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UNFICYP mandate change ruled out

Cyprus Spokesman Michalis Papapetrou ruled out any change in the established procedure for renewing the mandate of the UN Peace-Keeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) to accommodate Turkish Cypriot demands. Due to be debated by the UN Security Council before the 15 June expiry deadline, the renewal is expected to re-focus international attention on the need for a resumption of the stalled UN talks on the Cyprus problem, after a hiatus in diplomatic activity during the parliamentary elections (see this page).

Speaking on 31 May, Mr Papapetrou said that the Turkish side was pressing for the inclusion of an addendum in the UN Secretary General's next report on Cyprus setting out its demand for separate consultations with the Turkish Cypriots before the renewal of the UNFICYP mandate. He pointed out that the 1964 UN Security Council resolution establishing UNFICYP specified that the composition and size of the Force should be determined by the Secretary General in consultation with the Government of Cyprus and those of Greece, Turkey and the UK, the guarantor powers. The Cyprus Government therefore rejects any move to change this formula, seeing the Turkish side's pressure as part of its demand for recognition of a separate state.

The previous day Mr Papapetrou had strongly deplored an assertion by Turkish Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit after a meeting of Turkey's National Security Council that a "velvet divorce" was required between the two sides in Cyprus. Such a proposal, he said, "reaffirms Turkey's intransigent stance and unacceptable approach to the Cyprus problem" and was "in direct contradiction" with UN and European Union (EU) decisions.

●The Cyprus Government welcomed the confirmation given by US Secretary of State Colin Powell, in talks with Greek Foreign Minister George Papandreou in Washington on 21 May, that the US Administration was backing efforts for a resumption of UN talks and also supported the EU's 1999 decision in Helsinki that a Cyprus settlement was not a pre-condition for accession to the EU. □

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• Democracy in action....Counting the votes in Cyprus' eighth parliamentary elections since independence.

Fight for House President's post

Political interest following parliamentary elections on 27 May centred on who would be elected as President of the new House of Representatives in succession to Spyros Kyprianou, who retired at the elections. Political observers believe that any alliances formed now for the election of the House President may determine the alignment of forces for the presidential elections due in February 2003.

Nominated for the second most important post in the state hierarchy were Demetris Christofias, leader of the left-wing Progressive Party of the Working People (AKEL), while the conservative Democratic Rally (DISY) also nominated its leader, Nicos Anastasiades. At the end of the month both parties were campaigning hard to attract support from the other parliamentary parties prior to the convening of the new House on 7 June and the election of its new President.

The results of Cyprus' eighth parliamentary elections since independence showed that AKEL had displaced DISY as the largest party in the 56-member House of Representatives and that an unprecedented eight contending parties had obtained representation, four of them with one seat each. An historic task of the new House at some point during its five-year term is expected to be the ratification of Cyprus' accession to the European Union.

A keenly fought election campaign focused principally on domestic economic and social issues, with the Cyprus problem taking a back seat this time and all parties being supportive of EU membership. Under the prevailing system of proportional representation, the outcome was a characteristically small but significant shift in party strengths (see page 3 for detailed results). AKEL's gain of one seat

was less than opinion polls had been predicting, but enough to give it the coveted top spot with 20 of the 56 seats in the eighth legislature. It therefore exchanged positions with DISY, which fell back from 20 to 19 seats.

Of the three other parties represented in the previous House, the centre-right Democratic Party (DIKO), the Movement of Social Democrats (KISOS) and the United Democrats (ED) each lost one seat, retaining nine, four and one respectively. The remaining three seats went to New Horizons (NEO), the Fighting Democratic Movement (ADIK) and the Ecologist and Environmentalist Movement, known as the Greens for short.

Mr Christofias said that the outcome gave AKEL greater authority in its opposition to the Government's conservative economic and social policies. For DISY, Mr Anastasiades said that the result was "a denial of the opinion polls and a confirmation of the party's decisive role in the political arena". DIKO leader Tassos Papadopoulos expressed pleasure that his party had won enough seats to play a pivotal role in the new House.

Among the smaller formations, KISOS quickly experienced internal strains because of its poor result. On 29 May long-time leader Vassos Lyssarides announced his readiness to resign pending a decision on a new leadership by a party congress, although he made it clear that he intended to retain his seat in the House.

The outcome was also disappointing for the EDI led by former President George Vassiliou, currently Cyprus' Chief EU negotiator, although the party made no immediate move to carry out its pre-election pledge to withdraw from the Government if it did not gain ground. □