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**BRITISH-CYPRIOT RELATIONS** (13/06/07)**Event:** Keith Kyle Inaugural Memorial Lecture**Location:** London School of Economics**Speech Date:** 13/06/07**Speaker:** Geoff Hoon

Could I begin by thanking Zenon Stavrinides for this initiative to remember Keith Kyle who died earlier this year. Could I also thank our hosts at the London School of Economics and the Hellenic Observatory.

It is a great honour to speak at this first memorial lecture in memory of Keith, but it is as a daunting one. I hope I can do his memory justice.

Keith Kyle was a highly accomplished man in many fields but we remember him best as a journalist and as a historian.

Perhaps some of today's journalists might note that conjunction. He was the most scholarly of journalists and the most vibrant of academics. Keith wrote his academic works, in particular his account of the Suez crisis, with a journalistic verve whilst his broadcasts for the BBC and articles for the Economist and Observer had the authority of an Oxford scholar and Harvard Fellow.

He was also intensely interested in politics. He stood for Parliament as a Labour and SDP/Alliance candidate. He would, of course, have been a great asset to politics, as I have no doubt my former colleagues in the European Parliament, Lord Bethell and Costas Carras, would agree.

Costas described one of Keith's reports for the Minority Rights Group as "essential reading for all those involved in intercommunal contacts" – an issue I will explore this evening.

Tonight, we remember Keith Kyle's work on Cyprus. He was an active member of the Friends of Cyprus, so it is right that I should start with the bilateral relationship between the United Kingdom and Cyprus.

A strong, friendly, bilateral relationship is vital to the interests of both Cyprus and the UK. We are determined to broaden and develop the relationship, even deeper than the links we enjoy with our other EU partners.

I personally am committed to the development of a stronger dialogue on all aspects of our relationship with Cyprus – from trade to climate change to tourism.

Indeed, this was the aim of my visit to Cyprus in April - my first as Minister for Europe. Following a personal invitation from Foreign Minister Lillikas, I was able to discuss with him a range of bilateral issues. We acknowledged

that we had a vital interest in building an understanding which reflects that we are both mature democracies facing the common challenges of globalisation - but one that builds on our historical relationship.

Bound as we are by trade, by tourism and by history, we need that close relationship. Of course there will be areas where we might not agree: that is the way bilateral relationships, and the EU, work. But we can address such differences through dialogue based on mutual respect.

Of course there are historical issues which are sensitive, but we can build a better future by working together. I often say that only *real* friends can have disagreements and remain friendly.

But we cannot allow a complex partnership to be dominated by the tragic division of the island. A permanent and sustainable settlement is essential for both of us and for Europe as a whole.

Close inspection of the different elements of the bilateral relationship reminds us why we cannot afford to ignore it. The UK is Cyprus' main trading partner. We want to build on the strength of our trading relationship and help develop business infrastructure. British companies already have close and productive links in almost every sector of the Cypriot economy: cars, tourism, consumer goods, financial services. And many Cypriot businessmen and companies are finding success in the UK.

More and more young Cypriots are choosing to study in the UK. Following EU accession, the number of Cypriot undergraduates enrolling in UK universities rose by 60%.

I am keen to encourage this - many of you here tonight are students either at the LSE or at another British University, and whatever your views on politics, I hope you are building links with fellow students from across Europe and developing ties with the UK that will last your whole life.

We are also collaborating with the Cypriot government on higher education, lifelong learning and many other issues. Successful pensions reform, anti-hooliganism measures, job centres and town-planning might not win headlines. They may appear rather worthy, but they are signs of a vibrant and effective two-way partnership - two countries seeking to help each other develop modern, useful policies, on a range of levels, which benefit our citizens.

Our bilateral relationship fundamentally changed when Cyprus became a member of the European Union. This provided an imperative to build a relationship with room to lobby, discuss and agree positions on a range of EU issues. And it provided the opportunity to share experiences on the implementation of EU legislation and policies.

So there is a need to broaden the relationship and remove misunderstandings. We need to address old clichés about the UK being somehow anti Cypriot, or even more illogically, that because we are pro-Turkish, we must somehow be anti Greek Cypriot. In fact, Foreign Minister Lillikas and I see eye-to-eye on the strategic benefits of Turkish accession to the European Union. This is a shared priority. As it is of course for Greece and anyone else in the neighbourhood.

These polarities, no doubt reassuring to some, ignore the depth of our bilateral relationship. Take as an example, the determined efforts of Robin Cook to promote Cyprus' membership of the European Union. Today, three years from accession, some critics still claim that this was a mistake, that accession should have been made contingent on reunification. Whilst Robin made it clear that he would have preferred Cyprus to accede as a united island, he also made clear that this was not a fundamental condition for European Union membership.

Robin Cook worked tirelessly to overcome the concerns of other Member States and to secure Cyprus' rightful place in the European Union. This

was not in spite of, but because of, our long relationship with Cyprus. This political support reflected the close people to people links – links we can see in this auditorium tonight. Students, holidaymakers, but crucially the three hundred thousand Cypriots who have built their lives in the UK. You have all played a part in the development of the bilateral relationship. Equally, I strongly hold the view that you have a role to play in the reunification of the island.

After three decades of efforts, it remains of crucial importance to find a lasting solution. The communities on the island, and indeed the stability of the region, continue to suffer from division.

As well as Cyprus, Keith Kyle wrote and reported about both the Arab Israel dispute and Northern Ireland. Both provide a reminder that a frozen conflict may be preferable to the heat of war but also, with time, it becomes harder, with old grievances becoming more intractable and difficult to solve. I hope that this is not becoming the case with Cyprus. Time, however is not on the side of a settlement. The facts on the ground become daily more difficult.

We need to say over and over again, there is no alternative to reunification. If we continue to take as our goal, as we should, an outcome which can command sufficient support in both communities. The status quo, with all of its uncertainties is surely not acceptable. The UN process provides the principal route to a solution. We must now build on the eight July agreement until we have a permanent solution, a solution which will end Cyprus' divisions – a developed European country which is home to UN peacekeepers and separated by a green line.

The eighth of July agreement envisages confidence building measures at grass root level. Just as we saw in Northern Ireland, people divided by different loyalties and religious differences can contemplate a shared future. People's desire for peace and stability can impact on positions thought to be intractable and find ways out of an impasse. The lesson from the successful agreement on power-sharing in Northern Ireland is not that it provides a template for Cyprus, but that radically opposed communities can settle their differences through dialogue, compromise and political leadership. But it takes all three of these elements to pave the way for settling differences.

I remain concerned that bi-communal activities on the island are waning. These activities are designed to promote reconciliation and build trust. They give communities themselves the opportunity to feed in their views and affect the outcome of negotiations. We cannot have a comprehensive settlement without public buy in. It will not be imposed from outside. Cypriots themselves have the responsibility to find a solution.

The many Cypriots living in the United Kingdom have a powerful voice and I must urge you to contribute actively to this debate. Cypriots on both sides of the green line can rekindle bi-communal activities across the spectrum – schools, universities and business associations. Many of you here this evening have close family and friends in Cyprus. You can influence the most senior individuals in government, business and civil society.

I hope that you will use this influence wisely and work proactively for progress now. Because if we are to see progress on a settlement, we need urgent action to generate early momentum into the UN process. The UK, as a close EU partner, a concerned permanent member of the Security Council and a long term friend will do what it can to assist. But our voice will never be as compelling as that of the Cypriot communities themselves because ultimately it is these communities who must choose between a united island or continued division.

Keith Kyle, who we remember this evening, understood the central importance of bi-communal activity to create the conditions for a settlement. I hope that we can do his memory justice.

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