

OPENING OF FAMAGUSTA

a chance to restore
mutual trust



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A series of confidence building measures, of which the most important concerns Famagusta, are envisaged in the framework of the new initiative which started in February 2014 to resolve the Cyprus problem. As part of these renewed efforts, the leaders of the two communities in Cyprus agreed on 11 February 2014 on a Joint Declaration*, which empowers the negotiation process aiming at reaching a solution to the Cyprus problem.

Specifically, the proposal concerning Famagusta includes the return of the Turkish occupied city, currently a ghost city, to its lawful inhabitants, under the auspices of the UN and in line with the 1984 UN Security Council Resolution 550. This confidence building measure could inspire the people in both communities to believe again in the possibility of a solution, thus giving the peace process added impetus. The lack of trust between the two communities would be diminished, while the Turkish Cypriots could use the port of Famagusta for direct trade, under the supervision of the EU. A first positive step would be the agreement on a roadmap by both Greek Cypriot

and Turkish Cypriot experts for the reconstruction of the city, to be gradually implemented through joint efforts by the two communities.

An agreement on Famagusta would not only send a very strong message of the determination of both sides to reach a comprehensive settlement to the Cyprus problem, but would also resolve part of the territorial and the property dispute. Such a development could create a domino effect with the regards to resolving other aspects of the Cyprus problem.

* For the full text of the Joint Declaration, visit: <http://www.moi.gov.cy/moi/pio/pio.nsf/All/57229592C124622C2257C7D00273B91?OpenDocument>



Sealed-off area of Famagusta - PIO Photo Archive



Church of Ayia Zoni in the sealed-off area of Famagusta - PIO Photo Archive

INTERNATIONAL REACTION ON THE PROPOSAL

The proposal by the Greek Cypriot side put forward by Cyprus President Nicos Anastasiades was positively received by the international community, characterizing the initiative one of the key elements of the negotiations for a solution to the Cyprus problem.

The United States welcomed President Anastasiades' proposal for a package of bold and innovative confidence building measures and other constructive proposals, which have the potential, when agreed and implemented by the parties, to dramatically enhance cooperation between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities and restore faith in settlement efforts. Furthermore, in a statement issued by the Press Secretary of the White House, it was stated that "the United States will engage in diplomacy with all stakeholders to explore possible initiatives to reinforce settlement negotiation, including measures aimed at the future revitalization of the Famagusta region, when agreed by the two communities".

The European Union, through a statement issued by the President of the European Commission and the President of the European Council on 11 February 2014, fully supports the efforts to reach an agreement between the two parties on a package of confidence building measures, which can help create momentum towards a settlement to

the benefit of Cypriot people. Also, the EU reiterates its readiness to contribute to this objective in the prospect of a final settlement.

Moreover, the members of the UN Security Council reaffirmed their appreciation for the initiatives taken regarding the issue of Famagusta, and welcomed this tangible measure that could give extra impetus to the solution process.

CALLS BY THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

The European Parliament (EP) has repeatedly voiced its support for the return of Famagusta to its lawful inhabitants.

In February 2012, the EP adopted a Declaration, calling on the Government of Turkey to act according to the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 550 (1984) and 789 (1992), and the Recommendations of the 2008 Report of the Committee on Petitions of the EP on Petition 733/2004 and return the sealed-off section of Famagusta to "its lawful inhabitants, who must resettle under conditions of security and peace."

In its Resolution of 29 March 2012 on the Progress Report on Turkey (2011/2889 (RSP)) the EP "calls on the Government of Turkey to begin withdrawing its forces from Cyprus and to transfer Famagusta to the United Nations in accordance with Resolution 550 (1984) of the United Nations Security Council".

“ From the fence, which obstructs the stroller from gaining access to the Varosha shoreline, the sea-front hotels, apartment blocks and restaurants are no more than decaying concrete skeletons – massive urban gravestones standing resolutely against the march of time. The memories and the souls of the former occupants, many of whom were met by members of the delegation, still inhabit those walls. ”

(Report of the Committee on Petitions of the European Parliament on the Fact Finding Visit to Cyprus – 25 to 28 November 2007 concerning petition 733/2004)

The city of Famagusta is located on the eastern coast of Cyprus. Since the 1974 military invasion of the island by Turkey, the area to the south of the city, Varosha, has been turned into a ghost town due to the fact that it has been sealed off and closed by the Turkish occupying army which, to this day, still maintains a garrison there.

During the second phase of the invasion on 14 August 1974, the Turkish air force bombed Famagusta and subsequently the Turkish army seized the town. As a result, its 37,000 Greek Cypriot inhabitants were forced to flee the city. Overall, the Turkish military invasion and occupation in 1974 led to the forcible displacement of more than 180,000 Greek Cypriots thus causing a major humanitarian crisis and a flagrant violation of human rights. Turkey continues to illegally occupy 36,2% of the sovereign territory of the Republic of Cyprus and denies the right of return to the forcibly displaced Cypriots.

Until 1974, Famagusta was a significant contributor to the economy of Cyprus, exceeding by far its proportional contribution to the island's national income. Apart from possessing over 50% of the island's total holiday accommodation capacity, Famagusta was also the main port in terms of goods and passenger mobility, a determining factor for the town's development. In 1973, exports from the Port of Famagusta represented more than

42% of the island's total exports. In other words, prior to 1974, Famagusta used to be the leading tourist destination on the island and the most prosperous city.

Varosha, the once thriving sector of the economy of Famagusta and prime property site, is surrounded to the north, south and west by land and to the east by sea. From 1960 when Cyprus became independent until 1974 and the Turkish invasion, its beaches and seafront area made it a magnet for tourism. It is also close to what is known since 1974 as the "UN buffer zone", a zone which runs along the ceasefire line separating the Turkish occupied area of the Republic of Cyprus, from the government controlled area of the Republic. Since 1974, Varosha's refugees await for the return to their homes and properties. Barbed wire, concrete barricades and military warning signs erected by the Turkish occupation army surround Varosha, persistent in keeping everyone out of the fenced off area.

“ This situation in the beach area of Varosha is worse. After its mostly Greek Cypriot inhabitants fled in 1974, more than 100 hotels and 5,000 houses as well as businesses, public buildings, restaurants, museums and schools have been abandoned and watched over by the Turkish army. Despite two Secretary Council resolutions – 550 (1984) and 789 (1992) – Turkey has refused to transfer the administration of this area to the United Nations, but continues to sit there like a dog in the manger. ”

*Robert Ellis,
commentator on Turkish affairs in
the international press, in his article "Famagusta:
A forgotten city" ("New Europe", 22 May 2011)*



Resolution 550 (1984)

Adopted by the Security Council on 11 May 1984

The Security Council,

Having considered the situation in Cyprus at the request of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus,

Having heard the statement made by the President of the Republic of Cyprus,

Taking note of the report of the Secretary-General (S/16519),

Recalling its resolutions 365(1974), 367(1975), 541(1983) and 544(1983),

Deeply regretting the non-implementation of its resolutions, in particular resolution 541(1983),

Gravely concerned about the further secessionist acts in the occupied part of the Republic of Cyprus which are in violation of resolution 541(1983), namely the purported "exchange of ambassadors" between Turkey and the legally invalid "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" and the contemplated holding of a "constitutional referendum" and "elections", as well as by other actions or threats of actions aimed at further consolidating the purported independent state and the division of Cyprus,

Deeply concerned about recent threats for settlement of Varosha by people other than its inhabitants,

Reaffirming its continuing support for the United Nations Peace-Keeping Force in Cyprus,

1. Reaffirms its resolution 541(1983) and calls for its urgent and effective implementation;
2. Condemns all secessionist actions, including the purported exchange of ambassadors between Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot leadership, declares them illegal and invalid and calls for their immediate withdrawal;
3. Reiterates the call upon all States not to recognise the purported state of the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" set up by secessionist acts and calls upon them not to facilitate or in any way assist the aforesaid secessionist entity;
4. Calls upon all States to respect the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, unity and non-alignment of the Republic of Cyprus;
5. Considers attempts to settle any part of Varosha by people other than its inhabitants as inadmissible and calls for the transfer of that area to the administration of the United Nations;
6. Considers any attempts to interfere with the status or the deployment of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus as contrary to the resolutions of the United Nations;
7. Requests the Secretary-General to promote the urgent implementation of Security Council resolution 541(1983);
8. Reaffirms its mandate of good offices given to the Secretary-General and requests him to undertake new efforts to attain an overall solution to the Cyprus problem in conformity with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the provisions for such a settlement laid down in the pertinent United Nations resolutions, including resolution 541(1983) and the present resolution;
9. Calls upon all parties to cooperate with the Secretary-General in his mission of good offices;
10. Decides to remain seized of the situation with a view to taking urgent and appropriate measures in the event of non-implementation of its resolution 541(1983) and the present resolution;
11. Requests the Secretary-General to promote the implementation of the present resolution and to report thereon to the Security Council as developments require.

“ We shall never forget it and we shall always give it a voice, so that it will become once again the city of our life and the city for our children’s life. The question of the return of Famagusta to its lawful inhabitants will be a strategic move that will facilitate the promotion of a solution to the Cyprus problem and the reunification of Cyprus, through the messages it will convey and the symbolism it will have.”

Alexis Galanos, Mayor of Famagusta
(Municipality of Famagusta
website - www.famagusta.org.cy)



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