

THURSDAY, JULY 24, 1997

## EDITORIALS/OPINION

p. 8

International Herald Tribune 24/7/97

## Cyprus: Divorce Could Precede Reconciliation

By Philip Gordon

LONDON — The Cypriots have begun to talk again after a hiatus of more than three years. Under UN auspices and with the guiding hand of U.S. diplomatic troubleshooter Richard Holbrooke, Greek Cypriot President Glavkos Klerides and his Turkish Cypriot counterpart, Rauf Denktash, met near New York from July 9 to 12. They have agreed to pursue their discussions next month in Geneva.

A positive mood in Greek-Turkish relations contributes to the idea that after 30 years of division, a deal on the island might finally be at hand.

The unresolved Cyprus problem creates problems across Europe that are far out of proportion to the island's size.

By ensuring that Greece and Turkey remain bitter adversaries because neither can afford to abandon its Cypriot constituency, the problem forces both countries to maintain far larger and costlier defense establishments than would otherwise be necessary.

The ever present risk of war over Cyprus is a main cause of the Greek and Turkish military rivalry in the Aegean, which last January nearly led to war over some rocky islets.

A war over Cyprus — triggered, for

example, by Turkey carrying out its threat to attack a Greek Cypriot air defense system scheduled for deployment next year — would have wider consequences, drawing in perhaps other NATO allies and/or Russia.

The Cyprus stalemate complicates European diplomacy. Turkey's obligation to stand alone over Cyprus isolates it from its desired European partners and drives it toward the fringes of Europe, and Greece feels obliged to put its stake in Cyprus above its relations with the European Union.

Anyone who cares about European security should wish Mr. Holbrooke and his UN colleagues well. But we should also be realistic. A negotiated deal on a unified Cyprus seems no closer than before.

The reasons why a deal has been impossible for more than 30 years — disputes about freedom of movement on the island, the displaced refugees from both north and south, the role of settlers from mainland Turkey, and the insecurity felt by the minority Turkish Cypriots — remain today.

The Greek Cypriots may be ready to take the whole of Cyprus into the European Union, but the Turkish Cypriots have no intention of going along unless their security and political rights can be guaranteed.

If an agreement on a federal state cannot be reached, it may be time to contemplate formal partition. The idea is anathema to much of the international community because based on a sort of ethnic cleansing at the time of the 1974 Turkish invasion. (Some 140,000 Greek Cypriots fled south, and some 40,000 Turkish Cypriots fled north.) But formal partition would be no worse than the current situation.

It would make more realistic the prospects of EU accession for at least the southern part of Cyprus, pending integration of the entire island later.

Second, acceptance of partition would provide a basis for the enduring constitutional order that seems impossible so long as a minority Turkish Cypriot community, with strong memories of prejudice and violence from before the island's division, is not satisfied that it would be safe without protection from the mainland.

Even partition would require nego-

tiating a deal on compensation for lost property and on territorial compromise (with the Turkish Cypriots giving back some of the territory taken in 1974, in exchange for recognition). But negotiating partition might be easier than negotiating federal reunification.

Most importantly, negotiated partition — reinforced by an international military presence — would reduce the risk of war, which will always be present so long as a final political settlement has not been reached.

An agreement to live together in a federation, which would then join the European Union, remains the most desirable outcome of the current talks. But it is highly unlikely. Perversely, Cyprus's division might have to be recognized before it can be overcome.

Once their borders are made clear and their international status is settled, the two sides in the Cyprus conflict, like France and Germany before them, could get on with reconciliation, economic interaction and a stable peace.

*The writer, a senior fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, contributed this comment to the International Herald Tribune.*