

# Press Release

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## Turn buffer zone in Cyprus from a symbol of division into a symbol of co-operation, says PACE President

Strasbourg, 22.02.2007 – René van der Linden, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), today called for the Buffer Zone in Cyprus to be turned from a symbol of division into a symbol of co-operation, and urged Cypriot leaders to take other such "bold steps" to resolve the conflict on the island.

Speaking at the end of a four-day official visit to Cyprus, the President called on both sides to honour signs of trust and confidence shown by the other side. "Concessions will be painful, but dialogue and joint action are the only way forward."

During the visit, he met President Tassos Papadopoulos and Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat, and hosted a series of bi-communal meetings – including a historic meeting of religious leaders from both parts of the island for the first time since 1974. "This was an inspiring, encouraging and forward-looking meeting," said Mr van der Linden, "which is a starting point for their future co-operation".

The President appealed for "bottom-up" contacts between the two communities and urged them to build a critical mass of small steps for practical co-operation, singling out as "an excellent example" the partnership between Nicosia's Mayors Eleni Mavrou and Cemal Bulutoglu, who work together on matters such as waste disposal.

Mr van der Linden also:

- urged the immediate opening of the Ledra Street crossing in Nicosia, which he described as "the Berlin Wall of Cyprus", and more crossing points on the Green Line
- demanded progress in implementing the 8th July 2006 agreement, brokered by the UN
- proposed that Turkish Cypriot universities be progressively integrated into the Bologna Process to bring them closer to European standards
- appealed for respect for cultural heritage in both parts of the island, including opening places of worship
- called on Cypriot politicians to support a free and active bi-communal civil society
- proposed ways of improving sporting, youth and higher educational contacts between the two communities

The President said he would seek to bring together the Assembly delegations of Cyprus, Greece and Turkey, along with the two representatives of the Turkish Cypriot community, to help with the process of reconciliation.

The Parliamentary Assembly brings together 315 members from the national parliaments of the 46 member states.

President: René van der Linden (Netherlands, EPP/CD); Secretary General of the Assembly: Mateo Sorinas.

Political Groups: SOC (Socialist Group); EPP/CD (Group of the European People's Party); ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe); EDG (European Democratic Group); UEL (Group of the Unified European Left).