

Cyprus

The Secretary-General's Special Advisor (SASG) on Cyprus, Alexander Downer, has been facilitating negotiations between the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot leaders on settling the decades-long conflict over the island since September 2008. In executing his mandate, the SASG also liaises with other stakeholders, including the governments of Greece and Turkey, as well as the European Union. The SASG works alongside the head of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), Lisa Buttenheim, who acts as deputy to Mr. Downer in matters relating to the good offices of the Secretary-General.

The two leaders, Greek Cypriot Dimitris Christofias and Turkish Cypriot Dervis Eroglu, have now met over 100 times since UN-sponsored talks began. But despite optimism over progress made in 2010, negotiations towards a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation have slowed in early 2011.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has warned that a window of opportunity is closing for constructive talks and has urged the two sides to achieve significant progress as soon as possible. This call carries particular importance in light of key upcoming political events in Cyprus that could impact negotiations in the near future, including the country's preparation for the EU presidency in June 2012 and presidential elections in February 2013. Already, some observers caution that the results of the election of the parliament in the Republic of Cyprus on 22 May, which saw the right-wing opposition party make some gains, are likely to intensify resistance to reunification talks between the two leaders in the long term.

While progress has reportedly been made on aspects relating to governance and power-sharing, EU matters, the economy, international treaties and certain aspects of internal security, such as a federal police force and movement across domestic boundaries, negotiations have failed to make progress on the core issues of property, territory, and security guarantees.¹ Property, in particular, remains an intractable issue. In July, the Secretary-General reported acceptance from both leaders of an offer for "enhanced UN involvement,"² while also citing renewed optimism for convergence on all core issues in the near future. To make headway on the issue, the SASG and his team continue to make available international experts to assist with technical aspects of negotiations.

Overall, the negotiations seem to be foundering due to the lack of a practical plan to move them forward. Some observers attribute this to the lack of political will among parties and warn of the risk of stalled negotiations. The SASG, whose role is to ensure that talks between the two leaders maintain momentum, has the difficult task of steering negotiations forward. Responsibility for reaching the overall objective of a comprehensive and lasting solution meanwhile remains in the hands of the two leaders and their respective communities.

- 1 The Treaties of Alliance and Guarantees, signed in 1960 by the UK, Turkey and Greece, established a security structure for an independent Cyprus. If common or concerted action may not prove possible, each of the three guaranteeing powers reserves the right to take action with the sole aim of re-establishing the state of affairs created by the Treaty of Guarantee. Both the Republic of Cyprus government and Greek Cypriot citizens continue to reject Turkey's role as a guarantor within this arrangement, while Turkish Cypriots advocate maintaining Turkish troops on the island. See International Crisis Group, *Cyprus: Reunification or Partition?* Europe Report No. 201, 30 September 2009, p. 19, available at http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/europe/201_cyprus___reunification_or_partition.pdf.
- 2 United Nations, *Secretary-General's press encounter following his meeting with Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot Leaders* (7 July 2011), available at <http://www.un.org/apps/sg/offthecuff.asp?nid=1873>.