

# The Political Process in Cyprus and the Day After the Referendum

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The internal political process in Cyprus in the aftermath of the referendum in which Turkish Cypriots voted 'yes' by majority and Greek Cypriots voted 'no' by an overwhelming majority to the adoption of the Annan plan, is characterised by a lack of clarity. The lack of clarity expresses itself among Greek Cypriots through a postponement of decisions, and a failure to present clear alternatives before the body politic. The reasons for this lack of clarity may be partially related to the conduct of the referendum campaign among the Greek Cypriot community.

### The Referendum Debate

The debate before the referendum was extensive and open. But it did not have all the characteristics of an important public debate in a mature democracy, and it did not produce a quality of debate which is ideally needed when such a big issue with so many implications needs to arrive at national policy decisions. The public dialogue did not crystallise on a number of core issues. The voter was confronted with an enormous legal document and discussions on a whole range of issues, sometimes with changing priorities on the part of prime participants. So even those who were in favour of a 'no' vote did not form a consensus view of the central points that invited the 'no'. As one of the participants in the 'no' campaign perspicaciously pointed out early in the campaign, there would be a large 'no' vote due to 'converging dissatisfactions'.

Secondly, the 'yes' and the 'no' campaigns were both one-sided, each side pointing exclusively to positive or negative elements in the Annan plan respectively, thus giving people only a polarised alternative and a catastrophic view of the future if their position did not prevail. It has been correctly pointed out that one of the prerequisites of a mature democracy is the dissemination of the belief among the citizenry that even if the other side wins the country will survive. The country did survive, but mutually exclusive sentiments of relief or a sense of doom are not a fertile basis for a political dialogue.

Thirdly, it was not clear as to which rules the campaign was run by. Very small parties, and initially marginal points of view seemed to get equal time in the mass media with large parties. The sources of financing of the campaigns were not made public, though it was clear that the 'no' campaign was well financed and

professionally run. And distributors of certificates of patriotism, including the Government and most of the Church, allocated all of them to the 'no' position.

Finally, the campaign took on elements of a 'plebiscitarian' rather than liberal constitutionalist democracy with the role of parties and their constituent organs as formulators of comprehensive political propositions to be put before the public being pushed aside in *favour* of more or less charismatic direct appeals to patriotism. The President of the Republic for example, in asking *voters* to look not to their parties, but to history for guidance on whether to vote 'yes' or 'no' probably gave many voters the impression that he was identifying a 'no' vote in the referendum with the historic 'no' which expressed the resistance of Greece to the fascist attack against its territory in 1940. The two large parties which have historically represented almost 70% of the voters and were traditionally strong supporters of a compromise solution received electoral blows, which led their leaders towards caution.

Also the very limited time period available for the campaign did not contribute to the maturity of the outcome, and both campaigns left out crucial elements which might be thought of as essential ingredients for crystallised, comprehensive and clearly elaborated positions.

The 'yes' campaign emphasized elements of the fairness of the compromise contained in the Annan Plan, and the good will evident among ordinary people of both communities which would help the new state of affairs to function smoothly. The second element is undoubtedly valid. But crucial structural elements which are unlikely to be overcome merely by 'good will' were left out of this position, including the empirically known factors militating against the stability of a federation of two ethnically different components, (actually this aspect of a proposed federation in Cyprus has never been the object of extensive public discussion), the workability of the proposed solution, the economic dimension, and the possible uncertainties that might have been generated through a negative development of relations between Turkey and the EU.

The 'no' campaign heavily emphasised the unfairness of the Annan Plan for the Greek Cypriots, the loss of control of the Greek Cypriots *over* an internationally recognised state, the Republic of Cyprus, and exaggerated the clearly evident economic disadvantages of a solution while obscuring the advantages.

But where both campaigns were remarkable was in the assumptions and attitudes to the outside world. The catastrophe that the 'yes' campaign envisaged was the terminal partition of Cyprus in the event of a 'no' vote, largely overlooking the impetus to the country's integration that could come from the integration of Cyprus into the EU and the evolving relation of the Greek Cypriots to the Turkish

Cypriot community. The 'no' campaign concentrated on the provisions of the Annan plan and almost ignored the fact that it was the Cyprus Government which had invited the reactivation of the mediation efforts of Kofi Annan, on the basis of his plan, as well as the fact that the whole strategy of the Greek Cypriots and the Government of Cyprus since 1974 had been to involve the international community in an effort to induce Turkey to accept a solution of the Cyprus problem based on a bizonal, bicomunal federation.

### **Greek Cypriot Introversion?**

The campaigns thus contributed to a kind of introversion. The 'no' campaign tended to argue that the position of Cyprus would be much stronger after accession to the European Union, as a full member. This position, simply stated, does not take into account that the European Union stands for many things over and above its legal framework, and that the influence of Cyprus internationally had for the past thirty years derived from its positive relation to the international community and particularly in the last ten from its evolving status as an EU candidate country in good standing, and not merely from the undoubted legitimacy in international law of its claims. The 'yes' campaign contributed to an image of an indifferent or even vengeful international community, which would allow no more opportunities for a solution and lead to the permanent partition of Cyprus in the case of a 'no' vote. (The United Nations Secretariat and some governments through some of their statements tended to encourage this view.)

Neither of these attitudes were based on the pragmatic realities of European and international life: That legitimacy and legality are extremely important in international life, but that their applicability in reality is tempered by power politics, and that it is much harder for a small and weak country to impose its legitimacy than for a large and powerful country. Also, that a harassed European Union with an enormous agenda before it of a new Constitution, new member states, questions about further enlargement and serious economic problems, would be more understanding to reasoned and accommodating Cypriot political positions than to purely legal ones. And that accession to the European Union would introduce into Cypriot politics a 'third' new area of political reality, and new actors, the institutions of the EU and the other member governments.

The projection of the pre-referendum polarisation of 'no' and 'yes' views into the post referendum period expresses itself as a situation where many of those who said 'yes' see everything as being black and many of those who said 'no' seeing hardly any problems at all, compared to the doom that would have befallen Cyprus in the case of a 'yes' vote. This polarisation is inaccurate by omission, unproductive for dealing with the current situation, and only serves the retroactive justification of

positions previously taken. Moreover, the lack of clarities of the referendum campaign remain in the public mind, as well as the stereotyped attitudes as to patriotic or non-patriotic positions. Clearly, the campaign did not clarify precisely what is wrong with the Annan plan, or conversely what precise modifications would make it acceptable. All political actors seem reluctant to deal with this issue. In any event a case can be made that there is a whole dimension left out of discussion, which is that of how the international and European environment was handled during the run-up to the referendum and what should be done in this respect now. One might conclude that the referendum has left the Greek Cypriot community with a high degree of popular support for the result and for the Government, but with few policies and clearly defined short and long term goals in the public domain, or even a worked out understanding of the international situation the country now finds itself in.

### **Facts of the Day After**

An approach to analysis of the current situation would have to take stock of the following:

The two communities have had widely different political experiences in the past. Turkish Cypriot orthodox belief was that they had been liberated in 1974 from Greek Cypriot oppression and marginalisation. But this 'liberation' has long ago turned, in the view of many Turkish Cypriots, into oppression and marginalisation by the apparent liberator, Turkey. That is why to many of them the Annan plan could seem a prospect of liberation, economic progress and self-administration.

For Greek Cypriots, the Turkish invasion of 1974 was a catastrophe which resulted in loss of ancestral homes and territories, the division of their country, and the occupation of precisely the part of it now inhabited by Turkish Cypriots, by Turkish troops. Through their very efforts to survive and overcome the consequences of the invasion in 1974, they gained pride in their state, the Republic of Cyprus, its international effectiveness, and its internal adequacy in assuring liberty, democracy and prosperity. Their relation with Greece, now a mature and successful democracy, had become one of mutually respectful cooperation.

At the same time the internationally mediated negotiations to solve the Cyprus problem, had created a kind of *sui generis* Cyprus problem *acquis* based on successive compromises between the Turkish demands for division, separate sovereignties, equality between the communities, and maintenance of the strategic demands of the Turkish military for control of Cyprus, and the Greek Cypriot positions for a single state with a single sovereignty, normal democratic provisions, restoration of violated human rights and demilitarisation. Many of the results of this

compromise were incorporated in the Annan plan, and included characteristics such as 'bizonality' (or in the final version of the plan, 'reinforced bizonality'), 'sovereign exercise of their functions by each of the constituent states', permanent stationing of Turkish troops (and Greek ones, which no one had demanded), and labyrinthine and phased provisions for partial restoration of human rights. The complexity and phasing of arrangements reinforced doubts as to whether in fact there would be implementation. Doubts could be clearly expressed about the workability of such a solution without a framework of economic interdependence, ideological legitimisation and sustained political movements supporting its implementation on the ground.

Many of the provisions contained in the Annan plan appeared even more irksome to Greek Cypriots in view of their experiences and involvement with the Council of Europe and with the European Union and with the seriousness which the political process had approached issues of democratic legitimacy over the past thirty years. To many Greek Cypriots the Annan Plan seemed to threaten these very principles as well as the well functioning state the Greek Cypriots had created for themselves in the face of great adversity. So any deficiencies in the Greek Cypriot political process leading up to the referendum do not fully explain the size of the 'no' vote. Characteristics of the plan itself, the introduction of elements for the satisfaction of the Turkish military rather than of the Turkish Cypriots, and of the forced negotiation process which led up to its finalisation, also contributed.

But the clear satisfaction with the plan expressed by Turkey, and the positive referendum result among the Turkish Cypriot community, seems to have immediately absolved Ankara in the eyes of the international community from thirty years of misbehaviour. Turkey has had much pressure lifted, by being released from the condition of a Cyprus solution before getting a date for EU accession negotiations, even as far as Greece is concerned. If Cyprus were to block the decision on Turkey getting a date because the Cyprus problem is unsolved, it would have to carry all the weight on its own.

The Turkish Cypriots, whose mobilisations against the status quo and the Denktash regime, carry much credit for lending hopefulness to a previously frozen situation are now disappointed and many of them feel that the Greek Cypriots have rejected reunification.

The Cyprus Government and the Greek Cypriots have lost the moral high ground and the capital of good will accumulated with the international community from repeatedly being the side that had shown political will for solving the Cyprus problem. It would be extremely regretful and highly unjust if European and transatlantic decision makers, having for years tolerated absolutely negative and disruptive behaviour by Mr. Denktash and Ankara, would now go overboard with the

'measures to bring Turkish Cypriots out of isolation' and go into measures that would actually jeopardise the future chances of reunification. But on the current evidence, this cannot unfortunately be excluded.

It is inevitable that it will appear to Greek Cypriots that there is an element of retribution for their 'no' vote in the positions taken by the international community. That this attitude is retributive might be concluded from the monolithic ethnic approaches on this. All Turkish Cypriots, including the 40% who voted 'no' are to be praised and rewarded, while all Greek Cypriots, including the 24% who voted 'yes' (and who in absolute numbers are more than the Turkish Cypriots who voted 'yes'), are to be regarded as meriting blame.

The EU Commission has proposed measures for "bringing Turkish Cypriots out of isolation", some of which are not provided for in the Accession Treaty of Cyprus, and which use a legal basis which is not that for member states, but for third countries. The measures as a whole might indeed bring Turkish Cypriots out of isolation, and to the degree that they succeed in elevating the Turkish Cypriots' standard of living, this would be a welcome result. One part of these measures would, if implemented, also have the tendency to convert the occupied part of Cyprus into a new kind of entity, "an autonomous region of the European Union" as it was described by one member of a Brussels think tank. To this extent they would seem to have a political purpose as an attempt to direct the 'stick' part of a 'carrot and stick' policy towards the Cyprus Government and the Greek Cypriot community, with the aim of directing them to a change in policy.

As apparently punitive measures, they may prove to be counterproductive in their political impact on the Greek Cypriot community, particularly as they offer an opportunity for some politicians to direct dissatisfaction towards the outside world. At the same time, direct diplomatic and trade relations with the northern part of Cyprus could have further, probably unintended consequences. The Turkish Cypriot leaders, treated for the first time as political leaders acceptable in Foreign Ministries might actually be encouraged to indulge in and bask in this 'semi-recognition'. What interests will be generated by direct trade relations? Might they not build up separatism? Might it not also be concluded by the Turkish Cypriot elite that a path leading elsewhere than the company of the rest of Cyprus or with the EU might be conceivable? These are potential developments leading towards the normalisation or reinforcement of partition.

### **Need for Policy**

These are not pleasant facts to contemplate. Nor is the prospect that the Cyprus Government might enter into a situation of confrontation with European partners,

the Turkish Cypriots, and others, over measures that are being promoted. Yet the approaches and political balances developed during the referendum campaign seem to inhibit the Cypriot political elite from effectively confronting these dangers. If indeed the Cyprus Government has a policy and a strategy on these issues, other than legal measures, it is being secretive about it. But secretiveness is only an effective strategy in international relations for those who can hope to effectively act in pursuit of their interests on their own on the international scene. A small country like Cyprus can neither resign itself to a retributive stance by its partners nor hope to achieve its aims without winning them over. And it can not hope to do so without sharing its aims, aspirations and policies. Diplomatically effective and politically persuasive means to convince the international community and the Turkish Cypriots about what is constructive and what is destructive of future prospects need to be deployed. This involves open dialogue within Cyprus and with those Governments which can influence developments. There is a need to form a meaningful and complete strategy combining positions about the desired outcome and the means to be utilised in reaching the desired outcome, as well as the role of third parties and the kind of relations that Cyprus needs to develop with them.

Being a member of the European Union is extremely important and pregnant with potential. But this potential is not realisable as an automatic outcome of the legal fact of membership. The legal fact of membership needs to be complemented with the full practice of membership in all fields of EU activity. The fruition of the legal fact of membership will only come through building up political capital for Cyprus within the EU, forming internal alliances, or simply put, making friends and influencing people. Cypriots have to become active, knowledgeable and constructive members of the EU, contributing to issues of European interest at the same time as safeguarding Cypriot national interests. And they must once more begin to convincingly explain to their European partners not just about why they voted 'no', but also about their current and future aims and how they plan to achieve them.

It is remarkable that though all sizeable political forces agree that the Annan Plan would be the basis of any further efforts to solve the Cyprus problem, they abstain from a public debate on what needs to be changed in the plan to make it acceptable. The argument that such a debate would weaken the Greek Cypriot negotiating position might have some weight. (Though not as much as it might appear to have at first sight, since documents on all aspects of the Plan were submitted to the UN negotiators, and presumably some part of this was conveyed to the Turkish side as part of the negotiation process). But if no such public debate takes place how is a consensus to be formed? And how will Cyprus acquire allies in its effort? A similar kind of inactivity seems to be in danger of establishing itself to that which failed to politically utilise the time between the Hague negotiations in

March 2003 and the summons of Kofi Annan to New York in the early part of 2004.

After all Cyprus is neither a military nor an economic superpower and its prestige and effectiveness internationally mainly come from the persuasiveness and constructiveness of its positions and policies and the rationality of its arguments. These are the means which Cyprus deployed, and which, together with the highly successful foreign policy of Greece, overcame the initially heavy odds against it becoming a member of the European Union.

### **Engaging with the New Situation**

If Cyprus deploys a successful effort in this direction, it will be in a position to engage creatively with the positive elements in the new situation:

Mr. Denktash seems to have been moved to the sidelines, and the Turkish Cypriot leaders seem not to embrace for the time being his aim for a separate state, as this would take them further from the major aim of joining the EU. It is not clear how long this will last, and whether other alternatives to the unity of Cyprus and EU integration might present themselves to the Turkish Cypriot leaders.

The Cyprus Government's, the United Nation's, and Turkey's thinking on possible efforts before the next important date, which is December, are not yet fully publicly clarified. But if Turkey gets a date for the beginning of her accession negotiations by the end of the year, and that has never only depended on Cyprus, or the Cyprus problem, but also on the thinking in other European Union capitals, Cyprus would, after that date, be in a more predictable environment.

The biggest risk that the Greek Cypriots and Cyprus ran from a possible 'yes' vote would have been from a conceivable subsequent refusal of the EU to fix a date for accession negotiations with Turkey. Such an eventuality might have set in train internal processes in Turkey that could have made the implementation of a Cyprus settlement unworkable. In general we shall, after the fixing of a date for the beginning of accession negotiations, be in a more predictable situation. With the EU measures, the standard of living of Turkish Cypriots will probably be rising. (Though the recent building boom on Greek Cypriot owned properties in the occupied area worryingly indicates that not all forms of economic development are conducive to a solution.) We may see the development of a more transparent and democratic political process within the Turkish Cypriot community, and perhaps more open intercommunal discussion involving more of civil society. These and other developments could make the prospect of the solution transition less daunting and involving less threatening discontinuity.

Such developments would infuse a more endogenous element to the political



process in relation to a possible solution. A solution coming from the 'outside' would always have some problem of legitimation. But this does not mean that the Greek Cypriot political process can successfully carry off an introspective approach where internal cohesion and consensus appear to be all that is necessary in handling the outside world in terms of the formalities of the legal situation. A real intracommunal and intercommunal dialogue needs to take place on the issues before us. The dialogue must take into account ideas and policies which keep both the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities engaged on compromise terms for the reunification of Cyprus and are such that they engage the attention and understanding of the outside world, and particularly of our European partners.

Questions of land, money, power and bones have in the end to be settled if a longstanding political dispute is to be resolved, to slightly misquote a South African poet. It is likely that many of the solutions will be those identified in the Annan Plan. But these solutions will probably only appear as truly valid ones in a third political space, other than separate Greek and Turkish Cypriot politics, or the corridors of Buergenstock.

Cyprus has, through intensive efforts, reached this 'third space'. It is the political space of the European Union. The European Union does of course, as has been frequently pointed out, incorporate an *acquis* guaranteeing basic freedoms and rights. But it also incorporates a political culture emanating from its specific historical dynamic which brought peace and prosperity to the continent after centuries of nationalist strife. In this political culture nationality and cultural diversity are sacred, but nationalism is rejected. Basic citizens' rights are paramount and continually widened, but compromise is also valued. Democratic values are a *sine qua non*, but democracy is not always interpreted as strict numerical proportionality. The effort to reach unity in diversity leads to a situation where exclusion, xenophobia and prejudice are combated and the normal conduct of business involves accommodation of opposing views, painstaking efforts towards consensus, pragmatic implementation of principles, and tolerance of cumbersome decision making processes.

All this does not obviate the necessity of a resolution of the issues of land, money, power and bones. But it may give a chance for them to be negotiated in a new political context in which reconciliation, forgiveness and reunification are bestowed their proper value and weight.

In the process of negotiation with the EU presumably Turkey and the Europeans would bear in mind the continued presence of troops and settlers in Cyprus, and the unresolved territorial, refugee, property and constitutional issues, as well as the continuing need to eliminate military influence in Turkish politics.

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These issues have not disappeared because there was a 'no' result in the Greek Cypriot referendum.

The post referendum situation in Cyprus does not justify elation. But nor does it inevitably justify predictions of doom. New forces have been set in train that could unfortunately contribute to the normalisation of partition. There are also opportunities for a new development towards a social, political and economic action network favouring integration. I will hazard the judgment that in the determination of which forces will predominate the Cypriot political elites of the two communities respectively have a greater role, than they did in the past. What is uncertain is how positively and effectively the Cypriot political elites will utilise this political conjuncture.