conflict from the long-simmering conflict between Greece and Turkey, and Northern Cyprus is considered a Turkish conquered area with a limited level of independence. In this regard, one of the prominent achievements of the Annan plan was that its promoters succeeded in enlisting support for it in both Greece and Turkey. This support is interesting also in light of the beginning of a process of rapprochement between the two countries.¹⁶ While the Greek support, relatively restrained, did not propel Greek Cypriots to

vote for the plan, the support of the Turkish prime minister for the plan did contribute to approval among Turkish Cypriots, despite the opposition of the veteran Northern Cyprus leader Denktaş. Thus while it often seems that the involvement of other countries in the conflict only serves to complicate the chances for a resolution, it is possible to see that at certain points, the involvement of a regional player may contribute to the solution by adding to the pressure on the sides to reach a solution.

Inter-Community Communication and Mutual Suspicion

One of the encouraging signs for the possibility of reunifying the communities of Cyprus was that the partial opening of the green line¹⁷ to movement of civilians between the sides did not lead to any violent incidents.¹⁸ For the first time in many years, there is more contact between the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots. At the same time, it remains very difficult to overcome longstanding mutual suspicions, so that, for example, the Greek Cypriots vehemently opposed Turkish forces remaining on the island, even though, in effect, the reaction time required by the Turkish army – particularly, the air force – even if stationed in Turkey, to operate in Cyprus is almost instantaneous, so that there is barely any practical significance to forces being stationed on the island.¹⁹ Likewise, it may be assumed that Turkey would think long and hard about militarily intervening in the island again, now that Cyprus is a member of the EU.²⁰ Therefore, even though it is clear that the Greek trauma that resulted from Turkish intervention in the past played a role in shaping these suspicions on the part of the Greeks, in practice basic suspicions must be addressed so they do not derail peace plans.

The challenge in resolving the Cyprus issue may shed a pessimistic light on efforts at resolving conflicts that still entail a high degree of violence.

The Future of the Island

There are several possible scenarios regarding the political future of the island. Despite the stalemate in negotiations between the sides, in practice the entrance of the Greek Cypriots into the EU has created a new situation and a number of challenges. Thus, thanks to the “yes” vote of Turkish Cypriots, the international community decided in principle to remove some of the trade restrictions on the northern part of the island. At the same time, because of the Turkish claim that the fundamental decision was not sufficiently implemented, Turkey refuses to open its ports to the Republic of Cyprus. Another challenge for the EU regards the tension between Cyprus being one of the border countries of the EU, which necessitates significant regulation of those coming and going, and the interest in continuing to keep the border between the parts of the island relatively open. It is quite possible that solutions may be found to these specific challenges and that following the elections in the Republic of Cyprus, the negotiation process will be renewed but may later on arrive again at a deadlock. At the same time, it is possible to think of two more dramatic scenarios.

The first scenario involves partition. After the failure to pass the Annan plan in the Greek Cypriot referendum, some traditional voices in Turkey were again heard calling for the establishment of two countries. Thus, during his first visit to Cyprus as Turkish president, Abdullah Gül said that an agreement on the future of Cyprus must be based on Cyprus realities, and on “the existence of two separate nations, two separate democracies, two separate countries, and two separate religions.”²¹ The results of a public opinion poll in 2006 taken on the Greek side suggest that more Greek Cypriots support

living separately than those who support unification, and this trend is especially apparent among the young.²² There are even those who claim that because the partition of Cyprus contributed towards stability and the lack of violence, the profitability of reunifying is not absolutely clear.²³ While over the years it has been said that partitioning the island must not be allowed because this would constitute rewarding unilateral military action perceived as belligerent, it is also true that the international community sometimes acts according to policies that fall outside of traditional patterns.²⁴ It is similarly possible that with the passage of time, the difference between partitioning the island and the entrance of two states into the European Union on the one hand, and the unification of the island in a loose federation on the other, might seem less significant than it is currently perceived. At the same time, it is almost certain that in order for this scenario to become a reality, the Turkish Cypriots will nevertheless have to give up some of the territory they control today.

The second scenario is reunification of the island. In the event that there is some progress – which at the moment does not seem likely – regarding Turkey’s joining the EU, or if another compromise arrangement favoring Turkey is presented, this may promote Turkish willingness in general, and that of the Turkish minority in Northern Cyprus in particular, to accept more far-reaching concessions vis-à-vis the Greeks. It should also be stressed that when the EU heralds freedom of movement, it seems somewhat incongruous that Greece and Cyprus, as members of the EU, and Turkey, as a nation seeking admittance, are still discussing refugees and settler relocation, beyond the general agreement that they are eligible for restitution. Also,

the intensity of the discussion regarding the continued Turkish presence on the island, something that Greek Cypriots oppose both on security grounds and on the grounds that it constitutes an infringement of state sovereignty, may subside the longer that Cyprus is part of the EU where it enjoys a wider defense framework and where, in any case, it is required to concede some of its sovereignty for the sake of being an EU member.

Conclusion

It may sometimes seem to observers that the conflict in Cyprus is not as tortuous as some of the other conflicts on the international agenda, particularly because there has been an almost complete absence of violence on the island since 1974. Yet the challenge in resolving it points not only at the fundamental difficulty inherent in resolving ethnic conflicts after a history of violence and the creation of a refugee problem, but may also shed a pessimistic light on efforts at resolving conflicts that still entail a high degree of violence. One may of course claim that it is precisely the absence of violence over the last few decades and the absence of a hurting stalemate that contribute to the lack of ripeness²⁵ of the sides to resolve the conflict on Cyprus. However, the failed attempts in the past to resolve the issue, when the violent events were still fresh in people's memory, and when it seemed that the conflict deeply harmed the sides, may also be indicative of the limitations of this view. Beyond the problems associated with the conflict itself, one of the problems that has impacted heavily on finding a resolution to the Cyprus conflict is its connection to the Greek-Turkish conflict, similar to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict being a part of the Arab-Israeli one. In these respects, Israel should be interested in devel-

opments relating to the conflict on Cyprus. A further point is that the conflict is of significance in terms of Turkey, a country whose strategic developments are of critical importance to Israel as well.

Notes

- 1 James Ker-Lindsay, *EU Accession and UN Peacemaking in Cyprus* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 2.
- 2 International Crisis Group, "Cyprus: Reversing the Drift to Partition," *Europe Report*, no. 190 (January 2008).
- 3 Harry Anastasiou, "Nationalism as a Deterrent to Peace and Interethnic Democracy: The Failure of Nationalist Leadership from the Hague Talks to the Cyprus Referendum," *International Studies Perspectives* 8 (2007): 198.
- 4 Ker-Lindsay, *EU Accession and UN Peacemaking in Cyprus*, p. 114.
- 5 The Republic of Cyprus claims control of the entire island, and is the island's representative vis-à-vis the rest of the world at international forums such as the UN. Nonetheless, the northern part of the island is de facto controlled by the Turks. Hence the elections for president are taking place in the south.
- 6 There is much disagreement over how many citizens who were born in Turkey, whom the Greeks view as illegal settlers, live in Northern Cyprus. According to the Greek Cypriot claim, there are about 100,000 Turkish newcomers on the island, representing almost 50 percent of the population of Northern Cyprus and about one-eighth of the island's total population, which has been estimated by *The CIA World Fact Book* to be almost 800,000. According to the Turks, the newcomers number only some 15,000. The gap between the estimates is explained by the Turks in that most of the arrivals are temporary workers who do not stay on the island for more than five years. More neutral estimates tend to support higher numbers, i.e., that the newcomers represent almost 30 percent of the population of Northern Cyprus. Celestine Bohlen, "Fresh Tension for Cyprus: Counting the Newcomers," *New York Times*, January 23, 1997, <http://query.nytimes>.

- com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C05E2DC163A F930A15752C0A961958260.
- 7 Hubert Faustmann, "The Cyprus Question Still Unsolved: Security Concerns and the Failure of the Annan Plan," *Südosteuropa Mitteilungen* 6 (2004): 50-51.
 - 8 Roger Zetter, "Re-conceptualizing the Myth of Return: Continuity and Transition amongst the Greek-Cypriot Refugees of 1974," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 12, no. 1 (1999): 2.
 - 9 Faustmann, "The Cyprus Question Still Unsolved," p. 56, n. 33, pp. 63-64.
 - 10 Neophytos G. Loizides, "Ethnic Nationalism and Adaptation in Cyprus," *International Studies Perspectives* 8, (2007): 182.
 - 11 Thus for example there were reports that Bishop Chrisostomos from Paphos threatened that "yes-voters" would go to hell, Anastasiou, *Nationalism as a Deterrent*, p. 201.
 - 12 At the same time, harsh criticism of Denktas emerged in Northern Cyprus. In 2002-3, there were massive demonstrations demanding change and Denktas' resignation. In tandem, Mehmet Ali Talat, a moderate and a supporter of the Annan plan, was elected prime minister, Jan Asmussen, "Cyprus after the Failure of the Annan Plan," *European Centre for Minority Issues Brief* no. 11 (July 2004): 7.
 - 13 Anastasiou, "Nationalism as a Deterrent," p. 196.
 - 14 House of Commons, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Annan Plan*, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200405/cmselect/cmfa/113/11305.htm>.
 - 15 Claire Palley, *An International Relations Debacle: The UN Secretary-General's Mission of Good Offices in Cyprus 1999-2004* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2005), pp. 221-22.
 - 16 "Turks, Greeks to Share Foxhole," *Turkish Daily News*, December 5, 2007, <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=90450/>.
 - 17 British forces established the green line as early as 1963 to separate the southern and northern parts of Cyprus, and even the city of Nicosia. The demilitarized zone around the green line is supervised by UN peacekeeping forces.
 - 18 Anastasiou, *Nationalism as a Deterrent*, p. 198; David Hannay, *Cyprus: The Search for a Solution* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), p. 225.
 - 19 Committee on Foreign Relations, *Annan Plan*.
 - 20 Faustmann, "The Cyprus Question Still Unresolved," pp. 61, 66.
 - 21 Yusuf Kanli, "Did Turkey Change its Cyprus Policy?" *Turkish Daily News* September 20, 2007, <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=83840>.
 - 22 This poll, carried out by the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation, found that 48 percent of Greek Cypriots were in favor of living separately, while 43 percent were in favor of co-existence. Of people aged 18-24, 63 percent were in favor of living separately, and among people aged 65 and over, 61 percent were in favor of coexistence. See John Leonidou, "Most Greek Cypriots 'Don't want to Live with Turkish Cypriots,'" *Cyprus Mail*, April 5, 2006 http://www.cyprus-mail.com/news/main.php?id=25249&cat_id=1.
 - 23 Prominent studies in this respect are Chaim Kaufmann, "An Assessment of the Partition of Cyprus," *International Studies Perspectives* 8 (2007): 206-23, and Dan Lindley, "Historical, Tactical, and Strategic Lessons from the Partition of Cyprus," *International Studies Perspectives* 8 (2007): 224-41.
 - 24 During the Cold War, for example, international support for separatist efforts was relatively limited. On the other hand, the recognition by Western nations of Kosovo's independence is unusual, and among the EU members opposed are Greece and Cyprus, in part because of the concern that this will represent a precedent for Northern Cyprus. "Assessment: Kosovo to Declare Independence at the Beginning of 2008," *Haaretz*, December 10, 2007, <http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasite/spages/933002.html>.
 - 25 That is, a situation in which resolution through negotiations comes when the sides conclude that force cannot settle the conflict, and that the current situation is exacting too high a toll. I. William Zartman, *Ripe for Resolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 9.