



GOVERNMENT OF CYPRUS
MINISTRY OF INTERIOR



PRESS AND INFORMATION
OFFICE (P.I.O.)

PRESS RELEASE

No. 14

Thursday, 21/9/2017

Statement by the President of the Republic at the general debate of the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly

At the outset, I wish to convey my Government's congratulations to Mr. Miroslav Lajčák on his election as President of the General Assembly for its 72nd Session and assure of our unwavering support on his mission.

At the same time, I congratulate, once again, the Secretary – General, Mr. António Guterres, on the assumption of his duties since January 1st 2017. The Government of Cyprus and I have full faith and confidence in his abilities and vision.

To this end, we stand ready to provide any assistance deemed necessary towards the shared goal of promoting the values and principles of the UN in a period of great uncertainty and instability.

Your Excellencies,

2017 has been another turbulent year. To name a few incidents: terrorism, regional conflicts, forced migration, the alarming effects of climate change and humanitarian crises are realities which have placed enormous strain on our people and the environment.

Human nature drives us to aim at doing the best for us and the generations to follow: for the preservation of our planet; for peaceful resolutions to conflicts; for an end to terrorism and extremism; for actions to prevent natural disasters; for joint efforts to alleviate the immeasurable human suffering experienced around the world.

There is only one way to achieve this: Multilateralism. We stand here, as world leaders, to pledge our determination and commitment to a better world, through cooperation and joint actions.

It is only through collective efforts that we can address crises like the current one with North Korea, which threatens the resilience of our global non-proliferation and disarmament regimes, as well as the peace and security architecture of the region and beyond.

International, multilateral cooperation is also vital in dealing with the scourge of terrorism. Terrorist attacks have unfortunately become commonplace in our world, from Baghdad to Kabul, from Paris to Cairo, from Barcelona to London, where our cities and citizens have become the targets of coward acts of asymmetric aggression.

Parallel to adopting enhanced security measures, it is essential to prevent and to counter radicalization and violent extremism within our societies, through education, dialogue, economic growth and social inclusion.

Your Excellencies, Mr. President,

There is no security without development; and there is no development without security. Enhancing the resilience of our societies is a key aspect of our multilateral endeavors and in this respect, our determination to implement the 2030 Agenda must remain high on our list of priorities.

Sustainable development is at the heart of dealing with the root causes of forced migration which has, for the last two years, dominated the global agenda and not unjustly.

This crisis is putting pressure not only on our governments but also on our societies, while at the same time changing the way political dialogue is carried out. However overwhelming the situation is, we must not lose sight of the big picture, which is no other than the need for solidarity and burden sharing.

Mr. President,

All the above, and even more challenges we face, point to one direction: we need a just, effective, and efficient global governance system.

In this respect, we are here to renew our commitment to a global order based on international law, with the principles of the UN Charter at its core; a global order which ensures that peace, security, human rights and sustainable development remain the highest values which we undertake to preserve and uphold.

Cyprus believes that the reform priorities that the Secretary General has set, are essential in ensuring that multilateralism, at a time of growing skepticism and isolationist tendencies, remains relevant and effective.

The three pillars of reform, in distinct yet parallel and complementary processes will, if successful, provide us with a changed narrative as to the ability to prevent crises before they erupt; reinforcing and enhancing peace-keeping and peace-building, humanitarian assistance and long-term development and growth.

Mr. President,

The theme of this year's General Assembly, "Focusing on people: striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet", is extremely pertinent for my country which still suffers from the scourges of war and its ongoing violent division.

In this regard, it is our strong opinion that the most vital pillar to achieving inter-state, regional and global peace is through respecting and ensuring the full and unhindered independency, territorial integrity and sovereignty of each and every member-state of the United Nations.

A pillar which constitutes one of the most indispensable provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and the most basic rule towards prohibiting foreign interventions to the territory, the exclusive economic zone or the internal affairs of an independent and sovereign member-state of the UN.

It is only through abiding by this norm that we can avoid inter-state conflicts or bloody internal clashes, which in turn establish the conditions for protracted destabilization, violence and uncertainty.

One of the countries which unfortunately still endures the consequences of the blatant violation of the fundamental principles of the UN is my country, the Republic of Cyprus, which since the 1974 military invasion of Turkey still remains under its occupation.

The pretext for the invasion was the restoration of the constitutional order, following the attempt for a coup d'état against the President of the Republic by the Greek military Junta.

I deliberately referred to a pretext, since, instead of restoring the constitutional order, Turkey occupied 37% of the territory of Cyprus, forcibly displacing from their ancestral homeland more than a third of the Greek Cypriot community, with thousands murdered, while since 1974 more than a thousand Greek Cypriots are still missing.

With the same use of force, all our Turkish Cypriot compatriots were compelled by Turkey to relocate from the areas controlled by the Government of Cyprus in which they used to reside peacefully, to the areas occupied by Turkey.

In the same context and via the continuous presence of over forty thousand Turkish troops and thousands of implanted settlers in a conscious effort to alter the demographic character of the island, Turkey established an illegal entity which is under its absolute political, economic, cultural and religious control and dominance.

Mr. President, Your Excellencies,

It is not my aim to engage in a blame-game. On the contrary, I truly wish I could be in a position to inform that my vision to reaching a settlement, as I have repeatedly conveyed from this podium, had materialized.

Unfortunately, despite our constructive stance, our tireless and unwavering efforts and the progress achieved, this new round of talks which was launched in May 2015 and climaxed in July 2017 at Crans Montana, has reached a deadlock.

A deadlock, which is attributed exclusively to the intransigent stance of Turkey which, instead of being positively predisposed to establishing a truly independent, sovereign and normal state, through its proposals, aimed at reducing Cyprus to a Turkish protectorate.

The above-mentioned would be considered as an exaggeration, if I failed to substantiate my reference as I will now immediately proceed to do so.

Mr. President, Your Excellencies,

In 1960, with the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus, amongst others, under the Treaty of Guarantee, Turkey, Great Britain and Greece undertook to guarantee the independence, territorial integrity and security of Cyprus.

In this regard, allow me to stress that the exploitation of the said provision by Turkey has regrettably led to the pain and sufferings that the people of Cyprus, Greek and Turkish Cypriots, have and are still enduring; consequence of the unacceptable status quo.

It is for this exact reason that since resuming negotiations and in order to establish a normal and sovereign State, from the very beginning we set the goal of terminating the Treaty of Guarantee and the right of intervention, as well as agreeing to a sunset clause for the full withdrawal of foreign troops.

A principled-position which the UN Secretary – General himself also shared as an indispensable element in the efforts to reaching a settlement, as per his statement on June 4, 2017, and I quote:

“Progress in this chapter – meaning the Chapter of Security and Guarantees - is an essential element in reaching an overall agreement and in building trust between the two communities in relation to their future security”.

On the basis both of the observed progress in the bi-communal dialogue and the aforesaid evaluation of the UN Secretary – General, on June 28, 2017, the multilateral Conference on Cyprus commenced with great expectations.

During the negotiations which followed, the UN Secretary – General, in an effort to positively support the whole process, presented an outline of six fundamental thematic topics which consisted on the one hand the Chapter of Security and Guarantees, including the withdrawal of foreign troops, and on the other hand, issues related with the internal aspects of the Cyprus Problem.

Achieving convergences on the UN Secretary – General’s framework would have led to reaching a strategic agreement, thus, injecting a new dynamic impetus in the process with valid hopes that an overall settlement was feasible.

Acting in full conformity with the outline of the UN Secretary – General, I submitted credible and realistic proposals which effectively addressed the sensitivities and concerns of both communities.

Proposals taking into consideration, as also the framework of the UN Secretary–General, the capacity of the Republic of Cyprus as a member – state of the EU and the UN.

In stark contradiction to the framework of the UN Secretary – General and the positions of the other two guarantor powers, Turkey, adopting an inflexible stance, insisted on the following: Maintaining the Treaty of Guarantee and the right of intervention, as well as a permanent presence of troops.

Mr. President, Your Excellencies,

During his speech at the General Assembly, the President of Turkey, Mr. Tayip Erdogan, claimed that the unsuccessful outcome of negotiations at Crans Montana was attributable to the incomprehensible position of the Greek Cypriot side.

In response, I would like to ask the Turkish President:

- Is it incomprehensible to aspire to establish an independent and sovereign State, without any foreign guarantees, any right of intervention by a third country and free from the presence of occupation troops?

- Is it irrational to advocate establishing a normal State, in which all decisions will be taken only by its citizens, free from foreign dependencies?
- Is it unreasonable for an EU member-state to efficiently and effectively participate in the decision-making of the Union?
- Is it unfounded to envision terminating the anachronistic Treaty of Guarantee and establishing a robust system of security, based on the Charter of the UN and the Treaties of the EU and the Council of Europe?
- Is it against any established principle for the UN, as well as the relevant institutions of the EU, to ensure and safeguard the smooth and secure implementation of the provisions of the settlement?
- Concurrently, is it a paradox to reject Turkey's insistence that it should assume the said role?
- Does any constitution of a Federal State provide that for every decision at a Federal level, at least one positive vote by the members of the state is required? When especially one of the members of the Federation is controlled by a third country?
- Finally, could anyone uphold that reaching a settlement, based on the proposals of Turkey, would have led to establishing a functional and viable State?

Mr. President, Your Excellencies,

Despite our disappointment, what I wish to emphatically stress and convey is that the vision of the people of Cyprus is no other than ending the unacceptable status quo and establishing a federal state which would ensure to the generations of Greek and Turkish Cypriots, conditions of stability for a safe, prosperous and peaceful future. A State free from any foreign interventions and dependencies; "a normal state", as the UN Secretary – General very correctly stated. A State led by Cypriots for Cypriots.

In this regard and contrary to the statements by Turkish officials, it is my intention during tomorrow's meeting with the UN Secretary – General to convey our readiness to immediately resume negotiations, in accordance with his framework and always in line with the relevant UN Resolutions.

Within this context, it is widely acknowledged that for a new Conference on Cyprus to reconvene and in order to avoid a repetition of shortcomings of the past, there should be thorough and solid preparation and strong political will and determination by all interested parties and stakeholders, so as to ensure that this time deliberations will lead to a positive outcome.

And in this effort, I have no doubt that the UN Secretary – General and the UN Permanent Members of the Security Council will offer us their support and help.

In parallel, at this critical juncture, instead of unilateral actions which negatively affect the aim of moving the process forward, mutually agreed Confidence Building Measures which are in line with the UN Security - Council Resolutions and the UN Secretary – General reports, such as the return and resettlement of Varosha to its rightful and lawful inhabitants, would be a game changer in creating a climate conducive to resuming negotiations with the aim of reaching a comprehensive settlement. An aim which would be further reinforced through progress to the humanitarian issue of the missing persons. To this end, I call on Turkey to fully cooperate in order to resolve this tragic issue. With this opportunity, I also urge all countries which might hold information to open their archives in order to support our efforts to giving an end to this tragic aspect of the Cyprus Problem.

Mr. President, Your Excellencies,

In conclusion, I yet again urge Turkey and our Turkish Cypriot compatriots to realize that it is only through mutual respect and compromises and not obsolete fixations to failed practices that we will achieve a viable and lasting settlement. A settlement which should leave neither winners nor losers and fully respect and address the sensitivities and concerns of both communities. This is the only way for Cyprus to fully utilize its potential and exploit its unique geographical position.

This is my vision.

Thank You for your attention.

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