FRIEDRICH EBERT STIFTUNG

FES CYPRUS NEWSLETTER

EDITOR'S 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.

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FRIEDRICH EBERT STIFTUNG

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PODCASTS in APRIL:
No podcasts in April

PODCASTS in MAY:
No podcasts in May

PUBLICATIONS in APRIL:
No publications in April

PUBLICATIONS in MAY:
No publications in May

EVENTS in APRIL:
No events planned so far in April

EVENTS in MAY:
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Cyprus
Launch: Corruption Perceptions Report for North Cyprus - Report 2022
(in English)
Date: Wednesday, 10th of May 2023
Time: 18:00 - 19:30, Nicosia
Location: Home for Cooperation, Nicosia

CYPRUS PROBLEM AND BICOMMUNAL RELATIONS

As part of attempts to kickstart the stalled Cyprus problem negotiations, UN Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, Rosemary DiCarlo, visited Cyprus where she held separate meetings on March 15 with the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders, Nicos Christodoulides and Ersin Tatar, respectively.[1]

The UN official said that she talked extensively with Christodoulides about the Cyprus problem, reiterating UN Secretary-General António Guterres' support to finding a solution. Christodoulides informed DiCarlo about his proposal for greater EU involvement, explaining that the goal is to remove the impasse in frozen talks and to restart negotiations based on a bizonal, bicommunal federation. Christodoulides reiterated that he is ready for a meeting with Tatar.

Following her meeting with Tatar, DiCarlo stated that they discussed the Cyprus problem in depth and discussed the need to strengthen the technical committees so that they can work hard on a number of issues. The Turkish Cypriot leader said that he will not allow the European Union to be actively involved in the negotiations because "the union has already taken the side of the Greek Cypriots and because the only ones who can have a role in the negotiations are the two communities and the three guarantor powers". After the meeting, Tatar told reporters that the resumption of official negotiations will only be possible with the acceptance of his "new vision" for sovereign equality and equal international status for the de facto state in the north.

On March 16, DiCarlo met with Greek Cypriot negotiator, Menelaos Menelaou, and Turkish Cypriot Special Representative, Ergün Olgun. DiCarlo commended the two negotiators for the work they are carrying out. DiCarlo also met with youth representatives, stressing that the voices of young women and men are vital for a durable peace solution in Cyprus and elsewhere.

On March 22, Ersin Tatar stated that he would step down should Ankara revise its two-state solution policy on the Cyprus problem after the May 2023 Presidential elections in Turkey.

On March 27, the mayor of Famagusta, Simos Ioannou, and a delegation of the Famagusta Municipal Council met with Christodoulides to ask the President to raise the matter of the status of Varosha with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and French President Emmanuel Macron.

The recent devastating earthquake in Turkey and Syria has led to a temporary rapprochement between Greece and Turkey, which culminated in Greece supporting Turkey's candidacy for the International Maritime Organization General Secretariat. Turkey in return is expected to support Greece's campaign for the position of a non-permanent member of the Security Council for the 2025-2026 term. Commenting on the development, Christodoulides said that Cyprus' membership with the IMO will not be impacted in any way if Turkey is elected as its Secretary-General later this year. Christodoulides added that Cyprus cannot support the Turkish can-

[1]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).

didacy simply because Ankara does not allow ships under the Cyprus flag to dock in its ports as Turkey does not recognise the Republic of Cyprus.

As part of a two-day working trip in Brussels between March 22 and 24, Christodoulides attended the European Council session and held a number of talks where he briefed EU dignitaries on his idea to have an institutionalised role for an EU representative in the Cyprus talks. Christodoulides presented his suggestion, also a pre-election pledge, to the heads of the EU Commission, Council and Parliament, as well as to the UN Secretary-General António Guterres. He also discussed it with country leaders that he believed could have a significant role in promoting his idea, including German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, French President Emmanuel Macron and Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte. Christodoulides stated that a more active EU involvement was received "as a positive development to break the deadlock and move forward in resolving the Cyprus problem". The President said he was looking for a political personality that comes from an EU member state, who is familiar with the Cyprus problem or EU–Turkey relations. He highlighted that he does not seek to have the EU replace the UN. The Turkish Cypriot side has already rejected such a move while opposition AKEL has cast doubt on its feasibility. The President briefed party leaders on his proposal and his contacts at the European Council during a National Council held on March 30.

On 25 March, Ersin Tatar attended the 2nd International EastMed Energy Forum, organised by the Turkish Energy Strategy and Policy Research Centre, and Ankara Social Sciences University (ASBU) north Cyprus Campus, where he said that the connection of electricity networks with a cable via Turkey to the interconnected system of the European Union would be the "best choice to provide quality and sustainable energy for the island".

As part of a five-day visit to the UK, Ersin Tatar spoke to LBC radio on March 30 where he explained his vision for a two-state solution. Tatar argued that a two-state solution does not mean that Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots will cease to have contacts, but that, on the contrary, they will be able to better cooperate. He described it as crucial for the existence and well-being of the Turkish Cypriots and ruled out a solution based on a bizonal, bicommunal federation. Cyprus High Commissioner to the UK, Andreas Kakouris later said on the radio programme that a two-state solution cannot be accepted, as it stands in direct contrast to UN resolutions. Meanwhile, a group of Greek Cypriot students protested against Tatar as he was heading to a conference at Kings College London. Turkish Cypriot media reported that the students booed Tatar and banged on his car.

Turkish Cypriots married to non-Cypriots started an initiative by filing an appeal to the European Parliament Committee on Petitions (PETI) over Republic of Cyprus' denial of Cypriot citizenship to their children. The group of parents who have organised as a platform said that people in mixed marriages have been victimised and their children's rights have been violated by the Republic of Cyprus which refuses to grant Cypriot citizenship to children with one Turkish Cypriot parent and one non-Cypriot parent. Also referring to the children of mixed Turkish-Cypriot marriages, the head of the primary teachers' union (KTOS) Burak Mavis called on the Greek Cypriot government to resolve the problem.

According to the report in Cyprus Today, on March 16, a Turkish citizen was sentenced to four years in prison after he was caught trying to smuggle refugees into the southern part of the island across the Green Line. The human trafficker, who had previously been deported from north Cyprus for a crime he had committed in Turkey, sneaked back into the north by hiding in the trailer of a lorry. He

then attempted to smuggle 24 refugees across the Green Line. He pleaded guilty to the charges. In his sentence, the judge noted that the court took into consideration the fact that young children were among the refugees, that the defendant "repeatedly committed this crime despite being deported", and that he showed "no remorse" as aggravating factors against him.

On March 18, an EU-funded community centre in the Maronite-inhabited village of Kormakitis (Korucam) in the eastern part of the island was opened. The inauguration ceremony of the Kormakitis Centre for Cooperation (KCC) had become the focus of a mini crisis between the EU and the TRNC authorities after it emerged that no one representing the TRNC had been on the original invitation list. The crisis was eventually resolved after EU officials agreed that the Lapithos mayor, Firat Ataser, and National Unity Party (UBP) Kyrenia MP, Özdemir Berova, could speak at the event. According to a UNDP press release, the project commenced in September 2021 and was completed in January 2023, with funding from the EU (€1.2 million). The Turkish Cypriot leader's special representative, Ergün Olgun, and the Republican Turkish Party MPs Fikri Toros and Armagan Candan also attended the event, along with officials from the European Commission, including Mario Nava, who is the Director General for Structural Reform Support; the UNDP; and the diplomatic community in Cyprus. The centre will, among other things, host "activities that encourage multiculturalism" and provide "basic accommodation and … catering for groups of up to 60 people". The KCC will also act as a local primary school.

A bicommunal concert was held on March 20 in Eleftheria Square in memory of the victims of the recent earthquakes in Turkey and Syria as well as the deadly train crash in Greece.

On March 21, twenty Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot entrepreneurs from bicommunal groups were awarded cash prizes as the winners of the 13th Stelios Bi-communal Awards for Business Cooperation. Each of the winners, ten Greek Cypriots and ten Turkish Cypriots won a cash prize of €10k. From the institution's inception in 2009 until today, the total value of the Bi-communal Awards for Business Cooperation amounts to approximately €4.2m.

Labour organisation PEO and the Pancyprian Federation of Women's Organisations (POGO) held a joint event with Turkish Cypriot organisations on International Women's Day. The event was carried out under the slogan: Together for Reunification, Equality, Solidarity.

According to a report in the Turkish Cypriot daily Halkin Sesi, quoted in Cyprus Mail on March 22, the TRNC's demand for electricity from the south has almost doubled over the last three years, as the Turkish Cypriot public electricity authority Kib-Tek and the private Turkish company Aksa are unable to meet requirements in the north. The electricity grids of the two sides have been interconnected since 2016.

On March 23, an event was held to celebrate the completion of conservation works at Zuhuri Tekke and Tuzla Hammam, which were carried out by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage (TCCH) as part of the EU-funded support to cultural heritage monuments of great importance for Cyprus project. Zuhuri Tekke is located in central Larnaca and dates back to the 17th century. Conservation works began in December 2021 and were completed in February 2022. Tuzla Hammam is located at the Hamit Bey square in Larnaca. Its conservation began in February 2022 and ended in February 2023, marking the completion of the project.

On March 28, leaders and representatives of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot political parties participated in bicommunal meetings at the Ledra Palace under the auspices of the Slovak Embassy. At the conclusion of the meetings, they stated in a joint communique that the present status quo in Cyprus and the lack of negotiations were unacceptable. They also expressed willingness for cultivating a positive climate for the swift resumption of talks "now that earthquake diplomacy may prove that time is ripe for the negotiations not only to begin but to succeed and solve the Cyprus problem in a way beneficial for all stakeholders". The next meeting will be held on April 27.

On March 28, the first Turkish Cypriot hellim/halloumi producer was awarded the "Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) certificate under the EU quality scheme". However, the company still cannot sell its produce to the EU market because, according to the European Commission, the "Turkish Cypriot community still needs to implement measures related to EU sanitary and phytosanitary standards before hellim/halloumi produced by Turkish Cypriot producers can be allowed to be marketed in the EU. This is expected by the end of 2024". Mario Nava, EC's Director General for Structural Reform Support, stated that hellim/halloumi is a "shared heritage of both communities of the island. [This] important step demonstrates that concrete benefits of a full EU membership are available to the Turkish Cypriot community, and encourages the Turkish Cypriots to proceed towards achieving compliance with EU standards", he said. "In this context, the 'Halloumi'/'Hellim' PDO-process is a mini reunification laboratory. We remain committed to work with both Cypriot communities, contributing to the rebuilding of trust between them and paving the way to the reunification of the island".

On March 29, the Greek Cypriot government also welcomed the award being given to a Turkish Cypriot producer of halloumi/hellim as proof of the role the EU can play in efforts to resolve the Cyprus problem. The agriculture ministry said that the development also highlights the benefits bestowed to all Cypriots by being part of the EU and the crucial role the bloc has.

HYDROCARBONS

On March 28 during the EU's Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council meeting in Brussels, Energy Minister Giorgos Papanastasiou drew attention to the potential of the Eastern Mediterranean region to contribute to the diversification of the European Union's energy sources as part of its transition from natural gas to new renewable gases and hydrogen. Member states reached an agreement on the Council's general approach regarding the package of proposals on natural gas and hydrogen, which aims to facilitate the penetration of renewable and low-carbon gases into the energy system. Papanastasiou noted that the package takes into account the specificities of Cyprus as an isolated energy and emerging market.

GREEK CYPRIOTS

Economic Developments

According to a report released on March 17 by the Cyprus Statistical Service, tourist arrivals in Cyprus increased by 65.6% year-on-year in February 2023, reaching 119,081 visitors, up from 71,921 during the same month the previous year. Between January and February 2023, tourist arrivals totalled 209,630, compared to 115,865 visitors in the corresponding period of 2022, recording an increase of 80.9%. Arrivals from the United Kingdom were the main source of tourism for February 2023, with 32,394 visitors representing 27.2% of total arrivals. They were followed by Israel, with 15,196 arrivals

(12.8%); Greece, with 15,058 guests (12.6%); Poland, with 11,728 arrivals (9.8%); and Germany, with 6,107 arrivals (5.1%).

On March 21, government spokesman Konstantinos Letymbiotis, echoing assurances from the Central Bank of Cyprus (CBS), stated that the Cyprus banking system is resilient and able to cope with the ongoing issues that had led to the closure of several banks including Credit Suisse. Cypriot banks have significant capital and liquidity to cope with the situation, Letymbiotis noted. The Central Bank itself stated that Cyprus banks have no exposure whatsoever to Credit Suisse's AT1 (Additional Tier 1) bonds – wiped out in a rescue deal brokered by Switzerland's central bank.

According to data released on March 24 by the CBC, non-performing loans decreased to 9.5% of total loans at the end of 2022, in contrast to 11% at the end of 2021. The CBC also announced that it has slightly increased its estimates for economic growth in 2023, citing a more positive external environment and expected lower energy prices. In its medium-term macroeconomic forecasts for March 2023, the bank predicts that Cyprus' GDP will grow by 2.6% this year, up from its December 2022 forecast of 2.5%. It also predicts that the growth rate will rise to 3.0% in 2024 and 3.1% in 2025.

On March 27, the Minister of Finance, Makis Keravnos, called on banks to go ahead with loan restructurings, maintain low lending rates and bank charges, and increase deposit rates on the backdrop of continued basic rate hikes by Central Banks. In his first appearance to the Parliamentary Finance and Budgetary Committee, Keravnos reportedly said he raised the issue of rising interest rates in letters he sent to the governor of the CBC and to the management of commercial banks. He also pointed out that the continued suspension of foreclosures must stop and other solutions should be considered. Furthermore, Keravnos said the government is proceeding with a tax reform which, among other things, includes raising the tax-free income threshold and increasing disposable income, especially for low-wage earners. Keravnos also reiterated his aim to preserve fiscal discipline and financial stability.

According to data released on March 27 by the CBC, total deposits in February 2023 recorded a net increase of €357.1m, compared with a net decrease of €583.8 m in January 2023. Compared to February 2022, deposits increased by €413m. Total loans in February 2023 recorded a net increase of €81.2m, compared with a net decrease of €93.2m in January 2023.

Domestic Developments

On March 11, House President Annita Demetriou made history as the first woman to be elected as leader of DISY, securing almost 70% of the in-house votes during the party's leadership elections. Her rival, Demetris Demetriou, is a party MP and former spokesman for DISY. Meanwhile, former government spokesman Marios Pelekanos announced his candidacy for the position of vice-president of DISY. His candidacy follows the candidacies of DISY MPs Fotini Tsiridou and Savia Orphanidou for the three positions of vice presidents. MP Efthymios Diplaros and former MP Michalis Sophocleous have also announced that they are running for the position of the party's deputy leader. The final day to enter the running for the vice-presidency of the party and the deputy leaderships of the party is April 4. Elections for these positions will be held on May 6.

Former EDEK party member and MEP Demetris Papadakis announced on March 9 that he is looking to start a new political movement based on social-democratic values.

Labour Relations and Trade Unions

On March 8, the voluntary exit plan at CYTA (Cyprus Telecommunications Authority) expired, and thus the early departure of 400 employees from all levels of the organisation will result in tax-free compensation of up to €180,000 for each employee who opted to leave the company. The plan was voluntary; however, it was targeted at three specific categories of employees: clerical staff, specialized staff and managerial staff. This was the first time a semi-public organisation applied such a practice. The employer side, in consultation with the trade unions, committed to design the plan and to grant "bonuses" to those who would accept it as an additional incentive. A point of reference in the plan was the agreement between management and unions to establish a quota in relation to permanent and hourly staff. In other words, an innovative collective agreement was concluded between the trade unions and CYTA that obligated the organisation to operate with an organizational structure that consists of 60% permanent public staff and 40% private staff. New employees to the organisation, after consultation with the trade unions, will not be permanent workers by they will be paid on an hourly basis under private law and not under public law. Private law personnel will be governed by collective agreements and, if they wish, they will be able to join the trade union of their preference. The duties of the hourly staff will differ from those of the permanent staff.

On March 9, the trade unions stated that the process for the renewal of the collective agreement for the construction industry was at a critical point, as the employers' side has frequently violated the minimum wages that had been agreed on in the relevant labour legislation. This has an impact on workers and resulted in unfair competition between contracting companies. Moreover, as a result of this violation, the state loses millions of euros in income to social funds every year. The trade unions are sending a clear message that if there is no change in the employers' associations' attitude towards these issues when renewing the collective agreements, they will call on the workers to engage in dynamic labour mobilisations.

On March 9, the majority of the call centre staff at the Anytime by Interamerican insurance company went on strike that lasted the whole month. The cause of the strike action was "the illegal and vindictive dismissal of the union representative of the workers, in the midst of negotiations for a collective agreement, without any warning at all". The illegal dismissal of the trade unionist was reported to the Labour Relations Department of the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance. The Labour Relations Department then sent a letter to the company requesting they rescind the dismissal. However, the company repeatedly refused to come to the department for consultation, and when it finally did, it flatly refused to discuss revoking the layoff. Furthermore, in an attempt to break the strike, the company sent individual letters to the strikers demanding they immediately return to their duties.

On March 22, the trade unions met with the new Minister of Education, Sports and Youth and indicated that whatever arrangements the Ministry of Education decides on should not victimize workers who are employed under the service purchase regime in the Ministry's afternoon and evening educational programmes. The trade unions announced that they explained to the minister their positions regarding the proposal of the Ministry of Education, which the outgoing minister had approved. The proposal advocates for abolishing the purchase of services for the programmes and implementing a new regime for the employees and the operation of said programmes. It was noted that this proposal would lay off a large portion of those already employed in the programmes, and the trade unions requested that it be altered in order to ensure the continuation of employment of all the existing staff. It was pointed out

that "the Minister undertook to review the whole matter from the beginning in consultation with the Minister of Labour to submit a [new] proposal for discussion", taking into account the positions submitted by the unions.

Hundreds of businesses, such as restaurants, cafes, bakeries, kiosks, supermarkets, and clothing and footwear stores, compel their employees to remain standing for most of their working hours. AKEL has proposed legislation to put a stop to such tactics. The phenomenon has become a scourge in recent years, causing many health problems to workers and alarming the government. The purpose of the two proposals tabled by AKEL is to amend the "On Safety and Health at Work Law" and the "On the Organization of Working Time Law", in order to strengthen the existing legislative framework that governs the obligation of employers to enable workers to use sufficient and appropriate seating while working to avoid continuous and prolonged standing. In particular, the proposed regulation seeks to incorporate into national law the relevant provisions of Convention No. 120 of the International Labour Organization of 1964 that provide employees suitable seats and to give them opportunities to use them during work. It is noted that, in its relevant report for the year 2021, the European Organization for Safety and Health pointed out the ailments and musculoskeletal disorders that prolonged standing causes for workers.

On March 27, food distributors working for digital platforms staged a protest following an accident the previous week that resulted in the death of a 26-year-old delivery person. The workers demanded support and protection regarding their working conditions. Representatives of the trade unions referred to the need for the Ministry of Labour to speed up the process to conclude the collective agreement for this sector of workers.

TURKISH CYPRIOTS

Economic Developments

Inflation continued to hit the northern part of Cyprus hard. According to the Statistical Institute, the consumer price index was 66.97% higher in March 2023 compared to March 2022. Consumer prices had risen by 2.1% in March alone. Particularly, there has been a 5.20% increase in "restaurant and hotel" prices compared to the previous month.

According to the Statistics Institute's 2022 Household Labour Force Survey (HLFS) results, the official unemployment rate in North Cyprus fell from 7.8% in 2021 to 6.3% in 2022. A breakdown of the figures showed that women and young people are more likely to be unemployed than men and those aged 25 and above. The unemployment rate was calculated as 5.1% for men and 8.6% for women, while youth unemployment stood at 19.2%; labour force participation rate was only 49.1%. The highest unemployment rate was 9.7% in the Lefka district, while the lowest unemployment rate was 4.6% in Nicosia. Of those who currently work, 77.5% are employed in the services sector and 25.6% are employed in the public sector.

According to the latest Corruption Perceptions in North Cyprus report, covering 2022, written by Omer Gokcekus and Sertac Sonan, and published by the Cyprus office of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, corruption is "very common and a very serious problem" in the TRNC. The findings were based on a survey of 350 people who hold managerial positions in companies registered in the TRNC, alongside the results of an expert survey of a small group of retired senior civil servants with extensive experience in the functioning of the state mechanism in the TRNC. Of those who took part in the business survey, 99% think that bribery and corruption exist in the TRNC, while 72% think that corruption is a "very serious problem". According to the respondents, corruption

is most common in the awarding of public contracts and licenses, with 66% saying bribery is "very common" in this area.

On March 13, a new airline company announced its entry to the market with a launch event held at Ercan (Tymbou) Airport. Fly KHY's (Kibris Hava Yollari – Cyprus Airlines) flights will be operated by Freebird Airlines, a Turkish carrier established in 2000. The company's first scheduled flight is due to depart from Istanbul Airport to Ercan Airport on April 16. Initially, Fly KHY will provide two daily return flights to Istanbul, and one daily return flight to Ankara and Izmir, with plans to provide charter flights to North Cyprus via Turkey from Erbil, Iraq; Tehran, Iran; Pristina, Kosovo; Amman, Jordan; and Baku, Azerbaijan as of May 21. The owners of the new company said that since the collapse of the national carrier Cyprus Turkish Airlines in 2010, a local brand was missing, and the new company was established to fill this gap. They also said that they aim "to bring 275,000 people to our island in the first year". Currently, only Turkish Airlines (THY), Anadolu Jet (an affiliate of THY), and Pegasus Airlines (PGS) are flying to Ercan.

According to the report of the Turkish Cypriot weekly Cyprus Today, Farmers Association chairperson Mehmet Nizam stated that the height and development of barley crops is currently two months behind where they should be for this time of the year. "There is a drought in a large area and we see that many crops are starting to wither", he said. "If we don't start to get some rain in the coming days,... bad days lie ahead for producers." Livestock Producers and Breeders Association president Mustafa Naimogullari said that breeders "cannot continue to produce in this drought". Naimogullari also noted that there has been a 6-7% decrease in milk production compared to the same period last year.

Relations with Turkey

According to the Minister of Interior, Ziya Öztürkler, the official number of Turkish citizens who have sought refuge in north Cyprus following the earthquakes in southern Turkey, as of March 1, was 1,497. Earlier, the Minister of Labour, Hasan Tacoy had said that 3,800 survivors were in the TRNC, while President Tatar had said the number was "close to 5,000".

Prime Minister Unal Ustel said that 49 TRNC citizens died in the earthquake in Turkey while 945 TRNC citizens in seven provinces were also affected. Ustel also stated that 42 TRNC citizens lost their lives in hotels that collapsed, while seven died in their families' homes. A group of 35 people made up of junior high school volleyball team players from a school in Famagusta (Gazimagusa Turk Maarif College), their parents and teachers died in Adiyaman when the hotel they were staying at collapsed on February 6.

Ustel also said that the TRNC delivered approximately 78,000 boxes of humanitarian aid in 92 trucks to the victims and that the public donated approximately TL 13.2 million (€620,000) directly to the accounts of Turkey's Disaster and Emergency Management Authority, while approximately TL 8.5 million (€400,000) was donated to the TRNC Prime Ministry's bank accounts. Ustel also announced support for some 13,000 students from the earthquake zones who are enrolled at universities in the TRNC. Ustel stated that an allowance would be given to earthquake survivors who are students if they come to the TRNC to participate in face-to-face education, universities would provide remote education opportunities for those who cannot travel to the TRNC and would also give students the right to freeze registration free of charge if they are unable to continue with their studies.

On March 16, Turkey's main opposition presidential candidate and Republican People's Party (CHP) chairperson Kemal Kilicdaroglu visited the TRNC to

express his condolences to the families of the players of Gazimagusa Turk Maarif College (GTMK) girls and boys volleyball teams who lost their lives in the earthquake.

According to the report of Cyprus Today, on March 20, the Turkish Cypriot Coast Guard added three new patrol boats to its fleet in a bid "to crack down on trafficking across the Mediterranean Sea and to stem the flow of refugees arriving on the country's shores". The Turkish-made crafts, each equipped with a 12.7mm machine gun and thermal cameras, were put into service with a ceremony attended by Tatar and the Turkish Ambassador in Nicosia, Metin Feyzioğlu. With the three new Ares 35 FBP-type patrol boats, the TRNC Coast Guard's fleet has reached 25 vessels.

On March 31, a ceremony was held at the grounds of the Police Headquarters for the handing over of vehicles and equipment that Turkey donated to the Special Operations Unit. Two armoured vehicles, which will be used in "social incidents", attracted the criticism of the opposition.

Domestic Developments

Following the devastating earthquake in Turkey, the government have come under intense pressure to ensure that school buildings in the TRNC are earthquake-resistant. Some parents have been refusing to send their children to the schools deemed to be most at risk. As a temporary measure, the Ministry of Education decided to set up "tent classrooms" at some schools in Famagusta. However heavy rain caused further disruption to education, as tents at a school in Famagusta were flooded. The issue sparked a heated debate in the Parliament. The main opposition, Republican Turkish Party (CTP), accused the government of failing to set aside money in the budget for school repairs. In response to the criticism, the Minister of Education, Nazim Çavuşoğlu, stated that government projects have not been carried out due to "financial difficulties", adding: "We need to face the fact that tents are a reality in the country". He also said that the problems could not be pinned on one political party but are the result of problems that have accumulated over the years. The primary school teacher's union (KTOS) described the setting up of tents in the school yards in Famagusta as a "huge disgrace", and accused the government of failing to take the necessary precautions in school buildings despite warnings from KTOS "for years".

Nazim Çavuşoğlu announced on March 24 that agreements have been signed with four businesspeople to rebuild a primary school in Haspolat (Mia Milia); to build a new special education school in Ziyamet (Leonarisso); to build a new secondary school in Iskele (Trikomo); and to rebuild classrooms and administrative units at Yenibogazici (Ayios Sergios) primary school. Following the devastating quakes that struck southern Turkey in February, a number of public-school buildings or parts of buildings were deemed unsafe for education by inspectors. With funds for new school buildings not budgeted for, the Education Ministry has turned to business leaders to pay for them under its "You Build a School Too" project.

Cyprus Mail reported on March 21, that according to a study run by Dilek Öncül as part of the EU's Grow Civic programme, about 57.3% of Turkish Cypriots aged 18-30 want to leave the island. The study surveyed 302 young people, who answered questions about the psychological, economic, social and political circumstances in the north. The main cause for wanting to emigrate (51.8%) was financial, while 38.6% said they were concerned about the future. Results of the study also showed that 45.7% of the respondents expected the circumstances to get worse while 55.3% expressed that they felt desperate because of the economic circumstances. Also, 55.3% of the young people surveyed said that their income was not enough to sustain themselves without economic support from their families.

Labour Relations and Trade Unions

The minimum amount of money a family of four needs to have a "healthy, balanced and adequate diet" has risen back above the minimum wage, according to a report by Cyprus Turkish Civil Servants Union (KTAMS). The leader of the trade union, Güven Bengihan, noted that, as of February 28, the breadline for a family of four was calculated as TL 12,812 (€600) — around TL 1,000 (€47) more than the net monthly minimum wage. Bengihan said that on the same date the minimum wage was the equivalent of £519 (€585), while the poverty line was equal to £564 (€636).

Esra Aygin reported in a column for the Greek Cypriot daily Cyprus Mail that the general secretary of the Primary School Teachers Trade Union (KTOS), Burak Mavis, said, "We are founding partners and citizens of the Republic of Cyprus. We want Christodoulides to defend the rights of Turkish Cypriots as much as he defends the rights of Greek Cypriots. Turkish Cypriots are EU citizens regardless of a solution on the island". Underlining that the rights and freedoms of Turkish Cypriots are being threatened by an increasingly authoritarian Ankara and its Turkish Cypriot collaborators, Mavis said, "We are oppressed in the north and have difficulty exercising our rights in the south. We are sandwiched between the two". The current hard-line Turkish Cypriot leadership, which endorses a two-state solution may be expecting Christodoulides to recognise the existence of two equal sovereign states on the island, but ordinary peoples' expectations are steps that would help reduce their dependence on Turkey, reinvigorate the economy, and build trust between the communities. Mavis said this is possible through assisting the Turkish Cypriots to integrate more into the EU socially, educationally, and culturally. These would include steps like removing the obstacles for Turkish Cypriot children of mixed marriages getting Cyprus citizenship; easing the crossings; improving the Green Line Regulation for the movement of persons, products and services across the divide; allowing Turkish Cypriots to be included in EU educational programmes such as Erasmus+; adding Turkish to the EU languages; and making it possible for Turkish Cypriots to open bank accounts and companies in the Republic. "The Republic of Cyprus is pushing Turkish Cypriots to seek solutions in Turkey – a country they call 'the invader'", Mavis continued. "They are pushing Turkish Cypriots to get Turkish passports to be able to travel, to open accounts in Turkish banks to be able to do business, or to go to Turkey to study, play sports, participate in competitions. This is racist and discriminatory. They are violating the rights of people, who are pro solution and would say yes in a referendum". Mavis said he shared these suggestions with Christodoulides when the president visited KTOS during his election campaign. "These steps would revive hopes for solution, expose the nationalists who say 'Greek Cypriots do not want us', build trust between the two communities, and reduce dependence on Turkey", he added.

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