

# **The Cyprus Question and the EU: The Challenge and the Promise**

**Andreas Theophanous**  
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Students of the Cyprus problem and of the accession of Cyprus to the European Union cannot afford to ignore *The Cyprus Question and the EU: The Challenge and the Promise* by Andreas Theophanous. And this because it sets out an effective and comprehensive analytical framework for examining the complex and sometimes tortuous interrelation between the contemporary historical development of the situation in Cyprus ('the Cyprus problem'), the historical confluence of factors and the specific human efforts setting Cyprus on an accession course to the European Union, international interests and divergences in interests surrounding these two developments, the actual content of the 'Annan Plan', and the possible future developments. This work has cleared analytical ground, accurately mapped out the relevant historical factors, and has created a framework which needs to be tackled by those writing about the Cyprus problem and the European accession of Cyprus. By implication, it highlights the shortcomings of those approaches which, for the sake of analytical rigour, abstract a variety of factors from the situation.

This is not to say that it is impossible to disagree with various elements in this book. It is to say rather that it sets out the terms on which disagreement or agreement needs to be set out. For example, it is not really possible to meaningfully write about the rejection of the Annan Plan by the Greek Cypriot community in April, 2004, and not to try to understand the meaning that this plan had in political, economic and legal terms, and also to try to explain the differential interests and involvements of a variety of international actors.

The author does not attempt to in any way conceal his own view-point, clearly placing himself with those in Cyprus who said no to the Annan Plan. But in contrast to the rather purposeless, sometimes petty, and frequently backward-looking arguments that have been going on in Cyprus since the referendum, this book uses the analysis of past developments in order to attempt an estimate of where Cyprus currently finds itself, and the possible future developments. This is the approach Cypriots need to take if they are to follow Anna Diamantopoulou's wise advice on a recent visit to Nicosia to the effect that everyone must realise that we are all now under the constellation of 'No', but equally we must re-interpret this 'No' in a way that brings us together, that is 'No to non-solution.'

One of the ways of doing this is to focus, as part of this book does, on the strengths of the situation that Cyprus now finds itself in, including the value of Cyprus and of a solution of the Cyprus problem to the European Union, and to others. This reviewer would have preferred to see a little more on the demands now incumbent on Cyprus as a small, active EU member state, pursuing a European Union agenda, as well as a Cyprus problem agenda.

The author presents strong arguments illustrating the injustice, and, perhaps more importantly the fragility, of a number of elements of the Annan Plan. Reading Chapter V, in which the author lists a series of suggestions for ways in which the Annan Plan should be modified, it is difficult to avoid the thought that the changes proposed would make the plan quite similar to the proposals which the Greek Cypriot side put forward in 1989, after unanimous approval by the National Council. And of course which Greek Cypriot would claim that those proposals are not better than the Annan Plan. Certainly not this reviewer.

Nor is it easy to disagree with many of the shortcomings of the Annan Plan as analysed by the author, shortcomings with a clear and orthodox basis in political and economic theory. The fact that the Government at the time took a position against acceptance of the plan by the Greek Cypriots, does not obviate the need for an objective analysis of the plan, nor does it mean that the government's negative position was the only reason for the rejection of the plan by the Greek Cypriots.

What is less clear is that the author fully takes into account the fact that though Greek Cypriots are now under the constellation of 'NO', and can develop strong arguments for the reasons for this, Turkish Cypriots are in fact under the constellation of 'Yes', and that for them the rational arguments for the Greek-Cypriot 'No' have the emotional weight of a rejection. Though it is true that the new situation offers opportunities, part of the difficulty of the situation is that pro-solution Cypriots on both sides now feel that they have legitimate reasons for grievance: the Turkish Cypriots for the Greek 'No', and the Greek Cypriots for the building boom in the occupied area on Greek Cypriot land, and the renewed flow of settlers from Turkey.

It is also true that there is a tendency for Turkey to try to say that the Annan Plan is the end of the road and that its acceptance of that model for a solution finally absolves it from any further obligation towards Cyprus. This is one reason that I find this book's analysis of the Helsinki deal unsatisfactory. In reality the rights and obligations imposed by the Helsinki European Council in December 1999 are general and long-lasting and without direct links to the Annan Plan, which did not then exist. Cyprus was absolved from a condition of an antecedent solution of the Cyprus problem before accession, but not from the obligation to continue efforts towards a solution. Turkey was promised equal consideration as a candidate to EU

accession, but was accorded a political obligation to contribute to the solution of the Cyprus problem. This cannot be satisfied by a take it or leave it attitude to the Annan Plan.

I do not think that the characteristics of the Annan Plan which made it unacceptable to the majority of Greek Cypriots were related to failures of either the PASOK foreign policy of Greece or with European Union policies. These policies were very successful and among other achievements, contributed to altering the Ecevit government Turkish foreign policy ("The Cyprus problem was solved in 1974", "If Cyprus joins the EU our reaction will have no limits") to the Erdogan foreign policy. (These are not sufficiently distinguished in the book). The Annan provisions which were judged unacceptable by the Greek Cypriot majority have their origins rather in the cruel and unnatural conditions in which constitutional negotiations for a solution of the Cyprus problem took place since 1974, and which formed the antecedents of the Plan.

Finally I should mention that the book is well written and easy to read and avoids the jargon and illegibility which sometimes seems to accompany writing with claims to scientific status.

**Michalis Attalides**