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TIME TO END THE ISOLATION

THE UK'S RESPONSIBILITY TO TURKISH CYPRIOTS

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by Embargoed! on 14 September 2004

Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. The Outcome of the Annan Plan Referenda and Implications for Cyprus	4
3. Ongoing Suffering of the Turkish Cypriot People	7
4. The UK's Special Responsibility to Turkish Cypriots	10
5. Recommendations: Creating a Positive Dynamic on the Island	11
6. Conclusion	13
7. Notes	14

1. Introduction

Embargoed! is an independent pressure group campaigning to bring an immediate and unconditional end to all embargoes against Turkish Cypriots in North Cyprus. Formed in London, where a major concentration of Turkish Cypriots resides, the group welcomes the opportunity to present this submission to the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee.

In light of the recent referenda on the Annan Plan and previous legal agreements, we contend that the Greek Cypriot administration, acting under the banner of the 'Republic of Cyprus', has neither the right nor the authority to represent the Turkish Cypriot people.

For the last 40 years the Turkish Cypriot people have been in a state of isolation for no good reason. Yet the international community has been indifferent to their plight and unwilling to do anything that would fundamentally change the status quo established in Cyprus in December 1963.

The overwhelming acceptance of the Annan Plan by the Turkish Cypriot people as a permanent, peaceful settlement to the Cyprus Problem, and the emphatic rejection by the Greek Cypriot people of that plan, now demands a new approach by the international community. We believe the time has come for the British Government to reassess, and alter, their foreign policy towards Cyprus and more specifically to the Turkish Cypriot administration in the north of the island.

Turkish Cypriots can no longer be held hostage to the failed negotiations to reunite the island and their ongoing, unjustified suffering as a result of the internationally supported embargoes must come to a swift end.

This is what the international community, including the United Kingdom (UK), agreed to undertake following the April referenda. It is essential these do not become empty promises and so undermine the Turkish Cypriots' confidence in the world, and most especially the European Union (EU).

2. The Outcome of the Annan Plan Referenda and the Implications for Cyprus

The process for the Annan Plan represented the best chance of achieving a breakthrough in the stalemate on the island. Moreover, the Plan had the backing of all the parties involved in Cyprus, the EU, the United States of America (USA) and the wider international community.

The final Plan that was put to referenda was supported by both Turkish and Greek Cypriots and acknowledged by all parties, internally and externally, to be fair solution. It gave neither side all they wanted, but it was workable if the will was there to create a new partnership State.

UN Secretary General (UNSG) Kofi Annan himself said, "There is no other plan out there – this is it". Yet the Greek Cypriot side chose to reject this opportunity to reunify Cyprus. The Greek Cypriot leader Papadopoulos said, "Saying 'yes' in the referendum would do away with our internationally recognised State exactly at the very moment it strengthens its political weight with its ascension to the European Union"¹.

The Greek Cypriot attitude and vote prompted a range of negative feedback, including from the UN Security Council, which said it, "shares the UN Secretary General's disappointment that efforts since 1999 to reunify the island have not succeeded and regrets that an extraordinary historic opportunity to resolve the Cyprus issue has been missed"².

The Turkish Cypriot people voted 'yes', hoping for an end to the Cyprus Problem and their forty year isolation through joint entry into the EU. The world applauded this positive response from Turkish Cypriots, despite the significant sacrifices the Plan required of them³. For example, for the Turkish Cypriots of Guzelyurt, in North West Cyprus, voting in favour of the Plan meant them leaving their homes of the past thirty years and becoming refugees all over again.

It was this that prompted the UNSG and many other world leaders and international bodies to promise changes in Cyprus that would end the isolation of Turkish Cypriots. The UNSG report of 28 May 2004 to the UN Security Council⁴ expressed in no uncertain terms the paradigm shift expected from the countries dealing with the Turkish Cypriots:

“The decision of the Turkish Cypriots is to be welcomed. The Turkish Cypriot leadership and Turkey have made clear their respect for the wish of the Turkish Cypriots to reunify in a bicomunal, bizonal federation. The Turkish Cypriot vote has undone any rationale for pressuring and isolating them. I would hope that the members of the Council can give a strong lead to all States to cooperate both bilaterally and in international bodies, to eliminate unnecessary restrictions and barriers that have the effect of isolating the Turkish Cypriots and impeding their development — not for the purposes of affording recognition or assisting secession, but as a positive contribution to the goal of reunification.”

The views of the UN were also reflected in the comments from various European Union representatives:

EU Enlargement Commissioner Verheugen’s 25 April 2004:

“A unique opportunity to bring about a solution to the long-lasting Cyprus issue has been missed...What we will seriously consider now is finding a way to end the economic isolation of the Turkish Cypriots.”

The European Union Parliamentary Assembly Resolution, no. 1376 (2004), stated:

“The Assembly pays tribute to the Turkish Cypriots, who supported the Annan Plan by an overwhelming majority, thus opting for a future in Europe. The international community, and in particular the Council of Europe and the European Union, cannot ignore or betray the expressed desire of a majority of Turkish Cypriots for greater openness and should take rapid and appropriate steps to encourage it. The Turkish Cypriots' international isolation must cease.

The Assembly therefore welcomes the support expressed by several European political leaders for financial assistance for the Turkish Cypriots and an easing of the international sanctions against them. The United Nations should also consider whether the resolutions on which the sanctions are based are still justified. The Assembly considers it unfair for the Turkish Cypriot community, which has expressed clear support for a reunited and European Cyprus, to continue to be denied representation in the European political debate. Such continued isolation may help strengthen the positions of those who are opposing a unified Cyprus.”

Five months have passed since the referenda. Despite their yes vote and the many promises from around the world to end their isolation, very little has changed for the Turkish Cypriots. The embargoes still exist. The same status quo on the island, where one people’s rights are recognised, the other’s is not, still exists.

Should this status quo continue into the foreseeable future, the Turkish Cypriots’ goodwill towards the Greek Cypriots, the EU and the international community will be destroyed. At the same time, for the Greek Cypriot administration and people to continue to exercise the same dominance over the affairs of the whole of Cyprus will continue to ensure they have no incentive to compromise and establish the international vision of a federal solution.

Surely the fairest outcome following the Greek Cypriots’ vote against the Annan Plan, which prevented a unified Cyprus acceding to the EU, is that they can no longer be allowed to exercise control over matters that relate to North Cyprus, and Turkish Cypriots and the EU? The Turkish Cypriots must be empowered and dealt with on an equal footing with Greek Cypriots.

3. The Ongoing Suffering of the Turkish Cypriot People

The information below relating to the North-South divide in Cyprus underlines the need to change the status quo. It shows the adverse effect of the embargoes on the every day lives of Turkish Cypriots, while their Greek Cypriot neighbours continue to benefit from being the sole recognised entity on the island. There is no justification for this.

GNP per capita⁵

- The average Turkish Cypriot earns \$5,000 per year
- The average Greek Cypriot earns \$15,000 per year

Purchasing power⁶

- North Cyprus: \$787 million
- South Cyprus: \$9.4 billion

Exports⁷

- North Cyprus: \$46 million
- South Cyprus: \$1.03 billion

Impact of 5 July 1994 European Court of Justice (Case C-432/92) judgement on North Cyprus trade with the European Union (EU)

- EU member states not permitted to import fruit and vegetables from North Cyprus without a certificate issued by the Greek Cypriot authorities
- In 1993, North Cyprus exports to the EU totalled almost \$37 million. 10 years later, as a direct consequence of this ruling, exports dropped to £12.5 million⁸
- In contrast, "EU countries constitute the most important markets" for Greek Cypriots, with 54% of exports EU bound in 2003 generating £117 million⁹

Time and cost to fly to Cyprus from the UK

- North Cyprus: flight from London to Ercan, Nicosia via Turkey – 6 hours, average cost £270 per adult¹⁰
- South Cyprus: direct flight from London to Larnaca – 4.5 hours, cheap flights as low as £116 per adult¹¹

Time taken for a UK posted letter to arrive

- North Cyprus (via Mersin 10, Turkey): 1-2 weeks
- South Cyprus: 3-4 days¹²

Participation in international sporting and cultural events

- North Cyprus: representation not permitted in any international events, such as the Olympics, the Eurovision Song Contest, or the World Cup – even friendly football matches with other international club and national teams are banned¹³
- South Cyprus: can represent 'the whole island' in any international social, sporting or cultural activity

As can be seen from above, Turkish Cypriots continue to live as second class citizens in their own homeland. They have endured this for forty years – ever since Greek Cypriots seized physical and political control of the island in December 1963.

Today, Turkish Cypriots may not be in physical danger and their economy propped up by Turkey. Yet Turkish Cypriots continue to be denied their basic human rights through a range of Greek Cypriot imposed embargoes that obstruct every aspect of their lives:

- Denying their right of representation in international political fora;
- Preventing direct travel abroad – all flights to international destinations require a stopover in Turkey, which increases the time and cost of the flight;
- Reducing North Cyprus postal services to a PO Box in Turkey (Mersin 10). All other communication with the rest of the world also only possible via Turkey;
- Restricting trade and tourism opportunities between North Cyprus and the outside world;
- Barring Turkish Cypriot enjoyment of cultural and sporting relations with people from other countries, including Turkey.

Why do Greek Cypriots seek to impose these embargoes? Their purpose was, and still is to bully Turkish Cypriots into accepting a settlement on Greek Cypriot terms. They have been extremely successful.

The intensive lobbying of Governments, institutions and individuals has ensured many steer clear of North Cyprus, which Greek Cypriot propaganda positions as a pariah state¹⁴. Any efforts by external groups to create direct links between North Cyprus and the outside world is met by a wave of Greek Cypriot deterrents ranging from financial penalties to threats. Details of these efforts have been documented by many sources, including the internationally recognised Turkish Cypriot Chambers of Commerce¹⁵.

Greek Cypriots get away with such tactics through the continued indifference of the international community to the plight of Turkish Cypriots. Their sole presence in the global political arena means the domination and manipulation of decisions that reinforce their position, such as the UN Security Council Resolution 541 (1983), which calls upon the world not to recognise any Cypriot State other than “the Republic of Cyprus”.

However, there is no UN resolution which gives the Greek Cypriots alone the right to call themselves the ‘Government of Cyprus’ and even resolution 541 is advisory, not mandatory. Yet the international community chooses to treat the Greek Cypriots as such, and ignore the legal, political and human rights of the Turkish Cypriots.

Even the recent European Union actions to help promote the economic development of North Cyprus, such as Council Regulation (EC no 866/2004), also known as the Green Line Regulation, shows undue sympathy to the Greek Cypriot cause at the expense of Turkish Cypriots. The EU continues to follow Greek Cypriot demands that Turkish Cypriot exports can only enter the EU via South Cyprus. This creates added bureaucracy, complexity and cost for Turkish Cypriot businesses:

- They must register an address in South Cyprus together with an accounting system before they can export to the EU
- All goods produced in North Cyprus are liable to pay VAT in both South Cyprus and the member State the goods are exported to
- Businesses that export goods produced in the North will be obliged to pay company tax in both North and South Cyprus
- Turkish Cypriots continue to be deprived of using the more conveniently located air and sea ports in North Cyprus for direct trade and travel purposes
- Even though the Turkish Cypriots voted ‘yes’, North Cyprus is refused direct financial aid as a political settlement has not been reached

It is time for this unnecessary suffering and unjust isolation of the Turkish Cypriots to end. Turkish Cypriots have done nothing to deserve such treatment and as the recent referenda results show, continue to place their trust and good will in the hands of the international community.

4. The UK's Special Responsibility to Turkish Cypriots

The British Government has a legal duty, as a result of the Treaty of Guarantee of 1960, to maintain the political equilibrium established between the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, as set of in the 1960 Constitution of the independent Republic of Cyprus.

This equilibrium was shattered with the expulsion of the Turkish Cypriots from the Cyprus Government in December 1963. No legal Government of the Republic of Cyprus, as defined in the 1960 Constitution, has existed since that time. In effect two administrations arose in Cyprus, one Greek Cypriot, the other Turkish Cypriot. Yet successive British Governments have only recognised the Greek Cypriot authorities.

We submit that the British Government should alter this and deal directly with the Turkish Cypriot administration. This would ensure the UK fulfils its treaty obligations to treat the two sides equally, and also reflect the practical realities of Cyprus – it is the Turkish Cypriots that exercise effective control over the northern territory. Finally, it will demonstrate to Turkish Cypriots, both in the UK and in Cyprus, that the UK promise “to help end isolation of Northern Cyprus”¹⁶, made by UK Foreign Secretary Jack Straw to Turkish Cypriot Prime Minister Mehmet Ali Talat in July 2004, is being kept.

5. Recommendations: Creating a Positive Dynamic on the Island

The Turkish Cypriot side have long argued that recognition of the rights of one side (the Greek Cypriots), whilst ignoring those of the other (Turkish Cypriots) is not only inherently unjust, but also fails to create an incentive for the recognised side to reach an agreement. Is it any wonder that the Greek Cypriots rejected the Annan Plan in April 2004, when they had already been guaranteed a place in the European Union irrespective of their voting decision?

It is time to change these negative dynamics on the island. Rewarding the Turkish Cypriots for their brave vote in favour of the Annan Plan, even though it would have resulted in considerable sacrifices on their part, would send a strong message to Greek Cypriots about their need to compromise. It would also create a more equal playing field upon which a long-term peaceful settlement is more likely.

Given its historical links and legal obligations to Cyprus, the UK has a key role to play in bringing about a positive change on the island. Embargoed!, having consulted some of the major non governmental organisations in North Cyprus¹⁷, believe the UK should spearhead the following actions:

1. Acknowledge that the Greek Cypriot Government, acting under the banner of the Republic of Cyprus, has neither the right nor the authority to represent the Turkish Cypriot people
2. Deal directly with the elected representatives and authorities of the Turkish Cypriot people, including setting up representative offices in North Cyprus
3. Push the EU for immediate amendments to the Green Line Regulation that provide a fairer, simpler and more efficient set of processes for Turkish Cypriot businesses
4. Drive EU support for a "Direct Regulation" that permits the free movement of people, goods and services between North Cyprus and the EU without the need for an intermediary

5. Admit Turkish Cypriot exports that are transported directly from North Cyprus air and sea ports into EU member States
6. Accept the Certificates of Origin of goods to EU standards issued by the authorised Turkish Cypriot bodies in North Cyprus, such as Cyprus Turkish Chamber of Industry and Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce
7. Accredite the North Cyprus Veterinary Laboratory with the authority to issue health and plant certificates so agricultural products can be exported to the EU
8. Enable direct flights, postal and telecommunications links to and from North Cyprus
9. Remove the visa requirement on Turkish Cypriots
10. Support the participation of Turkish Cypriot organisations and representatives at international political, social, cultural, sportive events and organisations and specifically,
 - Encourage the English Football Association to support the Turkish Cypriots' efforts to secure special permission from FIFA to play friendly football matches with teams from other national associations

6. Conclusion

Now is the time to end the isolation of the Turkish Cypriots and as a first step we call upon the international community to remove, immediately and unconditionally, all embargoes levied against North Cyprus. There is no time to lose if the goodwill that has developed between the Turkish Cypriot people and the outside world is to be maintained.

Turkish Cypriots have been held hostage to the need for a final settlement of the Cyprus Problem for long enough. They have voted in favour of the Annan Plan whilst the Greek Cypriots overwhelmingly rejected it. There are no moral, legal or political reasons left to justify the continued isolation of North Cyprus and we therefore urge the UK Government to adopt policies that will swiftly enable the Turkish Cypriots to enjoy their inherent rights within the family of nations.

7. Notes

Embargoed! contact details can be found on:

www.embargoed.org

¹ Speech broadcast in South Cyprus on 7 April 2004

² Security Council Statement on Cyprus, 28 April 2004

³ United Nations Secretary General's statement, 24 April 2004

⁴ UNSG Report S/2004/437

⁵ CIA World Factbook, 2003, website: www.indexmundi.co

⁶ CIA World Factbook, 2003, website: www.indexmundi.co

⁷ CIA World Factbook, 2003, website: www.indexmundi.co

⁸ Figures taken from Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce website, <http://www.ktto.net/english/export1.xls>

⁹ Section 3.2 of the 'CYPRUS EXTERNAL TRADE DEVELOPMENTS IN 2003' report, produced by Greek Cypriot authorities, <http://www.cyprus.gov.cy/cyphome/govhome.nsf/0/AC5D0EAF3DB36F34C2256D960023F410?OpenDocument&languageNo=1>

¹⁰ Cyprus Turkish Airlines, <http://www.kthy.net/>

¹¹ For prices, <http://www.cheapflights.co.uk/flights/Larnaca/>, for travel duration, <http://www.cyprusairways.com/main/default.aspx?mid=563&TabID=55&ItemID=313>

¹² Royal Mail

¹³ FIFA decision in 1987, as expressed in letter dated 22 June 1987 from JS Blatter, General Secretary of FIFA, to the Cyprus Turkish Football Association

¹⁴ See the Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce publication 'Embargoes and isolation of North Cyprus' for examples of Greek Cypriot lobbying to block Turkish Cypriot ties with the outside world <http://www.ktto.net/english/ya20020101.html>.

In addition, the following is an extract from the Greek Cypriot Official Tourism website (13/09/04), used to deter travellers visiting North Cyprus:

“All airports in the part of the Republic illegally occupied by the Turkish invasion forces, have been declared by the Government of Cyprus as prohibited ports of entry and exit, and no visitor should enter or leave the Republic through these ports.

As a result of the Turkish invasion and military occupation of the northern part of Cyprus, the port of Ammochostos and the Keryneia harbour are closed to shipping and navigation, and have been declared by the Government of Cyprus as prohibited ports of entry and exit, and no visitor is allowed to enter or leave the Republic through these ports” <http://www.visitcyprus.org.cy/ctoweb/ctoweb/site.nsf/Main?OpenFrameSet>

¹⁵ <http://www.ktto.net/english/ya20020101.html>

¹⁶ The article “Straw promises to help end isolation of Northern Cyprus”, by Leyla Linton, appeared in The Independent on 02 July 2004

¹⁷ These include the Cyprus Turkish Chamber of Industry, the Cyprus Turkish Football Association, and Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce