

# Islam and Tolerance

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## in Wider Europe



# Islam and Tolerance in Wider Europe

Edited by Pamela Kilpadi

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# Political Identity and Human Rights in Turkey

## The Role of the Media and Local Initiatives in the Presentation of the Annan Plan in North Cyprus

*Dilek Latif*

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# The Role of the Media and Local Initiatives in the Presentation of the Annan Plan in North Cyprus

*Dilek Latif*

The UN Peace Plan for Cyprus known as the “Annan Plan”<sup>1</sup> has been a significant landmark in the history of the island. This is not only because it constituted the first comprehensive settlement plan to be submitted for public approval. More significantly, its importance is primarily due to the role of the media and local initiatives in presenting the arguments for and against the Plan. Unlike various peace proposals since the 1960s seeking a solution to the Cyprus problem, the Annan Plan has been intensively debated throughout the island among both Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities, the political elite and the media.

The ‘Comprehensive Settlement of the Cyprus Problem’ was first presented to the parties on November 11, 2002. After fervent negotiations it was initially revised on December 10, 2002, and then again on February 26, 2003. The final version was submitted by the Secretary General to the negotiating teams of both sides on March 31, 2004 in Bürgenstock in Switzerland, where the parties agreed to present it to the people of Cyprus in separate and simultaneous referenda. The comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem included “a proposed foundation agreement; proposed constitutions of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot constituent States; a proposed treaty on matters related to the new state of affairs in Cyprus; a draft act of adaptation of the terms of accession of the United Cyprus Republic to the European Union; matters to be submitted

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to the Security Council for decision; and measures to be taken during the April 2004” public referenda.<sup>2</sup>

After the Annan Plan was rejected by the great majority of Greek Cypriots in the April 2004 referendum, which led to its failure as a whole, a widespread belief emerged that the media contributed to the failure of the Plan on the Greek side. Likewise on the Turkish side, the media had a strong impact in supporting the Plan in the referendum. In fact, the media on both sides have played a vital role, albeit in different ways, in shaping public orientation. The specific focus of this essay is the role of the media and local initiatives in the reception of the Annan Plan in North Cyprus.

### **Catalyst for public dialogue**

In the Turkish part of Cyprus, the Annan Plan process has been described as a “media revolution.”<sup>3</sup> Since the first version of the Plan was revealed in November 2002 until the referendum was held in April 2004, Turkish Cypriots extensively debated the Plan. For the first time, negotiations between the sides became increasingly transparent as the Plan was leaked very early into the process. The uniqueness of the situation provoked considerable attention and a desire for more information. Following the leaks, the Plan was made available to the media and opened for public discussion.

Over the last two years of negotiations on the Annan Plan, the Turkish Cypriot media was dominated by discussions over the Plan and the eventual referendum. Regular radio talk shows, television broadcasts and the activities of nongovernmental organization (NGO) leaders providing brochures and press releases generated an extraordinarily heated debate on the issue. Daily newspapers supplied translations of the summary of the Plan, whereas various television and radio channels devoted entire days and nights to its various aspects.<sup>4</sup>

In particular, the private media in North Cyprus played a crucial role in mobilizing people to participate in large mass demonstrations, unique in the history of the island, attracting even the attention of the world media. As a consequence, civic initiatives influenced their political leaders and encouraged many to support a settlement along the lines of the Annan Plan. A number of commentators suggested an alternative view as well; that it was the civic initiatives which mobilized the media and then lastly the political elite.

In this period, state-run television and radio channels propagating the official viewpoints lost their monopoly on providing information to the people. Traditionally conservative and nationalist dailies which interpreted the Plan as an unacceptable compromise were also challenged by alternative newspapers that reflected opposing views. In this way, the media became part of the political campaigning for the Plan and the referendum in the North.

As a result, the media was broadly divided into two camps: the pro-Annan Plan/pro-solution camp and the anti-Annan Plan/anti-solution camp. The themes on which they focused, and the information they provided, differed accordingly. The pro-Annan Plan/pro-solution media and their associates presented the Plan as an opportunity that should not be missed for a peaceful settlement and reconciliation in the island.



Slogan from a Turkish Cypriot strike during the Annan Plan negotiations: "Peace in our homeland, peace in the world" K. Atatürk "Peace in Cyprus too" Cypriot-Türk  
 ■ Dilek Latif

In addition, they highlighted the issue of membership to the European Union and proclaimed that North Cyprus will "unite with the world." The referendum was depicted as an act of self-determination that would reflect the will of the people. The key objectives of the pro-solution media were the recognition of the existence and political equality of the Turkish Cypriots, the creation of a certain and stable future, and increased living standards.

On the other hand, the anti-Annan Plan/anti-solution media focused on the loss of sovereignty and the survival of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). The Plan was presented as full of traps: to vote 'yes' in the referendum would be to vote for self-subjugation and for security to be placed in the hands of foreign powers. The anti-Annan Plan/anti-solution side tried to manipulate the fears of Turkish Cypriots who became refugees as a result of the inter-communal strife in the 1960s and 1970s, by suggesting that the Plan would make them refugees a third or fourth time. Additionally, the dilution of the guarantees and withdrawal of the Turkish troops were arguably overemphasized. Exploiting the fears of the Turkish settlers who came to the island in the post-1974 period, they stressed the repatriation of all settlers back to Turkey.

Opponents of the Plan published a number of booklets, brochures and leaflets. For instance, the Ankara Chamber of Trade published a booklet titled "Annan Plan and Unknown Realities."<sup>5</sup> In the preface, the Annan Plan was described as a document which will destroy the political, social, economic and geographical base of the Turkish Cypriots. The booklet focuses on the territorial arrangements of the Annan Plan and argues that the Plan will leave Turks without any property, and that it aims to annihilate TRNC and the Turkish Cypriot community:

*TRNC will give 21 percent of its territory to the Greeks and 65 percent of the arable land, 1,350 working places will be closed down and 15 percent of the population will be unemployed. The total national loss will be 18.3 billion US dollars. A total number of 188 hotels and restaurants will be left to the Greeks which results in a 43 billion US dollars loss. Overall, it was estimated that the TRNC will cost 22 percent of GDP, which amounts to over 200 billion US dollars and a budgeted deficit of 43 million US dollars.<sup>6</sup>*

Moreover, the Cyprus Council of the Ankara Chamber (Ankara Baro) published a leaflet "Property Issue in the Annan Plan: Criticisms." Responding to the arguments of Dr. Christian Heinze, the Chief of the Chamber claims that:

*Turkish Cypriots living in a Greek property will have to return it back to the original owner before 1974. Those who built houses on Greek property should have to pay the present market value of the land to be able to keep it. The Plan envisaged leaving Turkish Cypriots without property and reducing them to a community with second-class rights. It does not have the potential to contribute to economic development and to reduce unemployment in the North.<sup>7</sup>*

Regarding the citizenship rights of Turkish settlers, the leaflet underlines that 35,000 people of Turkish origin should leave the island and not be entitled to the United Cyprus citizenship.

The National Solidarity Council, which is related to the fundamentalist National Peoples Movement, produced a pamphlet entitled “Annan Plan and the Realities not Explained.” The pamphlet claims that ‘pro-Annanist’ parties are in cooperation with Greeks, Americans, and the European Union, and questions whether such a cooperation could be beneficial to Turkish Cypriots. The pamphlet is formulated for the ordinary reader with very simple sentences and many pictures. For example, under the sentence “There will be no sovereign Turkish state but a Greek state” there is a picture of the TRNC flag which is transforming into a Greek flag. In a similar manner, it claims that “there will be no Turkish guarantees but a return to the pre-1974 period, no Turkish soldiers but UN soldiers, no Turkey but Greece and UK.” Through such simple sentences it continues: “no territory but migration, no Parliament made of Turks but a mixed Greek Parliament, no compensation but empty promises. 21 percent of the TRNC territory, 75 percent of the productive land and 80 percent of water resources will be given to the Greeks.” Throughout the pamphlet, cartoons illustrate that the Annan Plan is a trap to deceive Turkish Cypriots.

Alternatively, the pro-solution group such as the Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce, and strong civic initiatives—the Common Vision of the Turkish Cypriot Civil Society, This Country is Ours Platform, and various NGOs—effectively mobilized the masses during the Annan Plan process, producing and distributing numerous booklets as well. The information stressed that Turkish Cypriots are at an historically important time, and that a solution of the Cyprus problem today is vital:

*The Common Vision of the Turkish Cypriot Civil Society on a Solution in Cyprus and EU Membership proposed that the Cyprus problem should be solved before the end of 2002.<sup>8</sup>*





Another appeal by a number of NGOs to the President of the TRNC and the political leaders was that the Cyprus problem should be solved before the historic window of opportunity closes.<sup>9</sup>

On behalf of the Common Vision of the Turkish Cypriot Civil Society and This Country is Ours Platform, the Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce in 2003 called the President and the Prime Minister of Turkey to express support and voice their positive views concerning the referendum. The Chamber also pronounced their expectation from Turkey to ensure a 'yes' vote of the Turkish Cypriot President Rauf R. Denktas on March 10, 2003 in the Hague.<sup>10</sup>

### Civil society striving for peace

All these documents emphasized that Turkish Cypriots had demonstrated their will for the settlement of the Cyprus conflict and membership for the European Union. As part of civil society in the North, they announced that they will do their best to achieve a 'yes' vote in the referendum.

The struggle between the pro-Annan and anti-Annan forces characterized the December 2004 elections as well. Political parties in favor of a solution advertised in the daily newspapers and chose slogans corresponding to the increasingly vocal expression of the will of people for a solution to the Cyprus conflict and for the membership to the European Union. Conversely, anti-Annan and anti-solution parties used particular language to spread fear in the minds of people and brought the negative sides of the Plan to the forefront.<sup>11</sup>

Although the Turkish Cypriot media and local initiatives were divided and both tried to influence public opinion in the North, the pro-Annan forces were more successful in forming a positive approach towards the Plan and the resolution of the Cyprus conflict. An overwhelming majority of the Turkish Cypriots supported the Annan Plan as demonstrated by a 64.6 percent 'yes' vote in the referendum. Yet, both pro-Annan and anti-Annan media and local initiatives acted rather independently from the official position. It is impossible to prove whether they changed public opinion, but there is a strong conviction that the pro-solution civil society reinforced and solidified public hopes for peace.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> For more information and full text see the official United Nations website of the Secretary-General's comprehensive peace plan for Cyprus <http://www.hri.org/docs/annan/>.
- <sup>2</sup> Agenda—The Situation in Cyprus, S/PV.4940 Provisional, Security Council 4940<sup>th</sup> Meeting, New York, 2 April 2004, p.2.
- <sup>3</sup> Interview with Huseyin Guven, Director of News, Bayrak Radyo Televizyonu, 8 January 2005.
- <sup>4</sup> The Plan was handled and discussed differently in the Greek part of the island. An intensive and fervent debate on the negative and positive elements of the Plan has not taken place

as in the North. The media concentrated more on the negotiation process rather than the content of the Plan, since there were expectations that the content will face changes.

<sup>5</sup> Ankara Ticaret Odasi, *Annan Planı ve Bilinmeyen Gerçekler*, Ankara: Gemi Matbaacılık İnfaat ve Turizm San.Tic. Ltd.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.3–5.

<sup>7</sup> Ankara Barosu Yayınları, *Annan Planı ve Mulkiyet Rejimi–Eleştiriler*.

<sup>8</sup> The Common Vision of the Turkish Cypriot Civil Society, *Booklets of 2002*.

<sup>9</sup> Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce, TRNC Businessmen Association, North Cyprus Young Businessmen Association, North Cyprus Hoteliers Association, TC Association of University Women, North Cyprus Bank Association, Junior Chamber of North Cyprus.

<sup>10</sup> *Letter of the Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce*, 5 March 2003.

<sup>11</sup> *Kibris Newspaper*, 13 February 2005, p.3.



*Islam and Tolerance in Wider Europe* offers a refreshing new look at the complex interplay between religion, nationalism and expansionism in an increasingly globalized world, as revealed by a new generation of open society leaders working to build a more tolerant Europe. The authors are fellows and colleagues of the International Policy Fellowships program—an initiative of the Open Society Institute that has attempted to combat ‘brain drain’ while developing policy research capacities, initially in emerging democracies of the former Soviet sphere where concepts such as ‘policy’ and ‘fellowship’ were virtually untranslatable. Since its establishment in the late 1990s, some 250 of its fellows have grown into a network of open society leaders spanning more than 40 countries on nearly every continent.

Each chapter—focusing on Western Europe, the Caucasus, Russia, Turkey, Central Europe, and the Balkans—includes several essays by different authors, all of whom are actively involved in the dynamic policymaking processes transforming their respective countries. Their policy perspectives benefit from a uniquely ‘inside out’ rather than the usual ‘outside in’ orientation found in most English-language information about their communities. Taken as a whole, the compilation offers insightful insider stories and comparisons across countries and regions. The results are illuminating.