

CYPRUS

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Threats to annex rejected again

Renewed threats by the Turkish Government to annex the occupied area and Turkish forecasts of conflict if Cyprus joins the European Union (EU) before a Cyprus settlement were strongly condemned within the EU and internationally. The Cyprus Government viewed the threats as showing the desperation of the Turkish side over the failure of its attempts to block Cyprus' EU accession and over universal opposition in the international community to its demand for recognition of two separate states in Cyprus.

The Turkish threats of annexation and violence reached a crescendo at the commemoration on 15 November of the 18th anniversary of the creation of a pseudo-state in the Turkish-occupied area. Attended by high-ranking military and Government officials from Turkey and marked by a display of Turkish military power, the occasion impelled Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktaş to forecast a Turkish-Greek war if the EU accepted Cyprus as a member. Turkish Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit and Foreign Minister Ismail Cem both used the run-up to the anniversary to repeat earlier threats that Turkish-occupied northern Cyprus would be annexed in the event of EU accession.

Cyprus Government Spokesman Michalis Papapetrou on 5 November noted that EU leaders had made it clear that any move by Turkey to annex the occupied area "would end Turkey's European prospects". Subsequent statements from the European Commission and other EU sources confirmed this assessment. Addressing the UN General Assembly on 11 November (see page 2), President Clerides made a specific demand that Turkey should give up its threat to annex northern Cyprus and instead focus on a solution which would further Ankara's European aspirations.

Condemnations of the annexation threat by the UK government included a House of Commons reply by Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Peter Hain on 22 November. He said that attempted annexation of the occupied area would "severely compromise Turkey's relations with the EU and contravene her obligations under the [1960] Treaty of Guarantee". □

Inside:

- Clerides sets out his vision
- Straw confirms support
- EP President in Nicosia
- Major tax reform proposals



• Welcome to New York... Secretary General Kofi Annan greets President Clerides at UN Headquarters.

Doubts over face-to-face talks

After intensive diplomatic efforts in November, international attention focused on face-to-face talks between President Glafcos Clerides and Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktaş due to be held "on neutral ground" in Nicosia on 4 December. They would be the first direct meeting between the two leaders since August 1997. The talks were to take place in UN premises in the buffer zone, with the UN Secretary General's Special Adviser on Cyprus, Alvaro de Soto, the only other person present.

On the Greek Cypriot side, however, there was deep scepticism about whether the meeting would lead to a resumption of the UN-sponsored talks, from which the Turkish side had unilaterally withdrawn in November 2000. The doubts centred on Mr Denktaş's continued insistence on recognition of his illegal regime, despite universal rejection of his demand from the international community.

The proposal for a face-to-face meeting to discuss the Cyprus situation without preconditions was made by Mr Denktaş in a series of three letters received by President Clerides while he was in New York on 7-16 November to address the UN General Assembly (see page 2). Following Mr Clerides' return to Cyprus, the invitation was accepted on 19 November after the Turkish Cypriot leader had agreed to the President's stipulation that the meeting should take place within the framework of the UN Secretary General's good offices mission and should "reinforce his efforts to reach a settlement". Also extracted from Mr Denktaş was his acceptance that Sr de Soto should be present so that he could brief the Secretary General, who would in turn report to the UN Security

Council.

The Government nevertheless remained sceptical about the Turkish Cypriot leader's motives, especially since his second letter to President Clerides on 12 November had been accompanied by one to the UN Secretary General repeating his longstanding demand for "a partnership of two equal and sovereign states". That letter, coming as the Turkish side stepped up its threats about Cyprus' accession to the European Union (see adjoining report), had drawn a firm response from Cyprus Government Spokesman Michalis Papapetrou. The only legal basis for talks, said Mr Papapetrou, remained the UN Security Council resolutions calling for a federal solution within a single state.

After the face-to-face meeting had been arranged, Mr Papapetrou on 22 November made it clear that President Clerides was not prepared to enter into an endless series of meetings with the Turkish Cypriot leader. "There may be two or three meetings", he said, "but that's all. There is not going to be a continuous parallel process. After a couple of meetings, Mr Denktaş must answer whether he agrees to return to the negotiating table."

A meeting of the National Council on 27 November gave unanimous approval to President Clerides' acceptance of the proposal for face-to-face talks with Mr Denktaş.

● A sign that Cyprus had not disappeared from the international agenda was given on 30 November by US Secretary of State Colin Powell, who stated in Washington that he wanted to see "greater momentum" on the Cyprus deadlock. □