



## **FES CYPRUS NEWSLETTER**

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## **FES NEWS**

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# 1. New and Upcoming Publications/Podcasts (www.FEScyprus.org)

# November

Cihan Dizdaroğlu

Moving Beyond Soliloquy: Youth Perceptions on Politics, Peace and Inter-Communal Contacts

(In English, Greek, Turkish)



Sarah Morsheimer, Kyriaki Chatzipanagiotou, Tina Mykkänen, Hrishabh Sandilya A Systemic Analysis of the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Refugees, Migrants and Asylum Seekers in Cyprus: Part I - An Overview

FES Cyprus/Project Phoenix/Justice Project (In German, Greek)

# December

Elias Ioakmoglou, Nicos Trimikliniotis The Post-Pandemic Stimulus to Restart the Cypriot Economy: A Wage-led Growth Strategy Report

(In English)



Sertac Sonan, Ebru Küçükşener, Enis Porat Politics and Society in North Cyprus: A Survey Study, 2019 Report

(In English, German, Greek, Turkish)



Simona Mihai-Yiannaki, Fiona Mullen National Recovery Strategies – Cyprus Report

(In English)



# **Podcasts**

Our podcasts can be found on all major Podcast providers under FES Cyprus Podcast: Beyond the Divide and in the new media section of our homepage at:

<< https://www.fescyprus.org/media/>>



Hubert Faustmann, Sarah Morsheimer, Hrishabh Sandilya The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on RMAs in Cyprus – Exacerbating Systemic Faults (In English)



Hubert Faustmann, Thorsten Kruse

The Religious Heritage in Cyprus: The City of

Nikosia

(In English, German)



**Hubert Faustmann, Elias Ioakimoglou, Nicos Trimikliniotis** 

The Post-Pandemic Stimulus: Could a Minimum Wage Boost the Beleaguered Cypriot Economy?

(In English)

# 2. FES Cyprus Events

# 3. Cyprus Problem

An informal meeting with the Turkish and Greek Cypriot leaders Ersin Tatar and Nicos Anastasiades took place on November 3 with the UN spokesperson in Cyprus.

The meeting was held under the auspices of the Special Representative/Deputy Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Cyprus, Elizabeth Spehar, in the Chief of Mission's residence in the buffer zone. The leaders said they were willing to positively respond to the UN Secretary-General's commitment to explore the possibility to convene an informal five-plus-United Nations meeting including the guarantor powers (UK, Turkey, Greece), the Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities, at an appropriate stage. Anastasiades stated he would discuss a federal solution, which is what the two sides had historically agreed on and raised the issue of Varosha during the meeting. In contrast Tatar said it was time to put more options on the table such as a twostate solution and raised the issue of hydrocarbons.

On November 12, Spehar met with Tatar where they discussed the Cyprus problem, the work of the bicommunal technical committees and developments on the fenced area of Varosha. Varosha had been fenced off and under the control of the Turkish military since August 1974, when its mostly Greek Cypriot inhabitants fled the advancing Turkish army

and became displaced in their own country. Spehar recalled the position of the United Nations on Varosha which remains unchanged and is guided by relevant Security Council resolutions.

On November 15, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited the TRNC<sup>1</sup> to mark its 37<sup>th</sup> anniversary of unilateral declaration of independence. Amid reactions from both sides of the divide, Erdogan visited Varosha accompanied by Tatar to have a picnic on the beach as part of a political campaign to open the fenced city. The beach area of Varosha was reopened in October shortly before the presidential election by Ankara with a ceremony attended by Erdogan and Tatar. Erdogan stated that a two-state solution needed to be negotiated and that no one should expect peace and stability in the Eastern Mediterranean if the Turkish Cypriots and Turkey are not given their rightful place. He noted that a new period is beginning in Varosha for the benefit of all and called on Greek Cypriot owners of properties to apply to TRNC's Immovable Property Commission (IPC) to be reinstated. A few days later the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) is only recognised by the Republic of Turkey. While for Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots, Ersin Tatar serves as President of the TRNC, the international community considers him the communal leader of the Turkish Cypriots. As the government of the Republic of Cyprus remains internationally recognised as the government of the whole of the island, the entire island is now considered to be a member of the European Union. However, the acquis communautaire is suspended in northern Cyprus pending a political settlement to the Cyprus problem (see Protocol no. 10 of the Accession Treaty).

main avenue of Varosha was renamed after Semih Sancar the Turkish Chief of General Staff during the 1974 invasion.

The visit was condemned and criticized by the government as well as EU Commission Vice President, Josep Borrel who issued a statement stressing that there is no alternative to a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem other than on the basis of relevant UN Security Council Resolutions and a bizonal, bicommunal federation (BBF). On November 16, the Turkish foreign ministry responded to Borrel reiterating that the negotaiations about a BBF has not yielded any results.

On November 24, the Turkish Cypriot side reviewed its policy on the use of the Limnitis crossing, now requesting a negative coronavirus test certificate not older than 72 hours from Tylliria residents while those using all other crossing will need one from the last 24 hours. The previous arrangement concerned presenting a negative test certificate not older than 24 hours. This change angered residents of the Tylliria region since it would make it impossible for them to get the test results within 24 hours while they would also have to get tested daily since many of them travel to Nicosia through the Limnitis crossing to get to their workplaces and schools.

On November 26, a European Parliament resolution denounced Turkey's recent decision to open part of Varosha and called on the European Council to impose hard sanctions on Ankara. The non-binding resolution adopted by 631 votes in favour, three against and 59 abstentions, condemned Turkey's illegal activ-

ities in Varosha, and warned that its partial opening weakens prospects for a comprehensive solution to the Cyprus problem, exacerbating divisions and entrenching the permanent partition of the island.

On November 30, UN Secretary General special envoy Jane Holl Lute, arrived in Cyprus. Lute is expected to meet special envoy and head of UNFICYP Elizabeth Spehar on December 1 ahead of meetings with the leaders of the two communities. The purpose is to convene with the informal five-plus-United Nations meeting to discuss the way forward on the Cyprus problem.

MEP Niyazi Kizilyurek has launched a petition for the recognition of Turkish as an official EU language. Kizilyurek reminded that Turkish was one of the two official languages of the Republic of Cyprus but that he had been unable to address the European Parliament in Turkish because it was not an official EU language. The petition, which is directed at the Parliament, is launched European Kizilyurek's representative Derya Beyatli. "The Turkish Cypriots in Cyprus are discriminated as European citizens. They are speaking Turkish, one of the official languages of the country, without it being an official language of the EU," the text of the petition reads. It adds that the Turkish Cypriots cannot get information on the EU in their mother tongue or follow the discussions in the European Parliament unless they speak another European language. Highlighting Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, the petition underlines that any form of discrimination is prohibited. The petition asks for the European Parliament to put an immediate end to the ongoing discrimination.

The Turkish Cypriot member of the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus (CMP) Gulden Plumer Kucuk and deputy Mine Balman announced that they would be stepping down from their posts at the end of the year after being informed that their contracts would not be renewed by the new Turkish Cypriot president Tatar.

On November 14, the Turkish Cypriot side offered the Greek Cypriot side to transfer up to a hundred Covid-19 patients to the new emergency hospital in the north. The Turkish Cypriot chairperson of the bicommunal Technical Committee on Health Cenk Soydan has relayed the proposal to his counterpart in the south. "This is a humanitarian issue not political," Soydan said, adding that should the Greek Cypriot side accept the proposal this would allow their health system to have a bit of breathing space.

## 4. Hydrocarbons

On November 3, Turkey issued a new Navtex for seismic survey by the Barbaros in parts of offshore blocks 5 and 6 of Cyprus's Exclusive Economic Zone until February 16, 2021. Block 6 has been licenced to Italy's ENI and France's TOTAL.

On November 21, Turkey extended the seismic survey work of its Oruc Reis ship in a disputed area of the eastern Mediterranean until November 29. Along with two other ships, the

Ataman and Cengiz Han, Oruc Reis will continue work in an area west of Cyprus. Ankara pulled the vessel out in September to allow room for diplomacy with Greece, but then sent it back to the area, prompting an angry reaction from Greece, France and Germany. The ship had been expected to finish its work by November 23.

# 5. Greek Cypriots

#### **Economic Developments**

The government on November 12 announced new measures to support businesses and employment, as Cyprus enforced stricter restrictions to contain a spike in coronavirus cases, especially in Limassol and Paphos, which have been placed on lockdown. To date, the government has either spent or pledged over €700m in support schemes to over 190,000 beneficiaries.

On November 17, Cyprus received €250m through the European Commission's SURE programme. The cash will be used by the government to fund eight employment schemes that have been running since March, when the first wave of the virus hit the island. The temporary Support to Mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency, or SURE, was made available for member states that need to mobilise significant financial means to fight the negative economic and social consequences of the coronavirus outbreak on their territory. An additional €229m is expected early next year.

On November 30, the Parliament reviewed the fifth supplementary budget for fiscal year 2020 worth €254m which included:

- €77m on defence expenditures;
- €116m on the general government contribution to the Social Insurance Fund;
- €12m on pensions;
- €6m on promotions of police officers, firemen and special constables;
- €6m credit line to be tapped, if needed, to deal with the economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic;
- €4m on the assistance provided to Lebanon after the massive explosion at the port of Beirut in August.

The first and second supplementary budgets for 2020 were worth €369m and €220m and were allocated to dealing with the coronavirus. The third supplementary budget came to €231m, the majority of which was again allocated for dealing with the virus. The fourth supplementary budget had not been passed by parliament.

According to the Statistical service the number of registered unemployed on the last day of November 2020 rose an annual 34.6% over the same month in 2019. The number of registered unemployed for November 2020 was 32,968 persons in comparison to 24,495 in November 2019 where the unemployment rate was around 7.7%.

According to the Commission's Alert Mechanism Report for 2021 Cyprus is still experiencing excessive macroeconomic imbalances, in particular involving a high stock of non-

performing loans that burden the financial sector, and high private, government, and external debt. Real GDP growth is forecast to fall substantially as a result of the covid-19 crisis, from 3.1% in 2019 to -6.2% in 2020. Real growth is expected to reach 3.7% in 2021, leaving the nominal GDP level 0.7% lower than in 2019.

#### **Domestic Developments**

In November the confirmed COVID-19 cases increased dramatically from 4,366 to 10,565. The number or deaths attributed to the virus rose to 49. The government introduced a rapid test scheme which produce a result within 24 hours, as part of the health ministry's strategy to contain the spread and timely detect infections. Stricter measures were introduced by the government on November 30 according to which, the movement of persons is prohibited from 9 at night until 5 in the morning of the next day. Further measures included the closing down of restaurants at 7pm and permitting only 10 people to attend weddings and funerals. The measures will be in place until December 13. Paphos and Limassol had been placed on lockdown from November 12 until November 30.

On November 13, Socialist EDEK and the Citizens Alliance announced they would join forces for May 2021's parliamentary elections, putting forth a united "anti-bizonal front" and aiming at a solution to the Cyprus problem based on one state and one people. They both stressed their cooperation would reflect their rejection of a bizonal, bicommunal fed-

eral (BBF) solution to the Cyprus problem, which is the agreed basis on which the two communities have been holding talks to date.

The Dromolaxia land scandal resurfaced in November after a former AKEL member Venizelos Zannetou, who was sentenced for three and a half years, fingered a senior AKEL official, Nikos Katsourides, as the mastermind behind a land scam. The scam involved the purchase by the CyTA Pension Fund of Turkish Cypriot property in Dromolaxia, Larnaca, and the construction of an office complex at an inflated price, which saw five people jailed in 2015. The case even involved two secret service (KYP) officers who were jailed for six months each after being found guilty of taking bribes. The two police officers had pleaded guilty to two counts of conspiring to defraud the Republic of Cyprus between 2007 and 2010. They had been accused of taking bribes, €10k and €40k, respectively, from businessman Nicos Lillis to prepare a false report that Turkish Cypriot Mustafa Mehmet Mustafa permanently resided in the free areas to enable a land transaction.

Meanwhile AKEL accused the government of being a scandal-producing greenhouse over its handling of a the Cypra slaughterhouse fracas, which brought other issues to the fore, including the closure of a state abattoir in 2013. Cypra, which is owned by the family of the state treasurer Rea Georgiou, found itself under the spotlight after close to 100 staff tested positive for coronavirus. Among them, some 60 foreign workers who, it later transpired, were asylum seekers working without permits. It later emerged that the company

faced other issues relating to building code violations and environmental wrongdoings. Georgiou has been accused of acting against the interests of the state in one case involving her husband's company, and conflict of interest because she is the head of the public audit oversight board. Georgiou has also been accused of stopping the payment of a €54k cheque representing a guarantee of faithful execution of an agreement after her husband's company failed to honour a 2015 animal waste processing contract with the veterinary services.

#### **Labour Relations and Trade Unions**

On November 11, 500 employees of the construction company AVAX-TERNA JV went on strike at the "City of Dreams Mediterranean" (CASINO) construction site, due to repeated delays to the payment of workers' salaries by the company.

On November 12, PEO trade union filed a complaint to the Ministry of Labour and the Welfare Office after clients in a public service office violently attacked and beat employees. The Trade Union deemed the situation as unacceptable and called on the Ministry of Labour and the Welfare Office to take measures to protect workers, especially those at the forefront of public service. Otherwise, they warned that they will invite their members to abstain from servicing clients until the problem is resolved.

On November 12 the plenary of the parliament adopted regulations pertaining to the collective agreement renewal in the hotel industry, amid the growing problems facing the industry. The regulations of the collective agreement in hotels is part of the efforts by the government to avoid mass redundancies and an increase of unemployment due to the pandemic. The Regulations abolish all arrangements relating to the right of employment and the amendment of compensation for work during holidays, so that it is compensated with an additional half a day's wage (additional 1.5 days' wage instead of the current 1) from 1 January 2022. Arrangements for the deadline for the inclusion of workers in the welfare fund are also amended. A new regulation forces employers to pay an additional 1% of each employees' wage for the welfare of workers.

Strike action will be taken by workers at NPT bus company as they have been waiting for five months for the company to end violations of their rights and to implement what is already agreed. According to an announcement by the workers' trade unions, the major problems concern the continuing violation of the Collective Labour Agreement. More specifically, the legislation on drivers' working and rest hours is not respected, the amount of contributions to the Annual Leaves Fund is not paid in full, and there are miscalculations on workhours to be paid by the company. It should be noted that these violations were confirmed as such by the Department of Labour Relations. The trade unions call on the Ministry of Transport, which is the relevant authority, given that it signed the ten-year contract with the company. They also call on the Ministry of Labour, as it is responsible for labour matters, to intervene and to force the company to stop violating agreements and acting unilaterally.

The trade unions published a statement regarding the massive number of workers diagnosed with COVID 19 in an abattoir in Nicosia province. The majority of those workers are immigrants, civil asylum seekers and students. The statement highlights the issue of the employer's failure to take the necessary safety and health measures in a timely manner, as well as the gaps in the employment strategy of immigrants. They note that granting approvals to employers for the employment of asylum seekers and students outside the agreed tripartite committee's procedure and without respecting the existing Collective Labour Agreements puts the workers in a more vulnerable position, both as far as their terms of employment are concerned, but also their overall living conditions.

## 6. Turkish Cypriots

## **Economic Developments**

The 2021 fiscal year budget bill has not been passed by parliament due to the government crisis in the country (please see the domestic developments section).

According to the report of Turkish Cypriot daily Yeniduzen based on the Ministry of Education figures, there are 103,000 university students enrolled in Turkish Cypriot universi-

ties of which 78,000 are currently active. Of 35,000 active Turkish students only 6,000 are on the island while the other 29,000 are in Turkey receiving online education. Of 30,000 foreign students, 22,000 are on the island while 8,000 are attending classes online. In other words, around 57% of non-TRNC university students who are considered as the bloodline of Turkish Cypriot economy are currently not in the northern part of the island.

The Innovative Entrepreneurship and Dialogue Project, which is part of the EU-financed economic support package, launched the second phase grant scheme entitled 'Life-line support for hairdressers and beauty parlours'. Eligible workplaces will be able to receive 18,000 TL (€1,800) each. The goal of the scheme is to minimize the negative economic effects of the coronavirus pandemic and to assist the businesses in overcoming the cashflow problems experienced due to the pandemic. The first phase of the scheme was completed in September and nearly 800 establishments have benefitted from the support scheme which has a total budget of €3m.

#### **Relations with Turkey**

On November 15, the emergency hospital constructed in Nicosia with contributions from Turkey was inaugurated by Ersin Tatar and Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Later, however, it turned out that the hospital has not become fully operational. Reportedly, only PCR tests are currently being conducted in the hospital. The Head of the Turkish Cypriot Doctors' As-

sociation, Ozlem Gurkut told Turkish Cypriot daily Yeniduzen that work within the hospital building has not been completed yet. Minister of Health Ali Pilli said that the hospital would become fully functional within a few weeks.

On November 15, during the Turkish president Erdogan's visit to the northern part of the island, three separate protests in Nicosia against Turkey's intervention in Turkish Cypriot affairs as well as the unilateral steps taken in Varosha, took place. Some of the protesters carried banners #NoPicnicOverPain emphasizing their displeasure over the "picnic" in Varosha. Police had verbally banned all protests but the protestors still went ahead with the march. Among others, the main opposition Republican Turkish Party's (CTP) youth branch staged a protest where participants marched to the Office of the President only to be stopped by the police barricade. In a statement read during the protest, the CTP youth branch said "The goal of our protest is to raise our voice against unilateral actions on Varosha that violate international law and the UN parameters". It was added that the developments on the fenced-off town would have political and democratic consequences on the Turkish Cypriot community. Some CTP MPs and the party's secretary general Erdogan Sorakin attended the march. All protests ended without any incident.

Turkey's Konya Metropolitan Municipality has donated to the Famagusta Municipality 600 bicycles, a garbage truck, a cleaning truck and a water truck to be used in the newly-opened section of Varosha. Konya Municipality along with the Turkish Ministry for Environment and

Urban Planning as well as TOKI (Turkish Housing Administration) had carried out the land-scaping work along the route leading to the beachfront and contributed to the asphalting of roads, repairing sidewalks, placing barriers around dangerous buildings, drawing up bicycle lanes and the construction of a children's playground.

#### **Domestic Politics**

The TRNC has been without a new government for almost two months after the People's Party's (HP) withdrawal from the coalition with the National Unity Party (UBP) due to opening of a part of the fenced-off town of Varosha by Erdogan and Tatar without consulting with the HP leader Kudret Ozersay. The month of November came to an end without the TRNC having a Prime Minister; Tatar's failure to authorize an acting Prime Minister led to a political vacuum. What further complicated the government formation process was the UBP's failure to elect a new leader to replace Tatar, who had stepped down after becoming the president (as dictated by the Constitution).

In a shocking move, the UBP, which has the biggest group in the parliament, decided to call off the second round of its election to choose a new leader creating a wave of speculation within both party and political circles. Both candidates Faiz Sucuoglu and Hasan Tacoy had announced that they had withdrawn just two days before the second round amid speculations that Ankara had not approved of Sucuoglu (who had received the

highest number of votes in the first round and secured the support of other three candidates for the second round), as new UBP leader. It is widely believed that Sucuoglu, favoured to win, was pressured into quitting the race after being 'advised' to do so by Ankara who favoured his opponent Tacoy. Sucuoglu in a statement said he had accepted the decision to call off the second round to preserve the party's unity. He said there was already a consensus on cancelling the second round among the UBP MPs. "At the point of time, I had to make a very critical decision to protect the party's unity and peace, I was left with no choice but to approve the decision, which the other members of the party had given their consent to and which there was a consensus on," Sucuoglu said. In a similar vein, Tacoy said that he had withdrawn from the race for the sake of the party and country's unity.

Subsequently, the Secretary General of the UBP, Ersan Saner was appointed as the acting party leader. Saner was handed the mandate to form the new cabinet by Tatar on November 7. Upon taking the mandate, Saner met with the leaders of the Republican Turkish Party (CTP), the People's Party (HP), the Social Democratic Party (TDP), the Democratic Party (DP) and the Rebirth Party (YDP). Following the meetings, the CTP, HP and TDP all announced that they would not be entering a coalition with the UBP. The DP and YDP, on the other hand, expressed their readiness to take part or support any new government formation. When his last-ditch attempts to reestablish a partnership with the HP, the third biggest party in parliament with 9 seats, or a minority coalition of the UBP, DP and YDP failed, on November 21, Saner returned the mandate to Tatar.

On November 23, Tatar gave Tufan Erhurman, the chairperson of the CTP, which has the second biggest group with 12 MPs, the mandate to form the new government. After meeting with all party leaders Erhurman said "we prepared a list of principles and shared these with the parties. We are seeking to form a broad-based government which will take the country to early elections." The principles include the creation of two crisis desks (one for pandemic and one for the economy), amendment of the electoral law, fairness in public recruitment, limiting the number of political appointees, setting measurable criteria for granting citizenship and sharing with the public the situation of public finances.

By the end of the month, three parties, HP, TDP and DP, in principle, gave the green light for a four-party coalition with CTP, while YDP leader Erhan Arikli said that his party was ready to support a coalition headed by CTP leader Erhurman from the outside. Yet HP's acting leader Yenal Senin asked Erhurman for some time to evaluate the details. As a result, it was agreed that all parties had time until November 30 to make their final decision.

Meanwhile, on November 10, thousands of Turkish Cypriots marched through the streets of Nicosia to protest Ankara's growing interference in the democratic processes. An estimated 3,000-6,000 people, gathered as part of the event organised by the 'Democracy and Political Will Platform' demanding democracy to prevail. The protest came just weeks after the election of Ankara-supported Tatar as the

new Turkish Cypriot leader, replacing prosolution Mustafa Akinci, and the cancelling of the second round of UBP's extraordinary congress to after both candidates' withdrawal amid speculation of meddling by Ankara. Former Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci also attended the march even though he had just undergone a surgery. In a social media post, Akinci said the Turkish Cypriot community will continue to fight for its freedom and its political will. He said Nicosia witnessed a 'spark' on its streets, adding that Turkish Cypriots had demonstrated that they will continue to oppose any form of interference and will not submit to any anti-democratic impositions. The protestors who marched to Inonu Square, chanted slogans calling for democracy and for Ankara to take its hands off Turkish Cypriot democracy. Some of the placards and signs read "(Political) Will not Intervention", "Freedom not Submission", "Democracy for All" and "Cypriots have the final say in Cyprus."

#### **Labour Relations and Trade Unions**

The Minimum Wage Determination Commission convened to determine the second minimum wage of 2020 but could not go beyond exploratory talks according to the undersecretary of the Ministry of Labour who represents the government side in the talks; the parties just put their opinions on the table. The employers' representative said, "employers are also in a difficult situation due to the pandemic" and having difficulty to pay the current rate while, the workers' representative said

"private sector employees were left out in the cold". When the first minimum wage of the year was determined in late February the minimum wage was around €500; at the time of the meeting it went down to only €355 due to the rapid devaluation of the Turkish Lira. During the meeting, the *Emek* (Labour) Platform, took action outside the Ministry of Labor. The Labor Platform, formed by eight trade unions, called for the minimum wage to be indexed to the lowest public employee salary. Public sector jobs are subject to cost of living adjustment and hence protected from sharp rises in inflation.

# The FES-Newsletter team and the FES office in Cyprus wish you all a Merry Christmas and all the best for 2021.



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