

CYPRUS

NEWS

Issue No. 148

Covering the period
1–31 December 2001

Clerides expects new year to be crucial for Cyprus

President Clerides' New Year Message prophesied that 2002 would be marked by "two great events" for the future of Cyprus—agreement on its accession to the European Union (EU) and direct talks with the Turkish Cypriots "which may well lead to the solution of the Cyprus problem". The President stressed that he was referring simply to the possibility of a solution, because "obviously no-one is in a position to make an assessment with regard to the result of the talks before they have begun and evolved".

Warning that much of what had been said and written so far about the talks had nothing to do with reality, President Clerides noted that the international community was monitoring developments in Cyprus. It was up to the Greek Cypriot side, he said, to prove that it was sincere in its strong desire for a settlement that was "just, viable and functional as well as in accordance with the UN Security Council resolutions".

Addressing himself to his Turkish Cypriot "compatriots", the President assured them that "we are equally interested in their peaceful and productive future, in their security, progress and well-being in a unified Cyprus, member of the European Union". He concluded: "Above all, I wish that the new year will be the year of the peaceful solution of the Cyprus problem for the good of all Cypriots—Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots, Maronites, Armenians and Latins."

● Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktaş was uncharacteristically accommodating in a television interview on 30 December, saying that his dinner with President Clerides the previous evening (see adjoining report) had taken place "in a very sincere atmosphere" and confirming that he would co-operate on trying to resolve the issue of missing persons. □

Inside:

- Poll success for independents
- UNFICYP mandate renewed
- Natural gas supply decision
- Only talks will prove it
- Negotiations to end in 2002



• Keeping notes... UN Special Adviser Alvaro de Soto (centre) with President Clerides and Mr Denktaş before their meeting in Nicosia on 4 December.

Back to the negotiating table

As 2001 ended, international attention was focusing on the resumption of negotiations on the Cyprus problem set for 16 January, this time directly between the two parties with the aim of reaching a comprehensive settlement by mid-2002, and on how they will fare. Agreed in face-to-face talks between President Glafcos Clerides and Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktaş in Nicosia on 4 December, the relaunching of negotiations was accompanied by an unexpected round of "dinner diplomacy" in which the two leaders entertained one another in their private homes on either side of the ceasefire line.

The breakthrough on 4 December was achieved in the first direct talks between President Clerides and Mr Denktaş since August 1997, held at the residence of UN Chief of Mission Zbigniew Włosowicz in the UN buffer zone. The UN Secretary General's Special Adviser on Cyprus, Alvaro de Soto, was the only other person present. He was able to announce afterwards that the two leaders had agreed to open negotiations in Cyprus, under UN auspices and without preconditions, and to "continue to negotiate in good faith until a comprehensive settlement is achieved" (see page 3 for full text).

The agreement marked the end of the Mr Denktaş's 13-month boycott, dating from November 2000, of the UN-sponsored "proximity talks" which had been launched in December 1999 and pursued over five rounds without substantive result. The Turkish Cypriot leader dropped his previous insistence on recognition for his illegal regime and agreed to return to the negotiating table within the same UN framework as before. The only procedural differences in the new talks are that they will be face-to-face and will be held

in Cyprus rather than in New York or Geneva.

Cyprus Government Spokesman Michalis Papapetrou said that the Greek Cypriot side would attend the resumed talks in good faith and with an "intense desire of solving the Cyprus problem on the basis of UN Security Council resolutions, respect for human rights and the European Union's *acquis communautaire*, for the benefit of the whole Cypriot people, Greek and Turkish Cypriot".

The first Clerides-Denktaş dinner took place on 6 December, when the President crossed into the Turkish-occupied part of Nicosia for the first time since the 1974 Turkish invasion to visit Mr Denktaş at his house. The follow-up occasion was on 29 December, when the Turkish Cypriot leader came across the Nicosia ceasefire line, likewise for the first time, to be received by President Clerides at his residence. Both visits passed off without incident.

Spokesmen confirmed that the dinners had taken place in a friendly atmosphere and that the two leaders had spent part of the time reminiscing about the pre-independence years when they had both worked as lawyers under British rule. Mr Papapetrou disclosed after the second dinner that the President and Mr Denktaş had concurred on "the need to address the issue of missing persons" and had agreed "to work towards solving this humanitarian issue".

● The resumption of talks was discussed on 18-19 December at a session of the National Council, the President's senior advisory body on the Cyprus problem, consisting of the leaders of the eight parliamentary parties and key Ministers. Mr Papapetrou said afterwards that "there was a strong desire on the part of participants for consensus". □