

10th
anniversary

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Cyprus celebrates its 10th anniversary. To mark the occasion the FES newsletter has a new design and we hope you share our excitement over the new look. We hope that the pandemic will allow for an appropriate celebration later this year. In the meantime, we wish you good health and hope you enjoy our “new” newsletter.

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PODCASTS in APRIL:

Hubert Faustmann and Sertac Sonan

Politics and Society in North Cyprus - Fighting Misleading Generalisation
(In English)



PODCASTS in MAY:

Hubert Faustmann and Sertac Sonan

Austerity Policies in North Cyprus
(In English)

Hrishabh Sandilya, Sarah Morsheimer and Kyriaki Chatzipanagiotou (Project Phoenix)

Migration 2.0 Podcast - Episode 2: The Impact of COVID-19 on Migrants and International Students in the North of Cyprus
(In English)

Hubert Faustmann and Mete Hatay
Varosha: Between Human Rights and Realpolitik
(In English)



PUBLICATIONS in MAY:

Corina Demetriou and Nicos Trimikliniotis
Covid-19 and Fundamental Rights in Cyprus
(In English)

FES/Project Phoenix Report: Kyriaki Chatzipanagiotou, Samuel Akoni, Neophytos Aristodemou, Hrishabh Sandilya and Sarah Morsheimer

A Systemic Analysis of the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Refugees, Migrants, and Asylum Seekers in Cyprus: Part II - The Survey
(In English)

EVENTS in APRIL

No events planned



EVENTS in MAY:

No events planned so far





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CYPRUS PROBLEM

A flurry of diplomatic activity occurred in March ahead of the informal five plus one-party summit on the Cyprus problem, as the involved parties are preparing for the summit, scheduled to take place in Geneva between April 27 and 29.

On March 5, as part of a one-day visit, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, visited Cyprus. Borrell held separate meetings with President, Nicos Anastasiades and Turkish Cypriot¹ leader, Ersin Tatar. Following his meetings, Borrell tweeted: “There is a real opportunity that needs to be seized”. Borrell also met with the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative in Cyprus, Elizabeth Spehar.

On March 8, the UN Secretary-General’s Special Envoy, Jane Holl Lute, held separate meetings with Anastasiades and Tatar. During their meeting with Lute, both leaders reiterated their divergent positions on a Cyprus settlement. Anastasiades repeated his determination to work creatively beside the UN to achieve a functional and lasting solution that will ensure the Republic of Cyprus evolves into a bizonal bicomunal federation (BBF). He argued that the presence of the EU as an observer at the meeting in Geneva was in the interest of both sides, citing statements of the Turkish government for a positive agenda it seeks with the EU. Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot side object to the EU’s presence at the summit, arguing it will not be an impartial observer. Tatar reportedly explained to Lute his vision for a two-state solution, based on sovereign equality, with an equal international status, which would achieve the goal of peace and stability in the region.

Meanwhile, Anastasiades, briefed Greek Cypriot political leaders about the intentions of the Greek

Cypriot delegation at the summit. According to government spokesman, Kyriacos Koushos, the Greek Cypriot side’s goal is to achieve the continuation of the talks from where they left off in Crans-Montana, in the context of the UN resolutions and decisions that determine the form of a solution. Koushos further noted that it is important to find necessary convergences that will allow the UN Secretary-General to convene a conference for substantive talks for a Cyprus solution. All political leaders except for ELAM, stated they would accompany Anastasiades to the summit in order to support and advise him.

DISY leader, Averof Neophytou, launched a series of contacts aimed to discuss the Greek Cypriot side’s positions with foreign diplomats and Turkish Cypriot parties with an emphasis on the issue of political equality. As part of his contacts with the Turkish Cypriot parties, Neophytou met on March 17 with the head of the Republican Turkish Party (CTP), Tufan Erhurman, at DISY’s premises. This was the second meeting between the two parties after Neophytou visited CTP’s offices in the north earlier in the month. Neophytou also met with former Turkish Cypriot leaders, Mustafa Akinci and Mehmet Ali Talat, the head of the People’s Party (HP), Kudret Ozersay, and of the Social Democratic Party (TDP), Cemal Ozyigit. In addition, he also saw former negotiator of the Turkish Cypriot side, Ozdil Nami. Neophytou had previously stated that he fully backed Anastasiades’ idea of a decentralised federation, arguing this would ensure political equality and a functional, federal state.

Ahead of the five-plus-one conference on the Cyprus problem on March 24, AKEL Secretary General Andros Kyprianou and the head of the party’s Cyprus Problem Office Toumazos Tselepis also paid

¹The 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).

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separate visits to the TDP and the former Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci.

Aiming to reward Turkey's President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan for pulling back from confrontation over gas exploration, an EU Summit held on March 25 between EU leaders, agreed to deepen trade ties with Turkey, but also warned Ankara to expect sanctions if it restarts exploration over disputed hydrocarbons in the eastern Mediterranean. Following a discussion by video conference, EU leaders called on Turkey to abstain from renewed provocations or unilateral actions in breach of international law, stating that they will review progress in June 2021.

The conclusions were based on Borrell's report on EU-Turkey relations and came days after EU foreign ministers agreed during a Foreign Affairs Council on March 22, to keep all options on the table regarding Turkey, in case recent signs of de-escalation proved unsustainable. Borrell's report, which was discussed during the council, stated that the normalisation of EU-Turkey relations would remain extremely challenging in the absence of a solution to the Cyprus issue. The report noted that Turkey's non-recognition of the Republic of Cyprus continues to lead to the blockage of different paths of cooperation and stressed that the Cyprus settlement issue is a core element of Turkey's strong disagreements with the EU in the eastern Mediterranean. Borrell suggested in his report that the EU should start negotiations on deeper trade ties with Turkey but be ready to impose economic sanctions if Ankara moves against the bloc's interests. A so-called 'positive agenda' suggested by Borrell included: strengthening economic ties which he said, was another win-win situation for both sides; and modernisation and expansion of the scope of the current EU-Turkey Customs Union including a guiding framework for economic reforms in Turkey. Borrell also referred to certain milestones which Turkey had to meet which among others included developments on the Cyprus problem and exploratory talks with Greece. The report also suggests progressive restrictive measures in

the event of Turkey's return to the policy of tensions, ranging from additional listings of entities and individuals, to restrictions on the economy and tourism services, the energy sector and technology export bans.

On March 24, President Anastasiades and Russian Prime Minister, Mikhail Mishustin held a meeting in Athens during which the Cyprus problem and bilateral relations were discussed. Anastasiades referred to the importance of Russia's contribution to the efforts for a viable and functional solution to the Cyprus problem. During the meeting, Anastasiades thanked the Russian government for its positions of principle on the Cyprus problem, in support of a solution based on the UN Resolutions and aiming at preventing the two-state solution the Turkish side is pursuing. Anastasiades travelled to Athens to attend events marking the 200th anniversary of Greek independence where he also met with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis.

On March 25, US President Joe Biden stated he has not given up on trying to find a solution to the Cyprus problem. Speaking on Greece's Independence Day during an online conference held with prominent Greek and Cypriot Americans, Biden said that stability in the eastern Mediterranean is an important goal for his administration.

Six Cypriot trade unions across the divide, which are members of the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) said women in Cyprus experienced more victimization during the pandemic as is the case in the entire world. KTOEOS (Turkish Cypriot Secondary School Teachers' Union), OELMEK (Cyprus Secondary Education Greek Teachers Association), KTOS (Turkish Cypriot Teachers' Union), POED (Cyprus Primary school teachers' union), DAUSEN (Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU) Academic staff union) and OLTEK (Cyprus Vocational Education Greek Teachers Association), issued a joint statement to mark March 8, International Women's Day. "The Covid-19 pandemic has deepened social inequalities," the statement read, adding

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that the governments' policies to reduce the effects of the pandemic on the economy and society have unfortunately disregarded the problems specific to women. The statement also pointed out that the pandemic has become a serious risk to women's economic independence due to the lockdowns imposed across the island. Moreover, the statement said that women who were subjected to domestic violence during the lockdown had limited access to support mechanisms. The trade unions reaffirmed their dedication to protect and to develop women's social and political awareness while working towards achieving gender equality.

The Turkish Cypriot Foreign Minister Tahsin Ertugroglu extended his position in favor of a two-state solution model to the issue of vaccines and said that there was no need for Covid-19 vaccines earmarked by the EU for the Turkish Cypriot community to be delivered via the south as the delivery undermined the principle of two sovereign states. "It is a humanitarian issue but as long as our motherland (Turkey) sends us the vaccines, we do not need more vaccines via the south side," he said, claiming that the number of vaccines sent so far was laughable. Meanwhile, no side effect has been reported among the 1,500 people who have received the Oxford-AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine in the TRNC, according to Turkish Cypriot Health Minister, Unal Ustel. The EU has sent a total of 5,000 AstraZeneca vaccines to the TRNC by mid-March. On March 26, Turkish Cypriot health officials received 75,000 rapid antigen tests from the EU. The delivery was facilitated by the bicommunal technical committee on health.

A new attack has been staged on a mosque in the southern part of the island. The external part of the Muslu Cavus Mosque in Episkopi (Piskobu) in the Limassol region was daubed with Greek flags, blue crosses and words such as 'Greece', 'Long Live Greece' and '1821 and 2021'.

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres announced the appointment of Major General Ingrid Gjerde of Norway as Force Commander

of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP). The Turkish Cypriot Foreign Ministry condemned the UN over the appointment. According to a written statement, the Ministry said that the appointment of a new force commander ahead of the informal five-plus-one meeting could harm sensitive balance on the island. It described the appointment made without consulting or seeking the consent of the Turkish Cypriot officials as unacceptable.

The Ministry of Interior installed barbed wire along rural sections of the buffer zone in Nicosia reportedly to deter the uncontrolled crossing by irregular migrants. Anastasiades argued that the barbed wire is a necessary barrier to Turkey's strategy to alter the Republic's demographics via increased migratory flows, while also harming the economy. The installation of the barbed wire led to strong reactions by local farmers as well as activists especially the "Enough" movement who consider the wire as entrenching divisions between north and south. The European Commission confirmed that it had not been informed from the Republic of Cyprus about the construction of new fencing or a change in its policy in surveillance of the Green Line, as per Green Line Regulation.

HYDROCARBONS

The government refuted a report by Greek daily "To Vima" dated March 1 and quoting exclusive information, which set out a scenario of the EastMed natural gas pipeline circumventing the Cyprus EEZ. The report argued that the scenario had been proposed by Egyptian President, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, to Greece's Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, and that it has been discussed between the leaders of the countries involved in the project.

On March 8, Cyprus, Israel and Greece signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on cooperation in relation to the EuroAsia Interconnector, taking another step towards the implementation of the ambitious project to link the electricity grids of the

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three countries. The MoU was signed at the presidential palace in Nicosia by the respective energy ministers of Cyprus and Israel, Natasa Pilides and Yuval Steinitz, while their Greek counterpart Costas Skrekas signed it online in Athens.

Following nine years of stop-start talks, an agreement was reached on March 9 between Cyprus and Israel over developing the Aphrodite gas field. The Aphrodite-Yishai field is a cross-border natural gas reservoir but the two governments have been unable to reach an agreement on the fine print of its commercial exploitation. In 2019, Cyprus had signed a 25-year concession with Noble Energy, Shell and Delek Drilling for exploitation of Aphrodite. Israel had maintained an agreement was required before work started, because part of Aphrodite overlapped on to the Israeli side. The Aphrodite field holds an estimated 4.1tcf of gas. At stake was about 10% of the deposit, which is a fraction of the gas already discovered in Israel. Cypriot Energy Minister Natasa Pilidou and her Israeli counterpart Yuval Steinitz reportedly agreed upon a framework to resolve the issue, and guidelines would be passed on to the companies involved in the project. According to Steinitz the general idea is that the two governments will enable the companies involved on both sides of the demarcation line between the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) of Cyprus and Israel to sit together for the next half a year and to try to reach commercial arrangements between them that will be later submitted to the two governments to approve.

On March 10, the first official East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) meeting, took place in Cairo. EMGF was established in January 2020 by seven founding states, namely Egypt, Cyprus, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan and Palestinian Authority. The EMGD is a regional intergovernmental organisation aiming to promote cooperation among the member-states for the sustainable, effective and environmentally conscious development, use and preservation of the natural gas reserves to the benefit of their peoples. According to Pilides, Cyprus will preside over the

forum as of January 1, 2022. Pilides described the meeting as particularly productive.

GREEK CYPRIOTS

Economic Developments

In a statement following a meeting with business organisations on March 10, the government announced its intention to help the economic sectors stricken by the pandemic, but also to invest in alternative economic forms with emphasis on companies moving their headquarters to Cyprus, research and innovation, education, renewable energy sources, health, and tourism.

A report released on March 19 by PEO's Labour Institute of Cyprus (INEK-Peo) concluded that the coronavirus pandemic slashed an estimated 3% off local wages and salaries in the second and third quarters of 2020. The report analysed the situations as regards salaries, employment and income inequality, and proposed that the way out of the economic slowdown is wage-led growth, which will not only lead to economic recovery but reduce income inequality. This drop follows on from the erosion in salaries in the wake of the 2013 economic crisis. As a result, the purchasing power of the average real salary is now at 2013 levels, cancelling out the gains made from 2015 to 2019. Meanwhile, latest Eurostat figures showed that Cyprus with €1,477 is ranked number 14 among the EU member states when it comes to gross monthly earnings.

On March 25, the European Commission approved a €20m Cypriot scheme to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) affected by the pandemic. The aid will be provided by the resources of the Cypriot Energy Fund of Funds (co-financed by the European Regional and Development Fund and the State), established by an agreement between Cyprus and the European Investment Bank (EIB) and managed by the EIB. The purpose of the measure is to help the beneficiaries, address the liquidity short-

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ages they face and enhance their access to financing, thus helping them continue their activities during and after the outbreak.

Cyprus is the largest beneficiary of European Investment Bank (EIB) engagement in Europe relative to GDP, the EIB stated on March 29, as it announced a €19m loan agreement with Epic to accelerate broadband network deployment. A virtual press conference on the EIB's annual results for 2020 heard that outstanding EIB exposure in Cyprus totals €2.7bn, or 13% of national GDP. In 2020, new EIB financing for priority investment in Cyprus was €245m, representing the fifth largest support for transformational projects.

On March 29, the health ministry upgraded Russia, the UK and Israel, the three biggest markets for Cyprus in terms of tourism, from grey to red category, meaning passengers arriving from those countries do not have to self-isolate upon arrival. They will, however, have to present two negative PCR tests, one within 72 hours before departure and another upon arrival in Cyprus.

According to a press release by Capital Intelligence Ratings, the Cypriot economy is expected to recover in the second half of 2021 and the economic and fiscal disruption caused by the pandemic will dissipate over the forecast horizon. Despite the ongoing second wave of the pandemic and its protracted adverse impact in the first half of 2021, the short to medium-term outlook remains broadly favourable. The economy is expected to grow by 4% in 2021 and 3.3% in 2022, underpinned by recovering private consumption, the continued rollout of vaccinations, and higher investment supported by access to financing from the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF).

On March 31, the Council of Ministers approved a supplementary budgetary bill of €250m of which €140m for the continuation of support schemes until the end of June, €60m for vaccinations, tests and medical supplies and €50m for other expenses. The Cabinet also approved a bill on €1b in government

guarantees for banks to provide loans to businesses and the self-employed affected by the pandemic.

Domestic Developments

In March, the COVID-19 cases increased from 34,707 to 45,864. The number of deaths attributed to the virus rose from 231 to 256. The Health Ministry announced that by June, over 60% of the adults in Cyprus who have expressed their wish to be vaccinated against Covid-19 will receive at least the first jab.

On March 31, the government announced the relaxation to some restrictive coronavirus measures including among other the return of lower secondary schools and Limassol primary schools to classes and the allowance of three SMSs by the public on weekends. Earlier in the month the government allowed the reopening of restaurants, bars and coffee shops. Opposition MPs on March 4 accused President Anastasiades of playing 'hide and seek' over two private trips to the Seychelles in August 2015 and August 2018, using an aircraft operated by a Saudi businessman, who benefited from the citizenship-by-investment (CBI) scheme. The president argued that he paid for the first trip out of his own pocket, while the Saudi owner of the airline paid for the second as a 'gesture.' According to what was heard in the House watchdog committee back in early February, on August 18 2015, six days after Anastasiades' first trip to the Seychelles, the second wife of the Saudi businessman applied for Cypriot citizenship. The cabinet approved her application on the very next day, on August 19 2015. This case was flagged by both the auditor-general and by an ad hoc committee looking into high-risk naturalisations under the CBI, because Cypriot law does not provide for naturalising second spouses or for polygamy.

Cyprus has been cited in the latest US State Department Human Rights Report published on March 31, for lapses on certain human rights issues including serious acts of corruption, crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting members of nation-

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al and ethnic minorities, and lack of investigation of and accountability for violence against women. According to the report, although the government generally investigated and prosecuted cases of corruption, there were numerous reports of corruption during the year. It first cited the Al Jazeera expose, 'The Cyprus Papers', in which undercover reporters captured extensive evidence of government corruption related to the Citizenship by Investment scheme (CBI). The report also cited the case of the former mayor of Larnaca, Andreas Louroudjiatis, who was sentenced to five years' imprisonment for corruption, bribery, money laundering, and other related charges in connection to waste management plants operated by the municipalities of Larnaca and Paphos. The report also highlighted the issue of financial disclosure saying the law requires the president, members of the Council of Ministers, members of the House of Representatives, and members of the State Health Services Organisation board to declare their income and assets. The US report also covered direct or indirect discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Similarly, the report also detailed discrimination against ethnic minorities, which had increased during Covid restrictions.

The committee of inquiry looking into the now-defunct citizenship-by-investment (CBI) scheme will deliver its interim report to the attorney-general on April 6. The dossier will cover cases from the start of the citizenship programme from 2007, up until 2016, but it will also feature some high-risk cases dating up to 2020. The committee is investigating some 4,000 naturalisations granted under the controversial CBI, from its inception in 2007 to October 2020 when it was nixed. The European Commission has initiated infringement proceedings against Cyprus over the matter. Effectively the commission alleges that Cyprus was selling passports to investors who did not have real bonds to the country.

Labour Relations and Trade Union

On March 3, the unions requested the mediation of the Department of Labor Relations of the Ministry of Labor as the direct negotiations for the renewal of the Collective Agreement of Port Workers and Sailors, which expired on December 31, 2020, resulted in a dead end, due to the rejection of all employee claims by their employers.

On March 9, about 45 workers of the "Lois Builders" companies' construction sites, went on indefinite strike in all cities demanding wages owed to them by the company. These include salaries and benefits for up to the last six months and company contributions to the Provident Fund for up to two years. According to an announcement by the Trade Unions on March 10, the strike ended after a mediating proposal by the Department of Labor Relations, the Ministry of Labor, Welfare and Social Insurance, was accepted by both parties.

On March 10, the hourly wage staff of OKYPY (State Organisation of Health Services) went on strike after the organization violated terms of employment and applied unequal and unfair treatment to its hourly wage staff, according to the employees. Specifically, the organisation does not provide the Provident Fund to newly hired staff, it does not change the employment status of the hourly wage staff that completes 12 months of employment to permanent staff, and it does not compensate for shift allowances. OKYPY invited the Trade Unions to a meeting where an agreement was reached on almost all the issues raised by the employees concerning violation of the terms of employment of the hourly wage staff. A letter was sent by SIDIKEK PEO to the Mayor and the members of the Sotira Municipal Council, calling them to take measures against violation of a Collective Agreement. According to that letter, the Pancyprian Collective Agreement for municipal employees, explicitly provides that workers with successful service beyond 12 months are promoted to regular/permanent staff of the Municipality and enjoy all the benefits provided by the Municipality to its staff. However, four workers of the Municipality

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of Sotira with more than 12 months of service have been fired and their case was the subject of the dispute, because the Municipality of Sotiras proceeded to the re-employment of only 3 of them along with another new recruitment, but this time with a new employment status of 11-month contracts.

A spontaneous protest was held on March 11 by the staff of the Municipality of Paphos, alleging incidents of bullying and offensive behaviour by the Mayor of Paphos. The reason was the complaint of a Senior Officer for a verbal attack by the Mayor. The trade unions were on the side of the employees condemning such behavior.

On March 17, before the management of the Department of Labor Relations, the Trade Unions and the general cargo terminal manager at the port of Limassol, agreed to continue their consultations, after the spontaneous work stoppage on March 16 due to decisions to dismiss staff by the management. It is expected that the Ministry will see how the consultations for the collective labor agreement are progressing. The company insists that there is a staff surplus and a need for reorganization, while the trade unions argue that there is no such issue.

TURKISH CYPRIOTS

Economic Developments

The Turkish Cypriot economy took another blow after the plunge of Turkish lira following the Turkish President Erdogan's sacking of the Central Bank's governor on March 20.

Turgay Deniz, the chairperson of Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce (TCCC) announced the Fourth Quarter Economic Bulletin commissioned by the TCCC. The bulletin estimates a negative growth of 14.3% in 2020 in the TRNC - where no official growth figure has been released. Deniz noted that the number of incoming passengers dropped by 78% and overnight stays at hotels by 82% leading to growing unemployment in the north. "The slow-

ing down in the economic activities due to partial or full closure of many sectors has harmed employment, pushing unemployment to 10.1 per cent," he noted. Deniz also said while there is a 20% decrease in import figures due to the absence of university students and tourists, there was a 22% increase in exports when compared the figures in the first 11 months of 2020 with 2019. Deniz also welcomed the signing of the economic protocol with Turkey, noting that as a result, there will be cash injections in the market coupled with reforms in the public sector which should increase state revenues.

This Country is Ours platform, on the other hand, held a march to protest the government over the signing of the economic protocol on the grounds that this protocol would hand over authority to Ankara. "Those who emphasize sovereignty on the Cyprus problem do not see any problems in transferring rule over the north to Ankara with every protocol agreement signed to date," the platform stressed. "Our goal is to solve the Cyprus problem in line with international law and be integrated with the world and to govern ourselves," the platform added. The platform is made up of representatives of trade unions and political parties, including the Turkish Cypriot Teachers' Union (KTOS), the Turkish Cypriot Secondary School Teachers' Union, (KTOS), the Turkish Cypriot Public Servants' Union (KTAMS), the Federation for Turkish Cypriot Trade Unions (TURK-SEN), the Federation for Revolutionary Workers' Trade Unions, (DEV-IS), Turkish Cypriot Union for Cooperative Workers, (KOOP-SEN), Turkish Cypriot Customs officers' union (GUC-SEN), Turkish Cypriot Municipal Workers' union (BES), Turkish Cypriot state employees' union (CAG-SEN), Turkish Cypriot Doctors' Union (TIP-IS), Turkish Cypriot Press Workers' Union (BASIN-SEN), the Republican Turkish Party (CTP), the Social Democratic Party (TDP), the United Cyprus Party (BKP), the New Cyprus Party (YKP), Road to Independence (BY) and the Communal Liberation Party (TKP).

According to the Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Shop-

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keepers and Artisans (KTEZO), over 5,000 businesses have been closed since March 2020 leaving 50,000 people unemployed.

In the first week of the month, businesses in the entertainment and restaurant sectors threatened to carry out a campaign of 'civil disobedience' over ongoing Covid-19 restrictions. The head of the Restaurateurs' Association (Res-Bir) urged the government officials to allow restaurants and cafes, which could only provide takeaway and delivery services, to open their doors to customers. 'We are nearly bankrupt' the chairperson said, accusing the government of forgetting the restaurant sector while hairdressers, beauty parlors and other businesses that involve close contact with customers have been allowed to resume work.

According to the report of weekly Cyprus Today, on March 5, the Tourism Workers' Initiative held a protest march in Kyrenia and read out a press statement saying that the government's handling of the economy has been 'incompetent' and that 'not a single plane carrying tourists to the TRNC has landed since December 4, 2020'. On March 15, tourism workers staged a protest in Nicosia, which was attended by hundreds of people. The protesters handed over a list of demands to be passed on to Prime Minister and vowed to resume their protests if their demands were not met. Official figures from Tourism Planning Office show that arrivals by sea and air, excluding TRNC citizens, fell by 77,8% last year, from around 1.75 million in 2019 to just 389,000 in 2020.

The Cyprus Turkish Travel Agencies Initiative (KTSAI) said in a statement that 180 travel agents are in 'dire straits' and accused the government of ignoring their pleas for support. Travel agents have been closed for a year and have not been able to pay their workers' salaries, but are still expected to pay taxes, they said. Later in the month, KTSAI held a mock funeral for the tourism sector in Nicosia to draw attention to their plight.

Public transport operators also protested the government whom they accused of failing to support

them during the pandemic.

Relations with Turkey

On March 3, Turkey and the TRNC signed a 2.5 billion TL (€255 million as of the end of March) Economic and Financial Protocol in Ankara. The cooperation protocol includes financial support to the TRNC budget to be used to mitigate the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as help to revive the real sector and fund infrastructure projects. The Turkish Vice President Fuat Oktay who signed the protocol on behalf of Turkey, also announced that 20,000 more doses of CoronaVac vaccines would be delivered to the TRNC later in the week, bringing the total number of vaccines donated to 100,000.

Addressing the 14th, the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) summit virtually on March 4, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan urged member countries of ECO to enhance their relations with the TRNC in all areas.

The chairperson of the Turkish Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee Akif Cagatay Kilic paid a visit to the TRNC. Separately, the Turkish Minister for Trade Ruhsar Pekcan held several meetings in the north. Meanwhile, the Turkish Cypriot Minister of Education Olgun Amcaoglu visited Ankara.

Domestic Developments

March 10 marked one year since the first Covid-19 case was confirmed in the TRNC. A total of 3,644 cases and 24 deaths have been recorded in this period. A two-and-a-half-month lockdown followed the first confirmed cases; as of May, normalization started, with all restrictions lifted in June 2020. The second wave of infections hit the north in February. February 4, 2021, saw the highest figures recorded in a single day with 80 cases leading to a second four-week lockdown to prevent health services from being overwhelmed. The first COVID-19 vaccines arrived in the country on January 14 from Turkey. So far Turkey has donated 100,000 doses of Sinovac's CoronaVac vaccine and 10,570 doses of Pfizer/Bi-

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oNTech and AstraZeneca have been sent by the EU. On March 11, police detained and then released four activists on suspicion of vandalizing posters of Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan. Abdullah Korkmazhan, the general secretary of the 'Left Movement' and three other members of the movement had been held on suspicion of writing the word "Diablo" over the posters. The movement had also launched a "We Don't Love Erdogan" campaign on social media in response to "Love Erdogan" ads on billboards throughout the north. "This is an assault against freedom of thought and expression. They want us to be silent, but we shall not be. They say, 'don't think', but we will think. I don't know who did this in Famagusta, it was not us. But God bless whoever did it," Korkmazhan said. Korkmazhan's lawyer Mine Atli said her client was detained by the police upon a complaint filed by the AKP (Justice and Development Party) Famagusta Youth Branch. "The police filed charges against Left Movement members not on vandalism but their political viewpoints," Atli said, adding that there was CCTV footage showing they were elsewhere during the time of the attacks on the posters.

On March 1, KTGB (Cyprus Turkish Journalists Union) and Basin-Sen (the trade union of journalists and press workers) held a march to protest the two consecutive attacks on journalists. The participants protested Nur Nadir, vice president of the Kibris media group (the biggest private media company), for accusing journalists supporting the opposition of being members of FETO (Fethullah Gulen Terrorist Organisation) and Deputy Prime Minister Erhan Arikli for lashing out at a TV host during a TV program. In addition to the dozens of journalists taking part in the march, members of the Republican Turkish Party (CTP), People's Party (HP), Social Democratic Party (TDP) and Cyprus Socialist Party (KSP), trade unions and civil society organizations all took part in support.

Labour Relations and Trade Unions

On March 26, four trade unions organized in the

public sector, KTAMS, Kamu-Sen, Kamu-Is and Guc-Sen, issued a joint statement where they pointed out that the cost of living payment is not a salary raise, but a safeguard of purchasing power against inflation, and warned that "if the UBP-DP-YDP government issues a decree to freeze the cost of living allowance, we will use all kinds of democratic action rights including general strike and we will initiate a legal struggle." This did not stop the authorities on March 31, who issued a decree freezing the cost of living given to public employees and pensioners for 4 months. Accordingly, the cost of living adjustment will not be applied between March 1 and June 30.

On March 15, KTAMS, Kamu-Sen, Kamu-Is and Guc-Sen held a two-hour-long strike to show solidarity with private sector workers. Unionization is at a negligible level in the private sector. In his speech, Guven Bengihan, the chairperson of KTAMS, said that since the beginning of the pandemic, private sector workers have suffered great economic difficulties, many employees have been unemployed, but the government is hampering them instead of supporting them, and accused the government of helping the business circles instead of private sector employees.

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Office Cyprus
20, Stasandrou, Apt. 401
CY 1060 Nicosia

Tel. +357 22 377 336
Email: office@fescyprus.org
Web-Site: www.fescyprus.org
Facebook: www.facebook.com/FEScyprus
Twitter: [@fescyprus](https://twitter.com/fescyprus)

Text:
Hubert Faustmann, Yiannis Charalambous,
Sertac Sonan, Enis Porat, Gianna
Chatzigeorgiou and Sophia Papastavrou

Layout:
Stadtformat Einig & Kazmierczak GbR

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