

The Cyprus Problem after the April 2004 Referenda

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In December 1999, at the European Summit in Helsinki, the Greek government gave the “green light” so that Turkey could become a candidate for European Union (EU) membership. At the same time, the EU decided to open accession negotiations with the Republic of Cyprus without the previous resolution of the political problem being a prerequisite. This decision was a watershed for Europe and also for Greek foreign policy. The transformation of Greek policy on this issue was the result of the “Europeanization” of Greece’s foreign policy. Furthermore, it was the result of a new approach adopted by the Simitis government that we could call “the policy of Helsinki.” It had three parallel axes: (a) to anchor Turkey to Europe so that it will become a more cooperative and reliable neighbour, ready to seriously discuss the resolution of the outstanding problems between Greece and Turkey, and to lead Turkey to radical domestic democratic transformation, (b) “Europeanizing” the issues of Cyprus and Greek-Turkish relations so that this process could become a “catalyst” in order to arrive at solutions to these problems and (c) through their resolution to create a “triangle (Greece-Turkey-Cyprus) of stability” in the eastern Mediterranean. The third axis of the “policy of Helsinki” is

especially important. It underlines the fact that resolving the Cyprus problem and normalizing Greek-Turkish relations is necessary in order to create the conditions that will lead to the development of peace and stability in the eastern Mediterranean.

June 2003 to December 2004 was a critical period for Cyprus. During this period, greater efforts were made to resolve the political problem. The two separate but simultaneous referenda that were held on 24th April 2004 were the culmination of this process which, unfortunately, ended up with the rejection of the Annan Plan by the Greek Cypriot community. Hence, the failure in April 2004 to arrive at a comprehensive solution to the Cyprus problem complicates the effort to construct a “triangle of stability” in the eastern Mediterranean. What have been the major developments in the Cyprus problem during this period? What are the prospects for a solution in the near future?

After the failure to reach a solution to the Cyprus problem in The Hague on 11th March 2003, the Cyprus problem entered into a state of inertia. At the same time, however, the Republic of Cyprus signed, on 16th April, the EU accession treaty and few weeks later, Rauf Denktash’s regime in northern Cyprus partially lifted the restrictions imposed since 1974 on the free movement across the dividing line.

December 2003 was a critical month for the Cyprus problem. Since the end of the UN General Assembly meetings in September 2003, the US and the EU

were becoming more energetic on the Cyprus issue. All sides involved, however, had to wait for the outcome of the Turkish Cypriot elections before they could reach solid decisions about the initiatives that would be needed to re-energize the process of negotiations for a final settlement. The Turkish Cypriot “elections” of 14th December 2003 produced a new leadership that was viewed as more conducive to finding a settlement.¹

According to the “election” results, the opposition to Rauf Denktash received 50.29% of the vote and 25 out of the 50 seats in Parliament. These results were not the best possible outcome for the opposition but dealt Denktash’s policies a blow and it allowed Erdogan freedom of movement in pursuing his own policy in search of a solution to the Cyprus problem. In other words, it demonstrated that the majority of the Turkish Cypriots were in favour of a solution of the Cyprus problem based on the Annan Plan and the accession of Cyprus into the EU.

After the end of the elections the international participants involved, especially the US and Great Britain, re-energized their efforts to find a solution.² The EU asked the two sides to accept the conditions laid down by the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan for restarting negotiations; namely, (a) to accept the Annan Plan as the basis for negotiations, (b) to accept that if in the process of negotiations the two sides were unable to agree on certain provisions, the UN Secretary General would be able to fill the blanks

¹ For the importance of these “elections” see: Ayla Gurel, “Turkish Cypriot Elections and Turkey’s Cyprus Problem,” in Nathalie Tocci and Ahmet Evvin, eds., *Towards Accession Negotiations: Turkey’s Domestic and Foreign Policy Challenges Ahead* (Florence, EUI, 2004), pp. 175-183.

² The new effort was initiated after President Tassos Papadopoulos delivered, in December 2003, a letter to the Secretary General of the UN requesting the resumption of talks under his auspices.

of the Plan and (c) to ensure that the agreement would be submitted to separate but simultaneous referenda on a specific date.

On 4th February 2004 the Secretary General of the UN delivered a letter to the leaders of the two communities inviting them to return to the negotiating table based on his plan, provided they accepted the conditions set-forth in his invitation. In his letter the Secretary General outlined specific dates, the most important of which was 21st April 2004, for the separate but simultaneous referenda to approve or reject the plan. He also invited the two leaders for a meeting in New York on 10th February 2004 to begin the negotiating process. As he pointed out in his letter, "I would take your acceptance of this invitation as a commitment to finalize the plan (without reopening its basic principles or core trade-offs) with United Nations assistance by 31st March 2004, and to put the finalized plan to separate simultaneous referenda as provided for in the plan on 21st April 2004."³

As already suggested, the victory, albeit a narrow one, by the opposition to Denktash made the resumption of negotiations possible. The US, which was already very active, along with Britain and the EU, and of course the UN, assumed a central role in these efforts. There was what has been called "constructive pressure"⁴ exercised both on Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots to enter into final negotiations based on the Annan Plan. The Greek Cypriot leadership and President Tassos Papadopoulos specifically had two choices: either to work substantively and constructively for a solution based on the Annan Plan, or assume full responsibility for leading this effort to another dead-end with severe implications on Cyprus' European aspirations. At the same time, the Turkish Cypriot leadership had to deliver on the promise to negotiate a solution based on the Annan Plan. The ability of the Turkish Cypriot leadership to deliver was, of course, contingent upon Ankara's deci-

sion to take the necessary steps towards this direction and its ability, in close cooperation with the leadership in northern Cyprus, to minimize the capacity of Rauf Denktash to undermine or hijack the efforts for a solution.

On 10th to 12th February the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan invited the parties to resume negotiations and after four days of intensive talks in New York the leaders of the two communities of Cyprus agreed to do so. Although President Papadopoulos was resistant to the idea that if the two sides did not reach an agreement, the UN Secretary General would "fill-in-the blanks," in the end he was forced by developments to accept the Turkish proposal which adopted the Secretary General's conditions plus one: namely, the direct involvement of the two "motherlands" in the negotiating process. In other words, their agreement presumed that the parties accepted the UN conditions of using the Annan Plan as the basis for negotiations "without reopening its basic principles or core trade-offs"; letting the UN Secretary General fill in the blanks of the plan if the two sides – assisted by Greece and Turkey – failed to agree on certain provisions and committing themselves to put the final agreement to separate but simultaneous referenda on 21st April 2004.

In February and March negotiations took place in an effort to reach an agreed solution based on the Annan Plan. These negotiations were intensive and difficult as the mistrust of the sides towards each other, as well as towards the UN was prevalent. In the last week of March 2004 the two sides, as well as Greece, Turkey and representatives from the EU, Britain and the US, met in Burgenstock, Switzerland, for the final round of negotiations. At the end of the process the UN Secretary General presented to the two sides the fifth and final version of his plan for a comprehensive solution to the Cyprus problem. The two sides agreed to bring the plan to two separate but simultaneous referenda on 24th April.⁵ The leaders of the communities, Tassos

Papadopoulos and Rauf Denktash, asked the members of their respective communities to reject the plan, whereas the opposition in both communities campaigned hard for a "yes" vote. At the end of the day, the Greek Cypriot community, by a majority of 76%, rejected the proposed plan whereas the Turkish Cypriot community, by a majority of 65%, accepted it. These developments created a new environment on the island and have shaped the approach that the international participants are now following.

The day after the referenda found the Greek Cypriot leadership defending a strong "no" to the solution proposed by the UN and the EU. The international community put the blame for the failure to reach a solution squarely on Greek Cypriot shoulders. Whether fair or not, the Greek Cypriots became isolated and are to this day facing the implications of their decision to reject the Annan Plan. One of the most disturbing developments in post referenda Cyprus is the "construction boom" taking place on Greek Cypriot properties in northern Cyprus as a new wave of settlement due to the new demand for labour as a result of the construction taking place. These dramatic developments are obviously changing the facts on the ground undermining the prospects for a peaceful settlement.

On 17th December 2004 the European Council in Brussels took a major decision, to open accession negotiations with Turkey on 3rd October 2005. At the same time, the Council "welcomed the declaration of Turkey that 'the Turkish Government confirms that it is ready to sign the Protocol on the adaptation of the Ankara Agreement prior to the actual start of accession negotiations and after reaching agreement on and finalizing the adaptations which are necessary in view of the current membership of the EU.'"⁶ Hence, the period between now and 3rd October can be utilized for another, hopefully, successful effort to resolve the Cyprus problem. Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots have declared that they are ready to enter into final nego-

³ UN Secretary General Kofi A. Annan letter to His Excellency Mr. Tassos Papadopoulos, February 4, 2004.

⁴ For an explanation of the notion of "constructive pressure" see: Philippos Savvides, "The European Union as a 'Catalyst' for the Resolution of the Cyprus Problem" in Panayiotis Tsakonas, ed., *Contemporary Greek Foreign Policy*, Volume II (Athens: Sideris, 2003), pp. 227-273.

⁵ Report of the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan on His Mission of Good Offices in Cyprus, June 3, 2004. For President Tassos Papadopoulos response to the Secretary General's report, see his lengthy letter of June 7, 2004.

⁶ European Council, "Presidency Conclusions," Brussels, 17 December 2004.

tiations for resolution based on the Annan Plan. The international participators are expecting some clear indications from Greece and the Greek Cypriots as well. It is generally accepted that the Annan Plan remains the basis for a solution to the Cyprus problem. At the same time, however, it needs to be adjusted in order to reflect the realities created by the

accession of Cyprus into the EU as well as the new dimensions introduced in the framework of the European Constitution. Today the challenge is two-fold: (a) to create the conditions within the Greek Cypriot community to approve a "bizonal-bicommunal federation" as a solution to the Cyprus problem and at the same time, (b) to avoid the disillusionment of

the Turkish Cypriot community and preserve its volition for a solution. There is a tiny window of opportunity for a solution in 2005. It remains to be seen if the two sides will grasp this opportunity or whether the partition of the island will be further consolidated.

THE ELECTIONS IN GREECE AND SPAIN

The 2004 elections led to a change of Government both in Greece and in Spain. In Greece, where the socialist party, PASOK, had been in power since 1993, the March elections gave power to Kostas Karamalis, the conservative from the New Democracy Party, which obtained an absolute majority. In Spain, the attacks carried out on 11th March and the later events ensuing from them had a decisive influence on the elections. Power, which had been in the hands of the conservative Popular Party since 1996, the party forecast by all the polls

prior to 11th March to win the elections again, returned to the PSOE, the socialist party.

TABLE 10 Greece

Parties	2000		2004	
	%	seats	%	seats
New Democracy (ND)	42.7	125	45.4	165
Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK)	43.8	158	40.5	117
Communist Party of Greece (KKE)	5.5	11	5.9	12
Coalition of the Left and Progress (SIN)	3.2	6	3.3	6
Democratic Social Movement (DIKKI)	2.7	-	1.8	-
Others	2.0	-	3.1	-

Source: www.electionguide.org

TABLE 11 Spain

Parties	2000		2004	
	%	seats	%	seats
Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE)	34.2	125	42.6	164
Popular Party (PP)	44.5	183	37.6	148
United Left (IU)	6.0	9	5.0	5
Convergence and Union (CiU)	4.2	15	3.2	10
Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC)	0.8	1	2.5	8
Basque Nationalist Party (PNV)	1.5	7	1.6	7
Canary Islands Coalition (CC)	1.1	4	0.9	3
Galician Nationalist Bloc (BNG)	1.3	3	0.8	2
Andalucia Party (PA)	0.9	1	0.7	-
Aragon Junta (CHA)	0.3	1	0.4	1
Basque Solidarity (EA)	0.4	1	0.3	1
Navarre Yes (NaBai)	-	-	0.2	1

Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, www.elecciones.mir.es