



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Address to political parties representing the Greek Cypriot community and the Turkish Cypriot community

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Official visit to Cyprus/Nicosia
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Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I still remember our previous discussion during my first visit in October 2010 and I look for the same encouragement I received from you last time. Then, I left Cyprus with a hope. It is a pleasure to see you again this time and also colleagues from the Slovak and Czech Embassy whom I thank for supporting us.

Please allow me to make some introductory remarks before we engage in less formal discussions. I would like to focus on two issues, namely the worrying situation in the settlement process and the upcoming Cypriot Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

On the settlement talks: it is worrying that no settlement has been reached to date. There have been discussions as to whether the status quo could be a way, but this is nonsense – it does not satisfy anyone. Unfinished business on Cyprus is becoming unfinished business in the EU. You can feel it more and more in the EU. There are many issues where we are reminded on a regular basis that there is still homework to be done even 8 years after Cyprus entered in the EU.

There is no alternative to a comprehensive settlement and the reunification of Cyprus. To continue with the status quo is not a viable option.

New ideas are necessary on how to carry on the process to make it more productive, to deliver results. But until there is a hopefully more conducive environment – after the presidential elections - it is crucial to make best use of this interim period. So, what is going to happen between now and the elections?

The worst thing to happen would be to stop talking to each other. Only through a direct dialogue between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots can the Cyprus problem be solved.

This brings me to the following point:

The political parties can and should prepare the ground for the compromises that need to be agreed by the leaders. The political agenda is very often limited by the term of office and elections. Politicians are often victims of these calendars and expectations created by political parties. But there is only a limited period of time in the life of a politician to make compromises. If I look back at different political calendars, how can I define the best time for politicians to agree on the solution? We need to release them from the pressure of calendars. Political parties have a tremendous role to play. I want to use this opportunity to make this call: you have a chance to use the interim period to take the issues back to their roots and to make sure that politicians in the elections have all the backing to use the window of opportunity.

So my appeal tonight goes to both communities: Don't stop talking, but discuss how to move forward, discuss how the communities can work together already today for the benefit of the citizens, whether Greek Cypriot or Turkish Cypriot.

The range of issues can be very wide:

- Can new crossing points at the Green Line be opened?
- Can the economic interaction between the two communities be enhanced?
- How can the recently discovered natural resources in the Mediterranean be used as a catalyst for a comprehensive settlement? How to make sure that this is a blessing and not the curse for the region?
- How can the cultural heritage important for both communities be preserved?

- How can the environment be best protected throughout the island in the interest of the next generations?

The ideas are there and if you want to work together, you can start doing so.

Let me mention the trade in electricity across the Green Line after the tragic events last summer as a good example that more cooperation can be for the benefit of both communities. And it is sad to see in the trade volume that if we take out the electricity, the trade exchange is actually going down. Now is it a sign of the economic crisis or a sign that more needs to be done not to lose momentum? I asked my interlocutors today whether Halloumi/Hellim cheese registration could not be one of the issues where instead of communities approaching the European Commission on their own to protect their legitimate interests could it not be a basis for interaction between Chambers of Commerce or producers from both sides for the benefit of all?

The Commission will be eager and active to underpin financially such bi-communal activities or confidence building measures. As we have shown in the past on issues such as the de-mining of the buffer zone and the important work of the Committee on Missing Persons.

Let me touch upon the second issue: the upcoming Cypriot Presidency of the Council of the European Union. This is a great honour and a great challenge at the same time.

I do not agree that it is a threat to the settlement process. It is a false impression that the Presidency and settlement are contradictory issues. I believe that the Presidency can benefit all Cypriots and increase the chances for a successful solution to the Cyprus problem.

The increased attention in the next 6 months is in the interest of the pro-solution forces in both communities. The sense of urgency to solve the Cyprus problem will increase as a result of the Presidency.

My vision is to see a successful Council Presidency followed by a successful conclusion of a comprehensive settlement. This will require serious compromises by the leaders of both communities.

As President Barroso pointed out during his visit to Cyprus in 2009: "The challenge is to look at compromise not as a defeat, as losing something, but rather as winning something."

A solution to the Cyprus problem would clearly create a win-win situation, not only for Cyprus, but also for the European Union as a whole.

Eight years' after Cyprus' accession let's all work together to overcome the divide, once and for all in a truly European spirit!

And now one more personal thought: Presidency, hydrocarbons – at the beginning these are not the stories. These are issues. It is politicians who will create stories and opportunities out of these issues. Let us not become victims of our own stories. You have all the right instruments to turn these and any other issues into a positive contribution rather than to a negative one. As someone who tends to see the glass half-full and not half-empty I have my own idea on how important it is to steer the issue in a positive way. And here you have the special responsibility as parties and political leaders.

Thank you!