

Statement by Mehmet Ali Talat, President of the Turkish Cypriot Community

Strasbourg, 1st October 2008



*Mr. President,
Distinguished Parliamentarians,
Ladies and Gentlemen;*

First of all, I would like to thank the President of the Parliamentary Assembly President Mr. De Puig for inviting me to this august body.

I salute you on behalf of the Turkish Cypriot people. As the elected leader of the Turkish Cypriot people, I am pleased to be addressing you in this room; and I regard this opportunity as the demonstration of your appreciation of the Turkish Cypriot people.

Today is Eid Ramadan, a holy occasion for the Islamic world. On this occasion, I would like to greet the Turkish Cypriot people and all the Islamic world, and wish humanity peace and happiness.

The Turkish Cypriots are a modern people worthy of your consideration and support. At the same time, Turkish Cypriots are a people that has embraced the highest human values, and that believes and fights for human rights, the rule of law, social justice and democratic development.

Although Turkish Cypriot people has been the victim of the Cyprus problem for many years now, it has put forward a determined attitude and took action to solve the problem, without being enslaved by any feelings of revenge.



The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is the first international parliament to accept the elected representatives of the Turkish Cypriot people under its roof.

Taking into consideration **our YES vote for the United Nations Comprehensive Settlement Plan**, which was aimed at solving the Cyprus problem, you have, since the year 2005, provided us with a window to breathe through in our long-lived political isolation. Turkish Cypriot parliamentarians have been able to step into the international arena, thanks to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

*Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen;*

The Cyprus problem is a problem of cohabitation of two peoples on a small island. Unfortunately, I won't be able to say that we have been successful in doing so. However, I should say that the responsibility of the Turkish Cypriot people- that make up 20 percent of the island's population despite its separate political identity- in the creation and continuation of this problem, is very little compared to the responsibility of other actors.

The Turkish Cypriot people has had a single desire since the 1950s: and that is to participate in the governance of the island of Cyprus in a way that would allow it to determine its own future...

I am aware that Turkey is portrayed as the perpetrator of the Cyprus problem in many speeches in this very room. However, when Turkey was forced to intervene in the island in 1974, the Cyprus problem was already there. The representatives of the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot peoples had begun talks in 1968 about how they could solve the problem, resulting from the Greek Cypriots' hijacking 1960 partnership republic 1963. However, when the illegal Greek Cypriot armed forces, which had the support of the Military Junta in Greece, staged a coup against their own administrators and prepared to declare Enosis, Turkey was forced to send troops to the island fulfilling its responsibilities stemming from international agreements.

Turkey had proposed to intervene together with Britain, which is another guarantor country, but was rejected and had to fulfill this duty by on her own.

Because of this problem, Turkish Cypriot people is unable to take its honorable place among the free peoples of the world, and to establish adequate and effective relations with the world. We have spent our childhood and adolescence on a volcano ready to erupt any minute. Now, we are concerned with rendering secure the future of our children. And for this, we regard the establishment of a lasting peace in Cyprus as an urgent humanitarian issue.

The fact that we have not been able to achieve solution and peace despite changing world conditions, has greatly complicated the political aspects of the problem; and has imposed on the problem, the burden of decisions and attitudes of a bipolar world.

In fact, the United Nations Resolutions on the issue since the year 1964, or the attitudes that emerged right after 1974, still have a huge influence today.

The Turkish Cypriot people is able to deal with the difficulties imposed on it by lack of solution, leaning especially on the contributions of the Republic of Turkey. Turkey has been the main supporter of the Turkish Cypriot people and therefore, my people is rightfully grateful to the Republic of Turkey, and to the Turkish people, to whom it is related through historic and cultural bonds.

Thanks to Turkey's support, Turkish Cypriot people is able to benefit from state services, to establish telephone connections with the world, to benefit from postal services and travel.

If Turkey had banned direct flights as other states have, I would have been imprisoned in Northern Cyprus, instead of being here.

In fact, if it wasn't for the support of Turkey, there would not be a Turkish Cypriot leader speaking before you, since there would not be any Turkish Cypriots left in Cyprus.

Leaving aside the details of the problem, this is how you should view the support Turkey gives us.



*Mr. President,
Distinguished Parliamentarians;*

You know that the UN Comprehensive Settlement Plan, which was put to separate referenda to two peoples in 2004, was the best opportunity we ever had to solve the Cyprus problem.

The Turkish Cypriot people, by saying “yes” to this plan, has shown that it wants solution.

Unfortunately, this opportunity was wasted when the Greek Cypriot people voted “no,” due to the inconceivable efforts and encouragement of the then-Greek Cypriot leadership and its political supporters.

I don't have the authority to question the free will of the Greek Cypriot people. However, I cannot forget the state-led “no” campaign against the UN Comprehensive Settlement Plan and the negative role played by the Greek Cypriot leadership, namely, the leader of the time, Mr. Tassos Papadopoulos, and today's Greek Cypriot leader and my dear friend Mr. Demetris Christofias.

The Turkish Cypriot people is, as always, ready and working for an early, comprehensive, just solution to the Cyprus problem. The party that needs to contribute to the process and prove that it wants solution is the Greek Cypriot side.

The pro-solution stance of the Turkish Cypriot people is continuing, despite our disappointment in April 2004.

After April 2004, we tried very hard to re-initiate solution negotiations based on the UN Comprehensive Settlement Plan. We called on the whole world to support us in this regard. We gave voice to this attitude on every platform. Former Greek Cypriot Leader Mr. Papadopoulos persistently avoided this; he himself, announced to the whole world from the United Nations platform, which is the symbol of the freedom of people, that he pursues the policy of

“osmosis,” which means to absorb and dissolve the Turkish Cypriot people under its own administration, instead of a policy of finding a comprehensive solution through negotiations.

Mr. Papadopoulos’ “osmosis” policy did not find support in the world. Even the Greek Cypriot people became uneasy with such a policy, and in February 2008, they replaced Mr. Papadopoulos with Mr. Demetris Christofias.

Now, we have a new process. My dear friend Mr. Demetris Christofias took over the Greek Cypriot leadership saying that he will pursue a policy of solution and negotiations. We were, of course, pleased. And we immediately settled down to work.

We do have various difficulties... However, these difficulties do not emanate from Turkey, as argued by Mr. Demetris Christofias. These difficulties emanate from the fact that the Greek Cypriot side is reluctant to share the sovereignty of Cyprus with the Turkish Cypriot people.

I showed a lot of flexibility so that the Greek Cypriot side sits on the table for comprehensive solution negotiations... In order to strengthen Mr. Christofias, I gave my approval for joint statements that fulfilled their demands to create a “common language,” although this was not part of our procedural agreement signed on 21 March.

Today, I regard the initiation of comprehensive settlement negotiations as a great improvement, but I have to say that the main obstacle in front of further progress is the reluctance of the Greek Cypriot side to give effect the Turkish Cypriots political equality.

*Mr. President,
Distinguished Parliamentarians;*

As the Turkish Cypriot side, we want to establish a new partnership state in Cyprus, based on the political equality of the two peoples, and which is composed of two constituent states of equal status. We believe that Cyprus could be unified under such a framework and that we can stand before the world with a single international identity.



Although Cyprus has been accepted into the European Union in an unfair manner and without the approval of the Turkish Cypriot people, all our political forces agree that the new partnership state will be a member of the EU. I believe that the new partnership state can be shaped by remaining true to the founding principles of the European Union; nevertheless, the Turkish Cypriot people can be protected from threats stemming from historic problems or mistrust through certain derogations.

We ask for your help to formulate such a structure and to bury the Cyprus problem into the past.

*Mr. President,
Distinguished members;*

Please allow me to convey to you my observations on the report titled “Situation in Cyprus” prepared by the Joachim Hörster, the Political Affairs Rapporteur of Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and the draft resolution.

First of all, I would like to thank your Parliament for allowing two of our elected representatives to participate in the works of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in line with Assembly Resolution 1376, and contributing to the easing of the political isolation of Turkish Cypriots. On the other hand, we are expecting the urgent implementation of Resolution 170 of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe in 2004, which states that representatives of Turkish Cypriot local authorities should be represented in the Congress, as in the Parliamentary Assembly.

Again, the Assembly, in Resolution 1376 called for putting an end to the Turkish Cypriots’ international isolation. We regretfully observe that the isolations on Turkish Cypriot people are continuing despite the existence of such a Resolution by an institution, which is the cradle of democracy.

Only a week ago, the Greek Cypriot side arrested a Syrian captain for coming to Turkish Cypriot ports and once again showed how rigid it is in its policy of isolation.

The draft resolution only talks about the ban on Greek Cypriot-flagged ships against entering ports in Turkey. We see that the repeated call of the Turkish Cypriot side to simultaneously lift all restrictions on the island and the Action Plan proposed by the Republic of Turkey in this regard, have not been included in the draft resolution. We expect the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to support proposals that would contribute to the solution of the Cyprus problem, as part of an attitude that would encourage mutual cooperation, stability, and efforts based on mutual advantage, instead of supporting unilateral initiatives.

We are disappointed by the fact that the draft resolution also includes Greek Cypriot claims that they help Turkish Cypriots. The Greek Cypriot side uses this argument as a means of propaganda and political exploitation to prove its claims that Turkish Cypriots are not isolated. Since the Turkish Cypriot side launched an international initiative for the lifting of isolations and the world reacted positively, the Greek Cypriot administration has been claiming that it provides Turkish Cypriots with free electricity, although it is paid, and has been presenting the salaries of people, who work in South Cyprus, as 'aid to Turkish Cypriots.'

The Cyprus problem has given rise to a **property issue**. I would like to remind you that, as the Turkish Cypriot side, we have established the Immovable Property Commission in accordance with the recommendations and suggestions of the European Court of Human Rights. Accordingly, as an interim measure for those property owners, who are unable to wait until a comprehensive solution, we have accepted as domestic remedy, the options of partial restitution, exchange and compensation and have implemented them. The establishment of this Commission has unburdened the European Court of Human Rights of its extensive work load.

Property issue, which has been the subject of especially post-war mandatory regulations, has become a problem for many countries including European states. There are many current examples of this problem in the world. Our main target should be to share each others' experiences regarding this issue, and reach solution and peace through an agreement, which includes arrangements that do not force our people to immigrate yet again.

*Mr. President,
Distinguished Parliamentarians;*

Reaching a comprehensive solution in Cyprus, and rendering this solution sustainable, is also related to how the young generations on both sides of the island view each other.

I can tell you with pleasure that our Ministry of Education has reviewed the **text books** being used in schools, in accordance with the principles and recommendations of the Council of Europe. We are expecting the Greek Cypriot side to take action at once and eliminate language in their own text books that incite enmity and hatred against Turkish Cypriots. Our expectation from the Council of Europe is to encourage and embolden the Greek Cypriot side in this regard.

As the Turkish Cypriot side, we view all the **cultural monuments** in Northern Cyprus, as the common heritage of humanity, regardless of their origin, and try to preserve them with scarce resources without any international aid. I am calling on you today to support us in our efforts to preserve cultural heritage. In this regard, I would also like to bring to your attention that there exists Turkish-Islamic cultural monuments in the Greek Cypriot side, which are in need of the Council's special interest and preservation.



Education in one's own mother tongue is one of the basic human rights. As the Turkish Cypriot side, we have provided the Greek Cypriot children living in Northern Cyprus with the opportunity to receive uninterrupted elementary and secondary-school education in their mother tongues, by Greek Cypriot teachers and in line with the Greek Cypriot curriculum. In addition to this, this issue was taken up and closed by the Committee of Ministers. On the other hand, it is very saddening that a similar opportunity has not been offered to Turkish Cypriot students living in the town of Limassol in Southern Cyprus, who outnumber Greek Cypriot students living in the North.

You should encourage the Greek Cypriot side to remain true to its written and oral promises to the United Nations that it will establish a separate school for Turkish Cypriot students and to provide these children with education in their mother tongues, which is one of the basic human rights.

The issue of **Missing Persons** is not an issue that emerged in 1974, and which only concerns Greek Cypriots. Hundreds of Turkish Cypriot civilians were kidnapped on the way to home or work between the years 1963-1974 and have gone missing. It is a disappointment to see that this humanitarian issue has been portrayed as a problem that only concerns Greek Cypriots and that justice is demanded only on their part.

Amendments adopted at the Legal Affairs and Human Rights Committee further consolidated the one sidedness of the draft resolution. Accepting a resolution that includes such negative and unilateral elements at a time when comprehensive negotiations are ongoing on the island, would definitely not make a positive contribution neither on the solution efforts of the UN Secretary-General, nor the efforts to create a positive atmosphere.

*Mr. President,
Distinguished Parliamentarians;*

The Turkish Cypriot people is under political, economic and social isolation. The most important effect of this isolation is that Turkish Cypriots are unable to voice their political views in the international arena. The developments in Cyprus are, most of the time, brought to the attention of the world unilaterally and in a way that does not reflect reality. At the end of the day, this distortion contributes to non-solution in Cyprus.

First of all, we call on the world for the preservation of our right to express ourselves.

Your noble parliament has safeguarded this right. Although I see that many problems and developments have not been apprehended in a realistic way in the report about the Cyprus problem and about what goes on, on the island, I am thankful to you for safeguarding the Turkish Cypriot people's right to express itself and for showing the generosity of listening to us.

The Annan Plan which was strongly endorsed by the United Nations, European Union and, as well as the entire international community including the Council of Europe was approved by the Turkish Cypriots and rejected by the Greek Cypriots. Following this, despite the resolution 1376 adopted by you for the lifting of isolations, the current draft resolution before us contradicts with the expressed will of the Assembly. Adoption of the draft resolution will create disappointment among my people.

I wholeheartedly thank you for granting us this opportunity,
and **I sincerely hope that your efforts contribute to world peace.**

*Mehmet Ali Talat, President of the Turkish Cypriot Community
Strasbourg, 1st October 2008*

