



• Relaunching the talks... President Clerides (right) greets Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktaş at the opening of face-to-face UN-sponsored negotiations in Nicosia.

Restraint as talks continue

The pace of resumed UN-sponsored negotiations on a Cyprus settlement quickened at the end of the month when the agreed three sessions a week between President Glafcos Clerides and Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktaş were increased to include an extraordinary meeting between the two leaders on 31 January. It was their seventh face-to-face meeting since the talks were relaunched on 16 January after a break of 14 months caused by the Turkish side's unilateral withdrawal from UN-sponsored "proximity talks" in November 2000.

The venue for the talks was a UN building in the area of Nicosia airport located within the UN buffer zone. President Clerides was supported by Attorney General Alecos Markides, Government Spokesman Michalis Papapetrou and Presidential Under Secretary Pantelis Kouros. Also in attendance was the UN Secretary General's Special Adviser on Cyprus, Alvaro de Soto, who said after the opening meeting on 16 January that "a very encouraging start" had been made.

Whereas the resumption of the talks was enthusiastically welcomed by the international community, the Greek Cypriot side's expectations were more restrained. Foreign Minister Ioannis Kasoulides said on 15 January that the Government was "neither optimistic nor pessimistic" about the resumed talks, which it was approaching "with an open mind". He continued: "If Mr Denktaş has the green light from Ankara—and Ankara is a lot of things, including the military—then he can get a settlement. If he hasn't got it, his move is only tactical and this will show at the negotiating table." Mr Kasoulides stressed that "our main concern is to ensure that in the

agreed overall solution there are no elements that would allow the legal partition of the country".

The familiar news blackout on the content of the talks meant that the large corps of journalists covering the process had little concrete news to report and had to rely on recycling unsourced stories. On 22 January Mr Papapetrou categorically denied Turkish press reports that President Clerides and Mr Denktaş had agreed to establish "a new state", dispensing with existing titles, flags and insignia. "The position of the Greek Cypriot side", he said, "is that it is seeking to transform the Republic of Cyprus from a unified state to a federal one, and not create a new state".

Mr Kasoulides followed up on 30 January by confirming the Government's "crystal clear" opposition to any proposal for rotating the presidency of Cyprus between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities. Noting that Turkish Cypriots formed only 9 per cent of the people of Cyprus, he stressed that such a small proportion could not possibly elect the country's head of state.

● The Government announced on 24 January that it would submit the international treaty banning landmines for ratification by the House of Representatives and would also initiate the removal of mines from certain sections of the ceasefire line in Cyprus. The following day it confirmed that it was entering into talks with the UN authorities on the destruction of a store of arms which had been imported by President Makarios in 1972 and had subsequently been placed under UN custody. Both moves were seen as unilateral actions by the Greek Cypriot side to build intercommunal confidence. □

New initiative on the missing

The Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot sides exchanged papers in January setting out their thoughts on how to resolve the issue of those missing from the 1974 hostilities and earlier intercommunal conflict in Cyprus. The exchange followed two meetings between President Clerides and Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktaş on 11 January, specifically to discuss the missing. It was stressed that consideration of the humanitarian issue was separate from the concurrent talks on the overall Cyprus problem (see this page).

The Clerides-Denktaş meetings on the missing took place at the residence of the UN Chief of Mission Zbigniew Włosowicz in the UN buffer zone in Nicosia. They were arranged as a consequence of the "dinner diplomacy" of December, in which the two leaders had invited one another to dinner at their homes. The outcome was an agreement that each side would draw up a draft outline agreement on practical ways of proceeding to a resolution of the issue of the missing.

The Greek Cypriot draft agreement was sent to Mr Denktaş via the UN on 18 January. The Turkish Cypriot response was received on 28 January. No details were released of either document, although they were reported to provide for the reactivation of the agreement on the missing signed by President Clerides and Mr Denktaş in July 1997 but never implemented. Government Spokesman Michalis Papapetrou said on 29 January that no action would be taken on the Turkish Cypriot document until President Clerides had consulted with the Pan-Cyprian Committee of Relatives of Undeclared Prisoners and Missing Persons.

The 1997 agreement had specified that the two sides would exchange information on the location of graves and make arrangements for the reciprocal return of remains. The two leaders had also recognized the right of the families of the missing who are proved to be dead to have their remains returned for proper burial. □

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