

Debate held in the European Parliament on the prospects for the unification of Cyprus (21 April 2004)

Caption: On 21 April 2004, shortly before the referendum on the unification of the island of Cyprus, the European Parliament holds a debate on the Peace Plan proposed by Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary-General.

Source: Debates of the European Parliament on the prospects for unification of Cyprus. [ON-LINE]. [s.l.]: European Parliament, [10.05.2005]. Available on

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Publication date: 20/10/2012

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[...]

President. The next item is the Council and Commission statements on the prospects for unification of Cyprus before its accession to the European Union.

I should like, in starting this debate, to quote UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, as he spoke to the Security Council at the end of last week. He said 'The plan is complex and delicately balanced. Inevitably, as in any negotiation, it is a compromise. The presentation of the contents of the plan to the public has not always been equally balanced.'

I am bound to say, in following the debate with great intensity I very much share the concerns expressed by the UN Secretary-General in that regard.

I should also like to add a personal concern: we should note, in particular with regard to broadcasting in Cyprus, that there is an evident degree of manipulation of prime time slots; that there has been a deliberate exclusion of foreigners, such as Commissioner Verheugen – who will be the concitoyen européen of our Cypriot colleagues in the next few weeks; and that this represents an unwholesome spectacle unworthy of a state that otherwise seeks to, and should, fulfil the Copenhagen criteria.

(Applause)

I would greatly welcome it if those comments, as a modest suggestion of an alternative view, were to be broadcast in the place in question, despite the lack of balance there as regards broadcasting.

Roche, Council. Mr President, I am sure all Members, as well as the President, will be aware of the significance of this debate.

I am very grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this debate on behalf of the Council and the presidency. Our discussion this morning comes just three days before a truly significant date for the people of the island of Cyprus. On 24 April they will vote in separate but simultaneous referenda on the text of the comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem which has been presented recently by United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, in an agreed negotiating framework.

The European Union is deeply grateful to the Secretary-General, and in particular to his Special Adviser, Mr Alvaro de Soto, for their tireless efforts to bring about a settlement. They have worked closely with the parties and in collaboration with the governments of Greece and Turkey. They have created a unique and historic opportunity for a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem.

If the people of Cyprus vote 'Yes' in the two referenda on Saturday, a united Cyprus will join the European Union on 1 May, along with nine other new Member States. The accession of a united Cyprus remains the strong preference – I emphasise the strong preference – of the European Union. Let me recall today the commitment, made by successive European Councils, that the Union is ready to accommodate the terms of the settlement in line with the principles on which our European Union is founded.

The origins of the European Union are in the most terrible war in human history, which almost destroyed our continent. The Union was born of a deep desire to encourage European nations to work together for the betterment of all their peoples and to resolve their differences peacefully, without resort to conflict. Membership of the European Union has enabled nations and divided communities in Europe to bridge deep and bitter divisions between them. I am confident that, over time, this will be the case also for a united Cyprus within the European Union.

The accession of ten new Member States in just nine days' time will formally end the tragic post-war

divisions of the continent of Europe. There is now an opportunity to end yet another division in Europe. The decision on the Settlement Plan, presented by Secretary-General Annan, now rests ultimately with the people of Cyprus. The choice and the decision is theirs. They should be assured of the solidarity of the European Union as they contemplate, individually and collectively, a decision which will have a profound effect on their future and indeed on the future of their children and their children's children.

As the people of Cyprus exercise their democratic rights, they will be fully aware of the historic nature of this decision and of the opportunities at hand for Cyprus, for its neighbours and, indeed, for the rest of Europe. They will have heard – as we have done – the words of Secretary-General Annan, that the plan 'is the only available and the only foreseeable route to the reunification of Cyprus'.

The European Union and the wider international community stand ready to assist in the implementation of that settlement, both politically and economically. The commitment and the hope of the international community was evident at the high-level preparatory donors conference chaired by Commissioner Verheugen last week in Brussels. I was at that conference and successive speakers expressed their readiness, their wishes, their hopes and their desire to provide financial assistance for the implementation of this plan.

A number of very significant and definite commitments have been made. Should the plan be approved, the European Commission has already earmarked significant funds for the economic development of Cyprus and for the betterment of the people of Cyprus. Many Member States, including Ireland, have stated that they will announce significant and specific funding in support of the implementation of the settlement at a full donors conference which we hope will take place in the autumn.

The results of last week's international conference have been welcomed in a significant statement issued by the President of the UN Security Council on 16 April. In noting that it is now for the Cypriots to take a historic decision concerning their future, the members of the Security Council gave the commitment that, should the plan be approved, they stand ready to take further actions as provided for in the plan, including the establishment of a new UN operation in support of its swift and full implementation by all parties. The members of the Security Council would also be committed to helping ensure that the parties fully meet their commitments under the settlement.

The United Nations has been deeply involved with Cyprus for the past forty years. The UN Force in Cyprus was established in 1964 and is one of the longest running peacekeeping operations in the history of the UN. Member States, including my own country, have been proud to contribute military, police and civilian personnel to the force in the interests of all the people of Cyprus.

The European Union has stayed the course with Cyprus. Now, on 24 April, the people of Cyprus will make their democratic choice – and it is their choice – on the settlement proposals before them. They have a unique and historic opportunity. The choice is theirs, and it is theirs alone.

We wish the people of Cyprus well in making those choices. It is a difficult time. We understand that. We understand the history. We understand all the passion that goes into this, but the choice is theirs and theirs alone. We will respect whatever choice they make and hope that the decision is one that will allow for the peaceful integration of a united Cyprus into our Union on 1 May.

(Applause)

Verheugen, Commission. (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the fundamental principle underlying European unification is the common desire to work together and pursue policies which guarantee peaceful coexistence among the nations of Europe. That is the reason why we have united, and that is the reason why we are gathered here this morning. What we expect, first and foremost, from all our Member States, and what we expect above all from the countries which are due to join the European Union in less than ten days' time, is full endorsement of this basic principle of European unification as a peace project. That is what I expect from the Government of the Republic of Cyprus as well.

Cyprus is the last country in Europe that is still divided. Cyprus is the last country in Europe whose capital is

divided by a death strip with barbed wire and minefields. Never before, since this conflict started, have we been as close to achieving a solution as we are today. Centimetres separate us from our goal, and yet I must tell you that I now have very little hope that we will progress this last few centimetres. Let me explain why.

The situation which has now arisen is as follows. To everyone's complete surprise, the Cypriot Government led by President Papadopoulos has said that it fundamentally rejects the United Nations peace plan and is urging the Greek Cypriot community to vote against it.

From my perspective, this is a deeply depressing situation for two reasons. Firstly, when we changed our strategy on Cyprus in 1999 and, at the urgent request of the Cypriot Government, pledged to the Greek Cypriot Government that the solution to the Cyprus conflict would not be the precondition for the island's accession to the European Union, this was based on the clear understanding that we would do everything possible to facilitate Cyprus's accession, and, by the same token, the Government of the Republic of Cyprus would do everything in its power to achieve a settlement, and that under no circumstances would a settlement fail as a result of Greek Cypriot opposition. I have held dozens of talks with ex-President Glafkos Clerides and President Papadopoulos on this basis. There can be no misunderstanding. We had a clear agreement: we would arrange Cyprus's accession, and they would ensure that no settlement collapsed on account of the Greek Cypriots. We could not speak for the Turkish Cypriots.

I urge President Papadopoulos to fulfil his part of the deal now.

(Applause)

The second point that I wish to make is this: the negotiating process launched under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General was paralysed for a very long time by the outright opposition of the Turkish Cypriots. Thanks, not least, to the European Union's efforts, this blockade has been overcome and at every stage of the process, the Government of the Republic of Cyprus reaffirmed that it endorsed the basic framework of the Annan Plan, saying that it wanted minor points to be amended, but within the parameters of the plan – I quote: 'within the parameters of the plan'.

President Papadopoulos's statements after the end of the talks in Switzerland amount to the fundamental rejection of the basic principles set out in the plan. Based on what President Papadopoulos said, I can only conclude that the Government of the Republic of Cyprus now rejects the federal solution to the Cyprus problem, which is based on the coexistence and equality of the Greek and Turkish Cypriots and is endorsed by the United Nations and the entire international community.

Let me be quite undiplomatic. Ladies and gentlemen, I feel personally cheated by the Government of the Republic of Cyprus. For months – for months – I have done my utmost, like everyone else, in good faith and trusting in the promises made by the Greek Cypriot Government, to establish parameters which would enable the Greek Cypriots to endorse this plan. Sadly, this has not been achieved. The very least, however, that can now be expected from a country which wants to join the European Union in less than ten days' time is that it must ensure, at the very least, the provision of fair and balanced information about the objectives and content of this plan. Never before in the history of the European Commission has a member of the European Commission been banned from making statements on a key European issue in a Member State on the grounds that it constitutes interference in its domestic affairs. I call upon President Papadopoulos to ensure that in his country, the basic freedoms of information and opinion are strictly guaranteed, and that from today onwards, free access is granted in the Cypriot media to all those who are able to provide a full explanation of this plan in line with the United Nations' intentions. As before, I am willing to do so.

(Applause)

Let me make one point in conclusion. The solution is not intended to be a transaction in the interests of trade. I think it is very regrettable that in the many statements I have heard from the Greek Cypriot side in recent days, the word 'peace', the word 'reconciliation', the word 'mutual understanding', and the word 'different communities and religions living together' are hardly ever mentioned. The focus is almost entirely

on trade aspects. Let me make it clear: our objective is to provide a model, in this part of the world, that demonstrates that the concept of European integration is strong enough not only to avoid conflicts but also to resolve existing ones. That would send out a very strong signal, especially in this region, where the coexistence of communities from different cultures and religions has produced the most profound and difficult global crisis that we have faced for some time. That is why the importance of this issue extends far beyond Cyprus itself.

The Commission has fulfilled its pledge. As envisaged, we presented a file to the Council in which the provisions of the UN plan are adjusted in line with the *acquis*. After careful analysis, we ascertained that the new Republic of Cyprus, the United Republic of Cyprus, can speak with one voice, meet its international commitments, will not block international forums, and will be equipped with structures which are robust enough to enforce international law. We have stated that in our role as the guardian of the Treaties, we will apply stringent monitoring to ensure that these provisions are upheld. Finally, we have made pledges to assist with financing the costs arising from this agreement, and these pledges are very far-reaching.

Let me make one thing very clear to the Greek Cypriots: there will never be a plan which fully satisfies either one of the parties. That is impossible to achieve. What we can do is come as close as we can to such a plan, and there will be no better plan than this one. To those who now argue, 'yes but then too many Turkish soldiers will remain on the island', let me say this: rejecting the plan perpetuates the presence of 30 000 Turkish troops in Cyprus.

(Applause)

Another complaint is that too many Turkish settlers will remain on the island. Let me tell you this: rejecting the plan opens the door for a further 100 000 Turkish settlers to come to Cyprus.

(Applause)

This plan offers a solution which is in the interests of the Greek community and in the interests of the Turkish community. It is a solution which is in the interests of the European Union, and I send out a final appeal to the citizens of Cyprus to make a decision on Saturday which will enable this country to join the European Union with an entry ticket testifying that it is a country that stands for peace and understanding in Europe and the world.

(Applause)

President. Thank you, Commissioner, for the frankness of your observations.

Brok (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, Commissioner Verheugen, at the request of the Conference of Presidents, the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy has drawn up a report, based on Mr Poos's work, which is intended to provide assurances from our perspective too that guarantees will be upheld and that the Annan Plan can indeed be implemented without any major problems for citizens.

We must understand that on issues of this kind, the people will ask questions, and that this type of solution cannot regulate every aspect to every individual's full satisfaction. This is true, for example, of property issues, resettlement, or the compromises on the stationing of troops. It must be clear that everyone can exercise their rights, and this includes the lodging of complaints to the courts in Luxembourg and Strasbourg. However, we must also make it clear that a positive solution to these questions and the unification of the island will generally improve conditions for people on both sides of the demarcation line, and therefore no individual issue should stand in the way of this chance to achieve an overall solution.

I believe – and this is the view of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats, which I have the honour to represent – that a compromise had to be found, and that

under the present circumstances, the compromise put forward is fair. However, as the European Community, we must also ensure that the people have confidence in this plan, and we should work actively to ensure that this confidence is underpinned on our side too. That is why I think it is important that paragraphs 13 and 14 of Mr Poos's motion for a resolution clearly urge all the international institutions which have a stake in this process to provide guarantees that the Annan Plan will indeed be implemented, and that the European Parliament, through its permanent bodies, will monitor implementation to ensure that these guarantees are being upheld, thus ensuring that the reunification benefits the people themselves.

I myself became a Member of this House at a time when my country was still divided. The situation is not entirely comparable. Cyprus is not a divided nation; here, there are two different nations in one country. That is the difference. Nonetheless, I believe that we must recognise that although problems may arise with this type of reunification, overall, the benefits for both sides far outweigh the costs. For this reason, we are saying that the citizens of Cyprus have the right to decide for themselves on an independent and sovereign basis. We must also recognise that in a community such as Europe, we must support each other in order to ensure that we can live together within our community on the basis of trust, and that means that pledges must be honoured. On that basis, we are asking the people of Cyprus to endorse the plan. We can do no more than that. At the first donors conference which took place last week, we agreed substantial sums of money and signalled our willingness to support this process by appropriate means.

I hope that on this basis, and in the spirit described by Commissioner Verheugen, who has been highly committed to this issue for years, a positive outcome can still be achieved on Saturday.

Poos (PSE). – (FR) Mr President, in the history of a nation, there are moments when citizens are faced with a fundamental choice. It is as if they were halfway across a ford. They can carry on towards the far bank or turn back. In front of them lies the path to reunification, reconciliation and civil peace, drawing a line under the past. This is the path which the European Parliament has always favoured. We put our hopes and trust in the negotiating and mediating skills of the Secretary General of the United Nations. We are not about to abandon him with the end in sight.

Since the resumption of negotiations, the European Parliament has also set out some fundamental conditions: the ability to speak with one voice, a single legal status and no permanent derogation from the Treaty. The Commission has assured us today that these conditions have been met in the final version of the Annan plan. Consequently, there is no reason to doubt that the plan conforms with the Treaty.

The second path open to the Cypriot electors is to reject what Mr de Soto has called the culmination of thirty years of striving for a political solution. This means turning back.

If the plan is rejected, the island will be divided indefinitely. It is actually an illusion to believe that the final document will be opened up for renegotiation in three months or in three years. Who with? Under whose auspices? With what international support? It is also an illusion to hope that, if the plan is rejected, the difficult problems surrounding the return of refugees, property, Turkish troops, etc. will be able to be solved. The opposite is the case. The present situation will be frozen. Not a single refugee from either side will return to his or her home village and not a single Turkish soldier will leave the occupied zone.

(Applause)

Our draft resolution delivers a clear message. We hope the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot electors will have the courage to go forward right now. Before you join the European Union, we say to you: Leave nationalism behind you,

(Applause)

the European Union will help you overcome any difficulties arising during the construction of a united Republic of Cyprus.

(Applause)

Watson (ELDR). – Mr President, on Saturday, Cyprus votes on the Annan Plan and its future. Cyprus stands at a historic juncture. European Liberal Democrats and Reformers in this House have consistently urged all parties to support the plan and we do so again now.

The Annan Plan offers Cyprus a chance for reconciliation and renewal. It is a door to a better future on an island that has endured too much for too long. The plan makes important concessions to both sides. With goodwill on both sides it could be a first step away from years of partition. My Group thanks Commissioner Verheugen for the leadership he has shown in this matter. We regret that more EU leaders have not expressed the same commitment more volubly. The European Union will underwrite a huge amount of the reunification process and the Court of Justice will provide a legal framework for its resolution. This is the last, best hope for a unified Cyprus to join the European Union on 1 May.

We salute the leaders on both sides in Cyprus who have supported the Annan process and have commended it to their fellow Cypriots. 'No' would have been the simple choice: the answer which rhymed easily with resentment and suited political expediency. 'Yes' took courage.

There are many Cypriots, particularly on the Greek side, who ask what business it is of ours to be having this debate at all. In the face of all our concern and consternation they offer simply the shrug of self-determination. They can and will vote as they please and they have the right to vote 'no'. But I believe it would be a sad and sectarian choice, the wrong choice for the wrong reasons. Moreover, if the purpose of self-determination is the freedom to go on nursing old resentments and the right to weigh the money in your pocket today against reconciliation tomorrow, the Cypriots who have turned their faces against this process are welcome to it. I would just ask them to reflect on this. What if the West Germans had chosen that kind of self-determination in 1990?

On our scarred continent with its crowded history there are some old scores where restitution and compensation can only ever be relative. Only the historically illiterate can believe that we can somehow fix what has happened in Cyprus, anymore than we can fix Kosovo and Serbia or Israel and Palestine. What Cyprus needs is a *modus vivendi*: some way of living that looks forward rather than backward.

The Annan Plan is a *modus vivendi*. If it is lost on Saturday it could put back the reunification of Cyprus by a generation. The European Union would have to face up to a new reality on the ground: the possibility for a peaceful transfer of land will be lost; the Turkish army will continue to guard what will remain a militarised border; UN peacekeepers will patrol within the European Union.

The English writer Lawrence Durrell, who lived for many years on Cyprus, recorded a Greek Cypriot proverb that says there is no fire in old ashes. Liberal Democrats and Reformers in this House hope beyond hope that Sunday will not find Cypriots stirring the cold old ashes of a sad history.

(Applause)

Modrow (GUE/NGL). – (DE) Mr President, I visited the island for talks last week. The process of EU accession has raised hopes of a solution to the conflict, but many expectations are still unfulfilled, especially among the Greek Cypriots. The fact that negotiations have been taking place in New York and Switzerland has barely been reported to citizens in the towns and villages of Cyprus. The efforts made by Secretary-General Kofi Annan merit great respect, but it is difficult to communicate 9 000 pages of treaty text to both communities on the island within a matter of weeks, and this has clearly failed due to the different political interests at stake. There are different interpretations of the plan even within the governing coalition of the Republic of Cyprus, as the statements made by the President and the coalition partners demonstrate. These different assessments cannot be ignored, Commissioner.

For the reasons I have stated, there have been serious calls for the postponement of the referendum in order to gain more time for information and opinion-forming. The governing party, AKEL, which is affiliated to

my group, is not opposed to the Annan Plan, but given the situation, it is deeply concerned about the possible failure of the referendum, as has already been discussed here. Now there is a need for clear signals from the EU and the UN again. We should not downplay the situation. The country has undergone a war. Northern Cyprus has been under Turkish occupation for thirty years. In view of the concerns that exist, signals on peace and security must be sent out more clearly, and with these concerns in mind, it must be made clear there are no unilateral advantages for either side. Even with the 100% that you rightly question, there is still a problem, namely that these concerns exist at all. Politics is not about finality and eternal truths – the process of German reunification has taught us that. It is about constantly evolving processes, which can be mapped out to some extent in advance but which require a pro-active and very level-headed approach at every stage. In this critical situation, the EU has an obligation, together with the United Nations, to be a reliable partner for the Republic of Cyprus, but also for the two communities, in resolving the conflict. Not only Cyprus, but Europe as a whole will be the winner if we manage to heal this wound.

Cohn-Bendit (Verts/ALE). – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, we do indeed face a situation which is not only difficult but also very sad. For years, we have argued here in this House that we could not let a Turkish nationalist position prevent Cyprus's accession to the European Union. We were always resolute in our position. However, this has led us into a trap which the Greens warned about years ago. We asked what guarantees there were that, with a radical change on the Turkish side, the guaranteed accession of Greek Cyprus would not take place at the expense of the northern part of the island. This debate has always been neglected in this House, and we are paying a high price for this neglect today.

The situation is irreversible, and when they vote in the referendum, the Greek Cypriots will not be deciding their own future. They will decide on the future of the Turkish Cypriot community in the northern part of the island. The Greek Cypriots are already about to join the European Union. And then you talk about the plan. Mr Modrow, please think about it for a moment: the situation is like the Sudeten Germans saying: 'We refuse to let the Czech Republic join the European Union until our claims in the Czech Republic have been settled.' This House made it clear that that is unacceptable. As a left-winger, please convey that message to the Greek Cypriots as well. This is an historic plan. On the left and the right, up and down, we are always saying that the UN should do this and the UN should do that ... Now, the UN has decided. Of course a plan is a plan; it does not reflect the Greek Cypriot or the Turkish Cypriot position. This UN plan is an attempt to remove the last barbed wire border from the EU. What is our response? The sophists – for we are dealing with Greeks here – are back in power; they say, 'Yes, it is moving in the right direction, but it could be better'. Yes, the world could be a better place, I admit that. The world could be a much better place, and even if the Greens secure an absolute majority in Europe ...

(Laughter)

... the world will not become a better place! You see, you were too quick off the mark again, but I know what I am saying. I am convinced that the message we must send out is this. If there is a 'no' vote in the south and a 'yes' in the north, the European Union should open political relations with the north. As a first step, we must lobby for the lifting of the embargo against the north of the island. The citizens in the north should not be held hostage by the south. We cannot allow that on grounds of political decency. Then we will see what happens. One thing is certain, however: there is not a 'possible' UN plan: this is the only one. There is not a 'possible' future: this is the only one.

Very many of you are religious. I believe in miracles. I believe in the miracle that the people in the southern part of the island really will prove to be more intelligent than their self-appointed leaders, including the Green parties in Cyprus.

(Applause)

Dillen (NI). – (NL) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the fact that Europe had the idea of holding out to Turkey the prospect of accession to the European Union in Helsinki without making it an essential requirement that that country put an immediate and unconditional end to the illegal occupation of northern Cyprus shows almost criminal frivolity on the part of the European Council.

In Cyprus, Europe is going ahead and putting on ice the sacred principle of the free movement of persons on which our Union has been based for decades. I can only sympathise, then, with the intransigent position of the Greek Cypriots and their President, Mr Papadopoulos, who reject the UN Secretary-General's half-hearted compromise, and in three days' time will be voting 'no' in the referendum on the reunification of their island. This is not reunification, however, as the Turkish occupation would continue. The military border would remain, the hundred-thousand Turkish settlers would be allowed to stay in Cyprus, the Turkish army would stay, and Cypriots would not enjoy the same rights as other EU citizens, as their property rights and right to do business would be restricted.

In short, the Annan Plan perpetuates and legalises the Turkish occupation. I should therefore like to take this opportunity to pledge my wholehearted support to the Greek Cypriots and reiterate that, as far as we are concerned, Islamic Turkey must never join the European Union.

(Applause)

Oostlander (PPE-DE). – (NL) Mr President, the exceptionally gloomy statement by Commissioner Verheugen is particularly shocking to us all in view of the fact that we are on the point of reaching a solution, by means of the Annan Plan. We had previously thought that the slogan 'the solution is not a solution' could be attributed solely to Mr Denktash. We now see, however, that this slogan is also used by the President of the Greek Republic of Cyprus. That is of course unacceptable.

Personal interviews with Mr Papadopoulos, along with other indications, have always given me the unpleasant feeling that we were being deceived, that the Republic of Cyprus lacked the genuine will to do its utmost to reach a solution for Cyprus. Yet the assumption that the Republic would do its utmost to arrive at a solution and that it would not fail in this formed the basis for that country's accession to the European Union. There appears to be the presumption that it is also possible to trick one's way into membership of the European Union. That is unacceptable.

We also heard just now that matters falling within the Copenhagen political criteria, in particular, such as freedom of the press and access to the media, are closed off not only to our Commissioner Verheugen and to foreigners, but also to national opposition parties. When this happens in other countries we take umbrage and tell them that we are breaking off negotiations with them, as we did with Romania, for example.

We are thus now on the threshold of the membership of a new Member State that has achieved this by deception. In my opinion, we cannot accept this on any account, indicating as it does a lack of respect for the European Union. We have also experienced this in the past with Slovakia, which told us that we were interfering in its internal affairs. Yet membership of the European Union means becoming heavily involved in each other's internal affairs. This particularly goes for matters of the Copenhagen political criteria, and particularly for matters relating to the willingness to cooperate with the European Union in good faith for the purposes of reaching a solution capable of being of extremely great benefit to the inhabitants of both the northern and the southern parts.

Rothe (PSE). – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, Cyprus will join the European Union on 1 May. We always hoped that the accession process could serve as a catalyst to end the division of Cyprus. In three days' time, the Cypriots themselves must decide whether they wish to live in a unified state after almost 30 years of division, and whether after almost 30 years, they wish to join the European Union as a unified state. Since the Green Line was opened for Cypriots on 23 April last year, we have seen very clearly that Cypriots from both communities are willing and able to coexist peacefully. The Annan Plan which will be voted on by both communities on 24 April is a compromise between the wishes and legitimate demands of both sides. The plan may not be totally balanced; perhaps it does have weaknesses as regards the power of central government, and perhaps the guarantees for the implementation of individual measures are not clear enough. Are these doubts really a reason to reject the plan? Are the undoubted weaknesses an adequate reason to reject the opportunities that the proposal offers? My twenty years of experience in working towards a solution for Cyprus, for its accession and for unity, tell me that the opportunities far outweigh the risks.

We are not the ones who have to decide on 24 April. Even if we hope for a positive outcome, we will accept the democratic decision of the people of Cyprus. What the European Parliament can say with certainty, however, is that this year is 2004, not 1964 or 1974. A united Cyprus will become a Member State of the European Union, and as a Member State, it will not only enjoy the full protection afforded by membership. It will also see that the responsibility of the European Union as a whole for ensuring the successful implementation of the Annan Plan guarantees this opportunity for peaceful coexistence.

Today, the European Parliament will commit itself to monitoring the entire implementation process through its committee work. We are currently witnessing many fears, especially on the part of Greek Cypriots who look back at the past. However, looking forward to the future is the better option. Turkey in 2004 is a country with a European perspective. It is no longer the Turkey of 1974. The Turkish Cypriots showed back in December that they have largely thrown off the legacy of Rauf Denktaş. New opportunities are unlikely to present themselves soon. The only alternative to the plan is the ongoing and entrenched division of the island. This plan offers an opportunity and should not be gambled away due to false or inadequate information.

As Members of the European Parliament, we are today sending a message to our soon-to-be fellow citizens in the European Union. Statements by a European Commissioner, by the European Parliament or by individual Members do not constitute interference in Cyprus's domestic affairs or pressure from outside. They are well-intentioned advice. They are information which is being passed around within the family in which we must shape Europe's future from 1 May. I hope that accession day on 1 May will be a genuine celebration of reunification in Cyprus – the unification of all Cypriots with almost 450 million people in the European Union.

Davies (ELDR). – Mr President, the Commissioner said that he felt cheated by the Government of Cyprus. He was too polite. His good faith has been betrayed, as has that of our rapporteur, Mr Poos.

Under international law, the entire island of Cyprus will join the European Union on 1 May, regardless of the result of the referendum, and Turkish Cypriots will become EU citizens. However, if the Greek Cypriots reject the Annan Plan, Turkish Cypriots will be EU citizens who are denied recognition and representation and who are being kept impoverished by economic sanctions applied by the EU. Turkish Cypriots are trapped in a pincer: they are threatened on the one hand by Turkish settlers and on the other by the economic strength of the Greek Cypriots. They have been poorly led for years. However, the tide has now turned and if they vote 'yes' in Saturday's referendum, they will have done everything that we and the UN have asked of them. Under such circumstances it would be completely unacceptable for economic sanctions to be maintained. We cannot persecute our own citizens. The presidency and the Commission, with the UN, must take steps to lift their burden through the means of transport and trade, and must do so without delay.

Papayannakis (GUE/NGL). – (EL) Mr President, allow me to say something different from what we have heard so far.

I think that a distorted picture has been given. The majority of political forces in both Greece and Cyprus consider that the Annan plan may help to resolve the Cyprus problem, especially with the prospect of the integration of a united Cyprus into the European Union. That is the truth of the matter. A distorted picture is being given. There is the question of how one part of public opinion is taking this affair on board, how it feels. There is a problem there, a huge problem from the past, as to whether this plan can really be applied absolutely in time, fully and reliably to all the details, which are particularly complicated and particularly difficult. We have a lot of experience here of violated agreements.

Instead, therefore, of looking for some sort of miracle, as my friend Mr Cohn-Bendit suggests, let us do what we can. Let us desist from exaggerations, insults and criticism of one another. What we can do is to call for there to be now a serious and reliable guarantee from the UN and from the European Union that the entire Annan plan, as it stands, will be applied to the end and there will be no tricks and circumventions after one year or after eight months or two years. Let us call for that. It is the only thing we can do now, before the

referendum. We will see to the rest later.

Maes (Verts/ALE). –(NL) Mr President, Commissioner, President-in-Office of the Council, two peoples and two cultures living in one country is often a delicate matter. Reason is required, but feelings also come into play. The Annan Plan is a good plan, but it is a solution born of reason. Yet Cypriots choose not only with their minds, but also with their hearts.

Thirty years of occupation is a long time. I heard a Turkish Cypriot girl being interviewed on the radio. She said that, in her youth, she thought that only men lived on the other side. We are asking Cypriots to say ‘yes’ to the Annan Plan, as we are confident that it will bring them peace, reconciliation and prospects. However, does the population have sufficient trust in the countries that are to ensure the implementation of that plan, for example? Have Turkey, Greece and the United Kingdom not had their own agendas all along in the history of Cyprus? Has sufficient work been done on trust between human beings in those thirty years?

We are calling for Cypriots to vote ‘yes’, but let us remember, with a view to the accession of some Balkan states, that it is important to win the trust of the population. I have just heard Mr Verheugen saying that it is we who are organising the accession of Cyprus to the EU, but Greece that must enable unity in that country. I find that rather shocking: where is the people of Cyprus in all of this?

Well, that people will have its say. We are calling on it to say ‘yes’, but equally, if it does not yet have sufficient trust to do so, we must further build this trust and ensure that the unification process is a success, and that what is not possible today is possible tomorrow.

Trakatellis (PPE-DE). – (EL) Mr President, our position, in a word, as President Karamanlis of Greece has also described it and as my friend Mr Brok described it a short while ago, is that the positive elements of the yes vote outweigh the negative elements, especially when the yes vote to the reunification of Cyprus is considered from the European perspective, in other words that Cyprus will be a member of the European Union.

Nonetheless, the question is: how can we help the yes vote, how can we try to bring about a yes vote in the referendum? If we are to do this, however, we need to understand why the no vote had and has such resonance among the Cypriots. Let me give you some examples. Why would the thousands of refugees vote yes when their future looks uncertain, when they will not all return to their family homes and they will not all acquire their property, while at the same time they will also be deprived of the basic human right of the judicial protection of the European Court of Human Rights? Similarly, maintaining Cyprus, a Member State of the European Union, under a regime of guarantees by third countries, one of which is not even a member of the Union, goes against the principles of the European Union and weakens the development of the European security and defence policy, quite apart from the fact that the permanent presence of Greek and Turkish troops on the island goes against the principle of demilitarisation which is established in the plan. I could expand on numerous other reasons which constitute the causes for the resonance of the no vote among Greek Cypriots.

If, therefore, we want to promote the yes vote, we need to recognise and note some of these causes in the text on which we vote, even though these are wish lists, while at the same time demonstrating that European reality also means the European Parliament, where human rights held, hold and will hold a central position. We are therefore trying, with this text, to impart the idea that there will be, as Mr Papayannakis said, guarantees on security issues for the application of the plan and that we shall lend our ear here to human rights issues. Only thus can we convince of the importance of the yes vote, based henceforth on the European perspective. That is why I call on us to ensure that we vote for certain amendments which improve the text and show that the European Parliament is here to support the yes vote.

(Applause)

Katiforis (PSE). – (EL) Mr President, first of all I should like to say that I am sorry that Commissioner Verheugen has left. Obviously he had some other pressing business. I endorse everything Commissioner

Verheugen said and I share his disappointment on this issue, because he really was one of the protagonists, who worked very hard to bring things to maturity, to the point at which we can initiate material reconciliation between the Greeks and Turks in Cyprus.

When I was young, I suffered in my own country from the suppression of the freedom of the press and I feel pain and shame that today Greeks seeking their freedom are depriving Commissioner Verheugen of the right to address them and try to persuade them of what he considers to be right, he who fought so hard for things to reach a satisfactory situation.

We want a yes vote. Politicians in Greece, all of them, have said that they want a yes vote, with Mr Papandreou leading the way. We want the guarantees heard here to be given with emphasis, but the greatest guarantee lies in changing the global situation. The Cypriots divided because they were divided by a now bankrupt colonial regime, because they were divided by the cold war. These no longer exist. The European Union has refuted all this and is inviting them into its fold so that they can live differently. Not in order to keep them divided. The greatest guarantee is within and they must bring it forth from within themselves.

I shall end by reminding my compatriots in Cyprus of the words of the great Greek politician Eleftherios Venizelos, who said that the every nation seals its own fate and that whatever it does on its own whim is one less thing for its enemy to do.

Ludford (ELDR). – Mr President, I understand why Commissioner Verheugen feels cheated on the 1999 deal that the Greek Cypriot Government would facilitate a settlement if accession were unconditional.

My own view in 1999 that accession was not feasible without unification. We should have kept both sides guessing in order to keep up the pressure. I was criticised for that view and accused of bias. However, it looks as if communication with Turkish Cypriots – convincing them that Europe is friendly and welcoming – has paid off. That kind of effort has also been undertaken by the European Commission in the face of legalistic objections.

The EU institutions have perhaps let down the Greek Cypriots by failing sufficiently to challenge their version of history or to encourage them to realise that a compromise would be necessary – not a return to the pre-1974 situation. This House bears some of that responsibility. Mr Poos calls on Cypriots to leave nationalism at the door. I welcome that call. I just wish it had been made consistently on both communities over the last five years.

If indeed the north votes 'yes' and the south 'no', the status quo cannot endure and a new assessment will be needed. Ways will have to be found to bring Turkish Cypriots out of their political and economic isolation. For instance, we must drop the requirement for Cypriots to have Greek mother tongue in order to be officials in the EU institutions. There must be a European Parliament delegation to Northern Cyprus.

I am getting ahead of myself. I still hope very much that Greek Cypriots, as well as Turkish Cypriots, will vote 'yes' on Saturday. The World Bank predicts a huge growth spurt of 5% per annum if they do so.

Alyssandrakis (GUE/NGL). – (EL) Mr President, first I wish to express the full support of the Communist Party of Greece for the unsubmissive Cypriot people who, unlike the European Union, do not throw UN resolutions on the Turkish invasion and occupation into the waste-paper basket.

As I followed the debate, I remembered the words of the poet: how often came my enemies dressed as friends. Indeed, some people in Cyprus trusted the European Union. They believed that the much vaunted *acquis communautaire* would result in the resolution of the problem. It turned out that the *acquis communautaire* was a deception, a rag bag of no value, while erstwhile friends are now pressuring, coercing and threatening, including you, Mr President, and Mr Verheugen, who is showing his disdain for us by his absence.

It is unacceptable and wrong of Mr Verheugen to accuse the President of Cyprus of deceiving him. Mr

Papadopoulos and the Greek-Cypriot leadership never promised to accept any monster cobbled together by the UN Secretary General. What is the Commissioner afraid of? The obligations which derive from the fact that one part of a Member State of the European Union will be under the occupation of a candidate country? Who does the Annan plan serve? The Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots or more general imperialist plans? What sort of state is it that will operate as an umbrella for two practically independent states, which will even be able to send representatives to European Councils and diplomatic missions, two states which will need special agreements in order to regulate their relations, while being at the mercy of the guarantor powers and foreign courts? How secure will the Cypriots feel without their own army, but with the military presence of Turkey, Greece, the United Kingdom, perhaps even NATO? How do you judge the fact that the military agreements between the occupying regime and Turkey are being converted into primary Community law? How do you judge the fact that Cyprus is obliged to support the candidature of Turkey under any circumstances?

Leave at long last the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots to assess the situation, to take a decision on the basis of their own interests. Respect their history, respect their dignity, shake off the arrogance and haughtiness of the suzerain!

(Applause)

Tannock (PPE-DE). – Mr President, as a friend of the large Cypriot community which I represent in London, I have always supported peaceful reunification of Cyprus. However, I have never underestimated the practical and political difficulties created over the 30 post-invasion years in which Turkey has moved 120 000 mainland settlers into the north, when they do not share the common historical heritage of the island and generally do not speak English or Greek, previously the bicomunal languages.

The Annan III Plan has gone a long way towards settling differences in a fair sui generis way. However, I have received hundreds of e-mails from my Greek Cypriot constituents who are concerned that this plan offers no guarantees on Turkish implementation of troop withdrawal and territorial and property restitution. It is interesting that even the Greek Cypriots – the lucky ones who have been promised the return of their homes – seem to oppose the plan. They also object to mainland settlers being granted citizenship, as this would appear to reward the aggressor and violate the Geneva Conventions, which prohibit the settlement of outside populations by the occupying power.

Cypriot President Tassos Papadopoulos has rejected the proposals and called for a 'no' vote by the Greek Cypriot community. I personally believe it is best for outsiders, including Members of this House, not to put any pressure on a referendum process as this would be perceived as interference in Cyprus's sovereign affairs.

Furthermore, if both communities do not give their free consent and the arrangements break down in the future, blame will be apportioned to the players who leaned on the Cypriot people to get a 'yes' vote.

The British Government is prepared to cede some of the sovereign base territory surplus to its needs, if this will help. I, like many of my colleagues, wish the referendum process well and will support the outcome of the vote on the 24 April, whichever way it goes.

Souladakis (PSE). – (EL) Mr President, in three days the referendum will be held in Cyprus on whether or not to accept the Annan plan. A yes or a no vote in the referendum will not be two sides of the same coin; it will be different sides of different coins. The next day will not be the same as the previous day. Today's debate confirms the vital role of the European Parliament in this entire lengthy development of hope on the Cypriot question and the exceptionally positive role of Commissioner Verheugen, of Mr Poos, and of all sides of the European Union in general. Now is the time for responsibility on the part of all the political leaders in Cyprus, of both the Greek and the Turkish Cypriots, in Greece and Turkey and in the entire European Union.

The party to which I belong, PASOK, and its President, Georgos Papandreou, are and have been

protagonists throughout developments in Cyprus as regards the resolution of the problem and its integration into the European Union. It is the time of truth. We must all respond to the challenges of history, by looking the dilemma straight in the eye and responding responsibly and positively. A yes vote, with all the concerns but which operates in the new environment of the European Union, opens a window to the future and to hope. A no vote requires an answer. In all events, the answer will be given by the Cypriot people. The European Parliament and the European Union give both their support and their capabilities as security guarantees of the full exploitation of all aspects of the Annan plan. We must ask the same of the UN.

Our resolution today reflects precisely this perspective. I, as a Greek MEP, whose first contact with politics and political awareness was in the demonstrations and fights of the Cypriots to escape English colonialism and then in all the dramatic events in Cyprus, consider that a yes vote will result in an historic balance with prospects for a positive, historic reconciliation, in which everyone can trust in a positive future of prosperity and security for all, Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots and the area in general.

I should like to finish with an ancient Greek motto: time waits for no man.

Marinos (PPE-DE). – (EL) Mr President, I wish I could also say Commissioner but Mr Verheugen has left us very early and I am sorry about that, nearly all the political parties in Greece and the most important parties in Cyprus have come out in favour of the Annan plan. However, they share the concerns and doubts of the Cypriot people, who are not following the parties in this instance.

The negative reaction which has developed in Cyprus is due, I think, to extreme pressure of time, which has not allowed the people to be informed calmly and analytically. But how could they be informed within a fortnight of the submission of the last Annan plan? They could not. On the contrary, the inciting of passions and misinformation have prevailed, thereby exacerbating fears and doubts. If the referendum were postponed, as proposed, then the people could be informed more calmly and more substantially and, at the same time, clear and persuasive guarantees could be given that the full text of the plan and the agreement would be respected and would not again be violated by some of the guarantor powers. Because that is where the problem lies, with the guarantor powers. It was they who caused most of the disasters in Cyprus. These guarantees must also be given by the Security Council and by the European Union and by the European Parliament which, with its resolution, improved by the amendments proposed by the PPE-DE, the socialist party and Mr Papayannakis, will, I think, strengthen the tendency and desire of the Cypriots to say yes. The European Parliament must not appear to be exerting pressure. Blackmail, with threats of sanctions, which have, unfortunately, also come from official lips, have incited the negative stand of an uninformed and terrified people.

That is why, in addition to security guarantees, the prospect of a second referendum must be left open after the referendum in three days' time, which looks like being a no vote. Better informed Cypriots and stronger security guarantees could change the climate and thus, in two or three months' time, bring in a positive result, for which there is a great deal of hope. I do not understand why repeating a referendum, which other Member States of the European Union are allowed to do if there is a no vote, as happened in your country, Mr President, should not also be allowed for the Cypriots. Please vote for my amendments, which make the European Parliament resolution encouraging, reassuring and friendly towards the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots and will, I am sure, encourage them to give a more positive response to the Annan plan.

(Applause)

President. We thought the Nice Treaty was so good we should vote on it twice!

Tsatsos (PSE). – (EL) Mr President, without doubt there are practical problems with the Annan plan. It does not put both sides on an equal footing and it makes provision for painfully long transitional periods for transposing the *acquis communautaire*. Nonetheless, we unreservedly support the Poos motion and its constructive proposals, because on the basis of the resolution, first, the illegal Turkish occupation is removed from the northern part, further colonisation is prohibited, certain Greek lands are returned and a number of refugees can return. This positive position depends, as has been emphasised numerous times

today, on a strict system of guarantees of respect for the entire Annan plan. Secondly, it also depends on an express declaration that we agree in advance to respect any result, as the President-in-Office of the Council wisely emphasised here today.

Dimitrakopoulos (PPE-DE). – (EL) Mr President, first I should like to congratulate Mr Poos on his work, Mrs Mechtild Rothe on her efforts all these years as Chairman of the Joint Parliamentary Committee, Mr Oostlander, Mr Brok who is not here and, of course, Commissioner Verheugen, who unfortunately had to leave.

Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, it is a fact that we are at the moment holding a general political debate on the prevailing climate in the run up to the referendum on Saturday rather than on the content of the Annan plan, because a debate on the content of this plan, despite the fact that its positive points far outnumber its negative points, could turn into a detailed debate lasting several hours.

The positions of my fellow Members and of the Commissioner and the President-in-Office, and all the disappointments expressed in this House about the climate prevailing at the moment in Cyprus, bring me to the conclusion that, apart from the yes or no vote which has been debated closely here too, we should also hold an analytical debate on the proposal by the speaker of the Cypriot parliament, Dimitris Christofias, to postpone the referenda, especially in that postponement would need to be accompanied, on the one hand, by the clarification of certain points in the plan which are creating problems, such as security issues – I would ask Mr Patten to convey to Mr Verheugen the question of primary law and of people taking recourse to the courts – and, on the other hand, by work being carried out in the Security Council on the new resolution we want, which will include guarantees. I think that these two poles will certainly help to reverse the climate.

Finally, I want to finish by saying that, of course, an opinion needs to be expressed and this opinion of the European Parliament is being expressed through the resolution tabled by Mr Poos, together of course with all the amendments which have been proposed.

(Applause)

Roche, Council. Mr President, I wish to thank the honourable Members for their contributions.

Mr President, you and I both come from a divided island and we understand something of the passion that a debate of this nature will engender on the island of Cyprus. We also understand that conflict which is rooted in history and ingrained for generations is not easy to resolve. However, we also understand, as practical political people, that every now and again – perhaps once in a generation, or even more rarely than that – an opportunity comes to really change things. The agreement produced by Kofi Annan offers such an opportunity. As I said earlier, this is a decision for the people of Cyprus – both North and South. It is their decision, their decision alone and we will respect that decision.

In short, I can only repeat what the President-in-Office of the Council, the Taoiseach, Mr Ahern, said last night. I should first point out that we need to weigh our words very carefully, as we can all understand the hurt and concerns involved and need to be very careful that nothing is said or done in the next 72 hours to make a grim situation worse.

Last night Mr Ahern summarised the position of the European Council as follows: "These are crucial days for Cyprus and for its people. On Saturday the people of the island – North and South – will vote in referenda on the plan for a settlement presented by the United Nations Secretary-General. Through their patient and determined efforts in cooperation with the parties, the Secretary-General and his hard-working team have created a unique and historic opportunity for a settlement of the Cyprus problem. In his report to the United Nations Security Council, which was released yesterday, Kofi Annan stated clearly that the plan is the only available, the only foreseeable route for the reunification of Cyprus. The decision now rests with the people of Cyprus and is for them alone, freely exercising their democratic rights. The people of Cyprus know that the strong preference of the European Council is for the accession of a united Cyprus to the Union on 1 May. The European Union is ready to accommodate the terms of the settlement in line with the

principles on which this Union is founded. As President of the European Council over the past few months I have had discussions on Cyprus with political leaders across Europe.' And this is the important point, Mr President: 'It is only right to say that the view of the overwhelming majority is that the proposed settlement would be good for both communities in Cyprus and good for the European Union'.

Those are the views of the President-in-Office of the European Council and of the vast majority of the democratically elected leaders of the Member States of the European Union.

I said at the outset that we need to weigh our words carefully. We do not want to cause any difficulties or be seen to be intruding in decisions that are ultimately decisions for the people of Cyprus. We wish the people of Cyprus well in the remaining hours before they make their decision and hope that it will be the decision that best serves the people of the island of Cyprus as a whole – both North and South.

(Applause)

Patten, Commission. I should just like to say one or two words about this subject, which is not my normal beat. Firstly, I should like to apologise, on behalf of Commissioner Verheugen, that he had to leave before the end of the debate. He had another extremely important engagement, and this debate was scheduled to have ended a good deal earlier. However, I understand why the debate has run on so long: it arouses considerable passions and great interest in all parts of the House.

We were questioned about what would happen if there was a 'no' vote on the Greek side of the island and a 'yes' vote among the Turkish community. I should underline that the Commission has already announced that we will soon be putting forward proposals to assist the Turkish community in that unhappy eventuality, which we still hope will not happen. Clearly we cannot allow the Turkish community to be punished economically and socially because of decisions made by others, so we would have to try to find a solution to the problem of Turkish economic isolation as effectively and rapidly as we could.

I should like to speak briefly about the 1999 Helsinki European Council – the first European Council that I attended. As I recall, we always knew that the policy we endorsed then had about it an element of risk. It does not come as a surprise. We thought it was important to try to decouple the Cyprus conflict from the integration of central and eastern Europe into the European Union. I believe we made the right decision then and I believe it was the right way to proceed. But against that background, and in the light of some of the things Commissioner Verheugen said, you will understand why it is not just the Commissioner who feels very strongly that we have been badly let down in the last few days and weeks. It is a sentiment that is strongly held within the Commission and one that is held way beyond the Commission. I still hope that we will not be let down. However, one cannot ignore the fact that there is that sense that we have been cheated.

[...]