

## Time to bring the EU to all Cypriots

In a few days I will pay my first visit to Cyprus as European Commissioner. This is a good opportunity to set out my vision of the Commission's approach to a united Cyprus.

**We strongly supported the accession of Cyprus to the EU in 2004.** We wanted and expected the accession process to be used as catalyst for a Cyprus settlement in order for all Cypriots to fully benefit from membership. It did not work in 2004. Now Cyprus is a well established Member State, the first of the Member States that acceded in 2004 to join the euro and soon, in 2012, will take up the EU Presidency Today Cyprus is making a distinctive contribution to European Union policies, as a full Member State with all the privileges, obligations and respect that this entails. The Commission works with the Government of Cyprus on the basis of the principle of sincere co-operation and partnership.

**Cyprus joined the EU as *de facto* a divided island. The EU had no choice but to deal with the consequences** of this situation. Foreign Ministers in 2004 agreed on a strategy which had two key objectives: ending the isolation of the Turkish Cypriot community and facilitating the reunification of the island. The chosen mechanism to facilitate this was to encourage the economic development of the Turkish Cypriot community. We proposed three legislative acts: the Green Line Regulation, helping the movement of persons and goods across the dividing line; the Regulation on aid for the Turkish Cypriot community and a Regulation granting trade preferences for Turkish Cypriot goods sent from the northern part of Cyprus to the EU, widely known as the "Direct Trade Regulation". Two of them were adopted and are being implemented on an everyday basis, visibly changing the landscape on the island. The third is now before the European Parliament which acquired new competences for trade issues under the Lisbon Treaty.

Green Line trade has been gradually growing to a level of €6 Million per year. The European Commission is implementing a € 259 million Aid Programme in support of the Turkish Cypriot community meant to reduce the economic gap in Cyprus ahead of reunification, helping the Turkish Cypriots meet EU standards particularly in the field of environment and bringing them closer to the European Union. EU money is also invested in confidence building measures for example the highly valued work of the Committee on Missing Persons, de-mining actions and new crossings at the Green Line including the Limnitis crossing which will be opened during my visit. Additional EU funding is underway for 2011.

**From the outset, the European Commission has fully supported the current settlement process** under UN auspices and provided advice on EU related matters. In October last year, President Barroso appointed a personal representative to the UN Good Offices Mission in Cyprus to support the settlement process to the greatest extent possible. The Commission welcomes any proposal aimed at producing progress in the UN led talks from the leaders of either of the two communities. It is ready to support any agreed effort under UN auspices to reach specific solutions, including on Varosha. It is not for the Commission to approve or reject proposals which are to be discussed between the leaders at the negotiation table. When there is an agreement the Commission will support it.

**A united Cyprus is first and foremost in the interest of the Cypriots.** It would allow Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots to reconcile through a shared vision of the future for Cyprus. A united Cyprus is also in the interest of the European Union as a whole. A non-solution is not an option. The EU, therefore, strongly encourages the leaders of the two communities to bring

settlement talks swiftly to a successful end. Once the deal is sealed, the EU is committed to accommodating the settlement in line with the European Union's founding principles: liberty, democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. After reunification, the EU will help Cypriots be they Greek or Turkish to meet the challenges of uniting the country and mobilise all available resources to make the Cyprus settlement a truly European success story.

**A Cyprus settlement is not possible without a constructive attitude and concrete and continued support from Turkey.** The Turkish Government is well aware that a solution will give a boost to Turkey's own accession process. Supporting a settlement is therefore in Turkey's own interest for many reasons. It would, however, be a miscalculation to think that blocking the accession process with Turkey will increase the chances for a settlement. The Commission and the EU as a whole are fully behind Cyprus when expecting Turkey to fulfill its obligations deriving from the Additional Protocol to the Ankara Agreement which the Turkish Government signed before the EU opened accession negotiations in 2005.

**The foundations of the European Union are built on reconciliation** between communities and between countries. Reconciliation is what Cyprus needs now. **I am convinced that the price of a non-solution is much higher than that of any fair compromise.** A solution to the Cyprus problem creates a win-win situation for everybody, not only for Cyprus, but also for Greece, Turkey, and Europe as a whole. Cypriots from both communities can count on the European Commission as a fair and impartial partner in their efforts to reach a lasting, fair and comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus issue.