



Cyprus Action Network (CAN) on the pre- and post-February 28 Period

The Cyprus Action Network (CAN), a recently-formed grassroots organization which aims to improve the human rights conditions in Cyprus, has evaluated the latest developments in the negotiations for a solution to the Cyprus problem and reached the following conclusions:

As CAN, we realize that the current status quo in Cyprus substantially hinders the applicability of basic human rights to the Cypriot people. In light of this, we express our commitment to active involvement in activities that aim at the reunification of the island. We also undertake projects to contribute towards peaceful coexistence in the post-solution period.

With the presentation of a comprehensive outline of the solution to the Cyprus problem by the United Nation (henceforth referred to as the "Annan Plan") and the upcoming EU membership of the Republic of Cyprus, the decades-long problem entered a critical phase. The developments within the next few months are bound to have profound effects on the lives of generations to come. As CAN, we make the following observations and propose the following actions in both the pre- and post-February 28 period:

Pre-February 28

In the Copenhagen summit of the European Union, it was stated that if the negotiating sides reached an agreement by February 28, 2003, the conditions of this agreement would be incorporated into the EU admission agreement to be signed on April 16, 2003 and the "new Cyprus" formed as a result of this agreement would be admitted to membership. As the days before the expiration of this deadline are numbered, there still seems to be no breakthrough in the negotiations. Particularly worrying is the stand of Mr. Denktash who, despite growing unrest among the Turkish Cypriot people, still insists on his hardliner rhetoric.

We, as CAN, would like to point out that Mr. Denktash no longer represents the interests of the Turkish Cypriot community, but those of the military/civilian bureaucrats of Turkey who have vested interests in maintaining the status-quo. He himself openly declares that he is at the negotiation table to defend Turkey's "strategic rights" on Cyprus, and says that even if a referendum was held which authorized the signing of the Annan plan, he would not sign it.

The Turkish Cypriot community has been holding unprecedented demonstrations drawing up to a third of the total population asking for Denktash's resignation and a solution to the Cyprus problem followed by EU membership. The latest polls show that almost 70% of the Turkish Cypriot population desires a solution to the Cyprus problem as soon as possible so that the Turkish Cypriot community can enter the EU as one of the equal co-founders of a new partnership state. The support for Mr. Denktash's positions, on the other hand, is below 30%.

In light of these facts, we believe that it is no longer possible to accept Mr. Denktash as the true representative of the Turkish Cypriot side in the negotiations. Hence, we insist on the position we expressed in several events we organized or attended throughout the world within the past month that the true representatives of the Turkish Cypriot community are the NGOs that have been organizing the pro-reunification events and not Mr. Denktash, and that pressure must be put on him to ensure his resignation before the crucial deadline of February 28.



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Post-February 28

Both scenarios following the February 28 deadline will involve significant challenges both for the Cypriot people and the international community. It is worth considering these scenarios separately:

- Agreement Signed by February 28

(a) Referendum

If an agreement is signed by February 28, the first challenge facing both the Cypriot people and policy-makers will be carrying out a referendum in both sides of the island to ratify this agreement so that it can be put into effect. As CAN, we have great doubts about the existence of objective conditions for such a referendum in northern Cyprus. The demographic nature of this region has been changing constantly since 1974 due to an influx of settlers from Turkey and emigration of the Turkish Cypriot community from the island. The authorities in northern Cyprus have so far failed to supply detailed information about the origins of the people that are eligible to vote and this has raised questions regarding the validity of the elections held there, especially in recent years. Various reports have documented the heavy involvement of the Turkish military and diplomatic officials on the island in channeling the votes of people from Turkey that moved to Cyprus in the post-1974 period to obtain results favoured by Turkey.

What is even more troubling, however, is the uncertainty regarding the number of Turkish citizens who do not even live in Cyprus but have been given citizenship (of the breakaway Turkish Cypriot state) and vote in elections. In the past few weeks, large numbers of people came from Turkey to express their support for Mr. Denktash. In a conference in Nicosia last week, the president of the Ankara Chamber of Commerce known for his extreme-nationalist statements proudly displayed the "TRNC identity card" he had acquired thirty minutes prior to his talk and said that "if needs be, millions of Turks would get the identity card and vote against any kind of solution in a referendum".

As CAN, we therefore demand an urgent population census in northern Cyprus, under the close scrutiny and monitoring of international observers to establish the origins of people who currently hold citizenships of the breakaway state. We point out that any referendum held before such a census will not represent the true will of the Turkish Cypriot people and must be considered null and void.

It should also be stressed that our aim is not to violate the basic human rights of these people whose position regarding Cyprus is questioned here. Their status should be treated according to United Nations and European Union norms and as a humanitarian issue.

(b) Transition to peaceful co-existence

We hold the conviction that the transition period of the new state will involve several challenges which will need to be addressed by the Cypriot communities and the international community alike.



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In the past 29 years, the minimal contact between the members of two communities, combined with constant exposure to one-sided propaganda through both formal and informal channels has resulted in more than one generation of Cypriots growing up with no significant knowledge of the other community. The image of people from the other community that has been imposed by the regimes is predominantly negative and both communities have been exposed to “self-victimization” in a selective teaching of history. We are concerned that this may be used by the groups whose interests will be hurt by the solution to try to stir up ethnic trouble in the years following a solution.

It is this analysis that leads us to believe that in a post-solution Cyprus, there will be need for active reconciliation projects that will need to be internationally monitored. It would be a great mistake for the international community to consider its responsibilities over once an agreement is signed, since the signing of an agreement would not guarantee peaceful co-existence -- only sustained peace-building and reconciliation efforts in the post-agreement period would.

As a bi-communal organization, we will do what is in our power to work with the international experts in the field of reconciliation and try to obtain international support for projects of varying scales. We are already working on a project that aims to analyze the current teaching of history in schools in both sides of Cyprus, and in the post-solution period we will intensify our efforts with various other projects and we will seek international cooperation.

- Agreement not signed by February 28

The realization of this scenario would entail grave results, especially for the Turkish Cypriot community. Unless necessary measures are taken by the international community, even the communal existence of the Turkish Cypriots in Cyprus will be threatened. Should no solution be reached by February 28, CAN will intensify its international lobbying efforts with the following goals:

- Establishing a direct channel between international organizations (both governmental and non-governmental) and the Turkish Cypriot NGOs representing the Turkish Cypriot people of all backgrounds in an effort to improve the conditions of the Turkish Cypriots and prevent their emigration.
- Preventing further efforts to change the demographics of northern Cyprus by the people holding power
- Forming “Cyprus-watch” groups to monitor the developments in northern Cyprus and bring them to the attention of the international community.

CAN's Concerns about the Annan Plan

In a democratic regime, it would have been natural that a plan that is the result of decades of negotiations would represent the will and the interests of the people. However, Cypriots in general did not have that opportunity and the Annan Plan contains a lot of clauses that are of concern to many people.



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At this stage, we believe that the Annan plan should be viewed as a process rather than a final document. The Cypriot people have expressed their strong desire to keep the high-level negotiations going and Turkish Cypriot people in particular asserted their will through their protests. As CAN, we want to stress our commitment to this process and briefly outline several points that must be part of this process;

1. The Annan plan envisions a Cyprus where the ethnic divide is deeply embedded in the system. This goes against what we envision for Cyprus. Therefore, it must be changed such that it paves the way to a more unified Cyprus in terms of power sharing and administration.
2. It clamps heavily on the rights of people of from "outside" a given "component state". These measures should only be transitional and not permanent. This includes sensitive issues such as property ownership, right to participate in political life and freedom of movement.
3. Demilitarization should not be limited to Cypriots but it should also include Turkish and Greek armies. The security of the Cypriot people and the administration can be guaranteed via a strong, transparent police force and possibly international monitors.
4. The disinformation campaign surrounding the plan should be addressed. Government(s) should not be part of that. In order to ensure fairness in negotiations and allow for the representation of the people's will, the international community should monitor the whole process.
5. Referendums should be preceded by detailed population census and special measures should be taken to ensure that the voters from the Turkish Cypriot population are classified and analyzed so as to preclude the possibility of unrepresentative voting results.
6. Turkish Cypriots are not represented in the negotiations. Therefore, the demands arising from the protest demonstrations should be heard in the negotiating process to ensure that the Annan plan or whatever the final product is called represents their interests adequately.
7. All laws and regulations should be within the EU norms and/or it should be ensured that over time they will be adjusted accordingly. The EU membership of Cyprus is of critical importance to this process.
8. Special, transitional measures should be taken immediately to address the Cypriot emigration problem. Turkish Cypriot community has suffered very strongly from this problem and expatriates should be encouraged to return to the island and participate in the democratic process.