

**KEY NOTE BY THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS OF THE
SLOVAK REPUBLIC**

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AT THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

**30 YEARS OF THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN GREEK CYPRIOT AND TURKISH CYPRIOT
POLITICAL PARTIES IN SERVICE OF PEACE IN CYPRUS**

11 June 2019, Cyprus

United Nations Special Representative Spehar, Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an honour to be here with you today.

Thank you for the hospitality that's been extended to me during these past few days.

I have visited Cyprus many times, but it never ceases to amaze.

For 3 decades already, the political party leaders have been meeting at the bi-communal forum under the auspices of Slovak ambassadors.

The first meeting of a kind took place on 16 May 1989 in Prague.

The late Czechoslovak ambassador to Nicosia Emil Keblůšek laid foundation to what has become a medium for useful dialogue based on the spirit of co-operation, reflection, and mutual understanding.

Around the time the idea for the bi-communal dialogue was born, I had just joined the Czechoslovak federal Foreign Service.

After Slovakia gained independence on 1 January 1993, our diplomacy carried the torch and continued to build this bi-communal forum.

Today, I am grateful to generations of Slovak diplomats who sustained this effort that I will always continue to support.

Because just as in the world of 1989, waking up to the sound of falling walls; as in the world of 2019, when many want to build new walls - we need dialogue for peace.

During those 30 years, there have been many days of failures, followed by strands of hope.

There have been huge leaps forward and steps back.

But the engagement and efforts of politicians from both communities through these 30 years of bi-communal dialogue make me hopeful.

And that is the **first message** I want to share with you today: Over these past few days I have been meeting with representatives of political parties and people of Cyprus.

And let me say: what I experienced here, gives me hope.

The long tradition of bi-communal dialogue shows that there still is will, good intentions and determination, even despite current impasse in reaching agreement.

Many times in recent history, this forum has been the only existing direct contact for Cypriot politicians, exchanging views on the future of the island that Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots, Maronites, Armenians and Latins have shared together for centuries.

Over the years, these meetings have sent strong messages in support of peace-process that should result in a just, viable and sustainable solution for Cyprus.

They have also set a perfect example how to build trust and common understanding.

They yield forces in favour of solution based on the framework set by the UN Security Council resolutions and proposals.

During those 30 years in many places of Europe - barriers fell and peace and prosperity rose up in their place.

That can and should happen here.

This island can and should be the bedrock of opportunity for Europe and for the Eastern Mediterranean.

For that – there is no other alternative but unified, independent and sovereign Cyprus.

Divided Cyprus is a product of force and violence.

Forceful approach to conflict resolution could result only in dangerous situations and tremendous suffering of people.

I know that today, when the process has hit a deadlock and hope for a resumption of peace negotiations seems diminishing, it is easy to get side-tracked.

But the solution lies in dialogue, international law and multilateralism.

Don't let anybody look elsewhere.

That is my **second message** for you today.

The current status quo is unsustainable.

However, this does not mean that the only alternative is the permanent division of the island.

Any solution should be based on the framework set by the United Nations Security Council, giving Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots the right to live in a functional EU member state - in security and prosperity.

Unified. Independent. Sovereign.

For that, we need to look carefully at the tools at our disposal.

And we need to use them better.

This includes existing practices and mechanisms, and also new ones.

There are several Technical Committees engaged in different fields.

There are Confidence Building Measures agreed by both leaders; in areas such as demining, opening new crossing points, island-wide mobile phone operability, interconnectivity of electricity grids or education.

These are extremely important, because they are focused on people.

On improving the day-to-day life for all people of Cyprus.

And in the end – they are the reason we are all here today, they are the reason we have been searching for solutions together for 30 years.

These Confidence-Building-Measures have proven to be very useful in recent years - when prospects of the resumption of the peace conference were not always encouraging.

They are crucial for building a strong foundation for a comprehensive and sustainable solution.

Both, political dialogue and Confidence-Building-Measures have also been repeatedly mentioned in regular reports of the United Nations Secretary General on his Good Offices Mission in Cyprus.

This is a strong signal that it's the right track.

Every small, concrete step along with real dialogue can substantially help to move the settlement process forward at all levels of negotiations.

And in search for solutions, let's keep our eyes open for every tool and opportunity.

Like - gender mainstreaming, greater participation of women in the peace-making process, allowing young people to have a greater say, raising and educate them to humanity, respect, tolerance.

I know it is a process that requires vast amounts of persistence, perseverance and trust.

But you've got friends.

That is the **final message** I want to leave you with.

Slovakia stands prepared to provide any assistance we can towards you accomplishing that end.

We are ready to maintain the role of honest broker and impartial mediator – as long as the Cypriots find it useful and helpful.

We will continue to assist in protecting peaceful life on the island through recently increased presence of the Slovak contingent within the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus – as long as the United Nations Security Council allows us to do so.

But it is and always will be you to decide.

Only Cypriots can decide on a vision for your future, and only Cypriots can exercise the courage necessary to make that vision real.

I believe - as I know you do - it is possible to reach a settlement that unites Cyprus.

And the lengths this island can go if the next generation is freed from conflicts of the past – are without limits.

Thank you for your attention and I wish you every success.