



March and April 2026

FES Cyprus Newsletter No. 159

Headlines

- Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders met at the residence of the UNSG's Special Representative to discuss the way forward and CBMs.
- Iranian drone strike targets the United Kingdom's Akrotiri Air Force Base, resulting in limited damage but prompting an escalation of military presence on the island.
- Journalist and Volt parliamentary candidate, Makarios Droushiotis, reveals the "Sandy" case involving claims of serious criminal conduct, sexual offences, corruption, and the existence of a Rosicrucian brotherhood that includes public figures.
- April sees increase in buffer zone tensions due to crossings, unauthorized agricultural activities, and disputes over veterinary inspections.
- Turkish Cypriot labour unions launched an indefinite general strike in protest against a government decree freezing cost-of-living allowances for public sector employees.
- A series of Facebook account suspensions targeting journalists, media outlets, and political figures in the Turkish Cypriot community escalated into a broader controversy over digital censorship.

Editors Note

An EU member state in the Eastern Mediterranean, at the crossroads of Europe, Asia and Africa; this is Cyprus in a nutshell.

The monthly FES Cyprus Newsletter gives you a current overview of the domestic political situation and the external affairs of an island, which is far more than a divided country.

Have a pleasant read!

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Cyprus Problem and Intercommunal Relations

A series of diplomatic efforts and meetings were held in March and April 2026 in an attempt to create the necessary conditions to resume the formal negotiations of the Cyprus problem.

On March 13, during a visit in Turkey to mark the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, UN Secretary General (UNSG) António Guterres met with both Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan. The UNSG stated that he would do everything in his power to resolve the Cyprus problem, until his term ends at the end of 2026. Guterres added that he is neither optimistic nor pessimistic regarding the prospects for a solution but stressed that he remains determined.

On March 19, Greek Cypriot leader Nicos Christodoulides met with Guterres in Brussels. That followed a separate meeting in New York, in February 2026, between Guterres and Turkish Cypriot leader Tufan Erhürman.¹ According to Christodoulides, the meeting was substantive and productive, with Guterres stressing the need for substantive progress before the completion of his term in office. Guterres also informed Christodoulides about the discussions he held during his visit to Turkey. The UNSG also met with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President António Costa. Guterres noted that developments on the Cyprus problem must be expected within the context of the discussions that were held.

On April 6, the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders met at the residence of the UNSG's Special Representative, Khassim Diagne. Discussions were reportedly held in a positive and constructive atmosphere, focusing on substantive issues and the way forward. The leaders reaffirmed their support for the UNSG's ongoing engagement on the Cyprus issue, reviewed progress on confidence building measures, and instructed their representatives to continue their meetings aimed at finalizing remaining matters. Despite their agreement to meet before the end of April, the two leaders are expected to meet again on May 8.

On April 18, Erhürman met United Nations Undersecretary-General for Peacebuilding Rosemary DiCarlo on the sidelines of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum. The pair discussed confidence-building measures and the latest developments regarding the Cyprus problem.

¹ The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) is only recognised by the Republic of Turkey. While for Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots, Tufan Erhürman 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).

On April 19, United Nations Undersecretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix arrived in Cyprus as part of a six-day visit to the island. Lacroix held separate meetings with both Christodoulides on April 20 and Erhürman on April 21. He also met officials from both communities and discussed the current situation on the ground and the role of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) in maintaining stability.

Speaking to Kathimerini in an exclusive interview on April 26, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen affirmed the EU remains committed to a settlement based on United Nations Security Council resolutions, describing support for a bizonal, bicommunal federation with political equality as the agreed framework.

On April 14, tensions escalated in the buffer zone surrounding the mixed village of Pyla/Pile, which is located between Larnaca and Famagusta, after reports emerged of a line of Turkish tanks being spotted north of the ceasefire line, adjacent to the buffer zone. The incident was triggered by a dispute concerning veterinary inspections by the Republic of Cyprus Veterinary Services at Turkish Cypriot-owned livestock facilities inside the buffer zone, following the outbreak of the foot and mouth disease on the Greek Cypriot side. Turkish Cypriots reportedly objected to those inspections, allegedly framed as a sovereignty issue. UNFICYP reinforced patrols and increased its presence in the area after observing unauthorised entry by Turkish Cypriot security personnel into the buffer zone, which it stated constituted a violation of its mandate. The incident was viewed by Greek Cypriots as an attempt to alter the status quo in the buffer zone, while Turkish Cypriot officials accused the Greek Cypriot side of unnecessary escalation.

Unauthorised agricultural activities within the buffer zone in Avlona/Gayretkoy by Turkish farmers were reported on April 20 and April 27. The United Nations has classified the area in question as a frozen area, where no cultivation or access is permitted to any party. United Nations Peacekeepers reportedly reiterated the restrictions to the individuals involved but were unable to secure immediate compliance.

On April 28, Turkish Cypriot police officers erroneously believed that a Greek Cypriot farmer had crossed into the north and thus moved to intercept him, before UNFICYP Peacekeepers stepped in to diffuse the situation. UNFICYP spokesman Aleem Siddique stated on April 29 that UNFICYP is monitoring the situation very closely with the aim of preventing tension and maintaining the status quo.

According to the results of a poll conducted by CMIRS and published on April 14, more than three-quarters of Turkish Cypriots support a federal solution to the Cyprus problem. The poll asked 500 Turkish Cypriots for their political opinions during the month of March, with exactly 78.5% of respondents expressing support for a bicommunal, bizonal federal solution with political equality. However, 79.8% of

respondents also expressed concern about the possibility of renewed tension and conflict on the island, while 80.4% said they were concerned about recent energy and security agreements signed by the Republic of Cyprus. Meanwhile 74.4% expressed concern regarding Turkey's influence on the society in the north.

Hydrocarbons

On April 9, Bloomberg reported that Egypt agreed to buy the entire output of the Aphrodite gas deposit in Cyprus once the field starts production in 2031, as the North African country looks to ensure long-term supply to meet growing demand. Egyptian Natural Gas Holding Co. signed the preliminary deal with Chevron and Shell Plc, the companies that operate the Aphrodite field, and Cyprus's state-run oil and gas firm, Newmed Energy LP, which owns a stake in the project. The Aphrodite partners and Egypt also agreed to a framework to develop a gas transmission system off the coast of the African country. Newmed owns a 30% stake in the Aphrodite license, while Chevron and Shell Plc hold 35% each. The Aphrodite reservoir was discovered in 2011. It holds an estimated 3.5 trillion cubic feet of recoverable gas.

On April 29, Turkey's Energy Minister Alparслан Bayraktar stated that Turkey's state-owned oil and gas pipeline company Botas is conducting engineering studies to construct a natural gas pipeline to the TRNC.

On April 29, following a meeting with a delegation from American multinational energy corporation Chevron, Christodoulides called for an acceleration of plans to extract natural gas off the coast of Cyprus.

Greek Cypriots

Gender Developments

The 70th session of the Commission on the Status of Women took place from March 9 to March 19 at UN headquarters in New York. Representing the EU Council, Gender Equality Commissioner Josie Christodoulou called on the community of nations to commit to providing women unhindered access to a legal system safeguarding their rights in view of what she described as a serious global backsliding of gender equality.

Economic Developments in Times of Green Transition

Speaking to the state broadcaster on April 6, Energy Minister Michalis Damianos stated that the Great Sea Interconnector (GSI) project might not materialise if the cost is too high on Cypriot electricity consumers. The price tag for GSI has been estimated at €1.9bn with the EU pledging €658m in grants toward the project. According to Damianos, the governments of Cyprus and Greece formally requested the European Investment Bank (EIB) to carry out a new tech-

no-economic study on the interconnector. Cyprus has yet to decide whether it will directly invest, as a state, in the project.

In his address at the 16th Nicosia Economic Congress on April 8, Damianos stated that Cyprus is entering a phase of full energy transition, with the government prioritizing independence from imported fossil fuels as the only realistic option for economic stability. According to the minister, the government's strategy focuses on reducing costs through three central pillars, aimed at reshaping the country's energy framework. He explained that the completion of LNG import infrastructure is expected to reduce emissions by 25-30%, thus lowering the cost of emissions allowances that burden consumer bills. He added that systems for energy storage under the Transmission System Operator are being promoted to ensure grid stability and enable greater penetration of renewable energy sources. Damianos also referred to the GSI project, highlighting the need to safeguard economic and technical parameters. The minister announced that an energy upgrading scheme for homes will be relaunched in 2026, while a new grant scheme for energy storage in businesses will be introduced for the first time. He also referred to the creation of a smart grid system, including the installation of smart meters, as part of efforts to modernise the electricity network. Damianos noted that the state will be required to reduce energy consumption by 1.9% annually from 2027.

Domestic Developments

On March 2, the United Kingdom's Akrotiri Air Force Base in Cyprus was targeted by an Iranian-made Shahed drone, which caused limited damages but marked an escalation in the island's exposure to the ongoing Middle East conflict. As a result of the strike, the government took preventive measures including the deployment of naval frigates by European Union member states to the waters off Cyprus and the deployment of four Greek F-16 fighter jets to the island. The UK also deployed naval assets and air defense systems. French President Emmanuel Macron and Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis visited the island in a gesture of solidarity and support and to reportedly bolster the sense of security. Meanwhile on March 9, six Turkish Air Force F-16 fighter jets and air-defence systems were deployed in the TRNC, citing the need to enhance security amid escalating regional tensions. The incident sparked political debate in Cyprus, with some voices arguing that the presence of foreign bases has exposed the island to potential attacks, while others emphasised Cyprus' role in regional security and humanitarian operations. President Christodoulides stated that he will initiate talks with the British government about the sovereign bases in Cyprus, which are considered colonial relics. The government is taking targeted steps to protect Cyprus's tourism sector and counter what it describes as misleading perceptions abroad about the country's stability. Cyprus is also set to sign a Status of Forces Agreement with France in June 2026, which will establish the legal and operational frame-

work governing the presence, movement and activities of French military personnel in Cyprus. The agreement will formalise the expanded defense and security partnership between the two countries and will provide for the presence of French forces on Cypriot territory for humanitarian purposes.

In early April, journalist and Volt parliamentary candidate Makarios Drousiotis made public allegations centred around a woman known by the pseudonym “Sandy” that involve claims of serious criminal conduct, including sexual offences, corruption, and that public figures are members of the secretive Rosicrucian brotherhood. According to the allegations made public by Drousiotis, Sandy was allegedly raped by former Supreme Court Judge Michalakis Christodoulou when she was underage. Drousiotis asserts that this case was covered up by the Rosicrucians, a clandestine network of high-ranking figures in politics, the judiciary and business, which he claims colluded to shield wrongdoing and exert hidden influence over state institutions. The allegations, made public by Drousiotis, were based on a series of purported text messages and digital records which were provided to him by lawyer Nikos Clerides whom Sandy, in a state of fear, reportedly approached in 2019 to share evidence with him and ask for help.

Drousiotis also questioned the integrity of police handling of corruption allegations and reiterated claims of institutional coordination involving the presidency, the legal services and the police, particularly in relation to Focus Maritime Cooperation and the collapse of Cyprus’s banking sector, linked to Laiki Bank. Drousiotis linked President Nikos Christodoulides, in particular, to the Rosicrucian brotherhood, claiming he acted as a fixer between former president Nicos Anastasiades and late banker Andreas Vgenopoulos. Former President Nicos Anastasiades, Greece’s deputy minister Giorgos Mylonakis, ex-MEP Demetris Papadakis, and MP Nikos Tornaritis were among the figures named by Drousiotis to be affiliated with the brotherhood. All those named by Drousiotis have strenuously denied the accusations.

Authorities are preparing a criminal case against Sandy and opened an inquiry summoning Drousiotis to give multiple statements and hand over evidence. Police also searched the office of the lawyer, Nikos Clerides, seizing electronic devices and documents, challenging the principle of lawyer–client privilege. Investigators are also assessing claims of financial transactions allegedly linked to attempts to suppress information, including transfers said to total hundreds of thousands of euros. In her statement to the authorities, Sandy reportedly claimed that the material publicised by Drousiotis had been fabricated. The controversial material has been forwarded to Europol for forensic authentication while FBI personnel are anticipated to support Cypriot authorities in evaluating statements and technical evidence. Police investigations are ongoing, with authorities examining a large amount of digital evidence. Questions have been raised regarding the authenticity of some of the material already circulated publicly.

Cyprus EU Council Presidency

On April 24 and April 25, an informal European Council Summit was held in Cyprus as part of the Cyprus EU Council presidency. Discussions focused on key strategic areas aligned with Cyprus’ priorities during its assumption of the presidency including defense and security, energy policy and the future of the single market. With regards to defense cooperation, discussions were held on the EU’s mutual assistance clause under Article 42.7, which is an important element of collective security planning. President Christodoulides and the presidents of the European Parliament and European Commission, Roberta Metsola and Ursula von der Leyen, signed a roadmap for reforms, named “One Europe, One Market”, aimed at strengthening the European single market. On energy, the leaders examined both immediate and planned future measures, including steps towards a more integrated European energy system.

Future of Work, Labour Relations and Trade Unions

On March 3, Cyprus’ Minister of Labour and Social Insurance presented the priorities of the country’s EU Council Presidency in Brussels, focusing on fair employment, skills development, and social inclusion. The Minister emphasised the need to address challenges from digitalisation, the green transition, and demographic changes, highlighting reskilling, worker protection, and fair labour mobility as key pillars, alongside efforts to combat poverty and strengthen social rights across the EU.

On March 6, Cyprus published a revised decree regulating the employment of foreign students from third countries. The decree outlines the sectors and conditions under which students can work, among other criteria such as the completion of their first semester, proof of full-time studies, and a formal employment contract approved by the Department of Labour.

On March 12, a two-month extension of the permitted absence period for third-country workers stranded abroad due to geopolitical developments in the Middle East was approved by the government. Around 600 workers, mainly from Nepal, India, and Bangladesh, and largely employed in hospitality, have been affected by travel disruptions and limited flight availability. Many remained stuck in their home countries or in transit, prompting coordinated efforts by employers, agencies, and authorities. The decision followed a joint initiative by employers’ representatives and the Deputy Ministry of Migration and International Protection.

On March 17, bus drivers in Cyprus announced a two-hour work stoppage on March 27, from 09:00 to 11:00, in protest over issues linked to the traffic camera system and road safety concerns. Trade unions argue that the system creates safety risks for passengers due to sudden braking and that repeated appeals for technical adjustments, such as warning systems at traffic lights, have not been addressed by the Ministry of Transportation.

On March 20, Wolt delivery drivers launched a strike over declining pay rates and poor working conditions, with over 500 couriers reportedly supporting the action. Drivers support that earnings had become unsustainable despite long working hours, while the company claimed participation was limited and pointed to existing agreements with trade unions and the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance. The strike was later suspended on March 27, after about a week, with drivers returning to work without a deal being reached. However, workers described the move as temporary and driven by financial necessity, warning they may pursue legal action if no progress is made in negotiations over pay and conditions.

On April 2, the Cyprus Parliament approved a bill aimed at strengthening workplace health and safety protections for employees. The legislation reinforces employers' obligations to provide training, information, and supervision from an employee's first day of work, in a language they understand, while also ensuring workers receive full pay during training periods.

On April 9, the Human Resource Management Authority (HRDA) expanded its training scheme to include self-employed professionals. The amendment increases the number of beneficiaries from 5,000 to 12,000 and raises the budget from €1 million to €2.6 million. The scheme, implemented by the HRDA, aims to support training programmes designed by employers and self-employed individuals to upgrade workforce skills and transfer expertise.

On April 17, the Ministry of Finance submitted a package of three bills to Parliament introducing major reforms to the recruitment process for public service positions. The reforms aim to speed up hiring procedures, reduce bureaucracy, and improve efficiency by changing how vacancies are announced, how written exams are conducted, and how candidates are evaluated. Key changes include earlier publication of vacancies, exams held after job announcements, and the abolition of parliamentary approval for candidate lists. The bills also strengthen merit-based selection by increasing the weight of supervisors' evaluations and streamlining candidate ranking processes.

On April 22, a preliminary agreement to update and simplify EU social security coordination rules for people moving between member states was reached. The reform aims to make cross-border social protection more transparent and fairer, covering areas such as unemployment benefits, family support, long-term care, and rules for workers employed in multiple countries, while improving cooperation between states and reducing administrative complexity.

On April 23, livestock farmers staged a protest demonstrating against the mass culling of animals in the context of the outbreak of foot and mouth disease on the island, calling for alternative measures in line with EU protocols. The protesters accuse the authorities of harming the future of the livestock sector and demanding an immediate halt to

animal culling practices, while the demonstration took place under heavy police presence.

On April 28, the Minister of Labour and Social Insurance expressed confidence that Cyprus will meet the timeline for implementing the first pillar of pension reform by January 2027. The Minister said discussions with social partners show limited disagreement on the first pillar, though more consultation is still needed, while larger differences remain on pension funds. The reform aims to strengthen the pension system's sustainability, improve adequacy of benefits, and reduce poverty risk among retirees.

According to Eurostat, women held 25.3% of managerial positions in Cyprus in 2024, which is the lowest share in the EU, compared to an EU average of 35.2%. While female representation has increased since 2014, Cyprus still ranks last among member states, despite recording a notable improvement over the past decade. At the same time, according to CITEA (Cyprus Information Technology Enterprises Association), Cyprus has one of the lowest rates of female participation in STEM professions in Europe. Speaking at a STEM education conference, CITEA's president called for urgent modernisation of IT education and stronger efforts to include more women in the sector, stressing that excluding half the country's talent undermines innovation and economic competitiveness.

According to Eurostat, Cyprus is among the EU countries where the gender employment gap widened over the past decade, increasing by 2.3% between 2014 and 2024. Across the EU, the gap stood at 10 percentage points in 2024, with women also more likely to be in part-time or precarious work, highlighting ongoing inequalities in the labour market despite an overall decline in the gap at the European level.

According to Eurostat, Cyprus recorded the highest increase in employment among EU member states in Q4 2025, with a 0.6% rise compared to the previous quarter. Across the EU, employment saw a slight overall increase, with significant differences between countries, while labour market indicators point to continued mobility between employment, unemployment, and inactivity.

Turkish Cypriots

Gender Developments

According to Kıbrıs Postası news website on 8 March 2026, International Women's Day, the Statistical Institute reported that women's participation in the labour force in the Turkish Cypriot community stands at 35.3%, significantly lower than men's 60%. The report also notes that most employed women are concentrated in the services sector, while their representation in senior positions and political life remains limited. On the same day, Prime Minister Ünal Üstel stated that the government is covering 100% of social security premiums for female citizens to support employ-

ment, while also promoting women's economic and social empowerment through incentives such as low-interest loans for entrepreneurship.

The Social Struggle Platform marked International Women's Day with a series of events held across the north, emphasising gender equality and women's rights. The programme included a festival and march in Famagusta, along with cultural activities such as a silent reading event, rhythm performances, and a women's choir concert at the Venetian Palace. Additional activities held between 9 and 12 March—such as film screenings, workshops, seminars, and competitions—further highlighted ongoing advocacy efforts and public engagement around women's rights and social equality.

The Republican Turkish Party (CTP) Women's Organization also organised a week of activities for International Women's Day 2026, including factory visits, the 13th Working Women's Fair in Kyrenia, and health and literacy panels. According to Turkish Cypriot Member of Parliament Doğuş Derya, who serves as the organisation's chair, the initiatives aimed to highlight women's labour and economic contributions while strengthening solidarity and advancing gender equality.

Economic Developments in Times of Green Transition

On March 11, reports indicated that the Turkish Cypriot haloumi export sector is in crisis due to Middle East disruptions linked to the Iran war. Exports to Gulf countries stopped completely, halting 850 tonnes per month, worth €4 million. Producers faced undelivered goods and frozen payments, leading to financial strain. The industry called for urgent government support and new stabilising measures.

On March 31, the Corruption Perceptions in North Cyprus 2025 report, authored by academics Ömer Gökçekuş and Sertaç Sonan and published by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, was released. The report found that North Cyprus scored only 24 out of 100 on the corruption perception index and would rank 150th among 182 countries globally if included in Transparency International's international rankings, marking a deterioration from the previous year as North Cyprus lost two points and fell ten places in the comparative ranking. By comparison, the Republic of Cyprus scored 55 points and ranked 49th globally, while Turkey scored 31 points and ranked 124th. The findings further revealed that 33% of surveyed individuals reported offering bribes, gifts, or favours to access public services, while two-thirds of business professionals observed an increase in corruption over the past year. Bribery was reported to be especially widespread in areas such as public land allocation, government contracts, and licensing, while public trust in state institutions, parliament, and government continued to decline.

In April, Turkish Cypriot Finance Ministry launched a series of domestic borrowing auctions targeting 5 billion TL (€144 million) through government bonds. This move extended an intense borrowing cycle, with around 20 issuances in four months and total borrowing surpassing 17.8 billion TL (€513 million). According to Haber Kıbrıs news website, repayments are increasingly being deferred to 2027, raising concerns about fiscal sustainability and transparency.

On April 3, Star Kıbrıs reported a growing shortage of foreign currency cash in the north, with Exchange Offices Association chairman Halim Kahveciler stating that bureaux are unable to obtain sufficient hard currency from banks. The shortage has led to difficulties in meeting market demand, particularly for euros and dollars, and is seen as a sign of broader financial strain and liquidity pressures in the economy.

On April 13, Ercan/Tymbou Airport operator T&T Airport Management paid 385,146,398 TL (≈€7.3 million) to the Turkish Cypriot Ministry of Finance as part of its first-quarter 2026 revenue-sharing obligation. News reports described the payment as a significant boost to public finances, driven by rising passenger numbers and increased flight activity.

Fuel prices in the north rose sharply throughout March and April 2026, mirroring global energy market pressures triggered by the 2026 Iran war. Petrol prices, which were already around the mid-40 TL range per litre in early March, increased in successive adjustments to above 61.12 TL per litre (≈€1.15), while diesel climbed to similar levels, reflecting steep import cost increases. These increases were largely driven by surging global oil prices and supply disruptions linked to the conflict, particularly the restriction of flows through the Strait of Hormuz. In response, Turkish Cypriot authorities introduced mitigating measures, including removing VAT on fuel, aiming to cushion consumers from volatility. However, despite these interventions, prices remained elevated as international oil markets continued to react to ongoing geopolitical tensions.

According to the Statistical Institute, in March the Consumer Price Index (CPI) increased by 2.18% month-on-month, while the annual inflation rate stood at 37.40%, reflecting persistently high price pressures across the economy. The main contributors to monthly inflation were food and non-alcoholic beverages, transport, and housing-related expenses. In April, CPI inflation accelerated sharply to 4.62% month-on-month, indicating a broad-based increase in prices, particularly in food items, fuel and transport costs, and essential household goods. As of the end of April, the annual CPI inflation rate rose further to 38.15%, showing that despite fluctuations in monthly inflation, underlying price pressures remained elevated and continued to intensify.

Relations with Turkey

On March 5, Turkish Vice President Cevdet Yılmaz visited the north, meeting Prime Minister Ünal Üstel and officials to discuss regional security concerns stemming from the Iran war. Yılmaz also attended events for development projects, including the foundation ceremony of Altınbaş Cyprus University's new campus near Nicosia.

On March 9, Turkey deployed six F-16 fighter jets to Ercan/Tymbou Airport to strengthen security amid rising tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean. Turkish officials described the move as a planned step to enhance deterrence and air defence, with flexibility for future adjustments depending on regional developments. On the same day, Bugün Kıbrıs reported that Turkey is also developing a maritime surveillance network under its Eastern Mediterranean Vessel Traffic Services Project, extending to the northern waters of Cyprus. The project includes three monitoring stations equipped with radar and AIS to track sea traffic 24/7, transmitting data to control centres in North Cyprus and Mersin, Turkey, with the aim of improving maritime safety and security.

Turkish Cypriot Parliament approved transferring 3,500 acres of Karpas Peninsula forest land to Istanbul Technical University's North Cyprus Campus on March 16. The decision led to protests from NGOs and environmental groups, prompting the local Greenpeace Movement to file a lawsuit. While officials claim it is an educational investment, opponents say it endangers biodiversity and violates forestry laws.

On April 9, the 2026 Economic and Financial Cooperation Protocol was signed in Ankara between Prime Minister Ünal Üstel and the Vice President of Turkey, Cevdet Yılmaz. The package is valued at 23 billion TL (≈€433 million), potentially rising to 25 billion TL (≈€470 million), and will support sectors such as tourism, agriculture, industry, and SMEs. Üstel described 2026 as a "completion year" for major infrastructure projects (hospitals, roads, schools) and highlighted Turkey's role as vital for economic stability of Turkish Cypriots.

On April 16, President Tufan Erhürman met Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Istanbul ahead of the 2026 Antalya Diplomacy Forum, where the two leaders discussed regional developments and broader Turkey–North Cyprus coordination, according to official statements and regional press reports. Following the talks, Erhürman travelled to Antalya to attend the Antalya Diplomacy Forum (17–19 April 2026), where he participated in high-level diplomatic meetings with international counterparts.

Domestic Developments

On March 10, President Tufan Erhürman referred the law approving the North Cyprus–Turkey fibre optic infrastructure cooperation protocol to the Constitutional Court for constitutional review. The project, led by Türk Telekom,

aims to expand fibre optic internet infrastructure to improve connectivity for homes and businesses across the country. In his submission, Erhürman emphasised the need for stricter adherence to legal procedures in such agreements, suggesting that prior written consultation with the Attorney General would help strengthen institutional compliance. As reported in Newsletter No. 158, the fibre optic protocol has faced opposition from labour unions and opposition parties, who have raised concerns about digital sovereignty.

On March 12, the Turkish Cypriot Constitutional Court ruled that the law concerning the construction protocol of the Famagusta Divinity College is in accordance with the Constitution. The case had been referred to the Court by President Tufan Erhürman on 2 December 2025 for a priori constitutional review before promulgation, following parliamentary approval of the relevant legislation. The law in question approved an intergovernmental agreement with Turkey regulating the establishment and construction of the college. The Court concluded that the approval law and its underlying protocol did not conflict with constitutional provisions, thereby confirming its legal validity.

On March 21, Cyprus Today reported that nearly 10,000 passengers were denied entry into North Cyprus over the past two years, according to data from the General Directorate of Police. In 2024, 5,026 individuals were refused entry, followed by 4,883 in 2025, bringing the total to 9,909, with the largest groups coming from Iran, Pakistan, Iraq, Turkey, and Turkmenistan. Most refusals were classified as "inadmissible" or "undesirable immigrants", often due to missing documents, visa issues, or entry bans. Interior Minister Durmuş Oğuz said 860 more people were denied entry in early 2026, stressing that border controls are applied without discrimination and in coordination with Turkey, while also noting that deportation and detention procedures cost the state over 100 million TL (≈€1.8 million) last year.

According to a public opinion survey conducted by the Centre for Migration, Identity and Rights Studies (CMIRS) in March 2026, a significant majority of Turkish Cypriots support a resolution to the Cyprus problem, with 72.01% favouring an agreement and 60.65% considering the current status quo unacceptable. The survey, based on face-to-face interviews with 500 participants, also shows that 51.72% find living together with Greek Cypriots acceptable, while a bizonal, bicomunal federation with political equality received the highest support (78.5%). Beyond preferences to the Cyprus issue, the findings reveal a deep crisis of trust in institutions and governance. The most trusted institutions are identified as the presidency, the judiciary and the police, whereas the government, parliament, political parties, and trade unions rank lowest in public confidence. Public perceptions are broadly pessimistic: around 90% of respondents believe the country is moving in the wrong direction, and economic hardship, corruption, and weak political leadership are seen as the main challenges. Social trust remains very low, with a trust index of

3.49 out of 10, underscoring widespread dissatisfaction and concern over governance and future prospects. Overall, the survey highlights strong public demand for a negotiated settlement alongside entrenched pessimism and declining confidence in political institutions.

In a heated political exchange on April 1, President Tufan Erhürman characterised Prime Minister Ünal Üstel's calls for "state seriousness" and "rule of law" as a "bad April Fools' joke". Erhürman's criticism centred on the government's decision to bypass the legislature and halt cost-of-living allowances via decree, an act he viewed as a betrayal of constitutional order and crisis management trust. He found it deeply ironic and insincere for Üstel to lecture on statecraft while simultaneously undermining democratic institutions through unilateral administrative actions. While Üstel fired back that the President was detached from the "real world" of economic and security challenges, Erhürman dismissed the government's rhetoric as forced and distracting, stating that he had no time to waste on such "bad jokes" while the people's future was at stake.

In early to mid-April, a series of Facebook account suspensions targeting journalists, media outlets, and political figures in the Turkish Cypriot community escalated into a broader controversy over digital censorship. On April 14, journalists' associations reported coordinated "cyber-attacks" involving mass reporting and automated content removals affecting news related to protests and political criticism. Within this context, on April 15, Kudret Özersay, a prominent Turkish Cypriot politician and leader of the People's Party (HP), announced that his Facebook account had been suspended, warning he would continue outreach even through offline means if necessary. These incidents, occurring over several days in April, were widely interpreted by opposition actors, unions and media groups as coordinated attempts to silence dissenting voices online, particularly amid heightened political tensions and protests.

On April 22, it was reported that Ministry of Interior's Migration Management Centre coordinated a simultaneous six-district immigration inspection together with police and district officers. During checks at workplaces, accommodation sites, and public areas, authorities identified seven individuals living without residence permits, including one case of illegal stay dating back to 2019.

Future of Work, Labour Relations & Trade Unions

On March 12, after a 34-day strike, workers at Ektam Ltd. (the Pepsi Cola bottler and distributor in North Cyprus) secured a landmark victory for labour rights. A court ruling invalidated their dismissals for unionising, compelling management to formally recognise the trade union and reinstate all 39 employees. This struggle culminated in a signed collective bargaining agreement, marking a significant legal precedent for organised labour and protection against arbitrary dismissal.

On March 30, 62 Turkish Cypriot labour unions, led by major organisations such as KTÖS (Cyprus Turkish Teachers' Union), KTOEÖS (Cyprus Turkish Secondary Education Teachers' Union), KTAMS (Cyprus Turkish Public Servants' Union), and KAMU-SEN (Cyprus Turkish Public Employees Union), launched an indefinite general strike in protest against a government decree freezing cost-of-living allowances for public sector employees. The movement reached its peak on March 30–31, with civil disobedience and protests disrupting schools and state hospitals. While some sectors briefly suspended actions on March 31 for negotiations, sustained pressure from public worker representatives eventually forced the government to withdraw the decree by April 8. The period marked a major confrontation between the unified labour front and the government over austerity measures and economic stability.

On April 13, Kibris Gazetesi published the article "This system must be stopped", highlighting the case of a Pakistani migrant worker who claims he was unfairly dismissed and subsequently had his work permit cancelled. As a result, he faced the risk of becoming undocumented and being forced to leave the country within 40 days. The report outlines poor working and living conditions and underscores broader systemic issues in the treatment of foreign workers, particularly weak legal protections and exploitation.



Events in May and June

Event: FEPS Call to Europe Cyprus

Title: A progressive strategy for peace and cooperation in the Mediterranean

Location: University of Nicosia, UNESCO Conference Room

Date: 29-30 May 2026

Event: Bilateral Migration Agreements Brussels

Host: FES Tunisia and Brussels

Date: 01-02 June 2026

Event: The 7th Annual Conference of the International Association for Reconciliation Studies (IARS)

Title: Cyprus Conflict & Negotiation: Dialogue for Peace and Reconciliation

Location: University of Nicosia

Date: 19-21 June 2026



Recent Publications

Titel: Corruption Perception Report 2025 (In Turkish)
Authors: Ömer Gökçekuş& Sertaç Sonan

Fact Sheet Corruption Perception Report (In English)
Authors: Ömer Gökçekuş& Sertaç Sonan



Recent Podcasts

No Podcasts in May and June

Short Biographies of Authors

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Yiannis Charalambous has been a Research Assistant for FES Cyprus contributing to the writing of the monthly FES Cyprus Newsletter since July 2012. Yiannis obtained a Bachelor's degree in Turkish Studies from the National Kapodistrian University of Athens and an MA in International Relations and European Studies from the University of Nicosia. The subject of his dissertation focused on evaluating the catalyst effect in resolving the Cyprus problem, by comparing the factors of EU membership and the discovery of hydrocarbons. Yiannis speaks Greek, English and Turkish.

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Hubert Faustmann is a Professor of History and Political Science at the University of Nicosia. Additionally, he is the director of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Cyprus. He is an expert on British colonial Cyprus and post-independence Cypriot history and politics. His research also focuses on Hydrocarbon politics in the Eastern Mediterranean as well as the relationship between state and society with a focus on Political Culture, Clientelism and Political Patronage.

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