



• First contact... Foreign Minister Kasoulides meets new UK Minister of State for Europe Peter Hain.

UK backing on EU reconfirmed

Newly-appointed UK Minister of State for Europe Peter Hain had talks with Cyprus Foreign Minister Ioannis Kasoulides in London on 3 July, stating afterwards that Britain would work closely with the Nicosia Government "so that Cyprus will be at the head of the queue for accession to the EU". Mr Hain also reaffirmed the UK Government's backing for a bizonal, bicomunal Cyprus settlement within the framework of UN resolutions.

Later in the month, in his first statements on the Cyprus problem, the new UK Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Jack Straw, said that no third country had a veto on Cyprus' accession to the European Union (EU) and pledged that the British Government would continue to work for a political settlement under UN auspices.

Replying on 18 July to a letter from two London councillors, Mr Straw agreed that the

status quo in Cyprus was unacceptable and said that Britain would continue to work with the UN Secretary General to find a way forward. He also reiterated UK support for the EU's Helsinki decision in December 1999 that a settlement was not a precondition for Cyprus' EU accession.

Responding on 22 July to a report on EU enlargement by the Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, Mr Straw rejected its suggestion that EU talks should be held on the possibility of a divided Cyprus joining the EU. "To start doing so now", he said, "would risk undermining the credibility of the UN efforts to reach a settlement, by suggesting that the EU expected them to fail". The objective, he said, "must be to reach a Cyprus settlement before enlargement", but this was not a precondition for EU accession and no third party would be allowed to have a veto in the matter. □

More missing identified

The exhumed remains of seven more people killed in the fighting surrounding the 1974 Turkish invasion of Cyprus were identified in July, bringing the total identified in the exhumation process to 115, including 30 previously listed as missing.

The Foreign Ministry announced on 24 July that two of the latest identifications were of persons whose files had been submitted to the UN Committee of Missing Persons (CMP) and two of persons who had been listed as missing but whose cases had not been forwarded to the CMP because there were strong grounds for presuming that they were dead. The other three were soldiers known to have been killed during the Turkish invasion.

The exhumation work had started in mid-1999, by a team led by Prof. William Haglund of the US-based Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) and including scientists from the Cyprus Institute of Neurology and Genetics (CING). Prof. Haglund returned to Cyprus in mid-July to carry the DNA identification work forward.

Complications surfaced at the end of July when a member of the exhumations team, Xenofon Kallis, disclosed that some exhumed remains of presumed Greek nationals which had been transferred to Greece in the early 1980s may have been wrongly identified. Mr Kallis explained that in some cases the graves had named the wrong person, while in other cases the same name appeared on more than one tombstone.

The Foreign Ministry said that the earlier exhumations had been carried out by Greek teams without benefit of the scientific resources available to the present team. Mr Kallis expressed confidence that "in spite of the problems and difficulties before us, the process of identification will continue with the aim of identifying all remains exhumed". □

Investigation agreed before new antenna

Cypriot experts entered the Akrotiri British sovereign base area (SBA) on 31 July to carry out measurements of radiation from a controversial new communications antenna, as part of an investigation into possible health and environmental dangers agreed by Cyprus and the SBA authorities in the wake of violent protests at the base earlier in the month.

The violence had erupted on 3 July when hundreds of local people protesting against work on the antenna clashed with SBA security personnel. The trigger was the arrest by the base authorities of House of Representatives member Mario Matsakis, after he had attempted to penetrate the perimeter fence accompanied by a cameraman. Several hours of fighting ensued before Mr Matsakis and the cameraman were released, during which about 30 people were injured and substantial damage was done to cars and property.

The Cyprus and UK Governments both deplored the violence, with President Clerides issuing a firm rebuke to Mr Matsakis, and urging people not to take the law into their own hands. Urgent talks were convened between the Cyprus Foreign Ministry and the British High Commission, which resulted on 6 July in an agreement that joint scientific studies would seek to establish whether electromagnetic waves from the

100-metre-high antenna posed a threat to human health and to flora and fauna in the Akrotiri Salt Lake basin.

Within the main parliamentary parties a consensus prevailed that the sovereign status of the British bases, retained when Cyprus became independent in 1960, should not be raised while the Turkish occupation of northern Cyprus continued. However, on 13 July the House gave unanimous approval to a motion calling on the British Government not to proceed with the completion of the antenna without the consent of the Cyprus Government.

A study by the Greek Biotope and Wetland Centre published on 9 July found that existing installations in the Akrotiri SBA harmed local vegetation and wildlife and that new ones would make things worse. The following day a British-commissioned study contended that the installations posed a minimal threat to human health and the environment. On 11 July, therefore, the Cyprus Government proposed that an independent EU/UN commission should look into the competing evidence.

Reserving its position on the independent commission idea, the British side allowed Cypriot scientific experts into the Akrotiri SBA at the end of the month. Supported by two French scientists, they were expected to complete their work in August. □

Turkish Cypriots get their pensions

Labour and Social Insurance Minister Andreas Mousiouttas on 9 July dismissed as "utterly false" a claim by Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denkash that the Government of Cyprus is planning to stop paying pensions and other benefits to Turkish Cypriots who are entitled to receive them.

Mr Mousiouttas said that an assertion by Mr Denkash that the Government was pushing through legislation to stop payments to anyone who had not contributed to the Social Security Fund for 10 years was "baseless" and was probably an attempt to divert attention from the dire economic situation in the occupied area.

He revealed that the Government is currently paying pensions and other benefits to 4,104 Turkish Cypriots, most in the occupied area and about 700 abroad, at an annual cost of C£7,091,000. The cheques for Turkish Cypriots are distributed via the UN and are cashed with the permission of the Central Bank of Cyprus.

The Minister stressed that eligible Turkish Cypriots enjoy the same benefits as Greek Cypriots, with no discrimination. He therefore thought it unlikely that Mr Denkash was serious in his call for Turkish Cypriots to file complaints against the Cyprus Government at the European Court of Human Rights. □