

EU'S KYPRIANOU TO BE CYPRUS FOREIGN MINISTER-SOURCES

Source: Reuters

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BRUSSELS, 27th February 2008 - The European Union's health chief Markos Kyprianou is expected to return to Cyprus to become its new foreign minister, senior Commission sources said on Wednesday.

The sources suggested Kyprianou could become a leading figure in talks on the reunification of the Mediterranean island under Demetris Christofias who was elected president on Feb. 24 and will be sworn into office on Thursday.

"He (Kyprianou) is to return to Cyprus as foreign minister where he wants to push ahead with talks on the country's unification," one source told Reuters.

Another source, close to Kyprianou, said: "There are going to be changes and the percentages are very high that he will become Cyprus' foreign minister. An announcement could be made on Friday."

Kyprianou is a member of the Democratic Party, Cyprus's third largest party which backed Christofias in the presidential election runoff.

Christofias takes over on Thursday with his investiture in parliament. The full composition of his 11-member cabinet is expected to be announced by Friday.

Christofias's election has revived hopes of reunification on the ethnically divided island, which was split in a Turkish invasion in 1974 after a brief Greek inspired coup and remains a stumbling block to Ankara's EU aspirations.

"It has always been Kyprianou's dream to negotiate the reunification of Cyprus and he has always kept one eye at home throughout his time in Brussels," another Commission source said.

MESSY REPLACEMENT

Kyprianou was appointed EU Commissioner for Health and Consumer Affairs in May 2004, but his portfolio was halved following the arrival of Bulgaria and Romania into the 27-member bloc last year.

Other senior Commission sources said Kyprianou's departure was not officially discussed by the EU's commissioners at their weekly meeting on Wednesday.

"But I would be very surprised if he doesn't go back, it seems that the only thing holding things up is how he will be replaced and of course if (EU Justice and Security) Commissioner (Franco) Frattini also leaves," a Commission source said.

There has been media speculation that Frattini may return to Italy following the upcoming elections there.

Cypriot media have cited Androulla Vassiliou, wife of former Cypriot President George Vassiliou who was in power between 1988 and 1993 -- a politician in her own right -- as a possible replacement for Kyprianou.

A new Commission will be chosen following European Parliament elections in June 2009.