



## 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. Have a pleasant read!

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142  
MARCH 24

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## HEADLINES

UNSG personal envoy, Maria Ángela Holguín Cuéllar returned to Cyprus for a second round of contacts following meetings with guarantor powers Greece and Turkey.

Construction works for the LNG terminal resumed after being halted for a month. The terminal is expected to be finished by the end of 2024. The EU grant remains uncertain unless certain requirements are met.

Amalthea maritime corridor from Cyprus began to provide aid to Gaza. More than 500 tonnes of aid were shipped from Larnaca Port to Gaza.

The Social Security figures showed that 45% of those in employment in the northern part of the island are foreigners.

The corruption and fake/invalid diploma scandal in the higher education sector in the north cost the president of the oversight body his job.





## FES CYPRUS NEWSLETTER

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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:

*Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and Maria Angeli (Researcher & Project Coordinator at the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies)*

**“Grab A Cypriot Coffee” with  
“Cracking the Glass Ceiling: A Closer Look at  
Gender (In)Equality in Cyprus’ Workforce”**

Date: Wednesday, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2024  
Online



EVENTS in MAY:

*Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Sertac Sonan, Esra Aydin and Christophoros Christophorou*

**Seminar - „Corruption in Cyprus“**

Date: Monday, 16<sup>th</sup> May 2024

Time: 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm (EEST / Cyprus time)

Location: Home4Cooperation

*Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung,*

*Omer Gokcekus and Sertac Sonan*

**„Launch: Corruption Perceptions  
in Northern Part of Cyprus“**

Date: Tuesday, 16<sup>th</sup> April 2024

Time: 10:30 am – 12:00 am (EEST / Cyprus time)

Location: Rustem Bookshop (Nicosia)

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## CYPRUS PROBLEM & INTERCOMMUNAL RELATIONS

On March 4, the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) commemorated its 60th anniversary. Speaking at an event at the Ledra Palace hotel, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) in Cyprus and Head of UNFICYP, Colin Stewart, said he sees a window of opportunity in the Cyprus problem. He pointed out the new closer relationship between Greece and Turkey, the fact that Greek Cypriot leader Nikos Christodoulides is “pushing actively for a new political process”, as well as the fact that “for the first time in seven years, we have a personal envoy”. For this reason, he said, “I believe that the Cyprus problem is still solvable. However, to get there we need political courage, a willingness to make difficult decisions, to criticise and to compromise.” Despite his optimism that the Cyprus problem remains solvable, he said, “it is becoming increasingly clear that time is running out as the space for a mutually acceptable solution narrows every year.... We do not know whether there will be another opportunity if this one fails. We cannot afford to wait and see what happens.”

Following February’s visits in Greece and Turkey, the United Nations Secretary-General’s (UNSG) personal envoy, Maria Ángela Holguín Cuéllar visited London from March 7 to March 8 to complete her meetings with representatives of the guarantor powers.

On March 10, Holguín returned to Cyprus for a new round of meetings with the respective Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders, Nicos Christodoulides and Ersin Tatar. During her second round

<sup>1</sup>The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) is only recognised by the Republic of Turkey. While for Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots, Ersin Tatar serves as President of the TRNC, the international community considers him the communal leader of the Turkish Cypriots. As the government of the Republic of Cyprus remains internationally

of contacts Holguín met twice with each leader. She also met with political parties from both sides, with the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KEVE) and the Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce (KTTO), with both Nicosia Mayors Constantinos Yiorkadjis and Mehmet Harmanci, and various civil society groups. Evaluating her second trip to the island, Holguín said she had “listened to points of view and perspectives to better understand the main difficulties and opportunities”. Holguín also stated that there are no timetables for her next steps after leaving Cyprus and that it is possible that she will visit some European capitals in April and may meet some European Union officials as well.

On March 11, the pro-reunification, Turkish Cypriot “This Country Is Ours” platform handed a letter to the UN Secretary-General’s Personal Envoy Maria Ángela Holguín expressing support for her efforts to find a common ground to restart talks. The letter stated that the majority on both sides of the divide desired a federal settlement based on UN parameters and that talks should resume from where they were left off at Crans Montana in 2017 as soon as possible. Members of the platform made up of political parties, trade unions and NGOs gathered at the Ledra Palace crossing point to greet the UN Secretary-General’s personal envoy as she crossed over to the north to meet with TRNC President Ersin Tatar.<sup>1</sup> Holguín, who stopped to greet those gathered, was handed a letter by the trade unionist Selma Eylem representing the platform.

On March 19, the Greek Cypriot cabinet proposed a bill to amend the allocation and management of Turkish Cypriot properties to modernise the state’s

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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handling of the matter. The new approach aims to make relevant procedures clearer, equal, meritocratic, and protective of refugee interests. The changes will place limits on the discretion of the guardian of Turkish Cypriot properties, a role filled by the Interior Minister. Lack of restriction in the past has reportedly resulted in abuse and exploitation. The Audit Office, meanwhile, called on the government to evict people found violating letting agreements for Turkish Cypriot properties on Larnaca's Mackenzie Beach.

During an official event on March 19, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan defended the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974 and argued that if Turkish forces had moved further south, then Cyprus would have been all Turkish. Erdoğan's statements were condemned by Government Spokesman Konstantinos Letymviotis and the Foreign Ministry.

On March 21, President Christodoulides met in Belgium with UNSG Antonio Guterres on the sidelines of the European Council summit. Christodoulides and Guterres discussed the Cyprus problem, the results of Holguín's second visit to the island, and the planned next steps. He also met with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and European Council President Charles Michel.

In a statement to the press on March 25, and commenting on his meeting with Guterres, Christodoulides said the UNSG had some thoughts that could pave the way for the resumption of Cyprus talks. The president stated that he had a very good meeting with the UNSG in Brussels and that the next period would give indications as to whether the goal of resuming peace talks is close. He said that the Greek Cypriot side supports Guterres' ideas and he is expecting the Turkish side's response.

Following an invitation by the UNSG, the Turkish Cypriot leader Tatar will be meeting Guterres in

New York on April 5. The invite came after Guterres met Christodoulides in Brussels on the sidelines of the European Council.

A total of 34 bicomunal business ventures have applied for this year's Stelios Foundation Bicomunal Business Awards. The businesses, all of which are fronted by one Turkish Cypriot and one Greek Cypriot, are competing for ten prizes worth a total value of €200k, which will be split among the ten winners. The awards ceremony is set to take place on April 18 at the Stelios Foundation's headquarters in Nicosia.

### HYDROCARBONS

On March 19, officials from the Natural Gas Public Company (DEFA) informed MPs in parliament that Cyprus must meet certain requirements to cash in on the full €101m grant allotted under the Connecting Europe Facility for the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) terminal in Vasiliko. The first requirement is that recognized expenditures for the terminal must have come to €253m by the end of 2023, and the second requirement is that the project must be completed and obtain the relevant certification by the end of 2024.

On March 25, Energy Minister George Papanastasiou stated that Cyprus aims to conclude construction works for the LNG terminal in Vasiliko by the end of 2024, as this would assist efforts to reduce electricity generation costs. Construction works for the LNG terminal were halted at the end of January 2024, with the Chinese-led consortium CPP METRON appealing to a court of arbitration. The consortium claimed €200m for incurring higher costs and that the project manager and natural gas infrastructure company ETYFA failed to carry out its contractual obligations. However, works resumed in March, following a meeting between Papanastasiou and CPP officials. According to Chinese ambassador Liu Yantao, the floating, storage and regasification unit

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(FSRU) was currently in Shanghai and more than 99% complete. The vessel would be formally delivered to Cyprus by April or May 2024. Regarding the infrastructures on land at Vasiliko, Liu said works there were 50% complete.

The Energy Ministry was expecting the Chevron-led consortium to provide an updated production plan for the Aphrodite gas field by March 31 on the basis of the agreed development plan submitted in 2019, which included a floating production facility.

### GREEK CYPRIOTS

#### Gender Developments

On March 8, speaking at an event for International Women's Day at the Presidential Palace, Christodoulides said his government has the highest percentage of women in the country's history, particularly in the composition of the cabinet which stands at 39%, and, in the administrative boards of semi-governmental organisations, the percentage reaches 40%. According to the president, within 12 months since assuming office, the government has proceeded with institutionalising the Office of the Commissioner for Gender Equality, thus enhancing the commissioner's role in coordinating the gender equality officers in all ministries and deputy ministries. The new role of the commissioner is expected to be approved by the parliament soon. Regarding actions promoted by the government, Christodoulides referred to a proposed bill that would increase maternity leave, extend parental leave, and strengthen paternity leave. Regarding the gender pay gap, Christodoulides said that the Labour Ministry would proceed with special incentive schemes for the employment of unemployed women. Regarding the issue of violence against women, he referred to the implementation of the National Strategy and Action Plan for the Prevention and Combating of Violence Against Women, which includes training 75

frontline healthcare workers dealing with cases of gender-based violence. The training is scheduled to be completed within the first half of 2024.

According to a study conducted by analysts at Claims.co.uk, Cyprus has been ranked at a lowly 37th place of EU countries in terms of women's career progression. The study, which leveraged gender gap data sourced from the World Economic Forum (WEF), gave Cyprus an index score of 26.94.

On the occasion of International Women's Day, March 8, PWC also released two studies, the Women in Work Index and Inclusion Matters, indicating that the global progress towards achieving gender equality in the workplace continues at a slow pace. According to the studies, it will take more than half a century to close the median pay gap between genders in the 33 countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD). Although, women constitute the majority of the workforce in Cyprus, they continue to be paid significantly less than men, according to the Statistical Service. More specifically, women accounted for 51.2% of the population in Cyprus in 2022, make up 60.9% of the workforce and, on average, their gross hourly earning are 10.2% lower than men.

#### Economic Developments in Times of Green Transition

On March 22, the Central Bank of Cyprus (CBC) slightly revised its forecast for the country's economic growth in 2024, estimating it to be at a rate of 2.8%. This adjustment, the CBC explained, marks a marginal increase from its December projection of 2.6%. The CBC has maintained its predictions for 2025 and 2026 at 3.1% and 3.2%, respectively.

On March 23, Commissioner for the Environment Antonia Theodosiou stated that Cyprus is working on actions and synergies aiming to create climate-neutral communities. The actions will begin with the

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communities of Tillyria, northeast of Paphos, and in the valley of Xeros and Diarizos rivers, also in the Paphos District. The aim of climate-neutral communities is to drastically reduce emissions and to convert them into UNESCO biosphere reserves. She also said that, following government authorisation, the Cyprus Energy Agency is collaborating with municipalities and is drafting a climate-neutrality strategy for all communities and areas under the control of the Republic.

On March 25, the European Commission released a [https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/publications/depth-review-2024-cyprus\\_ennoting](https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/publications/depth-review-2024-cyprus_ennoting) that Cyprus' economy is on a healthy trajectory, expecting both GDP to grow and inflation to decrease. However, it concluded that interconnections with economies both within and outside the EU pose significant geopolitical and trade tension risks, according to an overview of macroeconomic imbalances. The GDP growth rate moderated to 2.4% in 2023, down from 5.1 % in 2022. Economic growth is expected to rebound again in 2024 and 2025, reaching approximately 3%. The commission's report on Cyprus also noted that the country's fiscal position remains strong, with a significant surplus in 2023, which is expected to be maintained in 2024 and 2025. It added that risks to economic prospects are generally balanced. It highlighted that the Cypriot economy heavily depends on Greek and Italian products and services, while Greece and the United Kingdom are also major export partners.

On March 26, Christodoulides announced during a cabinet meeting that green taxation will begin by the end of 2024 and not on April 1, 2024. He also noted that the government is working on compensatory measures and incentives for consumers toward energy saving and other environmentally friendly habits. Under the Law on Carbon Tax on Energy Products, the government will impose a tax of 5 cents on motor fuel in 2024 and on polluting industries.

Cyprus' state budget deficit for 2023 increased by €80m, compared to the deficit recorded in 2022, according to the state's fiscal report submitted to the House of Representatives. Specifically, the final state budget deficit for 2023 amounted to €980m compared to €900m in 2022.

Agriculture Minister Maria Panayiotou stated on March 28 that Cyprus is particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. The minister added that rising temperatures, rising sea levels and shifting weather patterns pose serious threats to Cyprus' environment, economy and society. Panayiotou pointed out that the government has implemented a series of measures aimed at addressing climate change and improving resilience to its effects throughout society. "Strengthening scientific research, developing national adaptation strategies and raising public awareness are key priorities to improve climate conditions", Panayiotou noted.

On March 28, the electricity subsidy was extended until the end of June 2024 as part of the government's latest package of measures aimed at alleviating the cost-of-living crisis. It had been initially extended in February 2024 to cover electricity consumption until the end of April 2024. Other measures included the extension of the zero VAT on everyday household items until the end of June 2024.

### Domestic Developments

On March 21, dignitaries from 35 countries and representatives of various international organisations arrived in the island for a meeting over the Amalthea initiative aiming at providing aid to civilians in Gaza via a maritime corridor from Cyprus. Attendees included representatives from the G7 countries, the United Nations, the European Union and NGOs. As part of the initiative, more than 500 tonnes of aid were shipped from Larnaca Port to Gaza. Aid included shelf-stable and ready-to-eat food.

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On March 21, Nicosia Mayor Constantinos Yiorkadjis announced his candidacy for director of Nicosia District local government organisation. The newly created post is part of the local authority reform, which Yiorkadjis described as a huge challenge. Yiorkadjis has been Nicosia mayor for the past 12 years.

On March 2022, Former DISY Vice President and former government spokesman Marios Pelekanos joined nationalist ELAM and was included on the party list for June's European elections. Pelekanos argued that his incorporation into ELAM was based on his long-standing positions on issues of utmost importance for every Greek Cypriot, such as immigration, demographics and the promotion of economic policies for the benefit of vulnerable groups in the population. Pelekanos resigned in February 2024 as vice chairman of DISY, after failing to be selected as a candidate for the party for June's European Parliament elections. Pelekanos was slammed by DISY leader Annita Demetriou for defecting from the party.

Deputy Environmental Department Director Elena Stylianopoulou said on March 28 that controversial works regarding the building of a monastery in an environmentally sensitive area in Ayia Napa are being investigated and halted. The controversial project was carried out on land entirely within protected and sensitive zoned areas of the Natura 2000 Cape Greco network without permit. The latest revelation came after outcry over actions at another Ayia Napa site, Ammos tou Kambouri, where terraforming was done to create a beach for the villa of infamous fugitive Jho Low.

### Future of Work, Labour Relations & Trade Unions

According to data presented before the Parliamentary Committee on Labour, only 1,800 individuals aged 15 to 29 are registered at the Public Employ-

ment Services, out of approximately 23,000 recorded by the Statistical Service as being Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET). During that meeting, it was noted that the problem arises with the registration of unemployed individuals in fields of study that are not included in the registry of the Public Employment Services. It was also mentioned that Public Employment Services will begin to implement the European Skills, Competences and Occupations System by June 2024, which adopts 436 categories of occupations as classified by the International Standard Classification of Occupations and expands upon them, describing over 3000 professions and 13,000 skills. Trade unions supported that individual counselling and further guidance should be offered when job seekers register with the Public Employment Services so that their skills and qualifications can be matched with jobs. In the same vein, employers' representatives stressed the importance of linking the labour market with workers' qualifications, noting that businesses in Cyprus and abroad are facing serious workforce shortages.

On March 6, trade union Equality expressed again its dissatisfaction regarding the regulation for the accelerated promotion of low-paid public servants and indefinite-term employees. The trade union warned of taking drastic measures, starting with a two-hour work stoppage, if the Minister of Finance does not accept the request for a meeting by March 21. The trade union argued that the regulation neglects the previous service of employees who were upgraded from the A1-A2-A5(ii) scale to the A2-A5-A7(ii) scale in 2020 or 2022, and it completely overlooks employees serving in the A1-A2-A5(ii) scale, who are the lowest-paid workers.

According to trade unions the new evaluation system of public servants is "fraught with omissions and errors", resulting in serious disruption within the public sector due to employees' reactions. Trade unions claim that significant provisions provided by the

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law are being overlooked. For example, the law provides that evaluators should be trained, but trade unions argue that they have evidence that some evaluators' training was completed either after the process or they received no training at all. On March 11, trade unions requested that the new evaluation system not be implemented but only piloted for this year so that it would not be taken into account for promotions in 2024. During the Parliamentary Committee on Economics, trade unions claimed that due to a series of distortions and ambiguities in the current legislation, many people might proceed with appeals to the courts.

On March 7, trade unions unanimously decided to take strike action on Thursday, March 21, 2024, and to hold a protest on the same day at 11:00 outside the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Youth. According to the trade unions, the minister "avoided taking a clear position on the issue of continuing the employment of those already working in the programmes", and it stated that "she does not accept any dialogue with a timeline." Note that the previous strike on March 1 was cancelled following Minister of Education's intervention to invite the two unions for a meeting.

On March 11, a meeting between employer's organisation (Cyprus Hotel Association) and trade unions Pancyprian Labour Federation (PEO) and Confederation of Cyprus Workers (SEK) for the renewal of the collective agreement, which expired on December 31, resulted in an impasse. Trade unions demanded the restoration of wages, allowances, and contributions to solidarity funds, which were cut during the economic crisis of 2013. Additionally, they demanded salary increases of 5%, an increase in the gross contributions to the provident fund from the current 5% to 7%, an increase of 50% in the Sunday allowance, and most importantly the incorporation of the collective agreement into hotel regulations of the relevant law.

On March 13, the Cabinet approved two incentive schemes for the employment and training of unemployed individuals. As announced by the Minister of Labour, Yiannis Panagiotou, the schemes were approved as part of the government's policy to further activate the local workforce and achieve the goal of creating conditions for full employment.

On March 19, the Parliamentary Committee on Labour decided to revise the bill which allows self-employed workers to exercise the right to parental leave by including an inadvertently omitted provision that stipulates that the minimum period for the payment of the allowance is one week. The bill amends the "Law on Leaves (Paternity, Parental, Care, Domestic Violence) and Flexible Employment Arrangements for Work-Life Balance" to be in line with the provisions of the Social Security Amendment Act (No. 4) of 2023, which introduced self-employed individuals as beneficiaries of the parental leave entitlement. On March 15, social dialogue concerning the strategy for the employment of third country nationals continued, with an upgraded role of the Minister of Labour. None of the participants made statements or agreed to continue discussion as the trade unions submitted complaints about the systematic violations of the criteria governing the procedure to employ third country nationals.

On March 27, trade unions announced that their members at the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation (CyBC or RIK) will start one-hour work stoppages twice a day, starting on Friday, March 29, if the issue of delayed payment of March salaries is not resolved. The trade unions communicated their decision to the management and administration of CyBC following a letter from the personnel and administration director stating that CyBC's accounts are still frozen and that staff salaries may be affected.

On March 29, the first public consultation event for the new Integration Action Plan for Migrants took

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place. The plan consists of 50 actions and is divided into five main pillars: Health, Education, Employment, Housing and Skills. Concerning employment, the plan provides for the timely recording and upgrading of migrants' skills, supporting women and members of the LGBTQI+ migrants community to enter or re-enter the labour market, encouraging entrepreneurship, and providing accurate information on their labour and other rights. On April 3 and 13, more public consultation events will take place in Larnaca and Limassol, respectively.

## TURKISH CYPRIOTS

### Economic Developments in Times of Green Transition

According to the Statistical Institute, the consumer price index was 94.45% higher in March 2024 compared to March 2023. Consumer prices had risen by 6.9% in March alone; the inflation rate in the first three months of 2024 has already reached 16%. The monthly food inflation was 3.37%. The highest monthly inflation was in the "clothing and shoes" segment where an increase of 18.9% was recorded.

As in the previous few months, calls have been made for the way inflation is measured to be reviewed amid concerns that the figures do not accurately represent the real changes in the cost of living. The composition of the basket of goods and services used to calculate the cost of living, and the weight given to each item, continued to attract criticism (for more on this, please see also the Trade Unions section).

Based on data provided by the fourth quarterly bulletin of the Central Bank (for 2023), Standard, a news portal specialized on economy, reported that 84% of the deposits in banks are held in foreign currency, and only 16% are in Turkish Lira. The annual inflation rate in 2023 was 83.63%; sectors with the highest

annual price increase at the end of December 2023 were education with 116.63%, restaurants and hotels with 111.95%, communications with 111.93% and healthcare with 96.09%. It was stated that the lowest price increase as of the end of the year was in the food and non-alcoholic beverages sector with 64.35%. It was also reported that the number of people in employment (based on the social security registry figures), which was 119,568 before the Covid-19 outbreak, increased to 127,172 as of November 2022, and to 141,441 as of November 2023: 77,904 of these are TRNC citizens while 63,537 are work permit holders. In other words, 45% of those in employment are foreigners. Almost 60% of the work permit holders are from Turkey while the rest are from "third countries". The share of third country nationals which was only 3.6% in 2008, rose drastically in the last 15 years to reach 18.2% by 2023.

### Domestic Developments

The head of the institution that oversees higher education institutions (the Higher Education Planning, Evaluation, Accreditation, and Coordination Board (YODAK)), Turgay Avci, resigned following his arrest as part of a police investigation into a fake/invalid diploma and corruption scandal that has rocked the country in recent weeks. Avci and former YODAK vice president were accused of accepting bribes in exchange for expediting the official approval process for the university's medical faculty. President Tatar appointed Prof. Dr Aykut Hocanin, the former rector of the Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU), as the new chairperson. Hocanin himself had resigned as EMU rector just six months ago over criticism of his handling of the university's financial problems.

Faith in the TRNC's institutions should not be allowed to be eroded because of the "mistakes" of individuals, Prime Minister Ünal Üstel said in response to the ongoing fake diploma scandal. The country has been rocked in recent weeks by claims of corruption at the Cyprus Health and Social Sciences





University in Morphou (Güzelyurt), which issued degrees to people in senior positions in the public sector without attending the required lessons or completing the necessary coursework. Among those who have been arrested as part of the investigation into the scandal were a former minister, two senior civil servants, and the president and secretary general, as well as former vice-president of YODAK, the head of the Famagusta Police Department, and a lieutenant colonel. Üstel highlighted the deficiencies in supervision due to inadequate resources and technological infrastructure at YODAK. To address these shortcomings, Üstel announced efforts with government officials to swiftly implement necessary reforms, including a partnership with the Council of Higher Education (YOK) in Turkey following discussions with Turkish Vice President Cevdet Yılmaz. “With the YOK’s technical support, the necessary infrastructure will be established in the TRNC”, Üstel’s statement continued. “Approximately one month later, our universities will enter all diploma data from the last five years in a system with complete, searchable content. Gradually, diploma information going further back will be entered into the joint system.”

On March 5, speaking during a parliamentary debate on a bill that aims to strengthen the Immigration Department, Interior Minister Dursun Oğuz stated that so far this year 471 people have been deported, including 424 inmates. Oğuz expressed confidence that the bill would alleviate the department’s burdens through increased recruitment. Filiz Besim, a member of the main opposition Republican Turkish Party (CTP), emphasised the significance of bolstering the Immigration Department and pledged her full support for the bill. Besim highlighted the country’s demographic challenges and expressed frustration over the lack of access to robust statistical data concerning deportations. Independent MP and former Interior Minister Ayşegül Baybars cautioned against a simplistic solution and argued that a rise in illegal immigration could not be adequately

addressed through staffing alone. Baybars criticised the lack of clarity regarding the proposed regulations for combating irregular migration and human trafficking and raised concerns about the absence of data on foreign individuals under 18 and over 65, highlighting the necessity for accurate statistics enabled by a 2019 law passed when she was in office. She also claimed that the number of students from abroad at universities and student immigration figures “do not add up”.

According to Ulaş Barış, of news portal Kibris Postası, 53,216 Russians living in Cyprus participated in the Russian Presidential election held in March. In the TRNC, 10,383 voters cast their ballots, while, in the Republic of Cyprus, 42,833 people voted. This was the first time when Russian citizens living in the northern part of the island voted in a polling station in northern Nicosia. The turnout figure gives a rough idea about how many Russians are living in the northern part of the island.

#### Gender Developments

The proportion of women in work (36.1%) remains significantly lower than the rate of men employed (58.9%), according to figures released by the Statistical Institute to coincide with International Women’s Day. The unemployment rate currently stands at 4.8% for men and 5.8% for women, indicating that women face greater challenges in accessing employment opportunities and encounter more difficulty in securing jobs compared to men; the situation is even worse among the youth as unemployment figures are 12.9% and 17.5%, respectively. The figures also showed that 89.3% of women who are in employment are employees, 9.3% are self-employed or employers, and 1.4% work as unpaid family workers. “According to the 2022 data of the Personnel Department, 65% of the top level managers are men and 35% are women, which reveals that women face some difficulties in rising to managerial positions even though they have the necessary qualifications”,





the report said. Although the number of female deputies in parliament has reached its highest ever with 11 (out of 50), the representation of women in ministerial roles stands at zero; none of the 11 members of the current Council of Ministers is a woman. "Although there has been an increase in women's participation in politics in the TRNC compared to previous periods, this rate is far from the desired equal representation and is far below the world average", the report said. It is also clearly seen in the number of municipal council memberships that women do not play a major role in politics: Only 25.5% of the current members of city councils are women.

Women constitute 46% of the TRNC's population, while men comprise 54%; it is pointed out in the report that, unlike in the TRNC, the female population is higher than the male population in most EU member states according to Eurostat data. The life expectancy at birth is 79.4 years for men and 83.2 years for women (2022); both figures are above the EU average where it is 77.3 and 82.8 respectively. There also is a discernible trend showing a gradual increase in the average age of marriage for women, rising from 30 in 2018 to 32 in 2022. A total of 906 crimes against women were recorded in 2023. While physical violence ranked first with more than 50%, this is followed by threat of violence with 5.4%, provocative calls/messages on the phone with 5.3%.

#### Future of Work, Labour Relations & Trade Unions

On March 25, the bill, which envisages the adjustment of the cost of living allowance (COLA) three times a year (rather than every six months as it was so far) for public sector employees and pensioners for the year 2024, was unanimously approved in the Parliament.

Ahmet Serdaroglu, head of the trade union federation representing minimum wage earners (Hür-İş), criticised the government for failing to deliver on its

promise to automatically adjust COLA for minimum wage. "At a time of such a high inflation, the Parliament decided to reflect the cost of living in public sector salaries every four months, but they forgot the minimum wage [earners]. Although the Ministry of Labour promised this when determining the first minimum wage of the year, the necessary legal arrangement has not been made", Serdaroglu said, and he condemned this as unfair and discriminatory.

The breadline for a family of four to maintain a healthy diet stands at TL22,622 (€646) [while the minimum wage is TL24,000 (€ 685)], according to the latest calculation by the Cyprus Turkish Civil Servants Union (KTAMS). The head of the union, Güven Bengihan, expressed disappointment that despite repeated requests from KTAMS, the basket of everyday goods and services used for calculating inflation has not been updated since 2015. "The responsibility for the cost-of-living allowance, crucial for preserving the purchasing power of workers and retirees, now seems to have lost its significance due to the lack of action from both the Statistics Institute and the government", he said. "In order to curb arbitrary price increases and alleviate the burden on citizens, we urgently demand the updating of the basket, accompanied by effective inspections as promised by the Prime Minister", Bengihan added.

On March 4, the Air Traffic Controllers Union (HTKS) initiated a strike at Ercan (Tymbou) Airport over safety concerns. Following the strike's commencement, the Council of Ministers swiftly intervened, using legal powers to postpone it for 60 days citing the potential disruption to essential services and "national security concerns". Operations at Ercan Airport then resumed. The head of the union, Cem Kapisiz accused the government of neglecting aviation safety, and prioritizing financial gains over public safety since the airport was privatised. He argued that the government's handling of contracts and financial responsibilities had compromised safe-





ty standards and undermined the TRNC authorities. Kapisız claimed that the new terminal building had been put into operation in July last year “even though it was not ready” for “the sake of political ambitions”. Public Works and Transport Minister Erhan Arıklı called the strike “meaningless and unnecessary”, emphasising the need for collaborative action to address any deficiencies at the airport.







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