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Concert for peace divides Cyprus p. 13

FROM MICHAEL THEODOULOU IN NICOSIA

THE United Nations-sponsored pop concert in Nicosia today, designed to bring young Greek and Turkish Cypriots together after 23 years, has demonstrated just how deeply divided the island remains.

It has met such strident opposition from hardline groups that a third of the UN's 1,200-member peacekeeping force, including most of the British contingent, will police the event at a football stadium in the UN-controlled buffer zone.

Hundreds of Greek Cypriot motorcyclists are planning a protest at a nearby venue. They have put up posters inviting people to "Come and spit at Sakis Rouvas", the young mainland Greek star who will be singing alongside Burak Kut, from Turkey, in what is expected to be the biggest gathering of Greek and Turkish Cypriots since the 1974 Turkish invasion split the island.

Leaflets appeared at the weekend on car windscreens in the Greek Cypriot south warning parents to keep their children at home. "If you want your children to become passive, homosexuals and organs of Turkish anti-Hellenic propaganda, send them to the concert." It added that the Grey Wolves, an ultra-right Turkish organisation, had

threatened to "drown the concert in blood", although diplomats said that there had been no such threat.

The leaflet was signed by "Evagoras", the name of an ancient Greek king who introduced the Greek alphabet to Cyprus. Some Turkish Cypriot press reports have also contributed to the scaremongering, talking of a "Greek Cypriot onslaught at the concert", while a far right group, Turk-Bir, issued a statement calling on its members not to attend.

Surprisingly, most hostility to the event has come from the Greek Cypriot side where the Government has been keen to promote the idea that the two communities can live peacefully together and, along with the powerful Communist Party and left-wing groups, has urged people to attend.

Turkish Cypriots, often prevented by their own authorities from attending bi-communal events, snapped up their allocation of 3,000 free concert tickets last week, but many from the Greek Cypriot side were returned to the UN.

"We know that there is huge interest among Greek Cypriots, but many have been frightened off by scare stories spread by rejectionists from their own side," said a European diplomat.