



31 March 2004

Remarks at the closing of the Cyprus Talks
By Secretary-General, Kofi Annan
Bürgenstock, Switzerland

Excellencies, dear Friends,

Thank you all for joining me here this evening. The hour is late, but the cause is urgent. The time for negotiation and consultation is over. The time for decision and action has arrived.

I am very glad that, in addition to the leadership of each side - Mr Papadopoulos, Mr. Talat and Mr. Denktash – Prime Minister Karamanlis and Prime Minister Erdogan are with us tonight.

I thank Mr. Guenther Verheugen, the European Union Enlargement Commissioner, for being with us, and demonstrating the Union's strong support for this effort to bring about a Cyprus settlement.

Two days ago, when some of us last met here, I submitted to you a revision of my plan to solve the Cyprus problem.

Since then, we have had forty-eight busy hours. I have met all the leaders, and I have listened to you very carefully.

You now have before you a final text, reviewed and amended overnight and again today.

I have written each of you a letter, outlining the procedure from here, in order for separate simultaneous referenda to be held on both sides in Cyprus on 24 April 2004 – and, I hope, for a reunited Cyprus to accede to the European Union on 1 May 2004.

We have arrived at this point following talks on the island, and now, during this last week, a concentrated effort in Bürgenstock.

The six weeks of negotiations and consultation which conclude tonight were conducted within an unavoidably tight schedule.

There has been intense public interest, and the press has played its part in encouraging a lively debate.

Even in the last two days, there has been much speculation about the revised plan. Many of the positive elements have been lost sight of in the discussion.

The revised plan has a property scheme that is simpler, fairer and more certain.

It has a more workable system of government.

It has better safeguards for the constituent states.

It has transitional arrangements that I am confident can and will work.

And it has been improved from the financial and economic point of view.

Since that revision was presented on Monday, further refinements have been made.

As a result, the plan now before you is very different from the proposal that has been in front of you for the past year.

The process of negotiation is not a football match. It is not a question of keeping score of goals and own goals, of winners and losers.

Rather, we have tried to accommodate the expressed concerns of both sides, so as to create a win-win situation.

I believe that we have succeeded. But the time has come for you, the leaders, and for voters in both communities, to assess what is before them as an overall package in the run-up to the referenda.

As the people of Cyprus, north and south, debate and consider their future over the next three and a half weeks, they will be looking to you, their leaders, for guidance.

You have undertaken the responsibility of organizing referenda. You have a responsibility to inform the people about the plan on which they will be asked to say yes or no, so that each voter can make up his or her mind.

This plan is inevitably a compromise. It does not satisfy everyone's demands. But I believe it meets the core interests, and addresses the key concerns, of people on both sides.

Let us be clear. The choice is not between this settlement plan and some other magical, mythical solution. In reality, the choice is between this settlement and no settlement.

If the settlement is approved in the referenda next month, Cyprus would reunify, in time to accede to the European Union. After only a short interval, freedom of movement would prevail, without border-like checkpoints.

A new state of affairs would emerge, far better designed than the one of 1960 to manage relations between the two communities.

A substantial number of Greek Cypriots would be able to return to the homes they left behind thirty years ago, and to do so under Greek Cypriot administration. Others would receive full and effective compensation.

Cypriots from both sides could return to their homes in the area administered by the other Constituent State.

Some Turkish Cypriots might have to move, though fewer than is sometimes thought. There would be time for this to be organized properly, and adequate measures would be taken,

with the help of the international community, to ensure that they have adequate alternative housing and opportunities to thrive.

For Turkish Cypriots, the decades of isolation would come to an end, as they come together with Greek Cypriots under the protective European mantle, as equal partners in the new state of affairs.

The United Nations would strengthen its operation in Cyprus, and help the Cypriots implement the settlement.

The European Union would accommodate the settlement and provide important political and financial support for its implementation.

Military forces would be substantially reduced levels during a transitional phase, and be halved again seven years from now. In time they would reduce to the moderate levels foreseen in the 1960 Treaty of Alliance.

A Federal government would be established, together with two Constituent states, one with a clearly identifiable Greek Cypriot identity, the other distinctly Turkish Cypriot, both largely running their own affairs.

The working of the Federal government would provide mechanisms to encourage people from both sides to work together.

Cyprus would be a full member of the European Union, based upon the rule of law, democracy, and respect for human rights.

No one says that reunification will be easy.

Yes, there will be plenty of challenges along the way – but the plan gives you a structure that can help you meet them.

Yes, it will cost money – though less than is sometimes thought.

Excellencies and Dear Friends,

This plan is fair. It is designed to work. And I believe it provides Cypriots with a secure framework for a common future.

At the end of the day, of course, it does not matter what I think. It is what the people think that counts. They decide – and rightly so.

This is a moment of high drama. It is inevitable that there should be tensions and uncertainty. Everyone wants to be sure that this settlement will bring about a better future for Cyprus and for them personally.

No one can be certain of what the future holds. But I am certain that my settlement plan offers the best and fairest chance of peace, prosperity and stability that is every likely to be on offer.

There have been too many missed opportunities in the past. For the sake of all of you, I urge you not to make the same mistake again.

Let us seize this chance for peace in a United Cyprus Republic.

Thank you very much.

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