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Foreword

by Andreas Theophanous

For any small Member State the assumption of the rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU, for the first time, is of profound importance. For Cyprus this acquires additional significance given its special circumstances and the challenges that it has to address. It is not only the economic crisis and the fact that it had to seek support from the European Stability Mechanism. Above all it is the continued occupation of its northern part by Turkey and the fact that Ankara does not recognise the right of the Republic of Cyprus to exist. We should remember that Turkey itself, candidate for accession, is more than 80 times bigger than Cyprus both geographically and in terms of population. Be that as it may, the Republic of Cyprus aspires to work in a way that its EU Presidency will prove to be a success.

Clearly, Cyprus does not wish to be associated only with problems; on the contrary, it wishes to play a constructive role in the region and to advance broader objectives of the EU. Especially at this very sensitive period when initiatives are required to promote networks of cooperation, economic growth and

tolerance in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East, Cyprus can utilise its geographical position as well as its historical relationships in positive ways.

Cyprus is expected to rise to the occasion and act in ways which would advance this network of multiple objectives and interests. The pressing challenge is for domestic reforms to be pushed through to facilitate an effective and efficient state structure. This will be of utmost importance for the EU as well.

It is also essential to understand that the Cyprus question is also a major European issue. It is problematic for the credibility of the EU when a candidate country and a major partner, Turkey, occupies a substantial part of the territory of a member country. And it is equally negative for the Union when Turkey does not recognise the right of that Member State to exist. This may also be indicative of the weakness of the Union to become a global political power.

Two major issues often raised in discussions about the future of the EU are credibility and solidarity. Cyprus is certainly a place in which these two objectives and principles are tested. When Cyprus applied for membership of the EU there was great euphoria. Over time many Cypriots have become skeptical about the role of the EU in relation to the Cyprus question as well as to its potential as an international player.

Last but not least it is essential to emphasize that one of the pressing questions for the entire international community is the issue of governance in biethnic and multiethnic States and societies. Consequently, the outcome in Cyprus has implications which extend much beyond the territorial boundaries of this island State. Indeed, it is possible to have an integrated political, economic and social structure in Cyprus which encourages the peaceful coexistence and creative cooperation of Greek Cypriot Christians, Turkish Cypriot Moslems as well as other ethnic and religious groups. Such a development could very well serve regional, European and international objectives.