

Negotiating Peace: A Comparative Analysis of Peace Agreements in Northern Ireland and
Cyprus

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Political conflict has no straightforward solution. The agreements that propagate after violence or over intractable issues are often imperfect, making it difficult to gain consensus support. However, the creation, implementation, and acceptance of peace agreements and subsequent new governments vary widely. Two cases that have similarities but had different receptions of their peace agreements are Northern Ireland and Cyprus. In Northern Ireland, the Good Friday Agreement came about due to a conflict between the predominantly Catholic Nationalists who wanted to be a part of Ireland and predominantly Protestant Unionists who wanted to remain with the United Kingdom. In Cyprus, the Annan Plan was proposed to reconcile the Greek majority and Turkish minority, who struggled to agree on government and power sharing after they gained independence and following an invasion from Turkey. These conflicts had many similarities, but their respective peace deals differed widely in their creation and subsequent reception, with the Good Friday Agreement passing in a national referendum, whereas the Annan Plan failed. Specifically, both cases have ethnic and cultural divisions, violence between the segmented groups over political control, and lengthy negotiations with international support. However, the Annan Plan compared to the Good Friday Agreement was less inclusive and transparent. This is because it did not include all relevant parties, and did not gain political consensus, leading to its ultimate failure. By examining these cases, through voting records, the agreements, and a review of existing literature, it is clear that despite the similarities between the Good Friday Agreement and the Annan Plan, peace agreement negotiations were more successful in Northern Ireland than Cyprus because of differences in whether they had inclusive transparent negotiations.

First, both cases have ethnic differences, which lead to an intractable conflict and a majority minority dynamic. In Northern Ireland, there is a long history of conflict between

segmented groups. In Northern Ireland there is deep seeded conflict between the predominantly Catholic Nationalists and predominantly Protestant Unionists. The tension that exists can be traced back to the 1600s when plantations were started in Ulster, where English and Scottish settlers came over to colonize Ireland (O'Leary and McGarry 1993, 55). The subsequent relationship can be described as triangular between the Native Irish who are predominantly Catholic, settlers who were predominantly Protestants from England and Scotland, and the English (O'Leary and McGarry 1993, 65). Since then, there has been division over who should have control over Ireland, with particular divisions in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland itself was created in 1920 under the Government of Ireland Act, due to Unionists in Ulster lobbying to be excluded from Home Rule for Ireland and have their own territory they could control (O'Leary and McGarry 1993, 100). The Northern Ireland State was born amid violence, and no one particularly wanted it, but it was a middle ground. However, the state quickly became a "Protestant supremacy" or "majority dictatorship" as the Unionists had the majority control, and this led to various forms of discrimination (Lijphart 1975, 94). The manifestation of this religious discrimination against the Catholic minority was lack of access to land, education, water, and power, and segregated neighborhoods among others (Munck 1992, 212). Thus, Northern Ireland has entrenched divisions that paved the way for conflict.

Similarly, in Cyprus, there are long standing ethnic divisions. While there has long been tension between the Greek and Turkish populations through various stages of occupation, the conflict arose after they gained independence from Britain and were unable to govern together. The Greek Cypriot leaders did not want to accept the Constitution and provisions it gave to Turkish leaders (Encyclopedia Britannica 2020). In 1974 when leaders from mainland Greece led a coup to assassinate the leader of Cyprus and establish Enosis, or unification, Turkey began

military occupation of the northern region of the island to protect the interests of Turkish Cypriots, effectively dividing the Island into two regions (Encyclopedia Britannica 2020). This led to a decades long conflict where to this day the groups are ethnically divided. Further, the manifestations of the ethnic divisions were Turkish Cypriots tending to be poorer, and many people losing homes and land when the new border was created. The population is about 78% Greek Cypriots and the 18% Turkish Cypriots (Michael 2007, 310). The similarities in these cases are the ethnic and cultural demographic differences, that importantly means they are intractable issues. This leads to two distinct groups in the majority and minority and longstanding conflict.

In addition, due to these segmented groups, both countries have a long history of violence between groups for political control. Over the course of the Troubles approximately 3,500 lives were lost directly from the conflict, with most of those deaths inflicted by loyalist and republican paramilitaries “claiming to represent the interests of their wider Protestant and Catholic populations” (Cunningham and Gregory 2014, 64). In Northern Ireland, the British Government did not have a monopoly on force and coercion (Rose 1971, 113). This meant paramilitary groups like the IRA, UDF among others, were the main perpetrators of this violence. Similarly in Cyprus, though there is no exact number, thousands of lives were lost (Fisher 2001, 311). Further, no one government had a monopoly on power, as both Greece and Turkey used their militaries to control their territories (Fisher 2001, 310). In both cases, the political control is mutually exclusive, leading to violent conflict. In the case of northern Ireland and Cyprus, many lives were lost in the conflict and both governments lacked monopoly on force.

Further, in both cases, the violence stemmed from contested political control. In Northern Ireland, during the Troubles, there was disagreement over who should have control over the

territory, mainly either the British government and the Irish government. This disagreement led to widespread internal violence. Similarly, in Cyprus, there was disagreement over government control, between the Greek backed government or Turkey backed government, which led to violence. The Greeks wanted union with Greece and started a campaign for Enosis, or unification (Fisher 2001, 313). In response the Turkish Cypriots in return called for partition into separate communities, or taksim (Fisher 2001, 313). These ideas are mutually exclusive and thus intractable.

Finally, in both peace agreements, international support from third parties played a key role. In Northern Ireland, “It is clear that George Mitchell, Bill Clinton, Richard Haass, Mitchell Reiss, and others were heavily involved in the efforts to achieve an agreement and implement it afterward” (White 2013, 11). The US played a central role in bringing about the talks that ultimately produced the Good Friday Agreement. The external actors could see the bigger picture and act as a mediator for the domestic parties. In Cyprus, Secretary General of the UN, Kofi Annan, and his Special Representative Álvaro De Soto facilitated negotiations between the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots (United Nations 2004, 13). While there were different international actors in Northern Ireland and Cyprus, both countries only came to their peace agreement because of help from international third parties.

Further, in both of these cases, the EU played a role, though albeit not entirely integral. In Northern Ireland, the EU’s ability to empower Northern Ireland was only partially successful since the Northern Irish government was unable or unwilling to fully engage with them (Hayward and Murphy 2012, 450). While not entirely consequential, the EU still played a role, specifically in economic aid. Through the European Peace Funds, they sent aid “to address the legacy of the conflict by empowering local communities, promoting socioeconomic development

and peacebuilding, and reducing sectarianism and violence in Northern Ireland and the border area” (White 2013, 11). However despite this inconsistent success, “the most critical element of the EU’s contribution to peace in Northern Ireland has been, quite simply, that of enduring commitment” (Hayward and Murphy 2012, 439). In Cyprus, “the European Union was largely marginalized in the negotiations by both sides,” so it was mainly left up to the UN to handle the bulk of the negotiations (Kaymark 2012). Thus, while there was conflict over whether Cyprus should join the EU, they were not directly involved in the peace talks. Though, the EU did help economically, sending 259 million euros to the Turkish Cypriot community (Kaymak 2012). Thus, while not consequential, especially in the case of Northern Ireland, the EU played a nominal role in the peace negotiations by committing support and funding, further illustrating the role of international actors in both cases.

Importantly, despite the aforementioned international support, negotiations in both cases were not easy and ended up quite lengthy. In Northern Ireland they had had previous agreements such as the Sunningdale Agreement and the Anglo-Irish Agreement. However, neither were the long term solution the country needed. Senator George Mitchell who was key in the talks leading up to the Good Friday Agreement said, “but as I’ve said many times before, that day of success, we had about 700 days of failure. It was a long, tough grind. I chaired three separate sets of negotiations over a span of five years,” (Mitchell 2018). These talks were not easy leading up and took lots of political moves and careful conversations. Including the proximity talks, there were 18 months of talks from September 1997 to April 1998. The Good Friday Agreement was the culmination of years of work and previous failed solutions. Similarly, in Cyprus, there were multiple iterations of talks with international third parties. Annan himself facilitated various negotiations from 1999 until April 2004 (United Nations 2004, 1). And before that there were

many plans and talks between independence in 1959 and the Annan deal (Fischer 2001, 312).

The negotiations for the Annan Plan were the culmination of lots of negotiations on both sides and multiple previous drafts. In both cases there were prolonged negotiations with international third parties leading up to the peace agreements.

So why then despite these apparent similarities did the agreements in Northern Ireland and Cyprus vary so much in their reception? In Northern Ireland the Good Friday passed in a national referendum with 71.1% in Northern Ireland and 94.4% in the Republic (Northern Ireland Elections). While there was not a segmented election, based on other data, there was much wider support of the Good Friday Agreement from the nationalist community than the unionist community (Amaral 2018). Even despite the differences, it still successfully passed because enough of the population was mobilized in support. While in Northern Ireland, the Agreement passed in a referendum and the country was able to start healing and moving forward in relative peace, Greece did not have the same experience. Among Greek Cypriots, the plan was supported by 23% of voters, whereas among Turkish Cypriots it was supported by 65% of voters (United Nations 2004). Because this plan failed, they are left in a limbo with no real agreement to move forward more effectively and govern together. However, there are key reasons why the Greek Cypriots were not mobilized in support.

Despite the many apparent similarities between the cases of Cyprus and Northern Ireland, there were key differences in their peace deals that led to their differing levels of success. Mainly, compared to the Good Friday Agreement, not all relevant parties were given substantial input on the Annan deal which led to a lack of transparency and lack of consensus.

First, in Northern Ireland, “while not all took part in these negotiations, most of the major parties in Northern Ireland and the British and Irish governments were part of an inclusive series

of talks” (White 2013, 3). Importantly, previous deals had failed because they failed to include sufficient actors. While they failed for different reasons at different points in time, “a common criticism was that they were not open to, or inclusive of, all the parties to the conflict” (White 2013, 7). This highlights that key to the success of the Good Friday Agreement was its inclusivity of the fragmented political parties. In order to achieve this inclusivity, there were elections to the Northern Ireland Forum and then representatives were selected to go to talks. In order to ensure the smaller loyalist paramilitaries were included, the top 10 parties elected were able to get seats (Elliot 1997, 117). This election and breadth of parties made the process inclusive and transparent, to ensure as much of the population was represented and mobilized behind the agreement.

In the case of the Annan Plan on the other hand, not all relevant actors were included and it did not gain support from the wider population. Specifically by only engaging the “political elite”, mainly the prime ministers in the talks, “the mediators created a communicative comfort zone at the expense of identifying, earlier on, and engaging in dialogue with their potential detractors” (Michael 2013, 597). By only including the political elite, there was not representation of all the differing political beliefs. Further, because the Annan Plan was negotiated secretly between political elites, the mediators failed to gain support from wider society (Amaral 2018). This makes it harder to mobilize the varying factions of people, as they did in Northern Ireland. This is important because the larger the number of participants in negotiations, the better the outcome, as there is more exchange of information, to an extent (Tannam 2016, 191). Thus, this was a central difference in the transparency and inclusivity of the talks.

Further, in Cyprus, not only were the talks not fully inclusive, but international actors had a disproportionate influence on the deal. Specifically, Annan filled in details and changes to the issues left unagreed at the last round of negotiations (Amaral 2018). When the plan was not fully flushed out, Annan decided to take the liberty of finishing it. Further, by having the Secretary-General decide on issues that were left unagreed at the last round of negotiations, it let the leaders not be accountable for the final plan (Amaral 2018). This is a problem because the unagreed to changes and amendments allowed Papadopoulos, the Greek leader, to lead the campaign against it given that no legal effects would follow as a result of rejection (Kaymak 2012). Because there was no agreement saying the plan required support, this led to the Greek Cypriot leaders not accepting it and mobilizing their base in opposition. This meant that the Greek leaders did not feel they had to support the deal. A central failure of the Annan deal was that it did not assure support for a settlement policy within each party's domestic constituency, an essential part of peace deals (Stein and Pauly 1992). Thus by not including relevant actors and allowing international actors instead to influence the plan, there is no invested interest.

The positioning of domestic actors is important because they have great influence over people's votes. When Papadopoulos publicly criticized the Annan Plan it changed the opinions of other Greek Cypriot political parties in the referendum. Specifically, their coalition partner in government, the AKEL, the largest political party and "traditionally been an agent of reconciliation and reunification," called for a "soft no" to the plan (United Nations 2004, 68). Annan had expected the Greek side to accept his changes and mobilize voters, but he overestimated this capacity (Michael 2007, 597, Tannam 2016, 195). This likely was due to the fact that the Greeks did not want to enter into a consociational or coalition government, as neither side ever wanted to be unified. Key to the failure of the Annan plan, was the inability to

mobilize support from the Greek leaders. This was problematic because both sides had to separately ratify the Annan Plan for it to pass.

In Northern Ireland on the other hand, everything was agreed to during the timeline of all-party peace talks. Having all-party peace talks with a deadline set by Goerge Mitchell, proved to be effective in forming a coalition (Curran and Sebenius 2003). Because there were most of the major parties involved, it was a middle ground which then allowed them to go back to their follower base and advocate for it. Although this meant widespread support from most parties, the campaigns were different strengths. The SDLP and Sinn Fein used very different tones to frame the Good Friday Agreement, but both were able to strongly mobilize their supporters (Somerville and Kirby 2012). Even while the DUP and UKUP did walk out of the peace talks, there was much more widespread support in favor, and the 'no' campaign was mainly targeted at Unionists (Amaral 2018). Thus, while there were discrepancies between Unionist and Nationalist votes based on these various campaigns, the support was still greater than Cyprus because more parties were included in the talks. A key difference between the Good Friday Agreement and Annan Plan was who was involved to what extent and how that impacted their support

The result of these issues in the Annan Plan was lack of transparency to the population. While the Good Friday Agreement had certain ambiguity, particularly in regards to disarmament, the formulation and content of the agreement was relatively more transparent. The negotiations were considered private, but not secret, and many shared what was going on (Amaral 2018). Further, with many parties involved, that meant there were many different perspectives represented. Importantly, before the referendum, a copy of the agreement was sent to every house in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland for people to read (BBC 2018). This meant

that not only were the talks transparent, but the language of the agreement was as well, so the voters could be well informed.

In Cyprus on the other hand, the UN mediators “reduced the public exposure of the negotiations” and for four years no reports were issued by the Secretary General, and the Security Council was only orally briefed on the negotiations process (United Nations 2004, 23). While they believed secrecy of the talks was important to the outcome, it meant the people did not know what was going on. This is a problem because in response to the criticism of Papadopoulos, the Greek leader, Annan said “I do not believe the speech accurately reflected the contents of the plan on a range of issues” (United Nations 2004, 66). If the population had been informed on the agreement, this would not have been as big of a problem. Because the Annan Plan negotiations were less inclusive and transparent, people were less aware of the agreement and less mobilized to support it.

In conclusion, the case of Northern Ireland and Cyprus have many underlying similarities in their situations and proposed peace agreements. Specifically, they both had a division along ethnic or cultural lines, making it intractable. In addition, in both countries there was widespread violence over who should have political control over the territory. In Northern Ireland the Unionists want to stay with Great Britain and Nationalists want a United Ireland. In Cyprus, the Greek Cypriots want to be under Greece, and the Turkish Cypriots want to be under Turkey. Third, the agreements came from prolonged talks with international third parties. In the case of Northern Ireland that was mainly the US, and in the case of Cyprus that was mainly the UN. However key differences led to vastly different outcomes in the reception of the peace agreements. Namely, because the Good Friday Agreement negotiations were comparatively more inclusive, there was more widespread invested interest across the country. In Cyprus, the

negotiations were less inclusive, leading to less support among different groups and less transparency. Thus, despite the similarities between the Good Friday Agreement and the Annan Plan, peace agreement negotiations were more successful in Northern Ireland than Cyprus because of differences in whether they had inclusive transparent negotiations. This illustrates the importance of inclusion and transparency in the success of peace agreement negotiations as both countries continue to work through their divisions.

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