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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 MAY:

Hubert Faustmann (Director FES Cyprus) and Hrishabh Sandilya (Project Phoenix) joined by Etinosa Erevbena-gie and Cynthia Savvides (Generation for Change)

Migration 2.0 Podcast - Episode 3: Winter Chaos at Pournara and in Nicosia, Boat Pushbacks and the Council of Europe Reprimands Cyprus
(In English)

Hubert Faustmann and Sertac Sonan
Austerity Policies in North Cyprus
(In English)



PODCASTS in JUNE:

Holly McCamant and Hrishabh Sandilya (Project Phoenix) joined by Zivka Deleva (Director of an Asylum and Reception Centre in Berlin), Elizabeth Kassinis (Caritas) and Qais Hatefi (Afghani refugee and university student in Germany)

Migration 2.0 Podcast - Episode 4: Refugee and Migrant Integration in Cyprus and Germany - Comparisons and Lessons
(In English)

PUBLICATIONS in MAY:

No publications in May



PUBLICATIONS in JUNE:

Kyriaki Chatzipanagiotou, Samuel Akoni, 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 MAY:

No events planned



EVENTS in JUNE:

No events planned so far

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CYPRUS PROBLEM

The informal five plus one summit on the Cyprus problem between the island's two communities and the foreign ministers of the guarantors Greece, the UK and Turkey, took place in Geneva between April 27 - 29. The purpose of the summit, coordinated and led by the UN, was to find a common ground that would allow substantive negotiations on the Cyprus problem to resume.

UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, announced at the end of the conference that there was not enough common ground for Cyprus negotiations to resume. In his remarks, Guterres stated that he will not give up and announced another meeting soon with the objective to move in the direction of reaching common ground within the UN framework of a bizonal, bicomunal federation. Guterres said there would be consultations before the next meeting, as there were before the Geneva meeting, with the aim of creating the conditions to allow for the next summit to be successful. A special envoy might be appointed to carry out these consultations but there was no information if Jane Holl Lute will hold this role. Answering to a question on how he could square the circle, given the sides' divergent views the UN Secretary noted: "To square the circle is an impossibility in geometry but it is very common in politics." A glimmer of hope has been kept alive in view of June's European summit that will take decisions on a range of issues regarding EU-Turkey relations.

The summit kicked off on April 27 with Guterres hearing the positions of the two leaders. He first met with Turkish Cypriot leader, Ersin Tatar, and then with the Greek Cypriot leader, Nicos Anastasiades. As expected, the Turkish Cypriot side, with Ankara's

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

support, stuck to its position on a two states solution and sovereign equality, while the Greek Cypriot side demanded adherence to a federal settlement with political equality, as was stipulated in UN resolutions. Tatar had reportedly been informed by Guterres during their meeting that a two-state solution was outside the UN framework.

During the second day of the summit on April 28, the two leaders submitted their proposals during the plenary session. Tatar submitted a six-point document calling for the adoption by the UN Security Council of a resolution recognising the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus¹ as an independent state. After this was achieved Tatar's proposal explained, the two states would then negotiate their future relationship and for an agreement on property, security and border adjustment, as well as relations with the EU. Tatar reportedly explained that negotiations will be supported by Turkey, Greece, and the UK and when appropriate, the EU as an observer. He also suggested the continuation of the system of guarantees arguing that the two states will mutually recognise each other, and the three guarantors will support this. Tatar also suggested that any agreement reached during these negotiations will be submitted for approval in separate referenda in the two states. Anastasiades, on the other hand, confirmed the Greek Cypriot side's proposals as submitted in Crans-Montana in 2017. Anastasiadis also suggested examining a model of a "decentralized" federation in which the constituent states would have increased responsibilities for their own house, but would not have sovereignty, as this would lead to a confederation.

Assessing the outcome of the summit, Anastasiades expressed his satisfaction with the way Guterres

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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handled the demands of the Turkish side for a two-state solution. Turkish Cypriot spokesperson, Berna Dogruyol, highlighted that this is the first time the Turkish Cypriots submitted a realistic and constructive proposal to break the status quo.

On April 24, Cyprus, an initiative supporting the reunification of Cyprus, addressed a letter to President Anastasiades in light of the upcoming informal five-party summit in Geneva. The purpose of the letter was to express support for a solution that will reunite Cyprus in accordance with Security Council resolutions and the Greek Cypriot side's officially declared positions. The letter called on Anastasiades to do "whatever is necessary" to ensure the positive development of the talks, so that an agreement is reached to transform the Republic of Cyprus into a bizonal, bicomunal federation (BBF) "with political and effective participation of the two communities". The organisers of the initiative, a group of five individuals, launched a petition earlier this month in support of the reunification of Cyprus, which was co-signed by 150 well-known Cypriots, from different social and political backgrounds. The petition has collected 6,000 online signatures since it launched.

On April 21, more than 100 organisations from both sides of the divide and abroad, called for Cyprus' reunification as a BBF with political equality. A total of 113 groups, parties, and trade unions stated they support a bicomunal march, scheduled to take place on both sides of the divide in Nicosia, as a means of responding to the negative political climate ahead of the informal summit in Geneva. In a joint declaration, signed by main opposition parties in the south and north, AKEL and the Republican Turkish Party (CTP) respectively, the group demanded the immediate opening of all crossing points, the strengthening of cooperation in all fields such as trade and employment all over the country and on the UN Secretary-General to take practical steps to implement the UN Security Council resolutions on Famagusta, including the proposal for a bi-communal technical committee of experts and representa-

tives to plan and develop the closed areas of Famagusta.

On April 12, the European Commission officially registered halloumi as a protected designation of origin (PDO) so that only halloumi produced in Cyprus according to the product specification can use the registered name. The move to protect the name against imitation and misuse across the EU is expected to bring clear economic benefits to the island and will help bolster trust between the two communities. For producers in the Turkish Cypriot community to benefit, the commission also adopted a measure allowing the PDO product to cross the Green Line, provided that the cheese and milk from which it was made has met all EU animal and public health standards.

On April 12, Tatar's spokesperson Berna Celik Dogruyol announced that an agreement has been reached between the sides to launch work for the reopening of the crossing points should the epidemiological conditions allow. In a written statement, Dogruyol said that Tatar's Special Representative Ergun Olgun had conveyed the Turkish Cypriot side's proposal to normalise crossings to the Greek Cypriot negotiator Andreas Mavroyannis at a meeting held on March 19 with the participation of the UN Special Representative and Chief of Mission Elizabeth Spehar. An agreement was reached to instruct the Bicomunal Technical Committee on Health to establish a roadmap aimed at harmonising COVID-19 rules on both sides in a timely manner.

The Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus (CMP) reported its activities in 2021 with a press release. In April, the CMP exhumed additional human remains at an excavation site in Bellapais / Balabayis, which increased the estimated number of persons recovered at this location to three and the total number of persons exhumed in 2021 across the island to six. Excavations continue throughout Cyprus at seven sites. Since January 2021, the CMP has identified 12 missing persons despite Covid-19 related restrictions. The CMP said that Covid-19 related access re-

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strictions, which had been in place for one year, were lifted at ten military sites in the north. The committee is preparing to conduct excavations at these locations shortly.

HYDROCARBONS

There were no significant developments in April.

GREEK CYPRIOTS

Economic Developments

According to a report by the Public Debt Management Office released on April 16, Cyprus has seen its public debt increase sharply in 2020, and even more in 2021. The public debt reached €24.8bn, or 118% of GDP in 2020. Currently, it is at €26bn, or 124% of GDP, pushed by increased government borrowing to support the economy amid the crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

Hellenic Bank posted its financial results for the fiscal year of 2020, exhibiting a solid foundation for the year to come, despite reduced profit and total net income due to the Covid-19 pandemic and its effects on the broader economy. The bank posted a total net income of €391.3m, reflecting a 3% drop year-on-year, as well as profit after tax of €50.5m, a 53% drop from the previous fiscal year. Both of these figures reflect the effect of the pandemic, as well as the limitations imposed on the economy as part of the response from the government in its aim to limit any dire consequences to public health.

On April 20, Bank of Cyprus announced that it has successfully launched and priced an issue of €300m unsecured and subordinated Tier 2 Capital Notes under its Euro Medium-Term Note (EMTN) Programme, the maximum amount possible under the rules for this kind of issuance. The bond issue was four times oversubscribed, attracting interest from more than 140 institutional investors, with the final pricing 37.5 basis points tighter than the initial pricing

indicating which accounted for a significant cost reduction of several million for the bank. A number of major institutional investors participated in the offering for the first time, and the total bidding reached €1.15bn. The investors participated in the offering were large funds with a long-term horizon, which do not engage in rapid “resale” for profit. These are blue-chip funds that engage for a substantial period of time.

Speaking at the 11th Nicosia Economic Congress, the governor of the Central Bank of Cyprus Constantinos Hereditou, warned on April 22 of an impending increase in non-performing loans in the near future. According to Hereditou, the Covid-19 pandemic has seriously affected certain sectors in the island’s economy.

On April 22, the cabinet approved a €165m scheme aimed at helping vulnerable people who took out housing loans under various state plans and were having difficulty repaying them. Dubbed, Ikia (home), the scheme is part of government efforts to protect primary residences and is almost entirely addressed to vulnerable households either with very low income or without any immovable property.

Domestic Developments

In April, the epidemiological profile of the country deteriorated as the COVID-19 cases increased from 45,864 to 65,909. The number of deaths attributed to the virus rose from 256 to 312. On April 27, the labour ministry announced the latest relief schemes available for businesses, employees and self-employed persons as a result of a two-week lockdown running from April 26 to May 9 in a bid to curtail the rapid spread of COVID-19 infections. Meanwhile the vaccinations program has picked up pace, with approximately 30% of the population receiving the first dose.

The health ministry has upgraded the UK and Israel in the country rankings relating to their epidemiological situation. Israel was upgraded from Orange to Green and the UK from Red to Orange. Travel-

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lers from countries in the Orange category require a negative PCR test certificate not older than 72 hours prior to departure. Green category travellers have no restrictions. Tourism Minister Savvas Perdios, announced that from May 10 onwards, Cyprus would accept tourists that are fully vaccinated against the virus from 65 countries, without restrictions. After intense negotiations for several days in Moscow, Russia agreed to restart regular flights to Cyprus on May 1.

According to data from the Cyprus statistical service (Cystat), Cyprus tourist arrivals saw an annual 93% drop in January to March.

On April 5, former Interior Minister, Socratis Hasikos, passed away at the age of 64 after a long battle with cancer. He had previously served as Minister of Defence under the Glafkos Clerides administration from 1999 to 2003 and vice president of DISY.

On April 26, former leader of EDEK and a central figure in Cyprus politics, Vassos Lyssarides died at the age of 100. Lyssarides, had formed a strong alliance with Archbishop Makarios while an armed group that he commanded fought against Turkish Cypriots and Turkish officers in Pentadaktylos during the intercommunal troubles in 1963-1964, and against EOKA B from 1971-1974. He survived an assassination attempt in 1974, in which EDEK youth leader Doros Loizou was killed.

On April 27, interim findings of an investigation into the citizenship-by-investment scheme were released. The report found that more than half of the citizenships granted were unlawful and recorded a litany of irregularities and outright unlawful practices in the granting of Cypriot passports down the years. According to the report, from 2007 through to August 17, 2020, a total of 6,779 citizenships were granted to foreign investors and family members, as well as to managers of companies investing in Cyprus. Of these, 48% related to investors/businesspeople, 34% to spouses, and 18% to the applicants' adult offspring and other relatives. The majority of

passports approximately 52% or about 3,000, related to family members. Under the applicable law, applicants' family members were, strictly speaking, not eligible for Cypriot citizenship.

On April 28, the former president of parliament, Demetris Syllouris, and a former AKEL MP, Christakis Giovanis, refused to answer any questions put to them by the panel investigating Cyprus' controversial citizenship by investment programme, citing advice from their counsels to exercise the right of silence over their involvement. Syllouris and Giovanis were forced to resign last year after Al Jazeera aired an undercover video of them offering help to a fictitious Chinese businessman with a criminal record to secure citizenship. Both men read statements before the inquiry, saying the video had been recorded illegally and had been edited by the broadcaster, to make them look guilty.

Labour Relations and Trade Union

On April 5, the Trade Unions sent a letter to the Director General of the Ministry of Education reiterating their request for a meeting aimed at the immediate resolution of the issue concerning the employment status of teachers in the afternoon and evening educational programs of the Ministry of Education and Culture. They are currently employed as service providers rather than as employees of the Ministry. The Organizations warn that in case a meeting is not scheduled immediately to discuss the issue, they will be forced to proceed in the coming days with drastic measures.

On April 7, a nationwide work stoppage of employees who are paid by the hour took place in public hospitals. According to the unions, the employees reacted to the insistence of OKYPY (State Health Services Organization) not to pay a provident fund to those employees even though they have completed 52 weeks of continuous service. Also, the organization does not proceed with the staffing of public hospitals with more staff where needed. During a meeting between the leadership of the Trade

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Unions and representatives of OKYPY, assurances were made to the employees' representatives that the payment of the provident fund and a substantial dialogue in order to resolve all the issues that have been pending for a long time will commence shortly. The labour disputes for the renewal of the Collective Agreement of Port Workers and Sailors, as well as of employees of the DP WORLD LIMASSOL company are currently examined by the Department of Labour Relations. The Port Workers 'and Sailors' Contract expired on December 31, 2020 and direct negotiations for its renewal ended in a stalemate due to the intransigence of the employers.

A protest was held on April 17 by the Initiative for the abolition of the 12% penalty in the pensions of those who retire at the age of 63. The organization considers the measure of the so-called actuarial reduction by 12% unfair, as it has a negative impact in the amount of the pension that is entitled to every insured person who meets the conditions set by law and has chosen or will choose to retire at the age of 63. This measure is considered anti-democratic and it was imposed by the Troika, in the period of the banking crisis of 2013. It is emphasized that the latest study has shown that the Social Insurance Fund is robust and long-term viable. The Initiative states that "The conditions created by the pandemic [...], the inability of many workers to return to work after a prolonged period of inactivity of entire economic sectors, delays in the employment of young people and continuous breaks in working life, the closure of many small and medium-sized enterprises and the problems that have accumulated for many self-employed professionals, are factors that support with even greater intensity the demand of society for the abolition of the leveling and unfair penalty of 12% in pensions and the restoration of the right to full pensions at the age of 63."

TURKISH CYPRIOTS

Economic Developments

According to the Tourism Planning Department, the number of tourist arrivals have dropped by 92% when the first quarter of 2021 is compared with the same period in 2020; 285,073 people arrived in the country in the period from January 2020 to March 2020 but for the same period in 2021, only 22,275 tourists visited the TRNC. Furthermore, while the number of arrivals in 2019 was 1,749,979, the arrivals in 2020 decreased by 77.8% to 388,837. The average occupancy rate in touristic facilities in 2020 was only 16.9% while it was recorded as 50.4% in 2019.

In 2020, the TRNC's imports also decreased by 23.1% compared to 2019, from US\$ 1,588 million to 1,221 million. 59.9% of total imports in 2020 were from Turkey, 16.9% from the European Union countries, 12% from the Far East countries, and 4.7% from the Middle East countries.

Relations with Turkey

On April 15, the Turkish Cypriot Constitutional Court ruled that Quran lessons organised by the Department of Religious Affairs (affiliated with Evkaf Administration) at mosques were unconstitutional, scrapping previous legislation which gave authority to the Department to organise such courses. The head of the Turkish Cypriot Bar Association Hasan Esendagli welcomed the court's decision and described it as a turning point. He pointed out that it was the first time the Constitutional Court examined whether a law was in line with the country's secular constitution. Esendagli said that the law was problematic in the first place as it granted limitless powers to the Department which is comprised of a group of religious figures. The Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (along with other Turkish officials including his VP) criticized the decision, saying,

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'it is impossible for us to accept this. The head of the Constitutional Court should learn secularism.' Making a call to the head of the Constitutional Court to correct the mistake, Erdogan noted, 'North Cyprus is not France. They have to adopt the practices in Turkey. ... otherwise, the steps we will take will be different.'

On April 19, Turkish Cypriot lawyers staged a demonstration to protest Erdogan's remarks. Speaking at the protest, Hasan Esendagli, President of the Turkish Cypriot Bar Association, said the Turkish officials, including the Turkish President himself, had either spoken without knowing the details of the verdict or had deliberately distorted the facts. 'Provocative statements are intended to incite enmity and a culture of lynching,' Esendagli said, highlighting the importance of a unified struggle to protect the country's justice system. He also stressed that an independent judiciary is vital for the rule of law, noting that the judiciary's responsibility is to ensure legal equality. 'It is also vital for the courts to make decisions without being pressured or force to act under the influence of any political authority,' Esendagli said, adding that the targeting of a country's judiciary by the ruling elite of another country was not acceptable. He also slammed the government for not defending the independence of the country's judiciary. The Chief Justice, Narin Ferdi Sefik and several other Supreme Court judges supported the protest, saluting the lawyers from the court building. On April 1, the premiere of the 'Once Upon a Time Cyprus,' a TV series produced by the Turkish public broadcaster TRT was held in Famagusta. The event was attended by the Turkish Vice President, Fuat Oktay as well as Tatar and members of the Turkish Cypriot government. Oktay said that the series, which covers the period between 1963 and 1974, is important as it shows where the Turkish Cypriot people came from and what they have lived through. "At a time when the 5 + UN talks are going to take place the series is a good reminder of what the people have gone through. By seeing what the EOKA,

Enosis and Akritas plan are our children and the youth will once again understand what the Turkish Cypriot people had gone through, the deaths and persecutions just to come to where they are today" said Oktay. Elsewhere, Oktay said that the main purpose of his visit to the TRNC was to attend the premiere but that he would be following up on the progress in the projects being carried out by Turkey. As part of this, Oktay inspected a site in Acheritou (Guvercinlik) village, where an industrial zone was planned to be built in accordance with the financial and economic cooperation agreement signed between Turkey and the TRNC in 2021. Oktay said that the new industrial zone will be the most modern in the country and that efforts to remove 'bureaucratic obstacles' were underway in the TRNC parliament. The Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu met face-to-face with Ersin Tatar in Nicosia for final consultations before the informal five-plus-one meeting in Geneva.

The Minister of Agriculture and Natural Resources Nazim Cavusoglu visited Ankara where he met his Turkish counterpart Bekir Pakdemirli and Fuat Oktay.

The Minister of Finance Dursun Oguz visited Ankara where he met the Turkish Minister of Treasury and Finance Lutfi Elvan, Minister of Trade Ruhsar Pekcan, the Governor of the Central Bank of Turkey Sahap Kavcioglu and Fuat Oktay.

Domestic Developments

On April 20, a new shipment of 40,000 doses of the Sinovac COVID-19 vaccine have been delivered to the northern part of the island by Turkey.

The party assembly of the senior coalition partner National Unity Party (UBP) has elected Oguzhan Hasipoglu (MP, Famagusta) as its new secretary general. Hasipoglu received 65 votes, while his opponent Ozdemir Berova (MP, Kyrenia) received 45 votes. The post was vacated when Ersan Saner was elected as the party chairman without a contest.

On April 13, the former Minister of Labour, Serife

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Unverdi, and her then private secretary Aytac Caluda (MP, Lefka) whose immunity against prosecution was lifted by Parliament in 2018, were indicted for 'misconduct in public office' and 'acting contrary to the Work Permit Law and its regulations'. The defendants denied the allegations. The court imposed a travel ban on both defendants pending outcome of their trial 'in order to prevent them from fleeing the country'.

On April 11, the junior coalition partner Rebirth Party (YDP) leader Erhan Arikli (MP, Famagusta) got re-elected at his party's ordinary congress beating his rival Bertan Zaroglu (MP, Nicosia) with a narrow margin of 2179 to 1891 votes. The run up to the congress which witnessed heated exchanges of insults and accusations between the two showed no sign of abating as a bitter Zaroglu refused to congratulate Arikli over his victory.

Labour Relations and Trade Unions

On April 8, six trade unions (KTAMS, Kamu-Sen, Kamu-Is, Vergi-Sen, Guc-Sen, Nurses and Midwives Union) held a one-day general strike and staged a protest outside the parliament. The unions went on strike over the government's decision to freeze the cost-of-living allowance (COLA) for four months; enacted through a decree, for the period of March 1 to June 30. Hundreds of public sector employees marched to the parliament to protest, and called for a reversal of the decision and for the government to resign over its mishandling of the economy during the pandemic. The strike led to the cancellation of the parliament's plenary session because most of the supporting staff participated in the strike. Protesters, who unfurled banners reading 'No to impoverishment' said they would not allow their legal rights to be taken from them. Guven Bengihan, head of KTAMS (Turkish Cypriot Public Servants' Union) said: 'This is only the beginning' adding the unions will continue with their struggle while Kamu-Sen head, Metin Atan, said: 'the decision to freeze COLA payment is a breaking point and that this govern-

ment has no choice but to go'. Earlier in the week, on April 5, a six-hour strike was staged at Ercan (Tymbou) airport over the same reason, which led to delays of three flights. A joint statement read out by the leaders of three trade unions organized in Ercan - KTAMS, Kamu-Sen and Kamu-Is, said that the 'officials running the country should have discussed with us and corrected mistakes made regarding the COLA'. Kamu-Is leader, Ahmet Serdaroglu, pointed out that the government has not taken any measures about the rise in living expenses and added that the COLA should not be considered a rise in salary but rather a mechanism which helps wage earners keep up with rising prices.

As part of ongoing protests against the government's decision to suspend COLA, on April 12, six trades unions had announced an indefinite strike at Ercan (Tymbou) airport due to start on April 13, but the Council of Ministers invoked its legal power to postpone the strike for 60 days with immediate effect.

On April 28, the acting chairperson of Hur-Is Federation, Ahmet Serdaroglu, made a written statement on behalf of the eight trade unions affiliated with his federation and argued that the amendment proposed by the government in Article 30 of the Labor Law would take away the collective bargaining right of the employees and pose a great danger to union life. Serdaroglu said, 'we will never accept this law that wants to take away the collective bargaining right of our employees. They want to establish a modern slavery system. We think that all unions should start a joint struggle against the proposed amendment'. According to the legislation in force until a new collective agreement is struck, the existing one is valid; if the proposed amendment is adopted, if a new collective agreement is not signed in one year the existing one will be abolished. The bill also limits the negotiation process to one month.

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