

ONE ON ONE

Continental divide

It's no longer at the forefront of news from Europe, but the division of Cyprus remains a hot topic, according to the leader of a parliamentary delegation that recently visited Australia.

It's remarkable the Republic of Cyprus has developed into a robust democratic country despite more than a third of this large island state in the Mediterranean remaining under the firm control of the foreign power that invaded it in 1974.

The passion surrounding this seemingly forgotten conflict with neighbouring Turkey nearly 40 years ago has not dampened with time, according to the President of the Cyprus House of Representatives, Yiannakis Omirou. During a recent visit to Australia with a parliamentary delegation from Cyprus, he was persistent in his calls seeking reunification of Cyprus.

Not surprisingly discussions between the visiting parliamentary delegation led by Mr Omirou and Australian MPs were dominated by what international action can be taken to reverse the partitioning off of the north-eastern part of Cyprus by Turkey.

The Turkish army had invaded Cyprus on 20 July 1974, five days after the Greek military junta had carried out a coup d'état in Cyprus, with plans to unite the island with Greece. Turkish armed forces landed in Cyprus on the pretext of protecting the Turkish Cypriots from Greek militias and to restore constitutional order as one of the guarantors of the 1960 Treaty of Guarantee between Turkey, United Kingdom and Greece.

The Turkish air force bombed Greek positions on Cyprus, and hundreds of paratroops were dropped in the area between the cities of Nicosia and Kyrenia, where enclaves of Turkish Cypriots assisted. Off the coast, 30 Turkish troop ships landed 6,000 men as well as heavy armour. Within three days Turkey had landed 30,000 troops on the island and captured significant territory. A second invasion on 14 August saw 37 per cent of Cyprus fall into Turkey's hands and led to an international stalemate that still exists to this day.

"We have the Turkish occupation for 38 years now so it is natural we are looking forward to a solution of this longstanding problem as soon as possible," Mr Omirou said.

"And solution means the implementation of the Security Council resolutions regarding the Cyprus problem, of the principles of international law and the chapter of the United Nations and of course European law as Cyprus is a member of the European Union.

"This solution must terminate the occupation and safeguard the implementation of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all the Cypriot citizens and of course termination of the anachronistic guarantees of 1960 — guarantees of the three powers United Kingdom, Turkey and Greece. We are the only country in the world living under such guarantees and guarantors. We are a member of the United Nations and we are a member of the European family. We don't want guarantees — the guarantees are



ONE FUTURE: *Yiannakis Omirou believes a unified Cyprus is possible*

our country's participation in the United Nations and the European Union."

Despite the stalemate, Mr Omirou remained hopeful of a unified Cyprus in his lifetime but warns most Greek Cypriots won't accept a co-federation of two separate states.

"We want the solution as soon as possible," he said. "We wanted the solution immediately after the Turkish invasion in 1974 but it does not depend on us, it depends on Turkey.

"We are not ready to accept co-federation and we are not ready to accept two separate states in Cyprus."

Mr Omirou presides over a House of Representatives chamber with 59 members elected for a five-year term. It has 56 Greek Cypriot members chosen by proportional representation and three observer members representing the Maronite, Roman Catholic and Armenian minorities. Twenty four seats are also allocated to the Turkish Cypriot community, but they have remained vacant since the 1960s.

He said Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots had lived together in harmony for centuries in the same villages and the same cities and he believed they could do so again. "Historically there were not any problems between the two communities of the island," he said

Cyprus joined the European Union in 2004, and Mr Omirou is looking forward to his nation taking its turn later this year in the presidency role of the European Union.

"Although we have not experienced this and although we are a small country, we are optimistic that we will succeed with this because we are a country with experience in international diplomacy, parliamentary diplomacy and organising conferences."

House Rules

Year of the private member

Private members made their presence felt in the House of Representatives in 2011 following the changes to standing orders after the 2010 election.

THERE has been wide debate about the impact of the parliamentary reforms negotiated following the August 2010 federal election. The statistics point to a significant shift in the way the House works.

One key goal stated by the independents in the negotiations was to give private members (MPs who are not ministers or the Speaker) more opportunity to highlight individual electorate issues and present their own legislation.

Increased participation by private members has primarily been achieved by changes to the order of business in the House and Federation Chamber (previously known as the Main Committee), and an increase in sitting hours in each chamber.

A comparison between the 2011 sittings and the pre-election sittings in 2010 shows around a 10 per cent increase in the proportion of time spent on contributions by private members. Nearly one quarter of all business conducted in the House in 2011 was made up of either private members' business — that is, legislation and motions sponsored by private members — or other opportunities available to private members, such as members' statements and contributions to adjournment and grievance debates.

Twenty-one of the 223 bills initiated in the House of Representatives in 2011 were introduced by private members. Of these, 12 were debated at the second reading stage and two were passed by the House. In previous parliaments, private members' bills were only occasionally debated and, even then, not usually voted on.



APFONE

BACKBENCH BOOST: *Parliamentary reforms emphasised the role of local MPs*

Also during 2011, 117 private members' motions were moved and debated, with 52 being put to a vote. Of those motions voted on, 42 were agreed to by the House. Prior to the 43rd Parliament, it was rare for votes to occur on private members' motions.

The statistical summary for 2011 also shows a heavy workload in the House and the Federation Chamber.

There were 64 sitting days in 2011 during which the House met for a

total of 640 hours, while the Federation Chamber met on 54 occasions for a total of 290 hours.

During this period, 142 committee reports were presented, 882 questions without notice were asked and 621 questions in writing were submitted.

There were also 195 petitions presented, which, in total, comprised 704,954 signatories, and 136 ministerial responses to petitions were presented. •

Continued from page 54

Despite its close proximity to Greece at the epicentre of Europe's sovereign debt crisis, the Cypriot economy and its financial institutions remain the most stable in the Mediterranean due to billions of dollars in investment from Russia. Cypriots are still among the most prosperous people in the region.

"We face some problems — for example we have unemployment," he said. "For the first time in our history we have nine per cent unemployment, which is very big for our country. But I could not say that the people are feeling the crisis as they are feeling the crisis in a majority of European member countries." •