



National Federation of Cypriots in the UK
Working for a Free, United Cyprus

Annual Parliamentary Meeting with Cyprus Foreign Minister Dr Constantinos Kombos

The National Federation of Cypriots in the UK and the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Cyprus organised our annual parliamentary meeting on Tuesday 18th July 2023, with 17 parliamentarians in attendance, to mark the tragic anniversary of Turkey's illegal invasion and on-going occupation of Cyprus since 1974. The Guest Speaker of the packed event, titled "Cyprus as a Regional Actor: Prospects, Challenges and Developments" was H.E. Constantinos Kombos, Minister of Foreign of the Republic of Cyprus.

Federation President Christos Karaolis gave an opening address to welcome the Ministers, MPs and the UK Cypriot community members in attendance. He told the audience that "Cypriots across the UK and the world will mark 49 years since Turkey's illegal invasion and continued occupation of Cyprus in 1974 began."

Mr Karaolis remarked on the parallels between Turkey and Russia's illegal invasions, noting that "an invasion is an invasion, irrespective of whether it happened 49 years ago in Cyprus or last year in Ukraine." He noted that "the UK lead the international community's response to Russia's illegal invasion" and that "therefore, the UK must be willing to hold Turkey to the same standard."

In closing, Mr Karaolis noted the important and unique role of the UK has to play in the Cyprus issue and conveyed the Federation's "deep thanks to all the parliamentary supporters of Cyprus, namely the Chairman and Officers of the Cyprus APPG, as well as our friends in both Houses of Parliament."

Caroline Nokes MP, Vice Chair of the APPG for Cyprus, opened the event on behalf of the APPG referring to Cyprus as a proven "reliable defence ally". She said that this is a difficult time of year for many Cypriots with "memories of the invasion coming to the forefront". She went on to say the Cyprus APPG is clear on a cross-party basis that the "only acceptable solution is the UN framework, with no third party guarantees" and that "talks must resume as soon as possible."

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus, Dr Costantinos Kombos, began his main address by focussing on Cyprus' role as a bridge between the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe. "Cyprus' engagement in our area," he said, "remains an important asset for the EU since it can facilitate the enhancement of EU relations with neighbouring partners." He continued, stating that, "We are confident to say that Cyprus has the best understanding of regional matters within the EU," which is "the result of geography, hard work, close relations, cooperation and honesty."

Dr Kombos then spoke about the regional challenges facing Cyprus, and their wider effects. He summarised Cyprus' response as acting "as a safe harbour" and of taking "important steps in the area of security, counter-terrorism, intelligence sharing and provision of training. For the challenge of migration, he stated that "we are restructuring our model, improving on our administrative and processing procedures."

Addressing Cyprus' energy capabilities, Dr Kombos referred to the island's "significant quantities of natural gas and of course all year-round sun." He told the audience that "we are focused on making the best possible use of our natural resources and to adopt that energy mix that will be focused on renewables, electrical interconnections and clean energy."

Lastly, Dr Kombos moved to the Cyprus issue stating that "the status quo is not viable, we will never accept anything outside the UNSC's parameters namely a bizonal, bicomunal federation and we remain ready to return back to the negotiating table, even tomorrow." He said that President Christodoulides "from day one, presented an initiative to create conditions conducive to the resumption of the UN-led negotiations" through a "joint effort with the support of the EU and the UN aiming to revive the process."

Explaining this plan, Dr Kombos, said that the "initiative focuses on the enhanced role that the EU can play in the negotiations, always acting in a complementary way to the UN efforts." The role, he noted, includes the "increased involvement of the EU via the appointment of an EU Special Representative can facilitate the UN efforts, while also actively contributing to discussions at the political level."

Dr Kombos stated, however, that "despite our constructive approach, Turkey preserves its intransigent stance and takes concrete steps for promoting its sole goal, that is the two-state solution." Specifically, he mentioned that "Turkey continues to challenge the internationally recognised Republic of Cyprus's sovereignty and territorial integrity via daily provocations as well as via promoting the upgrade of the secessionist entity."

Citing the role that the UK has to play, Dr Kombos said that "the UK as a guarantor power has a distinctive role to play within this context." He continued saying that, "Turkey must be persuaded to be more constructive with the aim to resuming meaningful negotiations" and that "we, therefore, rely on your invaluable contribution towards this end."

Dr Kombos closed by reaffirming to the audience that "we will never stop trying to reunify our island, we will never deviate from our principles and values." The Cyprus issue, he remarked, is "at the core of our efforts."

Speaking on behalf of the UK Government, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister of State for the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia and United Nations, gave his support to "renewed talks in line with the UN framework." He noted that the UK remains dedicated to finding a solution to the Cyprus problem, "in line with UN parameters of a bizonal, bicomunal federation".

Responding to Dr Kombos' positioning of Cyprus as a bridge to the Middle East and North Africa, Lord Ahmad expressed that he wanted to "take up" the Foreign Minister on the offer. Continuing, Lord Ahmad said that he is "interested in strengthening ties in all aspects" and expressed thanks for Cyprus being a safe hub for Britons during the crisis in Sudan earlier this year.

In his address, Shadow Europe Minister Stephen Doughty MP began by recognising the contributions of the Cypriot community in his Cardiff constituency and the broad cross-party support for Cyprus. He reaffirmed the Labour Party's "full support for a solution in line with the UN framework", saying that the any solution "would have to end the military occupation and reunite Cyprus as a bizonal, bicomunal federation". He also said that any actions that heightened tensions should cease and be reserved, specifically highlighting the Labour Party's opposition to Turkey's actions in Varosi.

On behalf of the SNP, Chris Stephens MP followed, noting his resolve to speak in support of Cypriots and Kurds in the face of official Turkish opposition. He reassured the audience that the "SNP will play its part in supporting a Cyprus solution and will continue to stand up for Cyprus and justice" and expressed "support and solidarity for the reunification of Cyprus and against Turkish illegal occupation of Cyprus and other lands in the region."

Chief Whip of the Liberal Democratic Party, Wendy Chamberlain MP, began her address by recognising the "positive contribution" that Cypriots have given to the UK. She stated that the Liberal Democrats will "continue to press the government until we see a just and viable solution in line with UNSC resolutions as a bizonal, bicomunal federation, that secures the Republic of Cyprus as an independent state."

Longstanding parliamentary friends Martin Vickers MP and Sherryl Murray MP also expressed their continued support for a solution to the Cyprus issue in line with the UN framework.

Chair of the APPG for Cyprus, Sir Roger Gale MP, closed the event, telling the audience that "we will stand with you until the day Cyprus is free." "It is outrageous," he said, "that we have tolerated one member of the Council of Europe occupying another. We must insist that negotiations restart from where they concluded in Crans Montana. All involved parties must get around the table."

Federation President Christos Karaolis also read statements sent by Theresa Villiers MP and Bambos Charalambous MP as they were not able to attend on the night. Ms Villiers reaffirmed that "I will always support your efforts to achieve negotiated settlement to reunite the island, on the basis of a federal state with a single international personality and a single citizenship, with its territorial integrity safeguarded" and that "I have been clear that third country guarantees, or rights to military intervention, have no place in any future settlement."

Mr Charalambous said that "it is imperative that the international community gets behind initiatives such as the 3+1 alliance to help bring peace and stability to the East Mediterranean and help kick start talks that will lead to a bizonal, bicomunal federation of a free and united Cyprus." He continued, "we need negotiations to recommence where they left off in Crans Montana in 2017 and it must be made clear to Turkey that talk of partition will never be tolerated" and "the UK with its strong historic ties to Cyprus also needs to play a big role in making this happen."

The event was also attended by the High Commissioner of the Republic of Cyprus to the UK, Mr Andreas Kakouris and members of his diplomatic team; Mark Jenkinson MP (Workington), Treasurer of the APPG for Cyprus; Catherine West MP (Hornsey and Wood Green); Fabian Hamilton MP (Leeds North East), Shadow Minister for Peace and Disarmament; Chris Clarkson MP (Heywood and Middleton); Lord Truscott; Mike Wood

MP (Dudley South); Navendu Mishra MP (Stockport); Steve McCabe MP (Birmingham, Selly Oak) as well as members of the Federation Secretariat and representatives of Federation member associations.

Prior to the annual parliamentary meeting, the Federation's President Christos Karaolis, Vice President Andreas Papaevripides (POMAK President), Treasurer Bambos Charalambous and Executive Members Susie Constantinides and Adrian Patsalos (NEPOMAK UK President) and Executive Secretary Andreas Karaolis, delivered a petition to Number 10 Downing Street. The petition, on the 49th anniversary of the Turkish invasion, called on Prime Minister Rishi Sunak MP to encourage Turkey to return to negotiations and solve the Cyprus Issue in line with the agreed UN framework.

In addition, the Executive Members also laid a wreath at the Cenotaph to honour those who fell defending Cyprus in 1974.