

CYPRUS

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EU enlargement unaffected by Irish vote

The unanimous decision of the European Union (EU) summit in Gothenburg on 15-16 June that the process of EU enlargement "is irreversible" and that Cyprus and other applicant countries would be members by mid-2004 at the latest was welcomed by President Clerides, who was present in the Swedish city for a meeting of EU and applicant countries' heads of state and government.

The Cyprus President noted that the timetable agreed at the summit specified that accession negotiations would be completed by the end of 2002 "for those candidate countries that are ready" and that they would "participate in the European Parliament elections of 2004 as members". He said that under this formula Cyprus, which was one of the two applicants most advanced in its negotiations with the EU (see page 3), could expect to be admitted in 2003, although he made clear his preference that other countries from the 12 currently negotiating for membership should join at the same time as Cyprus.

President Clerides also welcomed the EU's insistence on including in the summit conclusions a stipulation that the EU-Turkey Accession Partnership (AP) agreement "is the cornerstone" of pre-accession relations with Turkey. He said that this text was important for Cyprus because the AP agreement laid certain obligations on Turkey if it wished to progress towards EU membership, including respect for human rights and furtherance of a Cyprus settlement.

●The Cyprus Government's reaction to the rejection by Irish voters on 7 June of the Nice Treaty governing the enlargement process was one of relaxed disappointment. Foreign Minister Ioannis Kasoulides said that the result was a setback for the applicant countries but expressed his confidence that the Irish would change their minds in a further referendum. □

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• The UN's key role... Secretary General Kofi Annan hopes for new Cyprus talks by the end of the year.

Talks resumption viewed with caution

The Cyprus Government continued to press in June for the speedy resumption of the UN-sponsored "proximity talks" unilaterally abandoned by the Turkish Cypriot side in November 2000, but gave a cautious reaction to a suggestion by European Enlargement Commissioner Günter Verheugen on 28 June that a Cyprus settlement could be reached before the conclusion of Cyprus' accession negotiations with the European Union (EU) by the end of 2002. Instead, the Government remained convinced that Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktaş wanted to delay his return to the negotiating table until Cyprus' EU membership was imminent and would then seek to use the talks process to block accession.

Herr Verheugen's optimistic comments on the possibility of a Cyprus settlement before EU accession were made following his talks in Brussels with Turkish Foreign Minister Ismail Cem and separate meetings with the Foreign Ministers of Greece and Cyprus, George Papandreou and Ioannis Kasoulides. Also present were the UN Secretary General's Special Adviser on Cyprus, Alvaro de Soto, and the US State Department's Special Cyprus Co-ordinator, Thomas Weston. The Commissioner said afterwards that Cyprus was among the candidate countries expected to complete negotiations before the end of 2002 and that the EU would use all means, in co-operation with the UN, to bring about the desirable goal of a united Cyprus joining the EU, although a political settlement was not a precondition.

Cyprus Spokesman Michalis Papapetrou responded on 29 June that, while the Government would very much like to see a

settlement before the conclusion of EU accession negotiations, "we do not have any information that warrants such an optimistic prediction". He added, however, that "it looks as if there are intensive consultations and preparations focusing on the Cyprus question...with a view to the talks resuming".

Whereas the Cyprus Government stressed that it was ready to resume talks immediately, exactly where they had been broken off by Mr Denktaş in November 2000, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan admitted in London on 21 June that Sr de Soto was still "exploring the issues" with the parties. His hope was that "between now and the end of the year we may be able to get the parties back to the table".

Also in London, during a brief visit on his way to the EU summit in Gothenburg (see this page), President Glafcos Clerides on 13 June had talks with the Special UK Representative for Cyprus, Lord (David) Hannay, who said afterwards that he did not know when Mr Denktaş might return to the UN talks. In an interview with London Greek Radio broadcast on 14 June, President Clerides reiterated his belief that the Turkish side "will prolong the stalemate and will return to the talks when it realises that Cyprus is at the point of joining the EU". It would then, he forecast, "display a shift in its intransigent positions to claim a postponement of accession".

●President Clerides on 18 June presided over the first meeting since the May parliamentary elections of the National Council, his senior advisory body on the Cyprus problem. Membership of the Council was expanded to include the leaders of all eight parties now represented in the House. □