



Demonstrators from the Greek (left) and Turkish communities voice opposition to the plan to allow a reunified Cyprus to join the EU AP

Turkish Cypriots lured toward better future on united island

Support for the UN plan that will permit admission to the EU is in the balance, write **Metin Munir** and **Leyla Boulton**

After three decades of living separately, most Turkish Cypriots appear ready to join Greek Cypriots in a reunified island state.

The centuries of mistrust between the two communities since the Ottomans took the island from the Venetians in 1571 is still there. But a single state promises a future in the European Union - a better prospect than the isolation and economic stagnation of separation.

In the next few days, the leaders of both communities will be pressed to accept a UN plan to allow Cyprus to join the EU as a reunified state in May 2004.

Metin Hatay, a lecturer in tourism at two Turkish Cypriot universities, says: "People have mixed feelings. On the one hand there are worries about the plan but, on the other, there is a wish to just get on with the plan, accept it and see what happens. People are fed up with endless negotiations that end in failure and treat us as a bargaining chip."

But they may well remain bargaining chips. On the eve of today's EU summit in Copenhagen, at which vital decisions on Cyprus's future will be taken, Rauf Denktaş, the Turkish Cypriot leader, said he was not in a position to sign the UN peace plan.

Refusal by Mr Denktaş to co-operate would play into the hands of the Greek Cypriots who, according to one

observer, "have been hoping Denktaş will let them off the hook by blocking the plan".

The EU has said it will take all relevant factors into account - including who is perceived as responsible if the UN reunification efforts fail - before deciding to admit a divided island, excluding the Turkish Cypriots.

Whatever they decide, it would be difficult to put the blame on the Turkish Cypriot people themselves. Nearly 90 per cent want to join the EU and 53 per cent favour the UN plan, according to a survey by

international recognition of the government of the Republic of Cyprus while the self-declared TRNC was kept going only with ever-larger grants from the Turkish government.

The Turkish Cypriots' identity was diluted by settlers from the mainland. Of 188,000 (a quarter of the island's population) 63,000 are estimated to be settlers. Many Turkish Cypriots believe their numbers are inexorably diminishing, their land is becoming an annexe of Turkey and "they are losing control of their destiny", says Muharrem Fazl of Kadem.

Not all Turkish Cypriots want reunification. The Turkish Cypriot assembly is dominated by rightwing parties hostile to a settlement. Their electoral support may be erod-

says Erdil Nami, a 61-year-old construction materials supplier who has been prominent in efforts to reconcile the two communities. "But I don't want the Greeks to kill my son or to steal his business 20 years from now. There must be safety measures to ensure that."

The Greeks want a strong central government. Turks and Greeks intermingling, with most of those who lost their property being able to reclaim it.

Cyprus may be geographically small but its separation has created differences as great as any between west and east Germany before unification. The Turkish Cypriot income per capita is \$4,000 compared with \$13,000 on the Greek side. While the Greeks have adopted EU laws in preparation for accession, the Turks live within a legal framework that is not conducive to business.

The result is a booming south, some would say overdeveloped. The north is stagnant, if still unspoilt.

Yet Ali Erel, chairman of the Cyprus Turkish Trade Chamber, who took part in a mass Turkish Cypriot demonstration in favour of a settlement, says the economic disparity between the two sides does not scare him. "Without EU membership, I could not have said this," he says. "But with the EU, infrastructure will be improved, foreign investment will start and the sanctions against the Turkish side will be removed. In three years we could become competitive."

'I don't want the Greeks to kill my son or to steal his business in 20 years. There must be safety measures to ensure that'

the (Turkish) Cyprus Social Research and Educational Consultancy Centre (Kadem). Fewer than one in 10 would like integration with Turkey.

The explanation is that the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), established in 1983 after a 1974 Turkish invasion - itself triggered by a coup attempt to merge the island with Greece - has been unable to fulfil its people's aspirations. The Greeks inherited the international community's recognition and the north was crippled by a Greek Cypriot-induced embargo against its exports.

The Greeks inherited the

ing but they remain big enough to cause fears of clashes between pro- and anti-settlement forces.

Although the UN plan goes a long way towards meeting Turkish Cypriot aspirations by foreseeing two distinct "component states" within a weaker common state, its main weakness in their eyes is to allow up to 60,000 Greek Cypriots to return to the Turkish sector.

Even those strongly in favour of a settlement want to live in a Turkish Cypriot zone closed to more numerous and richer Greek Cypriots.

"You cannot find someone more pro-settlement than me,"

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