



**Cyprus in the EU: One Year Later - Prospects for Reunification**

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I would like to thank the American Hellenic Institute for this initiative and for their wonderful invitation to address you today.

I also thank each one of you for taking time off from your busy schedule to come to listen to me talk about my country, which is evolving into what one might call the “new” Cyprus. Cyprus, as you all know, is now a member of the European Union.

Cyprus’ accession to the European Union last year is strategically the single most important development for our country since independence in 1960.

This presents us with new opportunities, challenges and responsibilities that come with our new place in the international community. Our EU membership also ushers in new vistas of cooperation with enormous potential to further enhance the bilateral and multilateral relations between Cyprus and the United States. Cyprus is now part of the transatlantic dialogue.

Today, I will:

- (a) Briefly focus on Cyprus and its EU perspective;
- (b) outline the prospects for peace in Cyprus in the fundamentally new political context of the EU;
- (c) give you a glimpse of the current discussions about Turkey’s aspirations to join the EU and how these may relate to Cyprus;
- (d) explain some troublesome developments in the bilateral relationship between Cyprus and the US; and
- (e) finally, I will provide a view towards the path forward for my country.

At the conclusion of my remarks I will be glad to try to answer your questions.

**Background**

For those few in this room who are unfamiliar with my country's history, I will briefly say that Cyprus gained its independence from Britain in 1960. Greece, Turkey and the United Kingdom negotiated the treaties establishing Cyprus.

The composition of the population, based on the 1960 and 1973 censuses, is 80 percent Cypriots of Greek ethnic origin, 18 percent Cypriots of Turkish ethnic origin and the rest being Cypriot-Armenians, Maronites, and Latins.

In 1963 intercommunal fighting erupted.

In 1964 a United Nations peacekeeping force was established at the request, and with the consent of, the Cyprus government.

Following a criminal *coup* initiated and executed by the then military junta that tormented Greece, Turkey invaded Cyprus in 1974.

Cyprus has been *de facto* divided since that time.

To this day, Turkey continues to occupy close to 37 percent of the northern territory of Cyprus, including 57 percent of its coastline.

This is in clear violation of a plethora of United Nations (UN) resolutions on Cyprus, including General Assembly resolution 3212 adopted unanimously on 1 November 1974 with the positive vote also of Turkey.

This occupation is causing suffering to the people and it is destabilizing the eastern Mediterranean. None of the intercommunal problems that Cyprus faced in the past, regrettable as they were, compare to the calamities that have befallen Cyprus since the invasion.

Ever since 1974, Cyprus has endured the illegal military occupation of the northern part of its territory by more than 40,000 Turkish military troops.

Nearly one-third of its people were forcibly evicted from their ancestral homes and remain refugees in their own country. The UN peacekeeping force maintains a buffer zone called the "green line" between the government controlled areas and the occupied north.

Over the past 31 years, Cypriots have worked together, along with the international community, to try to find a settlement plan that will reunite Cyprus.

We have yet to achieve that goal.

However, it is my hope that many developments over the last-year-and-a-half are bringing us closer to a solution. I say this because these developments mean that the political and global landscape has changed a great deal for us.

I find myself representing a country that, today, is much different than when I first presented my credentials to President Bush as Ambassador to the United States back in December 2003.

## **Cyprus and the EU**

Cyprus joined nine other countries last May in becoming new members of the EU, raising the number of member states from 15 to 25, representing a total population of more than 450 million people. Our EU membership enables us to contribute to the formation of EU policies.

Cyprus' accession to the EU enhances the balanced enlargement of the European Union to the south since Cyprus, together with Malta, represent the EU's Mediterranean dimension. Our EU membership also advances the Union's integration process, promoting with the other member states issues like the Common Foreign and Security Policy, the European Security and Defense Policy, and Home and Justice Affairs.

As a member of the European Union, we are becoming, more than in the past, an economic, political, health and cultural link between the Europe and the Middle East and North Africa.

With its entry into the EU, Cyprus brings with it a history and a rich cultural heritage that dates back ten millennia. Cyprus also brings with it key economic sectors for the Union, such as shipping, the sixth largest in the world, and modern banking.

For the first time in our long and turbulent history, we have the opportunity to contribute to the collective effort for regional peace and development through our EU membership.

Mindful of the adage that geography is destiny, Cyprus has historically maintained friendly relations with Israel, the Arab states and with the Palestinian people.

Having served as Cyprus' Ambassador to Israel, I can attest that in spite of its own problems, Cyprus has on a number of occasions provided assistance to the parties of the Middle East conflict. As an example, I would like to recall the explosive situation in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem (May 2002) that was defused at the eleventh hour through the vital role of my government.

### **Cyprus, the EU and the Prospects for Peace at Home**

In pursuing our goal for reunification over the years, we were forthright and willing to conclude an honorable agreement.

We have agreed and we are pursuing the establishment of a functional bicomunal, bizonal federal republic, which means that eighteen per cent of the population will be politically equal to eighty percent of population.

I do not know of other countries in the world that have accepted a similar arrangement in pursuing the goal of peace.

Despite this historical compromise and others, attempts for a solution failed.

There were a number of reasons for this, including the non implementation of UN General Assembly and Security Council resolutions on Cyprus and the fact that there were, and continue to be, strategic economic and political considerations of third countries over a functional and viable solution.

It is also common knowledge that attempts for a solution were repeatedly frustrated by the well-documented obduracy of Ankara and the Turkish Cypriot leader Mr. Denktash.

Most recently, just as we were preparing to be welcomed into the European family, our prospects for peace at home came to a head. As the date for EU accession approached, a negotiation process under the auspices of the United Nations took on new life and urgency in the hope that Cyprus might enter the EU as a reunited country.

Cypriots were joined by members of the international community to try to negotiate a plan that would end the division of our country.

The culmination of these efforts was an extremely legally complex, nearly 10,000-page settlement plan proposed by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. With an accession date set for the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 2004, this plan was presented in late March and the people of Cyprus were asked to vote – in the space of just three weeks – on a plan that was to shape the lives of future generations and amend for the losses of the past. The official text of the plan was presented a day before the referendum.

Unfortunately, this plan contained major uncertainties and included provisions that would have meant the beginning of new dangers and new problems.

It would have institutionalized the division of our country based on racial criteria and would have allowed for the continued presence of foreign troops on the island with the right to unilaterally intervene militarily in Cyprus.

The plan satisfied nearly all of Turkey's demands. At least this is what Prime Minister Erdogan said publicly after the conclusion of the final stage of the process in April 2004.

At the end of the day, it seemed that while nearly all of Ankara's demands were reflected in the final version, key concerns of the Greek Cypriots on security, settlers, property rights, functionality and viability of the proposed plan, were either totally ignored or purposely drafted in ambiguous language.

The plan would have again created three overlords in our country. No self-respecting people can ever accept this.

As a result, the vast majority of Greek Cypriot voters, more than 75 percent, were unable to approve the plan. The Turkish Cypriots accepted it by 65 percent. Their vote, however, was not homogeneous, since it also included the vote of tens of thousands of illegal Turkish settlers from Turkey sent to the island since 1974 in a systematic effort to change the composition of the occupied areas of Cyprus.

By contrast, in other similar cases, such as in East Timor, the Indonesian settlers were not allowed to vote. Yet in the case of Cyprus and despite our protests, the settlers were allowed to vote.

We recognize that many in the international community, including the United States, were not pleased with the final outcome of the referendum. But it was important that the people of Cyprus decide their own fate through a robust democratic action; not let others decide it for them.

It is the first time in the history of Cyprus that the people were empowered to decide their own future.

Significantly, the vote of the Greek Cypriot community was *not* a vote against reunification but against this specific plan. No one is more committed to securing a bizonal, bi-communal federal solution than the government of Cyprus.

History shows that Europe solves problems by embracing them. If the European integration has reconciled the French and the Germans, safeguarded and secured the fragile democracies of southern Europe, has brought eastern Europe into its fold, is pacifying the Balkans and thus unifying the European continent, I am confident that it will do the same for Cyprus.

Last year's setback in developing a solution to the problem should not deter us from new initiatives towards the goal of reunifying Cyprus.

I believe that the EU is the mechanism through which all the people of Cyprus will prosper and achieve the peace, stability and economic prosperity they seek and deserve.

With Cyprus now in the EU, I believe that this is indeed achievable.

Given the tumultuous past relations between Cyprus and Turkey, and the challenges that lie ahead, Cyprus' EU membership creates an interesting situation with respect to Turkey's EU aspirations.

### **Turkey and the EU**

Last December, international attention turned to Cyprus as the EU was set to vote to determine if and when Turkey would receive a date to begin the long negotiations associated with EU membership.

For Turkey's candidacy to go forward, the decision of the EU had to be unanimous.

There were many legitimate reasons that Cyprus was tempted to block it. For one, Turkey refuses to recognize the Cyprus government, which is recognized by all other nations as the only legitimate government of the Republic.

Further, in addition to the more than 30,000 Turkish troops that today occupy the northern third of our country, Turkey has blocked our own ability to join a number of regional organizations of vital importance to us, organizations which complement our EU membership. And Turkey has barred our large commercial fleet from its ports and refuses to allow passage of our civilian aircraft through its airspace.

Nevertheless, we concluded that the time was right for Cyprus to reach out a hand of friendship to Turkey.

We recognized that accession to the EU is fundamentally important for Turkey and to the further development of a secure and economically robust eastern Mediterranean.

Perhaps most importantly, we supported Turkey's bid because it offers the prospect of providing a route to resolve the long-standing division of our country. Turkey's EU accession process requires the resolution of outstanding issues between our two countries, including the normalization of relations and the removal of Turkish troops from Cyprus.

Turkey's commitment to extend the EU-Turkey Customs Union to *all* new EU members, demonstrates that the EU process can provide an important catalyst for the normalization of relations between Cyprus and Turkey.

Cyprus' EU accession course has never been at the expense of Turkey.

If today Turkey is closer than ever in joining the EU, this is due to a large extent on the process of the accession of Cyprus and the paradigm shift in favor of Turkey by Greece. This is never admitted in Ankara or by think tanks in Washington, but there is ample proof in the negotiations with Brussels that bear this out.

## **Cyprus – US Relations**

One factor that can influence Cyprus-Turkey relations apart from the EU is the United States. Cyprus and the US have long enjoyed a strong relationship based on common values and principles.

Our cooperation against terrorism has been effective and long-standing.

I recall that in October 1983, when the lives of 241 American marines were lost in Beirut during a terrorist suicide attack, Cyprus was the first country in the region to avail its facilities for humanitarian and other support to the American mission in Lebanon. And this tradition has been maintained and substantially enhanced since.

We continue to stand in solidarity with the United States following the callous attacks of 9/11. We are working together on terrorism, the situation in Iraq, suppressing money laundering, and other initiatives.

We are the first and, as far as I know, currently the only EU country to have successfully agreed on the text to join President Bush's Proliferation Security Initiative, which is an important step in battling the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

Despite this history of working together and being allies on many fronts, since the referendum last April, the US has been taking incremental steps which, we believe, have the effect of eroding longstanding US policy on Cyprus which recognizes the government of the Republic of Cyprus as the only legitimate sovereign on the island.

The most recent example is an upcoming visit of some members of Congress directly to the occupied part of my country bypassing completely the government of Cyprus.

My government encourages continued US engagement with all Cypriots. But, these members will be entering Cyprus through an unauthorized point of entry, thus violating Cypriot law.

Such an act will only cause tension and will destabilize the drive to reunification of the island at a critical point in time. As a matter of fact, a Cypriot presidential envoy just concluded last Friday at the United Nations sensitive negotiations at the UN headquarters in an effort to resume efforts for reunification. The visit will certainly provoke the feelings of the people who increasingly see the US as pursuing its own agenda without due concern to their legitimate interests.

Repeated attempts to open up the airports in the occupied part, the behind the scenes encouragement of the above-mentioned congressional delegation to enter occupied Cyprus illegally; the new US policy that allows official US personnel to enter Cyprus through illegal ports of entry knowing that this violates our laws; the recent American trade delegation to the occupied area; the channeling of financial aid possibly through institutions in the occupied north such as the so-called "Ministry of Finance"; the US report on human rights that largely whitewashes human rights violations by Turkey in Cyprus and a number of other steps taken by the Administration, correspond to a *de facto* recognition of a political entity which has been declared by the UN and by other international bodies as illegal.

We believe that all these steps are undermining efforts to achieve the reunification of the island. These measures are deepening the divide.

Everything else to the contrary notwithstanding, Ankara and the Turkish Cypriot leadership see these measures as a first step toward legitimization and official recognition, while many in the Greek Cypriot community interpret them as punishment for exercising their democratic vote against a specific plan.

And it should be categorically emphasized that even if the Turkish Cypriot community approved the Annan plan, this cannot be used as a license by some countries to upgrade the status, diplomatic or otherwise, of the occupied part. The European Court of Human Rights by its decision earlier this month in the Myra XENIDIS-ARESTIS case, confirms that nothing has changed as regards the illegality of the occupied part.

The Court continues to consider Turkey responsible for what happens in the occupied areas by virtue of the control it exercises through the presence of its military troops.

Based on its own terms the plan, as it now stands, does not come into force and is defunct. Consequently, any attempts by the US or any other party for the unilateral implementation of the Annan plan violate the spirit and the letter of the negotiation process and the written assurances of the Secretary General to the parties.

The US has repeatedly stated that its goal is to end the "economic isolation" of the Turkish Cypriots. But we interpret US actions as being much more political than economic.

Efforts to promote US private and direct investment in the occupied part, may very well be exposing US citizens to legal liabilities, especially in the case of illegally seized properties that still belong to Greek Cypriot refugees.

The cause of the isolation of the Turkish Cypriot community is a direct result of the continuing military occupation of Turkey. As a consequence of this, the international community has taken positions that are reflected in the UN resolutions and in the decisions of European and American courts.

The isolation of the Cypriots of Turkish ethnic origin is ending by the dynamics of EU membership and by the outreach undertaken by the government of Cyprus. Turkish Cypriots are EU citizens. Tens of thousands passports were issued to them, some of them from our Embassy here in DC.

Since April 2003 and owing to the dynamics of EU membership, certain restrictions in the movement of people and goods across the so-called "green line" were lifted.

More than seven and a half million visits have taken place to and from the occupied part, incident free. I repeat: incident free.

And this fact alone speaks volumes about the relations between the two major communities on the island and for what they yearn.

Since April 2003, the Turkish Cypriot community has benefited nearly \$200 million from visits of Greek Cypriots to the occupied part. More than 10,000 Turkish Cypriot workers cross the line every morning to work in the government-controlled area. The per capita income of the Turkish Cypriots has increased by \$1,500 since April 2003. The government of Cyprus has spent more than \$21 million on medical care for the treatment of more than 23,000 Turkish Cypriots in the past two years.

In 2003 and 2004, the government paid social insurance pensions totaling more than \$43 million to Turkish Cypriots. Since 1974 we have provided free electricity to the Turkish Cypriot community at a cost of nearly \$343 million.

In mentioning the above sums I do not want to sound condescending in any way but instead to dispel the argument that we do not want a solution because we do not want to share our prosperity with the Turkish Cypriots.

The government is not giving any handouts. We are investing in ourselves. We are putting our money where our mouth is because we are fully committed to raising the standard of living of a large segment of our population.

No country can prosper if a large segment of its population does not have the same standard of living as the rest.

Further, the government has decided unilaterally to clear landmines in the buffer zone in the spirit of the Ottawa Convention. The Turkish side has yet to reciprocate.

Disappointment in the outcome of the April 2004 referendum is understandable. But we feel that our support of Turkey's EU ambitions and the steps that we have taken to assist the Turkish Cypriots serve as a testament to our commitment to a solution.

We also increasingly suspect that the US and Turkey are using Cyprus as an extension of their own policy. Let me be more specific.

During the recent (May 11<sup>th</sup>) Europe Subcommittee Hearing it was said, and was agreed by the members of Congress who were present, that a "politically risk-free" option to improve the souring relations between the U.S. and Turkey, is for the U.S. to help Turkey in its policy on Cyprus by lifting the isolation and to politically upgrade the regime in the occupied part of Cyprus. And why is this policy risk free for the US and Turkey?

Because Cyprus is a small, insignificant player in the grand scheme of things, and is being used as a trump card by others and as an extension of their own foreign policy and interests.

Let the U.S. and Turkey find other issues from which they can improve their relations, not at the expense of our country. I am sorry but we cannot oblige and we will resist.



It is high time that the Cypriots free themselves from the bondages of third country interests and proceed forward in the EU that solves problems by embracing them.

Why shouldn't this be consider as part of the freedom agenda?

### **The Path Forward**

The international community should know that the government of Cyprus is ready to engage in renewed efforts to bring about a lasting peace to a genuinely unified, sovereign Cyprus.

Looking ahead, there are several goals that my government will seek in any future settlement plan.

Firstly, and most importantly, it should safeguard the interests of the people of Cyprus as a whole and not those of other countries. It should also secure the genuine reunification of the country, its economy and its society – in practice and not just in theory and provide a functioning state structure, in which neither community will be in a position to impose its will on the other. At the same time, neither community should be able to create deadlocks in important functions and paralyze the state.

### **Conclusion**

So, a year after Cyprus joined the EU where does the question of Cyprus stand?

- We continue to constructively appreciate membership in the EU and the opportunities, challenges and responsibilities it provides us.
- We are cautiously optimistic that the negotiations of Turkey to join the EU will result in the long overdue normalization of relations between Cyprus and Turkey.
- We are determined to continue our outreach to Cypriots of Turkish ethnic origin, since strengthening their standard of living promotes democracy, reconciliation, security and stability on the island and in the region.
- We will continue to seek a just resolution of the Cyprus problem. We remain fully committed to the reunification of Cyprus as a bizonal, bicomunal federation.
- Over the years we have suffered many setbacks in finding a solution to the Cyprus problem. But we have never given up. We will not do so now.

I thank you very much for your time and your kind attention, and I welcome your questions.

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