

Cyprus 2004: Curtains for the Annan Plan



'OXI' means 'no'. 75.8% of Greek Cypriots turned down the Annan Plan on 24th April 2004

The results of the referendums on the Annan Plan¹ for reunification of the island of Cyprus held on 24th April, 2004 turned out much as expected. Voters in the south voted overwhelmingly 'No' while a majority in the north said 'Yes'. As the campaign to sell the Annan Plan intensified, the international community's former disapproval for TRNC vanished and the new 'bad boys' became those politicians in the south, Cyprus's president Tassos Papadopolous, in particular who had urged his countrymen to vote no.

However, despite promises of increased aid and cooperation for the Turkish Cypriots from the US and Europe, there is a limited room for manoeuvre as TRNC is an unrecognised state and there is no sign, as this report is written, of any change in its status. Similarly, it is difficult to see how the Republic of Cyprus can be effectively 'punished' as it is a economically successful state and now a member of the EU.

This does not mean that attempts are not being made to tarnish Cyprus's reputation both economically and politically. Small-minded snubs were directed at Mr. Papadopolous who attended a European gathering days later and, again, television commentary referred to the president's pariah status during the celebrations held in Dublin on 1st May to welcome the 10 new accession countries. Despite recently declared support for the government in TRNC disapproval of its president, Rauf Denktas remains undimmed.

In April 2003, Denktas had refused to put the Annan Plan to a popular referendum in TRNC, kicking it into the long grass, so to speak, until the president was effectively sidelined when his supporters lost parliamentary elections in December, 2003. He also refused to attend last minute talks held in Burgenstock, Switzerland at the end of March 2004 which came up with the fifth and final version of the settlement agreement. He, too, urged his countrymen to oppose the Annan plan. However, whereas the republic's 'big brother', Greece, took a hands-off approach to the issue, Ankara waded in and more or less demanded a 'yes' vote from the inhabitants of TRNC. Turkey's prime minister, Recep Tayip Erdogan had been assured favourable treatment when the country's application to begin accession talks with the EU comes up for debate later in the year if he delivered the right result at the 24th April referendum.

Over the past 18 months, BHHRG has followed the agonising debates that led up to the collapse of the Annan Plan. During that time, they have visited both parts of the island of Cyprus to take the temperature of public opinion. In particular, they have concentrated on developments in the north where, following large demonstrations in January and February 2003, public opinion has shifted away from Mr. Denktas's rejectionist stance to a starry-eyed belief in the benefits of a negotiated settlement. The Group monitored the parliamentary elections in December 2003 in which the opposition won although parties associated with Denktas performed far better than anticipated. However, afterwards, Mr. Erdogan increased pressure on the north to deliver a 'yes' vote in the April referendum. As the state media in

¹ http://unannanplan.agrino.org/Annan_Plan_MARCH_30_2004.pdf

TRNC was now in the hands of the Annan Plan's supporters, more waverers were won over in the five months leading up to the vote.

The Group's report, **Bitter Lemons, the search for a solution to the Cyprus problem** published in July 2003² predicted that the major difficulty facing the Plan's adoption lay in the hostile attitude of the inhabitants of the southern part of the island. The bottom line for the Greek Cypriots is the return of all their land and property which was expropriated by the Turkish Cypriots when they were expelled from the north of the island in 1974. They see no need to compromise as they consider that they have nothing to gain – they are prosperous as things are on top of which, they are now members of the EU.

However, commentators regularly predicted that Mr. Denktaş was the stumbling block and little thought was given to the overwhelmingly rejectionist atmosphere in the south. The international community now faces a delicate balancing act whereby punishing the Greek Cypriots presents formidable problems from an influential and affluent diaspora as well as an unmentioned player – Russia. There is a significant body of Russian investors in Cyprus and the Russian Federation (which likely opposed the plan too) vetoed a UN resolution urging the parties to adopt it in the days leading up to the referendum, the first time the country had used its veto since 1994.

Whatever transpires it is unlikely that matters will be allowed to rest there. There is talk of a new Annan, although the UN is being coy about any further involvement in the island's affairs. In the absence of an agreement, Turkey is still likely to be rewarded with an invitation to begin negotiations on EU entry. Whether or not this benefits the people of Northern Cyprus remains to be seen. Despite all the pats on the back, TRNC is likely to remain marooned in isolation dependent on Turkey whose main concern now seems to be humouring the EU and US rather than supporting its kinsmen in Cyprus.

The Lead up to the referendum; parliamentary elections in TRNC 14th December, 2003

The international community's central ambition was to have the Annan Plan accepted and Cyprus reunited before 1st May, 2004. If this didn't come about, only the internationally recognised southern part of the island, would enter the EU on that date with 9 other accession countries. Since the plan was put forward, most efforts had been spent wooing the Turkish Cypriots – successfully as it turned out. Large demonstrations took place in January and February 2003 sending a signal to President Denktaş and his government that people wanted change. This came about on 14th December 2003 when the leading opposition party, the Republican Turkish Party (CTP), which supported the plan, narrowly won the parliamentary elections.

During 2003, BHHRG's representatives visited TRNC on several occasions including a visit in November to monitor the election campaign followed by observation of the poll itself. Finally, on 24th April 2004, the Group covered the conduct of the referendum in both the south and north of the island.

Perhaps the most significant recent development in Cyprus was President Denktaş's decision on 23rd April, 2003 to open the border (the Green Line) allowing both Greek and Turkish Cypriots to travel to each others' part of the island. This move made, no doubt, in response to internal pressures was still clever. In the following months, thousands of Greek Cypriots visited their former homes and became reacquainted with places they had last seen nearly 30 years ago. Many returned disillusioned and were confirmed in their belief that life for them was better in the republic proper meaning they were happy to stick with the status quo. Many wondered who would pay for the elaborate arrangements contained in the Annan Plan and, having never depended on hand outs themselves, they distrusted the plan's talk of international financial assistance to bring about its fulfilment.

² See, "Bitter Lemons: the search for a solution to the Cyprus problem" www.oscewatch.org

Denktaş himself continued to be a figure of hate both for the politically correct and the major international players. A particularly splanetic example of this appeared in *The Guardian* in May 2004 where the author talked of the “breathtaking cynicism of the Dentaş regime”. The president himself was referred to as “a sectarian despot” who had “presided over the social and economic collapse of the north”.³ As parliamentary elections approached in TRNC, the EU commissioner for enlargement, Guenther Verheugen, made no secret of the organization’s desire for an opposition win and the sidelining of Mr Denktaş, even going as far as saying that “meetings are taking place in New York, Athens, Ankara, Nicosia and Brussels and decisions are being made without informing Denktaş”,⁴ a breathtaking lapse in diplomatic courtesies.

In November 2003, BHHRG’s representative visited TRNC on a pre-election mission. He held meetings with President Denktas; Chief Justice Taner Erginel (who is also the head of the High Election Board); Mrs Narin Ferdi Şefik, President of the Nicosia District Court and of the Nicosia District Electoral Commission; Ali Erel, the leader of the opposition “Solution and European Union Party”; and Vedat Celik, a former foreign minister of the TRNC. As the titles of the two judges indicate, elections in North Cyprus are run directly by the judiciary. The judiciary in the Turkish Republic, moreover, is structurally totally independent of the government, there being no Minister of Justice or equivalent figure in the Turkish Cypriot government. There are thus at least prima facie reasons for believing that the electoral authorities are independent. Indeed, the Chief Justice even censured President Denktaş himself for breaking the rules on electioneering when he used a presidential speech to attack the opposition.

BHHRG detected a strong desire among the senior election officials to ensure a fair poll in the face of ongoing criticism, especially concerning the validity of the election registers. The opposition alleged that settlers from Turkey were being added to the electoral roles in contravention of the law but obviously with the intention of bolstering support for the pro-Denktaş forces. These complaints were somewhat bizarre because no such problems had been raised about the (same) electoral register used at the recent local elections, when the opposition won power in several urban centres. Therefore, BHHRG sought to examine some of the process of electoral registration.

The election law in North Cyprus is structured so as to take account of the fact that this is a territory in which a large number of people have houses which are not their normal residence. Such people include holidaymakers and retirees, but also Turkish Cypriots and Turks who in fact spend most of their time in Turkey. The law requires three years continuous residence in order to obtain resident status. In order to be able to vote, a person must have both citizenship and resident status. This latter requires either a business or a home in North Cyprus. There are also checks carried out on the number of times a person enters and leaves the territory, to ensure that people are not merely pretending to live in North Cyprus. To have resident status you must be registered in the electoral district where you live. There are also conditions for being a candidate at an election: a person must have citizenship and three years’ continuous residence in the period prior to the election.

Taken together, these laws in fact make it quite difficult for people who have come to work in Cyprus - Turks, say – to obtain voting rights. Turkish Cypriots who live abroad cannot vote either. So the accusation of a sudden influx of Turkish settlers onto the voting list seems difficult to justify. The law was even used to prevent a Turkish Cypriot man from standing as a candidate who had distinguished himself so heroically in the war of 1974 that there is a statue to him in Famagusta. Indeed, there are numerous Turkish settlers who have resident status but not citizenship. In any case, there is no evidence to support the claim that Turkish settlers vote for the government in greater numbers than the Turkish Cypriots. Because of the legal restrictions placed on them, and because of the difficulty they have in obtaining titles to their properties, settlers from Turkey are often quite hostile to the government.

³ Fiachra Gibbons ‘We know we can live together’ *The Guardian*, 1st May, 2004, www.guardian.co.uk

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<http://www.trncinfo.com/TANITMADAIRESI/ARSIV2003/ENGLISHarcive/DECEMBER/041203.htm>

Moreover, the scale of the registration issue seemed to be very small. On its visit to the Nicosia District Electoral Commission, BHHRG's representative was impressed by the diligence and professionalism of the judges and staff compiling the lists. Applications to have one's name put on the electoral register closed on 12th November at 6.30 pm. Of the 43,833 voters on the register in Nicosia (Lefkosa) the District authorities accepted 157 objections: people who had either died or moved out of the district were removed from the list. 108 objections originally lodged were withdrawn, of which 80 were because they live in Nicosia but in a different electoral district from the one in which they were registered. The authorities received 1,533 applications to be put on the register, mostly from people who had recently moved into Nicosia from other parts of TRNC. These figures indicate that the suggestion of a large scale rigging of the electoral register is difficult to justify.

BHHRG also talked to the local Turkish Cypriot opposition. Mr. Ali Erel, for instance, who heads the recently-created pro-EU and pro-solution party was abrasive and evasive during his interview with BHHRG's representative. He refused to say how many members his political party had (he said he did not know the figure); he refused to say what the budget of his party was; and he said that he did not know whether TRNC law forbids or allows the funding of political parties from foreign sources. (It does not forbid it, as BHHRG was able later to ascertain.) These latter questions were put because the government alleges that Mr. Erel has received significant sums of money from the European Union itself, which backs the Annan plan, an allegation Mr. Erel denies. But his refusal to say what the budget is for his party, where the money comes from, or who his members are, indicates that he has a very inadequate understanding of the need for transparency in the democratic process. By the same token, the opposition newspaper, *Afrika*, is run by Sener Levent, a lifelong Communist and supporter of the Soviet Union. He is entitled to his opinions, of course, but it is odd, to say the least, that a man whose web sites denounce the "CIA-backed invasion of Cyprus by Turkey" (because it prevented Cyprus becoming Communist) now embraces wholeheartedly the American position.

Parliamentary Election in TRNC



Poster for the ultra-nationalist Turkish 'Grey Wolves', who came from the mainland to oppose the plan causing minor disturbances. This was probably a provocation. Denktas (featured here) has no connection with the Wolves.

BHHRG sent observers to monitor the conduct of the election itself held on 14th December 2003. As TRNC is an unrecognised state, official monitoring organizations like the OSCE as well as EU bodies were unwilling to send representatives to observe the poll. However, a group from the University of Oslo had been in TRNC for several months monitoring the

campaign and a small number of German SPD MPs (including a member of Turkish Cypriot origin) attended the election itself. There were also two British observers, acknowledged supporters of TRNC.

7 parties contested the 50 seats in TRNC's parliament. Elections are conducted by a complicated system of proportional representation which allows not only a vote for the bloc but also a preferential vote which can be for candidates from other parties. There is a 5% threshold for entry into parliament. By polling day, 141,479 electors had been registered.

For many years, TRNC had been governed by a coalition led by the National Unity Party (UBP). The party had often been at odds with President Denktaş, but basically supported TRNC sovereignty. It also later opposed the Annan Plan. The leading opposition party the Republican Turkish Party (CTP) is, effectively, the reformed Communist Party and as such has enjoyed good relations with AKEL, the Communist Party in the Greek south. CTP's leader, Mehmet Ali Talat, was courted by the West and even dispatched to study international relations at TRNC's Near Eastern University, presumably to acquaint him with the niceties of new world order thinking.

The parties with the next layer of support were the Peace and Democracy Party (BDH), the most EU enthusiastic party in the country, and the Democratic Party (DP) a milder version of the UBP, led by Denktaş's son, Serdar which had been in coalition with the UBP in the outgoing government. The DP remained somewhat non-committal in its stand on Annan and presented itself as open to negotiation while maintaining an underlying hostility to the plan. Smaller parties like the Solution and EU Party (CABP) of Ari Erel failed to surmount the 5% threshold for entry into parliament as did the Cyprus Justice Party (KAP) and the Nationalist Peace Party (MBP). It is probably true to say that some of these parties managed to split the vote – cutting into support for the UBP in particular. Both the KAP and MBP were opposed to the Annan Plan.

The streets of Lefkosa overflowed with symbols and posters emblazoned with the EU stars - the BDH had the most extravagant EU campaign. Its offices, just around the corner from the British Council in Lefkosa's 'Mayfair' district lent credence to the rumours that the UK had provided funding to the party – the EU itself had been giving large sums of money to Mr. Erel's local Chamber of Commerce for some time. However, the foreign funding of political parties is not illegal under TRNC law.

Most of the media was pro-unification led by Asil Nadir's Kibris media group comprising TRNC's leading newspaper, *Kibris* and Kibris television as well as Genc TV. However, at the time of the election state television was in the hands of the UBP/DP coalition government which opposed the Annan Plan. Although all parties agreed that they had been provided with the requisite time for their political advertisements, the opposition complained about state TV's bias in the amount of time given in discussion and news programmes to the anti-Annan forces.

While agreeing that the balance had been restored by Kibris and Genc TV's programming, CTP spokesmen still complained that these stations could not be received in all parts of the island – for example, on the Karpas peninsula. At a post election press meeting with Chief Justice Erginel Norwegian monitors from Oslo University refused to include the input of the private media in their assessment of the balance of pre-election media coverage. TRNC state TV is less slick and much less popular with the public than Mr. Nadir's Kibris and Genc stations meaning that the latter are more effective tools of propaganda. However, these experts claimed that their 'mandates' only allowed them to monitor state TV.

BHHRG observed the voting in (Girne) Kyrenia, Güzelyurt (Morphy), (Lapta) Lapithos and Lefkosa. They also interviewed the Chief Justice Erginel, head of the High Election Board and party activists, including representatives of the victorious TCP party. Polling took place without problems and there were no complaints on the ground about the voter registers despite criticism from opposition activists during the pre-election period. Although the election was about the general political orientation of TRNC, most voters accepted the *sous texte* –

that they were indirectly endorsing (or rejecting) the Annan Plan which would lead to the island's reunification and their membership of the EU.

BHHRG was especially interested in how the plan might be received in Güzelyurt which is targeted for wholesale return of its former Greek population and the resettlement of its present population. The town - Morphu in Greek - is home to a major orthodox church, St. Mamas, but has fallen on hard times and is now populated by large numbers of settlers from mainland Turkey. Many of these people told BHHRG that they approved of the plan and were happy to move – of course, they assumed that they would be provided with adequate, ideally better, accommodation by international donations from the bodies like the EU.

As the results were broadcast on a large screen set up in Ataturk Square, the fortunes of the leading parties swung perilously from one to the other. By midnight, it appeared that the CTP had won the largest share of the vote. But, when the count was completed, including the preferential votes, the final result showed a dead heat with no overall winner. Many people, who voted for the opposition had probably expressed their unease by giving their preferential vote to the parties supporting Denktaş.

This meant that the opposition's victory was underwhelming, to say the least. The result was a dead heat in terms of the number of seats won but the CTP gained the highest percentage of the votes (35.18%). The former governing parties' strong showing meant that Talat's ambition to remove Denktaş as negotiator on the Plan was not going to be straightforward and that support for the Annan solution was much less robust than previously thought. However, Talat was appointed prime minister and with the government now in the hands of pro-settlement parties the state media's previous opposition to the plan ended. This was to be a significant development when it came to the referendum in April 2004.

Talat's position at home was made less complicated by the position taken by Ankara. Turkish prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, had already voiced his support for a negotiated solution which was seen as a condition for the fulfilment of Turkey's long term ambition – membership of the EU. In the months following the 2003 poll, Erdogan expressed support for the Annan Plan even managing to freeze out Denktaş as TRNC's main negotiator.

Turkey and TRNC



Rejectionists in TRNC still revere the founder of the Turkish state, Kemal Ataturk.

Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in November, 2002 two months before the first demonstrations against Rauf Denktaş's policies took place in TRNC. Turkey's prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and his new foreign minister, Abdullah Gul are perceived to be loyal friends of the international community. They supported (albeit discretely) the US invasion of Iraq and approved the dispatch of Turkish troops to help the coalition there, something eventually thwarted by lack of support from parliament. A solid commitment to pursue EU membership has gone in tandem with their pro-US policies.

For as long as anyone can remember, European institutions have been remorselessly critical of Turkey's human rights record, in particular the country's perceived over-militarization and persecution of its large Kurdish minority. The European Court of Human Rights has also penalized Turkey in numerous judgements condemning the depredations suffered by Greek Cypriots during the 1974 invasion and awarding large sums in compensation for the loss of property.⁵

For the past 18 months, Ankara has sought to assuage many of these criticisms. Firstly, by putting Turkey's powerful military under civilian control and by reducing its power in the national security council. Kurdish rights are being addressed by allowing the use of the language in certain areas of public life, including the media and money had been made available for Kurdish language teaching. On 9th June 2004, Kurdish activist, Leyla Zana and 3 others were released from jail after a long campaign by Amnesty International and other international bodies.⁶ Finally, Erdogan and Gul have provided forceful backing to the proponents of the Annan Plan in TRNC, again, fulfilling the demands of both the EU and US.

It should be added, that Turkey is also following many of the well-trodden policies of the IMF in an attempt to curb inflation and regulate corruption. "Following the financial crisis the International Monetary Fund imposed a "reform programme" on Turkey, which only served to worsen widespread poverty and already high levels of unemployment. Contrary to its election promises, when it spoke of standing up to the IMF, since taking over government the AKP has in fact pursued and implemented barely unchanged the IMF programme of privatisation, deregulation, price and tax increases for consumers and cuts in grants for small farmers".⁷

BHHRG was in Turkey during local elections held on 4th April, 2004. Although the AKP is supposedly highly popular, it didn't do as well as predicted by opinion polls, gaining only 42% of the vote in what, for Turkey, was a low turnout of 76.14%. This was the lowest level of participation in nationwide elections since 1984 - in the 1994 local elections, for example, the turnout was 92.2%. The party took 58 out of 81 municipalities but lost to the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) in Turkey's second largest city, Izmir. Economic reforms have hit the poorer sections of society with tourism in 2004 likely to suffer after terrorist attacks in March and high VAT imposed on luxury goods, like wine. Proposals to send troops to Iraq are still on the table and it has been suggested that were parliament to refuse to approve a deployment if asked a second time it could lead to the government's downfall.

There is still substantial grass roots support for TRNC sovereignty in Turkey, but as the major media outlets support the Annan Plan and integration into the EU, the rejectionists have little exposure. The army, perceived as the north's other main supporter, is now on the back foot, removing a major plank in TRNC's armoury. It would be fair to say that, when the referendum on the Plan took place, official Turkey was four square behind a 'yes' vote.

Washington has been as vocal as the Brussels in supporting a solution to the 'Cyprus problem' while leaving the EU to act as public cheer leader. The US has a new agenda, the Greater Middle East Initiative, which accords Turkey a pivotal role as a moderate Muslim country which can act as a bridge between east and west. A solution to the Cyprus problem

⁵ Loizidou v. Turkey <http://hudoc.echr.coe.int>

⁶ "Kurd activists leave Turkish jail" <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3790997.stm>

⁷ Justus Leicht and Sinan Ikinici "Turkey: Victory for AKP in local elections masks social tensions", *Turkish Daily News*, 16th April, 2004, www.turkishdailynews.com

would, according to commentators “strengthen Turkey’s image as a model of successful democracy within a Muslim nation”.⁸

The once fiercely secular country is now being coaxed into allowing various (allegedly harmless) manifestations of Islam, like the wearing of head scarves while educational reforms have been put forward to allow students with qualifications from Islamic schools (imam hatips) to attend any of the country’s universities. In order to show solidarity with this project, Mrs. Erdogan is always photographed in public smothered in garments associated with a ‘woman’s place’ in Islam, including a headscarf.

Many Turks feel bewildered by this development. Whatever the faults of the Turkish state, Muslims have been free to worship within a secular environment. This is a precarious strategy, at variance with much of the letter and spirit of the Turkish constitution and President Ahmet Necdet Sezer recently refused to sign the new education law upgrading imam-hatip schools for that reason.

Between the December election and the April referendum

The defeat of the anti-rejectionist parties in the December election led to the revival of the Annan Plan in January 2004. Although the CTP and its allies had demanded that Denktaş resign as TRNC’s main negotiator, he was kept on after consultations with Ankara. This in itself reflected divisions in society where the elder statesman still commanded popularity and respect. However, after leading the TRNC delegation in a preliminary visit to New York in February, Denktaş stepped down as final negotiations loomed, saying he could not advise acceptance of the plan as it stood.

As the parties had agreed to let the UN Secretary General ‘fill in the gaps’ in the parts of the plan where no agreement had been reached, arrangements were made for talks to be held leaving time for a last minute referendum to be called before the 1st May deadline on the final version of the document. At the same time, Erdogan was offered various sweeteners to reward TRNC (and Turkey) for their cooperation.

The ‘last chance saloon’, so to speak, was in the Swiss Alpine resort of Burgenstock. Rauf Denktaş washed his hands over any further negotiations, saying the present proposals were contrary to the constitution of TRNC. Prime minister, Mehmet Ali Talat and Serdar Denktaş led the negotiating team from the north. However, Mr. Papadopolous did attend as the Republic of Cyprus had agreed to negotiate on the basis of the Plan. The prime ministers of Greece and Turkey were also in attendance as was Britain (all three countries were signatories to the Treaty of Guarantee signed in 1960) which remains in existence. The EU was represented in the person of Mr. Verheugen while the US remained behind - the-scenes but actively endorsing a solution.

By this stage the penny had firmly dropped that Mr. Papadopolous was the main obstruction to an agreement. Gossip started to emerge from Burgenstock that the Greek Cypriots were now the bad boys, relegated to a corner with a bag of sandwiches while the Turkish Cypriots sat at the top table drinking champagne. The deal that emerged offered the Greeks the following concessions:

1. TRNC territory to be handed back to the south reduced from 37% to 29%, an increase of 5% .
2. Reduction in the number of Turkish troops that would remain on the island to 6,000 by 2011 and 1600 by 2018. Eventually, 650 Turkish and 950 Greek troops would remain.
3. Increase in the number of Greek Cypriot returnees.

⁸ Niels Kadritzke, “Cyprus: Saying no to the future” *Le Monde Diplomatique*, May, 2004 www.monde-diplomatique.fr

However, Turkey also received concessions. Although 33% of the 1974 expellees could return to their former homes, two thirds would be compensated in bonds and property appreciation certificates (PAC) - but only after five years. TRNC would now be able to ban permanent residency for Greek Cypriots for 5 years – apart from on the Karpas peninsula and for those over 65 years of age. Greek Cypriots would not be able to buy property in TRNC for 19 years or until Turkey joins the EU.

Turkey would be allowed to keep troops on the island until 2018 and even after that 650 would remain, the situation to be reviewed if/when Turkey joined EU. The number of mainland Turks who would be allowed to remain after the Plan's adoption remained at 45,000 but there was no more talk of repatriation or of people being 'forced' off the island .

There was also tinkering with the balance of representation on future unified island's governing institutions. The latest version of the Plan gave Greek and Turkish Cypriots equal representation in the future Senate.

The revised plan – its fifth version –was presented to the delegates at Burgenstock on 31st March. It contained the text with 9000 pages of annexes. According to the BBC “the revised plan was still being written less than an hour before being handed over – only one copy per delegation was printed in time”.⁹ Although the new version “contained major changes”, according to a UN official, it was admitted that “details of the plan have not been made widely available” and that the two sides would have “just three days” to consider the text. Quentin Oliver, a referendum expert, remarked that before going before the electorate “it is standard practice to allow voters 6 weeks to digest the issues”.¹⁰ Even supporters of an agreement said that there was “too little time for an informed decision”.¹¹ It was openly accepted that no one had read the latest version. Those who complained that it was being railroaded through were told to stop being spoilsports by niggling over the small print and concentrate on the ‘achievement’.

But, although the Turkish side seemed happy, President Papadopolous refused to endorse the new version so, the ‘process’ sputtered on according to Annan’s timetable with the referendums scheduled to take place on 24th April, little more than three weeks after the delegates left Switzerland.

The Referendum

BHHRG observed the conduct of the referendum on 24th April in both the north and south of the island. Although opinion polls had consistently shown a majority against, it was only after the Burgenstock talks that the Greek Cypriots’ rejection of the Plan seemed inevitable. According to all those involved in the negotiations, this would mean the end of any serious attempt at reunifying the island for the foreseeable future. For a long time, complacency had ruled with commentators predicting that the Greek Cypriots would ‘come round’ in time for the referendum.

However, during a visit to the republic in June 2003, BHHRG was left in no doubt that people did not want a settlement based on the Annan Plan. The Group got the impression that, in the absence of a complete return to the *status quo ante* of 1974, Greek Cypriots had no interest in reaching an agreement with TRNC. It is easy to forget that over 167,000 people were expelled from the north in 1974. They and their relatives make up a large part of the population in the south and they are in no mood to forgive and forget.

It is also hard to see what Annan had to offer them. Cyprus has a vibrant economy and was scheduled to enter the EU in May, 2004. Many feared that talk about ‘international donor

⁹ “Annan unveils revised Cyprus Plan” www.bbc.co/uk 29th March, 2004

¹⁰ Jean Christou “Too little time for informed decision” *Cyprus Mail*, 24th April, 2004, www.cyprus-mail.com

¹¹ see, also Christou, *Cyprus Mail* 24th April, 2004, www.cyprus-mail.com

conferences' only served to hide the fact that they would be left footing the bill for some of the Plan's more costly proposals, including property restitution and, population transfers. They also wanted the complete demilitarisation of the north, something which is not even contemplated before 2018. Many Greek Cypriots fear that the Turkish army could attack them again if a future dispute was to arise as the 1960 Treaty of Guarantee remains extant under the Plan.

After Burgenstock, anger was openly directed towards President Papadopolous for his failure to back the Plan and his later address to the nation in which he urged the public to reject it. The implication was that people needed a 'lead' while forgetting that they had voted for him in the first place as he was perceived as being a tougher negotiator than his predecessor, the more emollient Glavkos Clerides. There was also much criticism of the referendum campaign in the south and the government's failure to ensure that the 'Yes' campaign had proper exposure. However, various sections of Greek Cypriot society had already expressed strong reservations about it, including the governor of the central bank and the civil service. Although the government was berated for allowing misinformation to circulate about a likely loss of civil service jobs under Annan, even the plan's supporters had to admit that there were proper concerns. There were also fears of future deficits being passed on to the central government "if valuations and compensation for properties in the poorer north are increased to match those in the south".¹²

The only major party supporting the plan was the right-wing Democratic Rally Party (DISY) but even it had dissenters in the ranks; two third of the party's supporters voted 'no' as did 40% of former president George Vassiliou's (pro-agreement) United Democrats. The smaller New Horizons and Green Party were hostile. However, the biggest blow to the referendum's success came when the Communist Party (AKEL) general secretary, Demetris Christofias, demanded a postponement of the vote – otherwise AKEL would have to recommend a 'no' vote to its members. The Communist (AKEL) and Papadopolous's Democratic Party (DIKO) are coalition partners in the current government. AKEL had always been perceived as pro-settlement but at a special party congress¹³ held in March delegates presumably realised that Annan was so unpopular with the public that the party could actually lose support if it was to endorse the plan.

It was alleged that 'yes' campaign posters had been defaced. There weren't many visible on the streets of Nicosia, most posters and flyers were for 'oxi' – no. But, in truth, there was little public visibility of either side's campaign. Teachers had been, allegedly instructed to encourage their students to promote a 'no' vote and they "were provided with 'No' banners by their teachers"¹⁴ But, whereas on previous visits BHHRG had encountered Greek Cypriot refugee activists, from Kyrenia, demonstrating at the Green Line they were not there on referendum day neither were Greek Cypriots travelling to the north that day. Several bishops of the Orthodox church attracted attention, for example, Bishop Pavlos of Kyrenia who said that all 'yes' supporters would go to hell.

The media was attacked for the same reasons, even though its overall response was mixed. The English-language press in the south – The *Cyprus Mail* and *Sunday Mail* as well as the *Financial Mirror* were almost hysterically pro-settlement. The views of such papers are not irrelevant in a country which was once a British colony, where everyone speaks English and where c. 4000 British troops and their dependents live. The local, Greek-language press presented a variety of views but it was still criticized for failing to present the referendum choices objectively, something denied by Kypros Chrystomides, the government spokesman. Even the *Cyprus Mail* had to admit that while the "No' campaign had been given more airtime, individual politicians were all 'yes'"¹⁵ The attacks on the media in the south reached their zenith with Cyprus TV's refusal to allow EU enlargement commissioner, Guenter

¹² "Measuring the Cost of a Solution" *Cyprus Today*, 20th-26th March, 2004

¹³ <http://www.greeknewsonline.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=1251>

¹⁴ *Cyprus Mail*, 27th April, 2004, www.cyprus-mail.com

¹⁵ Katya Diogenous "'No' voice given significantly more airtime over campaign" *Cyprus Mail*, 24th April, 2004 www.cyprus-mail.com

Verheugen, to address the nation on the Plan's virtues days before the referendum on the grounds that this could be construed as outside interference in the election process.



EU commissioner for enlargement, Gunther Verheugen, looking somewhat sinister in the camera's glare

Mr. Verheugen (who had demanded a two hour interview!) was outraged - he felt "cheated" by the Cypriot government. "For months on end" he wailed "I have done everything I could in good faith to make it possible for the Greek Cypriot side to accept this plan on the understanding that this is what they intended to do".¹⁶ One has to wonder what Verheugen "means here when he refers to the government's "intentions" - surely, the public was the ultimate arbiter of the referendum's outcome. Or, did Mr. Verheugen expect a more propagandistic tone from the authorities, like the one expressed over the Green Line. Anyway, quite why Mr. Verheugen - an EU official - should be allowed to address the Cypriot population on the merits of a UN sponsored plan was never addressed. In fact, in the case of the republic, the EU's views were superfluous at this stage as Cyprus was already on the brink of membership of the union. If anything, Verheugen's petulant intervention was probably counter-productive and notched up a few more 'oxi' votes.

Verheugen had already put many backs up in the north of the island. In December 2003, President Dentaş had compared the commissioner to "an elephant in a china shop" after he had said that the EU would only take cognisance of the election results in TRNC if the opposition won. Denктаş concluded that Verheugen made these remarks to intervene in the elections. On the day of the referendum, the High Election Board in Lefkosa refused to allow state television station to broadcast Turkish PM Erdogan's address to the voters in TRNC urging them to vote for the plan. Again, this seemed to be in accordance with the country's electoral laws.

Little noticed was the following report stating that "perceptions of pressure from the US, the EU, the United Nations and by great part of the Greek political opposition, namely by the [PASOK](#) party and its leader [George Papandreou](#) also had a negative effect. In fact, Mr. Papandreou pressured Cypriot people into voting "Yes" down to the point of holding a public TV speech directed to Cypriot People before the Cypriot President [Tassos Papadopoulos](#) did, which was considered unacceptable and provoking by a large part of the Greek and Cypriot community".¹⁷

The Plan's international sponsors and supporters made no criticism of Papandreou's intervention or the media coverage in TRNC where all the main outlets were pro-Annan leaving only small-circulation papers, like *Vulkan*, to present the opposition's case. BHHRG was told that Kibris media, in particular, had presented a utopian picture of life after Annan

¹⁶ Sebastian Alison "EU 'Cheated by Greek Cypriots' ", *Reuters*, 21st April 2004

¹⁷ /smart/browse/Cyprus_reunification_referendum%2C_2004§ion=1" title=

even publishing glossy photographs of the kinds of opulent properties which would be available to those condemned to relocation - photographs, it was alleged, that had been lifted from American real estate magazines. People were also led to believe that there would be a tourism boom leading even some of the previously suspicious ex-pats to imagine their dingy English cafes and fish and chip bars would soon overflow with foreign guests.

Perhaps the proponents of the settlement in the north's main achievement was to have persuaded people that they were poverty-stricken and uniquely disadvantaged in the European context. In fact, most northern Cypriots enjoy a reasonable standard of living helped, no doubt, by the island's exceptional Mediterranean climate. Roads are good, people own cars and many homes have private swimming pools. In fact, the inhabitants of TRNC are living in an earthly paradise compared with many areas of the 'new Europe' like Poland and the Baltic States.

Resentment and discontent soon lead people to seek salvation from elsewhere rather than solutions at home. 'Europe' was sold as the panacea to all local ills and people embraced the idea that, out there, there was a large organization ready to house them, find them jobs and, above all, pay the bills. No one pointed out that it was too late now for TRNC to obtain any formal hand outs, structural funds on the back of Cyprus's accession to the EU. Many years and frustrating negotiations lay ahead before that pot of gold will be released. No doubt, the culture of dependency was built into the very structures of TRNC which, rebuffed by the international community, was left to the mercies of subventions from Ankara. No one pointed out that the Greek Cypriots had built up a thriving economy on their own without loans and handouts from the EU or other international 'donors'.

BHHRG noted that while voting in the south was calm and problem free both voters and election officials in the north were often bad-tempered and unhelpful. This was partly explained by a ruling of the election commission that prevented outsiders from being within 100 yards of a polling station, passed after CNN had announced its intention to conduct exit polls that day. No observers were present on either side of the island. However, there was undoubtedly underlying bitterness in TRNC – many 'yes' voters, particularly the elderly, were endorsing the plan with unease under massive pressure from the state and media.

In the event, 67% of Turkish Cypriots voted for the Plan while an overwhelming majority (75.8%) in the south rejected it. Many rejectionists in the north were aware that their cause would be saved by the south, not their own population. Soon after the polls closed in TRNC, a party observer in Lefkosa told BHHRG that the Greeks had said 'no' which meant, he said, "the end of the ghastly plan". However, the result in the south meant that much of the bloom was taken off the victory for the 'yes' campaign in TRNC. There was some honking of horns and waving of EU flags in Lefkosa that night, but complete victory was thwarted. On this occasion, no one complained about the election registers, even though the number of registered voters in the north had increased from 141,479 to 148,165 within 4 months.

Aftermath

In the following days and weeks, there was much criticism of the Greek Cypriot authorities for their handling of the referendum. At a 26th April meeting in Luxembourg, "EU foreign ministers treated their Greek Cypriot colleague, George Iacovou to a highly unusual verbal battering at a private lunch, furious over Greek Cypriots rejection of the Annan Plan"¹⁸ BHHRG is not surprised at this as the EU regularly berates countries for 'disobedience' in not electing the 'right' people or producing the 'right' result.

There were vague suggestions that the Plan could be salvaged but, for the time being, it appears to be dead in the water. Those newspapers that had argued in its favour, now began to spread predictions of doom and gloom for the Cypriot economy. "The economy is in tatters" wrote the *Financial Mirror* "our social fabric is disintegrating with no policies to clamp down on the spread of drugs, prostitution, increased robberies and execution-style murders".¹⁹ In fact,

¹⁸ Paul Taylor "Foreign Ministers battle Iacovou" *Cyprus Mail*, 27th April 2004, www.cyprus-mail.com

¹⁹ *Financial Mirror*, 21-27th April, 2004, www.financialmirror.com

outside the tourist areas the republic appears to visitors as a remarkably well-ordered society. But, there are reports of an increase in drug trafficking – some say that “opening the borders to the occupied areas has increased the supply” [of drugs].²⁰ Police Chief Tassos Panayiotou admitted “since the opening of the border they suspect more heroin is being brought into the republic”.²¹ If this is true, the reunification of Cyprus could, ultimately, hinder rather than promote economic prosperity.

Tourism in the south was suddenly presented as tacky and unappealing to the modern, upmarket traveller, a “dead duck”.²² In fact, one problem for the republic is that the lower end of the package holiday market now finds Cyprus too expensive rather than too cheap. Discriminating folk, we were told, would now prefer to explore the more unspoilt areas in the north. But, this ignored the fact that even if international flights are allowed into TRNC the infrastructure for mass tourism simply isn't there and although the northern pan handle Karpas peninsula in the north is indeed unspoilt there is a plethora of unattractive, low cost housing developments blighting much of TRNC – something that does not usually appeal to the ‘up-market’ tourist. The service sector is also undeveloped. BHHRG was told that lunch was not being served in the restaurant in Lefkosa's historic Buyuk han (inn) on 28th April, showing a lack of commercial acumen – the city was a sitting market with hundreds of foreign journalists in town for the referendum.

The ‘yes’ camp based its final appeal to the voters on the prospect of foreign donors and EU structural funds coming into a united Cyprus. This will have fallen on many deaf ears as, unlike most EU newcomers, Cyprus had not built its economy on hand outs and did not see EU membership, anyway, as a means of getting something for nothing. The republic will be one of the few entrants in 2004 to be a net contributor to the EU.

Perhaps the most unattractive message from supporters of a ‘yes’ vote – like the *Financial Mirror* – was that the south would still have “indirect domination” of a united Cyprus as “Greek Cypriots will indirectly dominate the agenda because of their experience ..higher educational and technological standards”²³ This admission directly underscores the reasons for President Denktas's opposition to the Plan but it is unlikely Mr. Talat or any of its cheer leaders in TRNC pointed out such cynicism to their voters.

Conclusion

In its 2003 report, **Bitter Lemons**, BHHRG speculated on why the international community should have been so committed to a united Cyprus based on the Annan Plan. Other divided islands have been accepted into the EU – Ireland itself, for example. The eventual status of TRNC could have been better solved if Turkey, as seems likely, enters the EU in the not-too-distant future.

Conspiracy theories abounded about the motivations at work behind what must be seen as a bungled policy. At a seminar held in TRNC's Near Eastern University on 26th April 2004, BHHRG was told by an American academic that the international community surreptitiously supported the Greek Cypriots, knowing all along that they would reject the Plan. But, this must be a conspiracy too far. It seems far more likely that the Plan's backers expected lesser subjects to fall into line with their schemes and were unused to - and unprepared for - ‘disobedience’. Once on the roller coaster leading up to the referendum, they couldn't row back.

BHHRG understands all too well why people in TRNC and the Republic of Cyprus should have rejected Annan. For one thing, there was much in it that mirrored the failed 1960 constitution. More recent arrangements for federalizing former combatants into a harmonious unit, like the Dayton Peace Agreement, are not happy precedents either. Bosnia has not flourished under a complicated system of governance with a rotating presidency (similar to

²⁰ Katya Diogenous “Drug problem spirals out of control” [www.cyprus-mail](http://www.cyprus-mail.com) 13th June, 2004

²¹ *ibid*

²² *ibid*, *Financial Mirror*, 21- 27th April, 2004

²³ *ibid*

Annan). On 11th June 2004, it was reported that Lord Ashdown, the High Representative in Bosnia, wanted the government sacked: “members of Bosnia’s joint presidency should take responsibility for large-scale embezzlement of public funds and resign”. The audit office had “found evidence of frequent procurement irregularities, excessive spending, underreporting of expenditure and inflated staff salaries”.²⁴

In the case of Cyprus, outside pressure to influence the outcome of the referendum was counter-productive, particularly in the south. Afterwards, organizations like the EU have acted reprehensibly by refusing to accept the will of the people, blaming politicians like Tassos Papadopolous who only reflected his voters concerns. BHHRG can vouch for the fact that voters’ hostility to the Annan Plan among the Greek community was deep seated and carefully considered, whatever any outsiders might say.

As this report is written, there hasn’t been any further push for a repeat referendum or any other new initiative. However, in his report on Cyprus delivered to the UN Security Council on 2nd June, Secretary General Annan “called on the Council to renew for another six months the mandate of the 40-year-old U.N. peacekeeping mission in Cyprus, which is set to expire in mid-June. *But within three months, he intends to review all U.N. peace activities in Cyprus and issue recommendations on any needed adjustments or restructuring, he said.*” [BHHRG itals.]²⁵ What could this mean? Is it possible that the UN might try to “bounce” north and south Cyprus into a de facto unified state by removing the Green Line? A somewhat similar situation occurred in February 1999 when China vetoed the continuation of a 1,100 strong UN peacekeeping force (UNPREDEP) in Macedonia after the Macedonian government recognised Taiwan earlier in the year. This was obviously a cunning ruse to remove the UN forces so that there would be no impediment to the forthcoming attack on Serbia (including Kosovo). It also enabled troublemakers to foment violence in Macedonia itself in 2001. In the light of Annan’s remarks, it would be wise for both Greek and Turkish Cypriot governments to prepare for the possible withdrawal of UN peacekeepers and not succumb to provocations that could lead to a violent confrontation.

Meanwhile, Mr. Talat appears despondent as crumbs from the EU table for his fulsome embrace of the Plan have not yet materialized. TRNC goods still have to be exported via the south – vehicles crossing the Green Line having to pay “extortionate” insurance premiums, according to the prime minister. Even the €259 m. in EU assistance promised to the north remains deadlocked. Greek Cypriot representation in EU institutions will now have a say in its disbursement.²⁶ But it would be unusual if the international community did not return to the issue sometime in the near future as the motto *quieta non movere* (leaving well alone) is not its way, even though the opening of the Green Line in April 2003 indicated that, left to themselves, the parties might struggle towards some form of acceptable co-existence.

BHHRG would also warn of the dangers of forcing the two sides into a unsatisfactory union. However unfair it might seem to many outside observers, there is much latent anger towards TRNC in the south where there are still thousands of people directly and indirectly affected by the events of 1974. BHHRG has met many such people and are convinced that, pushed to the limits, they could respond with violence. Even rejectionists in the north could be stirred into rebellion by what they see as an inequitable solution.

In its previous report, BHHRG concluded that the real intent behind the negotiations to ‘solve’ the Cyprus problem was a desire to weaken the Turkish military. If the Annan Plan had been endorsed by both sides, the number of Turkish troops on the island would have begun to wind down. As things stand, 35,000 remain, seemingly indefinitely. However, calls are again being made for “a unilateral withdrawal of Turkish military forces from Cyprus” as part of the country’s commitments to EU entry.²⁷ As prime minister Erdogan has accepted all the

²⁴ “High Representative Says Bosnian Leaders Should Resign” www.rferl.org 11th June, 2004

²⁵ “Report angers Cyprus antagonists” *Turkish Daily News*, 3rd June, 2004, www.turkishdailynews.com

²⁶ Simon Bahceli “Talat: many EU obstacles lie ahead” *Cyprus Mail*, 12th June, 2004, www.cyprus-mail.com

²⁷ Dr, Michael Iacovou “Comment – Why Turkey still needs to prove its European credentials in Cyprus” *Cyprus Mail*, 13th June, 2004, www.cyprus-mail.com

conditions imposed so far on Turkey by the EU, it is not out of the question that a unilateral withdrawal will take place even though a final status agreement for Cyprus remains unfulfilled.

While the knee jerk reaction to this development will be positive, the demilitarization of Turkey should also be seen as another setback for the country's secular identity. Islamism – albeit in a mild form – is now US policy in the region. But, if it went badly wrong and there was 'blowback', Turkey could end up as another Iran – or Talibanised Afghanistan - rather than the Hollywood version of seraglios and sweet meats dreamed up in the corridors of the US Department of State.