

# UN Plan Fails in Cyprus: Implications for Turkey, the European Union, and the United States

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## Brief Analysis

On April 24, Greek and Turkish citizens of Cyprus voted on UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's plan to resolve the long-standing dispute on the island. The elusive Cyprus issue once again evaded solution: although 65 percent of the Turkish Cypriots voted to accept the Annan plan, 76 percent of Greek Cypriots said no. The plan -- born out of recent UN-sponsored negotiations between Turkey and Greece, as well as Turkish and Greek Cypriot leaderships -- envisaged the unification of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), recognized only by Turkey, and the internationally recognized Government of Cyprus (GOC) in the ethnically Greek south into a federal state ahead of the May 1 deadline when the GOC is scheduled to enter the European Union (EU) representing the whole island. Why was the Annan plan accepted by the Turkish Cypriots, yet rejected by the Greek Cypriots? What are the implications of the new situation for Turkey, the EU, and the United States?

### The Path to April 24

The Annan plan enjoyed support in Turkey and was accepted in the TRNC because both saw it as increasing their prospects of EU accession.

Turkey. Since its rise to power in November 2002, Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP) government has pursued an aggressive EU-entry agenda with the hope that when Turkey goes for review at the EU's December 2004 summit, Brussels will grant Ankara a date on which to begin accession talks. Drawing confidence from a powerful pro-EU drive, the most potent force in Turkish politics -- and with skeptics suggesting that it is using the EU process to erode the power of Turkey's secular establishment -- the AKP has passed a number of important political reforms in order to satisfy the EU's accession rules, the so-called "Copenhagen Criteria." (See [PolicyWatch no. 781 \(templateC05.php?CID=1659\)](#).)

Although, by admission of EU Commission President Romano Prodi, the resolution of the Cyprus conflict is not part of the Copenhagen Criteria and should not therefore serve to qualify or disqualify Turkey for EU membership, it was expected that a Turkish-induced settlement on the island would have a positive impact on the EU public opinion vis-a-vis Turkey.

Thus, the AKP launched some bold steps on the Cyprus issue. On February 13, Turkey, Greece, and Turkish and

Greek Cypriots agreed at the UN that the Annan plan would be used to settle the Cyprus conflict through a predetermined process before May 1. First, Turkish and Greek Cypriots would negotiate throughout February. If they failed, Turkey and Greece would come in to mediate in March, and in case they also failed, Annan would step in to "fill in the blanks" and finalize a settlement. Then, the plan would be submitted to referendum on both sides of Cyprus before the island would be unified. The calendar moved as anticipated until the April 24 referendum where it failed.

Cyprus. As in Turkey, also in Turkish Cyprus, the idea of EU accession has been the driving force behind the Annan plan. The 1974 war that resulted in the division of the island and imposition of sanctions on the Turkish north has produced two Cypruses today: a wealthy ethnically Greek south, which thrives on tourism as well as off-shore banking of Serbian and Russian money (as described by iconoclastic Greek writer Takis Michas), and a poor ethnically Turkish north, cut off from the world. Most people in the TRNC saw in the Annan plan a promise of EU membership, access to the outside world, and prosperity, and supported it. In due course, TRNC prime minister Mehmet Ali Talat of the formerly communist Republican Turkish Party (CTP) allied with Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, whose AKP is rooted in Turkey's banned Islamist Welfare Party (RP), to derive strength from and push ahead with EU accession. Ironically, only a decade ago, the CTP and the RP would have rejected the EU, the first calling it a capitalist enterprise, the second a Christian club. Together the CTP-AKP alliance out-powered its adversaries, Turkish Cypriot president Rauf Denktas in the TRNC and the nationalist opposition in Turkey.

On the Greek side, the resolve toward a settlement of the conflict was much weaker. Greek prime minister Costas Karamanlis was tepid in his support for the Annan plan. GOC president Tassos Papadopoulos called on his constituents to reject the reunification plan. The Greek Cypriots, who were to sign their EU accession treaty on April 26 and scheduled to enter May 1, had little incentive to accept the plan. Although the EU made some last minute statements in favor of the Annan plan, it had long since lost leverage with the Greek Cypriots by guaranteeing them membership, whatever the outcome of the referendum.

#### Implications for the EU, the United States, and Turkey

The Annan plan was based on a compromise between the Turkish and Greek Cypriot positions. For the Turks, who saw themselves as an equal partner on the island, it offered a Turkish constituent state alongside with a Greek constituent state. For the Greeks, who saw themselves as the dominant community in Cyprus, the plan offered a united federal state to which the Greek and Turkish constituent states would belong. By approving the Annan plan, the Turkish Cypriots showed their commitment to the fundamental European value of compromise and should be rewarded for that. Since the referendum, the EU has responded negatively to the Greek Cypriot leadership that did not support a plan to which it had given its consent earlier. Instead, in the days leading to the referendum, the Greek Cypriot leadership voiced maximalist demands, such as the right of return of all refugees to the north, in defiance of the compromise reached in the Annan plan.

Today, the EU is discussing new measures toward the TRNC. These include recognizing the 1974 armistice line on Cyprus as the EU's external border, thus debunking GOC's claim that it represents the entire island, before it enters the EU on May 1. In addition, the EU is also considering opening up a representative office in, establishing commercial links with, and offering aid to the TRNC. If this all goes through, the EU-GOC-TRNC relationship would be similar to the EU-China-Taiwan relationship, with Brussels dealing officially with the GOC and unofficially with the TRNC. This policy of rewarding compromise -- by lifting the trade embargo and establishing contact with the TRNC -- in the Eastern Mediterranean, an area of the world rife with zero-sum games, might also serve as the basis of a U.S. position toward the island.

The implications of Turkey's performance throughout the past months vis-a-vis Cyprus are momentous. The EU has often complained that Turkey does not qualify for membership since it does not satisfy the Copenhagen Criteria of

rule of law (meaning that the Turkish military was present in the political sphere) and respect for minorities (namely that the Kurds did not have cultural rights). Pursuant to the recent reforms, which granted cultural rights to the Turkish Kurds and trimmed the powers of the military, Brussels's attitude toward Turkey changed only slightly. Many in the EU believe that while Ankara meets the Copenhagen Criteria on paper, it does not meet them in spirit, since Turkey has not yet implemented the reforms. However, the fact is that Kurdish-language education schools opened in March 2004. More importantly, the Turkish military was absent from the scene throughout the entire Annan-plan process, which was driven by a debate between the government, opposition parties, nongovernmental organizations, and the media. These developments should serve as proof that Turkey now fulfills even the most stringent interpretation of the Copenhagen Criteria. At the December 2004 EU summit, Brussels will have to look hard to find a legitimate reason to say no to Turkey.

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