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Intervention on Turkey-Cyprus in the European Parliament

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

European Parliament Plenary Session

Strasbourg, 27 September 2011

President,

Distinguished Members of the European Parliament,

As soon as tensions appeared over this issue, we have been following developments very closely and with increasing concern.

The High Representative and I made it very clear right from the start: threats are not an option when it comes to solve problems between neighbours. Disputes need to be settled by peaceful means. This is a guiding principle in international relations and in the European Union. We regret and refuse any statement or action that run counter to this approach.

Moreover, as the Council has stressed on several occasions, our Member States have the sovereign right to conclude bilateral agreements with third countries, in accordance with the European Union acquis and international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Let me recall that under international law the European Union and its Member States only recognise the Republic of Cyprus on the island. The EU has also repeatedly underlined the importance of progress in the normalisation of relations between Turkey and all European Union Member States, including the Republic of Cyprus.

I firmly believe that Turkey and the European Union have much more to gain through integration and dialogue than through tensions, especially at a time where the stakes in the region – following the Arab Spring - are so high. Turkey and the European Union need to support jointly the aspirations of the people on the Southern flank of the Mediterranean for democracy, human rights, stability and prosperity.

The European Union is based on a number of core principles and values, including good neighbourly relations and the peaceful settlement of disputes, resorting, if necessary, to international arbitration. We are and remain committed to this approach, which is the best guarantee for peace and stability.

Be assured that both High Representative Catherine Ashton and I made all these points very clearly in our recent contacts with all our interlocutors.

At the beginning of July, the United Nations Secretary-General met the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders in Geneva. They decided to enter into an intensive period of negotiations towards a comprehensive settlement.

Since then, we have all been looking forward to a crucial phase of settlement talks in autumn and the resolution of an issue that would be to the benefit of all Cypriot citizens, the European Union, Turkey and the entire region. This phase is ongoing and I understand the leaders are intensively discussing the substance of several core pending issues.

This is a chance not to be missed under any circumstance.

I therefore urge all parties now to focus all energy, efforts and minds on the comprehensive settlement.

During this crucial ongoing phase, it is essential that all parties concerned exercise restraint and do their utmost to ensure a positive climate that will facilitate a successful completion of the process. Let us give the settlement talks the best chance to succeed.

I trust that all European Union institutions, including the European Parliament, will send the same messages and encouragement towards this end to all the parties concerned.

Intervention was followed by a "questions and answers" session with members of the European Parliament.