

CYPRUS

NEWS

Issue No. 143

Covering the period
1–31 July 2001

• Ready to talk... Foreign Minister Ioannis Kasoulides, with Luxembourg counterpart Ludie Polfer during her official visit to Cyprus on 26-27 July, expects Turkish Cypriots to return to the negotiating table.

Restart of talks remains elusive

The diplomatic logjam in the search for a settlement of the Cyprus problem appeared to be loosening in July, as reports from various sources indicated that the Turkish side might be responding to increasing international pressure for a resumption of the UN-sponsored talks unilaterally abandoned by Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktaş in November 2000. According to observers, a key factor for the elusive goal of resumed talks is the chronic economic weakness of Turkey and its need for international financial support, which may be persuading Ankara that it can no longer accommodate the intransigent Denktaş line in Cyprus.

Foreign Minister Ioannis Kasoulides confirmed on 24 July that "there is a strong indication" that the Turkish Cypriots would return to the negotiating table, without having achieved any concessions on the preconditions set when they withdrew from the talks. His comments came after an announcement by Mr Denktaş that he will decide whether to return to the talks after a meeting with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, which has not yet been fixed. Potentially significant was a reference by Turkish Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit, in a television interview on the anniversary of the 1974 Turkish invasion (see page 4), to the Turkish Cypriots' need to resume the dialogue on a Cyprus settlement.

Mr Kasoulides said that if the Turkish side was prepared to resume the peace process from where it left off in November 2000, "that is fine with us". He added that he shared the reservations expressed by some party leaders in Cyprus about the Turkish Cypriots' probable motivations, asserting that if they did

return to the negotiating table it would be because "they have realised that they have got themselves into political isolation".

The prospective Denktaş-Annan meeting was confirmed by the UN Secretary General on 24 July. He said that he hoped "to get things moving in the not too distant future", no doubt subject to the outcome of his talks with the Turkish Cypriot leader. A fortnight earlier the Secretary General's Special Adviser on Cyprus, Alvaro de Soto, had expressed his expectation that people "will be pleasantly surprised" by imminent new developments.

In further remarks on 26 July after a session with the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Cyprus House of Representatives, Mr Kasoulides said that the Government had no objections to suggestions that the name of the UN process should be changed from "proximity talks" to "indirect talks", provided this did not signify any change in the established terms of reference as defined by the UN. Asked to comment on reports of a serious rift between Mr Denktaş and Ankara, Mr Kasoulides said that the Cyprus Government was looking into the possibility that there could be a divergence, without ruling out the opposite.

The latest developments were assessed on 31 July by a meeting of the expanded National Council, the President's senior advisory body on the Cyprus problem including the leaders of the eight parties now represented in the House. After the session, Mr Kasoulides said that he was not authorized to comment on reports that President Clerides had received a letter from the US Government about US moves to bring about a resumption of the UN talks. □

New G8 call for Cyprus talks welcomed

President Glafcos Clerides gave an immediate welcome to the section on the Cyprus problem contained in the conclusions adopted on 23 July by the Group of 8 (G8) major industrialized countries meeting in Genoa, Italy, noting that it was closer to the Cyprus Government's position than previous G8 declarations.

The G8 declared their "commitment to support the efforts of the UN Secretary General to find a just and lasting settlement that protects the fundamental interests of all parties in an undivided Cyprus, giving full consideration to relevant UN Security Council resolutions". The leaders continued that they "look forward to renewed efforts by all parties and a prompt resumption of talks under the good offices of the UN Secretary General."

President Clerides commented that the Genoa statement "for the first time clarifies that a settlement of the Cyprus problem must provide for an undivided Cyprus and comply with relevant UN resolutions". He noted with particular satisfaction that diplomatic efforts by the Turkish Government to secure the removal from the paragraph of its references to "an undivided Cyprus" and "UN resolutions" had been unsuccessful.

The Turkish reaction to the G8's Genoa statement was predictably dismissive. The Turkish Cypriot leader, Rauf Denktaş, contended that it showed that the world leaders were not fully aware of the realities of the Cyprus situation.

● Eight of the 20 luxury liners which accommodated some of the G8 leaders during their stay in the port of Genoa were hired from Cypriot shipping companies. □

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