

Cyprus: referendum on the Annan Plan

By Justus Leicht
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On April 24 a referendum will be held in Cyprus over the plan for the reunification of the island put forward by UN General Secretary Kofi Annan. There will be separate votes in the Turkish north of the island and the Greek south. Should both halves of the island accept the plan, a united Cyprus will take up membership in the European Union on May 1. Should either the north or the south, or both parts of the island, vote no, then only the Greek half will join the EU.

According to the latest opinion polls a majority will vote for the plan in the Turkish north, while it is expected that a clear majority will vote against in the Greek south.

In Northern Cyprus only President Rauf Denktash and a minority of extreme right-wing nationalists, much of whose support comes from settlers from the Turkish mainland, are campaigning publicly for a rejection of the Annan Plan. Thirty years ago Denktash and his clique established the Turkish Republic of North Cyprus and have dominated politics there ever since. The republic has been officially recognised only by Turkey. In parliamentary elections last December the nationalist parties close to Denktash suffered a devastating defeat against a background of a series of mass demonstrations demanding the reunification of the island.

Recently Denktash's support in Turkey has been limited to Bülent Ecevit's Democratic Left Party (DSP)—which in 1974 ordered the intervention of Turkish troops in Cyprus—and the Islamic fundamentalist Felicity Party (SP) led by Necmettin Erbakan, which in 1974 sat in the ruling coalition headed by Ecevit. Denktash also has the support of a handful of fascist groups. None of these organisations currently has representation in the Turkish parliament. For its part, the Turkish military has made known its reservations about the Annan Plan, but has not officially rejected it.

The head of the Turkish government, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, leader of the moderate Islamic AKP (Party of Justice and Development), supports the Annan Plan in order to improve Turkey's own chances of entry into the European Union. He expressed his annoyance with a recent tour of Turkey made by Denktash, saying that the latter should say what he wants to say in Cyprus. This was the first time in 30 years that Denktash has had to face such a negative reaction from a Turkish prime minister.

Following considerable pressure from both Washington and Brussels, the Greek government and opposition have also spoken out in favour of accepting the plan. In southern Cyprus, on the other hand, President Tassos Papadopoulos, a majority of the media and parties, including (after initial wavering) the Stalinist AKEL, the Greens and the right-wing DIKO, are all campaigning for a rejection of the plan. The Greek Orthodox Church has gone so far as to designate the plan as "the work of Satan."

Should these different positions be confirmed in the election it would mean the transformation in a short period of time of the usual state of affairs: until now Turkish-Cypriot opposition was always regarded as the main obstacle to reunification. Hopes of overcoming deeply rooted social problems, widespread unemployment and poverty have proven in this case to be more powerful than all forms of nationalism. On the other hand, in the Greek south, chauvinist arguments appear to have the upper

hand: the rejection of any sort of guarantees for, or concessions to the Turkish minority, and diffuse worries about the costs involved in the economic development of the poverty-stricken north, which has suffered decades of international isolation. Additional concerns revolve around the perceived threat of Turkish cheap labour.

The *World Socialist Web Site* decisively rejects the chauvinist arguments used by reactionary forces in the north and south to oppose the reunification of the island. The Annan Plan, however, does not represent an alternative. Despite all propaganda to the contrary, the plan will only serve to increase and not weaken chauvinism; it will cement rather than overcome divisions on the island—dividing rather than uniting the different communities. Its real aim is to exploit Cyprus's location at a strategic intersection in the eastern Mediterranean, and establish stable relations for the development of the island as an economic platform and military base for interventions by the US and EU in North Africa and the Near and Middle East.

The name proposed for the new state is the "United Cyprus Republic," but a more appropriate name would be the "Divided Republic of Turkish and Greek Cyprus." While the island will have a common national government with its own flag and national anthem, it will in fact consist of two sub-states which will be empowered to carry out their own economic and foreign policy, as well as determine their own forms of separate citizenship.

Article 3 of the constitution expressly stipulates that the exercise of political rights is tied to ethnic identity—to the so-called "status of internal partial state citizenship." The article further states: "Other than in elections of senators, which shall be elected by Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots separately, political rights at the federal level shall be exercised based on internal constituent state citizenship status. Political rights at the constituent state and local level shall be exercised at the place of permanent residency." No one, therefore, can undertake political activity as a Cypriot, he must first identify himself as Turkish or Greek.

The right of residency will also be tied to ethnic origin: "Cyprus may limit the right of Greek nationals to reside in Cyprus if their number has reached 5 percent of the number of resident Cypriot citizens holding Greek Cypriot internal constituent state citizenship status, or the right of Turkish nationals to reside in Cyprus if their number has reached 5 percent of the number of resident Cypriot citizens holding Turkish Cypriot internal constituent state citizenship status.

"...for a transitional period a constituent state may, pursuant to constitutional law, limit the establishment of residence by persons hailing from the other constituent state. To this effect, it may establish a moratorium until the end of the fifth year after entry into force of the Foundation Agreement, after which limitations are permissible if the number of residents hailing from the other constituent state has reached 6 percent of the population of a village or municipality between the 6th and 9th years and 12 percent between the 10th and 14th years and 18 percent of the population of the relevant constituent state thereafter, until the 19th year or Turkey's accession to the European Union, whichever is earlier. After the second year, no such limitations shall apply to former inhabitants over the age of 65 accompanied by a spouse or sibling, nor to

former inhabitants of specified villages.”

In this respect it is important to recall that historically Cyprus was not always divided into a “Turkish north” and a “Greek south.” This first came about as the result of the expulsion and flight of hundreds of thousands from both communities in the 1960s and 1970s. The conflicts at that time were actively encouraged by both the Turkish and Greek governments, and tacitly supported by the US and the “guarantor power”—Great Britain.

Further passages in the Annan Plan stipulate how many seats in both chambers of parliament can be taken up by deputies of different nationalities, and what proportion of votes from both national groups is necessary to arrive at decisions: “Each Chamber shall have 48 members. The Senate shall be composed of an equal number of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. The Chamber of Deputies shall be composed in proportion to persons holding internal constituent state citizenship status of each constituent state, provided that each constituent state shall be attributed no less than one-quarter of seats.

“Decisions of parliament shall require the approval of both chambers by simple majority, including one-quarter of voting senators from each constituent state. For specified matters, a special majority of two-fifths of sitting senators from each constituent state shall be required.”

Even more complicated is the regulation regarding the “Presidential Council,” which is to exercise executive powers and will, in practice, have a right of veto in both the subordinate states.

Officially it has been stated that the constitution has been drawn up along the lines of those of Switzerland and Belgium, but in fact it has more in common with that of Bosnia or the Good Friday agreement in Ireland: every citizen will be forced to define himself in terms of a nation determined by race or religion. The nations which have then been determined in this fashion will be played off one against the other—and when necessary kept apart with military force.

There are press reports in circulation which state that the US is checking the possibility of sending “peacekeeping troops” to Cyprus. An analysis of the Cyprus situation in the *Asia Times* states: “Now Washington wants to upgrade its half-century intelligence presence on the island into a full-fledged army base when—and if—the Greek and Turkish Cypriot sides agree on reunification. The Pentagon might begin by establishing a ‘bare-bones’ military presence on the eastern Mediterranean island, following the possible reunification of the divided country, according to strategic analysts...”

“Using Cyprus as a logistics base would allow the Pentagon more flexibility in planning interventions in the Middle East and give it firmer control over the oil-rich regions of the Middle East, North Africa and the Caspian Sea, especially at a time when Libya’s rehabilitation within the international community is gathering momentum. In addition, it would allow easier supervision of regional sea routes and complement the US presence in Djibouti that guards the southern access point to the Suez Canal, by establishing a presence near the canal’s northern exit.”

An additional factor is that the northern extremity of Cyprus is only 70 kilometres from the Turkish Mediterranean port of Ceyhan—the final destination of a US-backed pipeline which begins in Baku on the shores of the Caspian Sea.

Two pieces of land in Cyprus—Akrotiri and Dhekalia—have for some time served as British military bases and are in fact under British sovereignty. Akrotiri is one of the biggest British airbases in the world and US intelligence services have been active in Cyprus for decades. From Cyprus the CIA coordinates its activities in Africa and the Middle East and conducts surveillance of Arab radio transmissions.

The Annan Plan not only involves the retention of the British bases, but also preserves the status of Great Britain, the former colonial master of the island, as “guarantor power” alongside Greece and Turkey. A reduction of the Turkish and Greek armies is planned that will mean, in

the long term, that the only significant military presence on the island will be American and British.

It is these two countries which bear the main historic responsibility for the sufferings endured by the Turkish and Greek communities.

The British colonial authority on the island reacted to the struggle for independence in the 1950s by deliberately recruiting Turkish Cypriots as reserve police and then employing them against their Greek compatriots. When the Turk nationalist TMT, which had been built up by the Turkish mainland intelligence service, began attacking Greek Cypriots, the British turned a blind eye. The British then went on to tolerate the TMT as it extended its campaign to systematically terrorising the Turkish working class, murdering the leaders of the workers movement and intimidating its members—above all, to prevent all attempts to establish solidarity with Greek workers.

The colonial power was assisted in this respect by the policies of the Stalinist AKEL, which was the biggest single party at that time in Cypriot political life and dominated the trade union movement. Taking up the nationalist battle cry “Enosis” (unity with Greece), the AKEL even went so far as to collaborate with the bastion of reaction on the island—the Orthodox Church.

The most determined protagonist of Enosis was the EOKA, led by Georgios Grivas, a fanatically anticommunist and nationalist army officer who undertook a terrorist campaign against the British, the Greek left and Turkish Cypriots. On the basis of its anticommunism the EOKA received protection and assistance from the US. Until 1967 Washington favoured a “solution” on the basis of Enosis, at the same time allowing Turkey to get a military base on the island. Later, as the strategic value of Turkey grew, it was assured a more extensive role.

It is regarded as highly likely (a number of authors have assembled considerable relevant material) that the right-wing putsch in 1974 (the year of the island’s division), which briefly brought EOKA gangster Nikos Sampson to power, and the subsequent invasion by Turkish troops, received the green light from Washington. In any event, the result was entirely in the interests of the US and Britain: a division of the island between right-wing, chauvinist and anticommunist forces, who were nevertheless pro-Western and prepared to allow effective control to remain in the hands of the two NATO countries.

Cyprus can be free, united and a part of Europe only when working people overcome religious and ethnic barriers, and according to the original ideals of the Cypriot workers movement join together and fight for a socialist Cyprus as part of the United Socialist States of Europe. The Annan Plan must be rejected with a clear “no” vote in the referendum. At the same time, working people must reject all forms of Greek and Turkish chauvinism and demand that all foreign troops be withdrawn from the island and Western military bases closed.

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