



## 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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131  
APRIL 23





## FES CYPRUS NEWSLETTER

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### PODCASTS in MAY:

*No podcasts in May*



### PODCASTS in JUNE:

*No podcasts in June*

### PUBLICATIONS in MAY:

*Omer Gokcekus and Sertac Sonan*

**"Corruption Perceptions in North Cyprus  
2022 Report"**  
(In English)



### PUBLICATIONS in JUNE:

*No publications in June*

Compilation Volume

#### **Conflict resolution in the Mediterranean: Energy as a Potential Game-Changer**

*Editors: Ahmet Sözen, Nimrod Goren, Camille Limon*

*Authors: Intissar Fakir, Michael Harari, Ahmet Sözen,  
Hesham Youssef*

Diplomeds - The Council for Mediterranean Diplo-  
macy & Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Project on Peace  
and Security in the MENA Region

### EVENTS in MAY:

*Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Cyprus*

**Launch: Corruption Perceptions Report for  
North Cyprus - Report 2022**  
(in English)

Date: Thursday, 18<sup>th</sup> of May 2023

Time: 7:00 p.m., Nicosia

Location: Home for Cooperation, Nicosia



### EVENTS in JUNE:

*Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Cyprus*

**Right Wing Populism in Europe and Cyprus**  
(in English)

Date: Thursday, 1<sup>st</sup> of June 2023

Time: 6:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

Location: University of Nicosia, Nicosia

Please RSVP by 31st of May 2023 by emailing  
Elisabeth.vonBach@fes.de





## FES CYPRUS NEWSLETTER

### CYPRUS PROBLEM

On April 2, the Turkish Foreign Ministry issued a written statement condemning the signing of an agreement between the National Guard of the State of New Jersey and the Ministry of Defence of the "Greek Cypriot Administration" (GCA), i.e., the Republic of Cyprus. "The US disrupted the balance on the island of Cyprus to the detriment of the Turkish Cypriots in 2022 by lifting the arms embargo on the GCA. These last steps are also encouraging the Greek Cypriot side's armament", the Ministry noted. "We call on the US to reconsider this policy, which in no way serves the stability of the region, and to contribute to a just, lasting and sustainable settlement of the Cyprus issue", it added. Later in the month, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC)<sup>1</sup> and Turkey "strongly condemn[ed] the docking of the USS San Juan attack submarine at a Greek Cypriot seaport".

"We repeatedly state that the removal of the arms sales restrictions imposed by the US on the Greek Cypriot administration and subsequent Cypriot administration to take up arms", the written statement of the TRNC MFA said.

In an interview with Politico published on April 22, President Nikos Christodoulides stated that Turkey may revive negotiations on the Cyprus problem after the Turkish Presidential elections in May 2023. He argued that following the devastating earthquakes, Turkey was taking steps favouring rapprochement with the West and other countries in the region and expressed his hope that this would allow for better diplomacy over Cyprus.

<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

On April 24, Christodoulides met with the heads of the bicomunal technical committees. Following the meeting, Greek Cypriot negotiator Menelaos Menelaou stated that the opening of more check-points could be discussed in order to create new momentum on the Cyprus negotiations.

According to an article in Yeni Duzen, dated April 26, the total number of applications to the immovable property commission (IPC) reached 7,248 as of April 2023. To date compensation of £382,541,826 (€440,994,217) has been awarded for 1,233 claims. Among the total applications, 1,449 resulted in an out of court agreement and 34 were sent to trial in the TRNC. The IPC was set up in 2006 by Turkey in the TRNC as a domestic remedy for claims of Greek Cypriots and others who owned properties in the northern part of the island prior to the forceful division of the island in 1974. It examines claims for restitution, compensation and exchange of property.

On April 27, the House of Parliament rejected the president's veto of a law passed in late March which requires structural integrity checks on Turkish Cypriot properties in the south. The law mandates the Custodian of Turkish Cypriot Properties, of the Interior Ministry, to verify that Turkish Cypriot properties are certified for structural integrity before being leased to eligible persons. On April 13, Christodoulides sent the law back, informing parliament he would not sign it as it was unconstitutional. The president had argued that the structural integrity checks would increase the state budget. The issue emerged after it became apparent that the Custodian was leasing out Turkish Cypriot properties in an advanced state of disrepair.

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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### BICOMMUNAL RELATIONS

It has been 20 years since April 23, 2003, when the crossing points were opened between the two sides of the island. In these two decades, almost 141 million crossings have been made through the checkpoints. According to the data provided by the Turkish Cypriot police, the number of crossings varied between 4–6 million in the first years and gradually increased to 13 million in 2019, just before the pandemic. The total number of entries and exits, which had decreased to 3–4 million in the 2020-2021 period due to Covid-19 restrictions, once again climbed to 13 million in 2022. On April 23, the bicommunal peace initiative, United Cyprus, called for new crossing points to open between the two sides at the Famagusta and Paphos gates in Nicosia, the Athienou / Kiracıkoy – Louroudjina/ Akıncılar area, as well as Kokkina / Erenkoy.

According to the latest Crisis Group report on Cyprus, issued on April 17, Greek and Turkish Cypriots have become more estranged since the collapse of the talks in 2017 in Crans Montana. The report identified seven key issues, including geopolitics and militarisation, a widening split over sovereignty, Ankara's increasingly assertive role in the TRNC, Varosha, challenges facing the technical committees and distrust from the grassroots. Tension over hydrocarbons was also raised as a major concern. The report concluded that since a comprehensive deal seems to be out of reach for now, the parties could adopt a conciliatory stance and pursue transactional cooperation for their mutual benefit, such as collaborating to facilitate trade and travel, and jointly taking incremental steps.

Trade unions across the Green Line – PEO federation from the south; Dev-Is federation, KTAMS, KTOS, KTOEOS, BES, Koop-Sen and DAU-Sen from the north – held a press conference at the Home for Cooperation in the buffer zone to announce that May Day will be celebrated with a bi-communal

event to be held in the buffer zone under the slogan “Solidarity-Reunification-Social Justice”. The joint statement was read out by the secretary generals of Dev-Is and PEO. The joint statement drew attention to the fact that the rise in the cost of living and the constant increase in the prices of basic necessities had worsened the living conditions of workers. The joint statement also said that the trade unions would continue to fight for peace and the reunification of the island. It also stated, “Negotiations for a solution on the Cyprus problem should be resumed as soon as possible from where they left off in Crans Montana”, and “The ongoing stagnation, absence of dialogue and new fait accompli are leading our country towards final partition. We call on the two leaders ... to restart the negotiation process”.

### HYDROCARBONS

On April 7, Energy Minister George Papanastasiou stated that the completion date for the construction of a jetty to facilitate a floating liquified natural gas (LNG) storage and regasification unit (FSRU) at Vasiliko is likely to be pushed back once again to the end of 2023 or the beginning of 2024. During a meeting with representatives of CHINA PETROLEUM PIPELINE ENGINEERING CO LTD., which, among other companies, won the contract for the infrastructure works at the terminal, Papanastasiou noted that, contrary to predictions putting the percentage of completed works by October at 90%, the real figure is likely to be only 40% complete.

On April 13, Papanastasiou floated the idea of importing natural gas quantities from reservoirs in Cyprus' exclusive economic zone to be used for power generation, coupled with exports of LNG via a small LNG modular plant on the island.

On April 26, Papanastasiou stated that US-based oil company CHEVRON will shortly begin drilling in

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the Aphrodite gas field in Block 12 of Cyprus' exclusive economic zone (EEZ) to confirm further deposit quantities. The minister noted that for this purpose a floating drilling rig had been dispatched to Cyprus' EEZ. In response, the TRNC foreign ministry issued a statement in which it warned that it will act, along with Turkey, against the Cypriot government over the confirmatory drilling. The statement reiterated the position that the Turkish Cypriot people, as co-owners of Cyprus, have equal rights to all resources on and around the island.

### GREEK CYPRIOTS

#### Economic Developments

According to the latest forecast from the International Monetary Fund, Cyprus' economy will grow by 2.5% this year as both inflation and unemployment recede. For 2024, economic growth is expected to speed up to 2.8%. On unemployment, the IMF projects a rate of 6.5% for this year and 6.2% for 2024. Inflation in 2023 will come down to 3.9% from 8.1%, which was recorded last year, further falling to 2.5% in 2024.

On April 11, Finance Minister Makis Keravnos sent letters to lenders urging them to absorb some losses by not raising their lending rates on performing loans of up to €350k. It was the minister's second attempt to shield borrowers, following two successive interest rate hikes from the European Central Bank (ECB) in its bid to fight inflation. Banks have yet to react to the Finance Minister's appeal.

According to a report released by the Cyprus Statistical Service (Cystat), Cyprus' trade deficit for 2022 amounted to €7.1bn. The report revealed that the main trading partner for Cyprus in 2022, in terms of imports, was Greece, (€2.64bn), followed by Italy (€1.18bn), China (€898.2m), Israel (€835.9m), and Germany (€600.5m). Total imports of goods from EU

member states and from third countries for 2022 amounted to €11.29bn. The total exports of goods, again to both EU Member States and third countries, reached €4.18bn. The main trading partners for domestic product exports were Lebanon (€287.3m), the United Kingdom (€204.8m), Greece (€121.0 m), and Israel (€81.6m).

Cyprus' composite leading indicators (CLI) saw an annual increase of 1.4% in March 2023, according to the Economics Research Centre (CypERC) of the University of Cyprus. The CLI is designed to provide early signals of turning points in business cycles showing fluctuation of the economic activity around its long term potential level. CLIs show short-term economic movements in qualitative rather than quantitative terms. The positive growth rate reflects the positive performance of most of its domestic and international components, compared to March 2022. This latest development comes after annual decreases of 0.5% and 2.9% were recorded in February 2023 and January 2023, respectively.

According to the Cyprus Statistical Service, tourist arrivals to Cyprus increased by 61% during the first quarter of 2023. Total numbers reached 393,893, compared to 244,705 in the corresponding period of 2022. The upward trend recorded in the first two months of the year continued in March 2023, during which 184,263 arrivals were recorded, compared to 128,840 in March 2022, an increase of 43%. Arrivals from the United Kingdom were the main source of tourism for March 2023, accounting for 33.8% of arrivals, or 62,282 tourists.

#### Domestic Developments

Cypriot individuals and companies were named in sanctions by the US and UK for knowingly assisting Russian oligarchs to hide their assets in complex financial networks. In particular, 23 Cypriot passport holders, of which 10 are Cypriot-born and 13 have dual or triple nationalities, were among the individu-

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als sanctioned. The sanctions from the US also hit 18 Cyprus-based companies, while those from the UK impacted two companies. All persons named in the US sanctions have had their assets frozen and must be reported to the US Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control. More than 4,000 accounts held by Russians in Cypriot banks may be closed over the next two months following the imposition of the sanctions.

On April 14, Michalis Michael, whom President Christodoulides appointed as board member of Cyprus' Public Service Commission (EDY), the commission responsible for overseeing the civil service, resigned only a day after being appointed to the job, when his academic credentials were called into question.

### Labour Relations and Trade Unions

On April 4, the secretariats of the PASYEK-PEO and OEKDY-SEK trade unions met in order to consider the possibility of taking strike measures over the delay and indifference of the Ministry of Finance to complete the dialogue in the Joint Labour Committee for the renewal of the collective agreement of the hourly-paid government personnel. They complain, according to a statement from the two trade unions, that the leadership of the Ministry of Finance had delayed instituting the Joint Labour Committee for the last three years, resulting in important labour issues concerning the hourly government personnel remaining stagnant. The hourly-paid government personnel have not received any salary increase since 2010. Moreover, in the eyes of the trade union, the employees have suffered salary reductions and have contributed financially beyond what they can bear to contribute to the Cypriot economy during the financial crisis of 2013. The two trade unions both noted that while the Cypriot economy has been experiencing high growth rates, this category of government employees continues to be subject to wage reductions. Salaries for new recruits have been re-

duced by 10%, shift allowances have been reduced by 15% and additional reductions have been made on other benefits. In addition, a unilateral government decision has been implemented to reduce the way the welfare fund of the hourly-paid government staff is calculated, which dramatically reduces their benefits, although they are the lowest paid staff in the public sector. The trade unions are warning the Ministry of Finance that there will be strike action if there is no positive outcome in the renewal of the collective agreement before the end of April 2023.

On April 6, the employees of a hotel unit in Paphos went on a spontaneous strike demanding payment of the cost-of-living-allowance (CoLA) and the implementation of the signed collective agreement. In their statements, the unions said that although 90% of the hotels have paid CoLA according to the relevant legislation, 11 hoteliers in Paphos are not implementing the agreement reached last October to grant CoLA increases to workers in the industry. That is, the employees of the hotels were paid, but their salary did not include the indexation allowance. It is important to note that the opinion of the Legal Service of the Republic was for the payment of the allowance. The employees announced that if they do not get all the CoLA retroactively, the strike would continue. However, on the same day, the workers returned to work after a relevant settlement was made between the management of the hotel and the trade unions. In particular, the management of the hotel unit in question signed a commitment that they would grant CoLA and an additional 1.5% with employees' April salaries. However, the management of five other hotels have yet to give their workers the increases and CoLA, and the trade unions stated that if they did not do that soon, the workers would strongly react.

On April 24, the Parliamentary Labour Committee gave the Ministry of Labour a two-month deadline to submit specific proposals to end the practice of

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mandating workers to stand for prolonged periods. However, the director of Labour Inspection of the Ministry of Labour requested more time to engage in a dialogue with the social partners to agree on a bill before submitting it to Parliament. The trade unions, in turn, said that the current situation was an inhumane employment practice that strains workers every day and causes serious health problems, such as musculoskeletal diseases and rheumatism, which is documented by a special report of the European Organisation for Safety and Health at Work, adding that the safety and health of the workers is the exclusive responsibility of the employers. Nevertheless, the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry disagreed with the proposals. A representative of the Chamber stated that such legislation was not necessary, as the requests were included in existing laws. He proposed that the Ministry of Labour increase their inspections of companies and also use tools that already exist to prevent compulsory standing.

On April 28, the Minister of Labour presented to the two social partners, employers and trade unions, the proposal for the new CoLA payment structure. According to the basic provisions of the proposal, which was announced orally to the leadership of the employers' organisations and trade unions, CoLA will be restored to 2/3, or 66.7%, with effect from July 1. This is essentially a renewal of the transitional agreement of 2017, with an increase in the rate of payment once a year to 66.7%, instead of 50%, which the social partners had agreed until now. The payment of 66.7% will be calculated based on the inflation index for 2022. The agreement will be valid for three years, that is, from July 2023 until December 31, 2025. At the same time, social dialogue with an expiry schedule is foreseen to begin before the agreement expires in 2025, in the context of which employers and unions can reach a comprehensive agreement on the future of CoLA, with a time horizon of 10 years. It is noted that CoLA had been abolished in 2012, at the request by the troika in the midst

of an economic restructuring programme. After Cyprus exited the memorandum of understanding and after having prolonged negotiations, the social partners accepted the proposal from then Labour Minister Zeta Emilianidou to restore CoLA once a year at 50% of the rate of inflation. The transitional agreement was valid until December 31, 2020. Due to the pandemic crisis, employers and trade unions informally agreed to extend its validity. The two parties brought the issue to the table last October with the employers demanding the complete abolition of CoLA and the trade unions demanding its full restoration. Initial reports from employers' organisations and trade unions suggest that the compromise proposal did not fully satisfy either side. After their competent bodies evaluate the ministerial proposal, the social partners will meet again with the Minister of Labour.

### TURKISH CYPRIOTS

#### Economic Developments

According to the Statistical Institute, the consumer price index was 67.3% higher in April 2023 compared to April 2022. Consumer prices had risen by 5.3% in April alone. Particularly, there has been a 13.75% increase at "restaurant and hotel" prices compared to the previous month. This was followed by "leisure and cultural activities", where prices went up by 8% in April. The monthly inflation in food prices reached 5.55%.

Based on data from the Central Bank, Cyprus Today reported that most of the key indicators of the economy were above their pre-Covid levels in the last quarter of 2022. The report showed that the number of people in work and the number of non-TRNC citizens entering the country via border crossings were higher in 2022 than in 2019, which was the last full year before the devastating economic and social effects of the Covid-19 pandemic took hold.

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The report revealed that 4.67 million people, excluding TRNC nationals, entered the TRNC from the south in 2022, exceeding the figure of 4.53 million recorded in 2019. The economy has also been bolstered by the return of university students and tourists; the number of arrivals (by air and sea) in 2022 was around 1.4 million (still below the level recorded in 2019, which was 1.75 million). After Turkish citizens, who accounted for more than 1.1 million arrivals in 2022, the highest arrival figures were for Russians (32,442), Iranians (31,450), Germans (27,800), (non-Turkish Cypriots), and British citizens (24,167). The Central Bank report also pointed to a positive outlook in the labour market: The number of registered employees, which was 119,568 before the Covid-19 pandemic, decreased to 105,945 in January 2021 but rose to 127,172 as of November 2022. During the same period, the total number of employees with work permits – i.e., migrant workers – increased by 41.7%, from 38,340 to 54,355, while the number of TRNC citizens in work also rose, from 67,605 to 72,817. “The budget deficit, which was 954.7 million TL in 2021, decreased by 73.9% to 248.8 million TL in 2022”.

### Relations with Turkey

Turkey has pledged TL9.5-billion (€443 million) in grants and loans to the TRNC as part of the “2023 Financial and Economic Cooperation Protocol”, signed on the last day of March. Speaking during a joint press conference following the signing of the deal, the Turkish Cypriot Prime Minister Unal Ustel said that, in addition to the projects for 26 schools, three hospitals, one medical centre, and one national disaster and earthquake centre, the protocol also includes projects to strengthen civil defence and fire brigades, and for energy, agriculture, transport, work life, public finance, industry, e-government, and technology. The PM noted that the 26 school projects included in the protocol are part of the work on earthquake preparedness. On his part, the Turkish Vice-President Fuat Oktay said that the protocol is

a “concrete sign” of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s “support for the Turkish Cypriot people”. Among other things, Oktay said, “We have taken the first step in the construction of a new 500-bed state hospital in Nicosia”. He also announced the plan to build a 700-student “theology college” in Famagusta, which will cost TL85 million (€3.96 million).

Elsewhere, Oktay said that the planned electricity cable linking the TRNC “to Turkey will be able to supply energy in both directions”. Speaking to Kibris, a local newspaper, Oktay stated that the electricity cable project was underway. “For the prosperity of the Turkish Cypriot people and for a sustainable economy for the TRNC, we are determined to take the necessary steps together, seriously and without delay”, he said. Regarding the “interconnector” project, Oktay said it would, in fact, involve two cables, each able to provide up to 400MW of electricity “in both directions”. Oktay also said that Turkey allocated TL200 million (€9.3 million) for fuel oil shipping costs in 2022 and that this support will continue in 2023. Turkey also paid TL29 million (€1.35 million) for the maintenance of three diesel generators belonging to the [Turkish Cypriot] Electricity Authority (Kib-Tek) and is planning to spend TL100 million (€4.66 million) for the maintenance of four other diesel motors, he added.

On April 15, another Turkish Cypriot journalist, Ulas Baris, was denied entry to Turkey on the grounds of national security.

On April 27, the voting process for Turkish nationals residing in the TRNC began. Turkish citizens in the TRNC can cast their votes early for the presidential and parliamentary elections set to take place on May 14. Voters cast their ballots at three polling stations set up across the TRNC: one in Nicosia, one in Famagusta and one in Morphou (Guzelyurt). According to the Turkish Ambassador, Metin Feyzioglu, there were around 142,000 eligible voters in the TRNC.

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### Domestic Developments

A by-election will be held on June 25 to fill the Minister of Parliament seat, which became vacant after People's Party (HP) leader Kudret Ozersay resigned as a Nicosia MP last year. According to the electoral law, all voters, not just Nicosians, will be eligible to vote; in other words polling stations will be set up in all districts as if this will be a general election, increasing the cost of the election, which is expected to be TL30 million (€1.4 million). The main opposition Republican Turkish Party (CTP) and HP had said that there should instead be an early general election, but this was over-ruled by the ruling three-party coalition of National Unity Party (UBP), Democratic Party (DP), and Rebirth Party (YDP). HP were one of the biggest losers in last year's (January 2022) general election, seeing their number of seats slashed from nine to three. Last May, HP leader Ozersay had announced his party was withdrawing from Parliament, citing the formation of the current coalition government, which came after the UBP leader and PM Faiz Sucuoglu was effectively ousted from both the government and UBP leadership [as a result of pressure coming from Ankara]; hence Ozersay called the coalition government "illegitimate". However, the two other HP MPs at the time – Jale Refik Rogers and Aysegul Baybars – refused to follow the party's decision and decided to continue as independents. The result of the by-election is not likely to change the parliamentary arithmetic as the ruling coalition already has a comfortable majority of 29 members in the 50-seat parliament.

The "Financial Assistance and Preparedness for Earthquake and Other Natural Disasters Law", which aims to contribute to the victims of the earthquake in Turkey and to create resources for the preparation of a possible earthquake in the TRNC, entered into force on April 20. The law envisages "voluntary" deductions from salaries, wages and pensions; the first draft of the law made these deductions compulsory, causing an uproar. Additional contributions

will be made from various taxes, duties, fees and charges. Among others, a 10% contribution will be received from the monthly contribution paid to political parties by the state; the Central Bank will transfer TL400 million (€18.65 million) from its profit, and between 1 and 10 percent will be collected from motor vehicle registrations and license fees.

The Center for Migration Identity and Rights Studies (CMIRS) announced its first quarterly survey results for 2023. CMIRS Director Mine Yucel said that over 80% of respondents think that injustice (84.2%), partisanship (82.6%), corruption (91%) and bribery (83%) were common in the TRNC. "It is not possible to talk about the quality of life in such a country, nor is there any chance of success for a policy that does not focus on solving these problems". Society's happiness rate was 5.82 out of 10, which is a slight improvement compared to 5.23 in December 2022. The happiness rate saw its lowest point in April 2022, with 4.37 (the lowest since the surveys were begun in March 2015) and gradually went up in the following surveys.

According to the report by Cyprus Today, water levels in the TRNC's 17 reservoirs have fallen sharply in the last four years: While the reservoirs contained 12.163 million m<sup>2</sup> of water in March 2019, there was just 4.611 million m<sup>2</sup> of water in March 2023 – a decrease from 73.06% percent of capacity to just 31.38%.

### Labour Relations and Trade Unions

On April 6, doctors at state hospitals and health centres went on a three-hour "warning strike" to highlight deficiencies in the health system. The doctors' trade union (Tip-Is) members gathered in front of Nicosia State Hospital holding a banner bearing the message "No medicines, no beds, plenty of patients". Tip-Is chairperson Dr Sukru Onbasi made a statement to the press in front of the hospital in which he said the budget allocated for healthcare is low and

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the “economic crisis has made the budget even more ineffective”. Dr Onbasi said the need for personnel and physical infrastructure deficiencies in public medical centres “could not be eliminated due to a bureaucratic ... system” and that “instead of finding a comprehensive solution to the country’s problems, daily solutions were produced with political concerns because of the lack of a national healthcare policy”. Dr Onbasi expressed that there is a serious medicine shortage in both the public and private sectors. “We are almost at a point where we cannot even treat tonsillitis”, he said. “There has been no tetanus vaccine in state hospitals and medical centres for months. There has been no rhythm-regulating medicine for months. Many blood pressure medications cannot be found in public or private pharmacies, but the Health Ministry announces that it provides aspirin and Panadol as if it were a feat”. Medicines used for cancer and in the treatment of chronic diseases such as Parkinson’s, Alzheimer’s and MS “could not be continuously supplied”, he said, and that neurologists “could not find blood thinners to open cerebrovascular rhythm blockages and cardiologists could not find stents to open heart vessels, or temporary pacemakers for rhythm disorders”.

Once again, the electricity authority (Kib-Tek) and El-Sen, the trade union for Kib-Tek workers, were under the limelight in April. The month started with power cuts lasting up to 16 hours. The disruption began on April 3, with the longest power cuts taking place the following day when the El-Sen members downed tools as an act of civil disobedience, despite a 60-day ban on El-Sen strike action imposed by the government. They later returned to work restoring energy flow. However, there were further blackouts on April 5, as around 250 El-Sen members and their supporters staged an all-day demonstration outside Parliament while MPs debated a proposed amendment bill to procurement laws, which will affect purchase of fuel for the Kib-Tek operated power plant in Teknecik (Trapeza). The government argued that

the planned changes to the law, which El-Sen and the main opposition Republican Turkish Party (CTP) are opposed to, will make it easier for the government to make “direct purchases” from “large companies that have made existing investments” in the TRNC in “urgent cases” regarding water and electricity supplies. Those who oppose think that the government intends to get around anti-corruption regulations. Furthermore, El-Sen claims that the amendment bill is a move to side-line Kib-Tek.

Referring to the government’s decision to ban El-Sen’s strike, former Ombudsperson and High Court judge, Emine Dizdarli, said that the arbitrary use of the Council of Ministers’ power to limit the right to strike is unconstitutional. Stating that the right to strike is one of the rights guaranteed by the TRNC Constitution, Dizdarli argued that the exercise of this right can only be regulated “to protect national security, the constitutional order, public safety or the rights and freedoms provided by the Constitution to any person”.

Meanwhile, the government appointed Kib-Tek chairperson blamed El-Sen, saying the power cuts were not due to malfunctions but were a result of “deliberate” actions, i.e., sabotage. Indicating that they have filed complaints with the police, the chairperson pointed out that these incidents took place after El-Sen’s planned strike was banned by the government. Furthermore, Prime Minister Ustel said in a written statement, “It is everyone’s democratic right to protest. But if the protest causes the people to suffer and threatens the safety of their lives and property, the state will intervene and do what is necessary”. This is not a protest but sabotage and an attack against the rights and interests of the people. Ustel said the government’s goal is to provide “clean, affordable and secure energy” and to “implement the electricity cable project and to establish an interconnected system with Turkey”. His statement continued: “For some reason, some people want

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to condemn us to using electricity bought from the Greek Cypriots...”.

Meanwhile, the government has tabled a draft bill to take on a debt of TL600 million (€28 million) that Kib-Tek owes to the energy generation firm Aksa, the Turkish company which runs the second power-plant in the north in Kalecik (Gastria). The “general justification” of the draft law states that Kib-Tek had to sell electricity “below cost price” due to the “economic conditions in our country”. “Due to [Kib-Tek’s] serious debt burden, its financial structure has deteriorated and it has become unable to pay its debts”, the statement said. It added: “It is essential to ensure Kib-Tek’s ability and sustainability to provide public services by guaranteeing supply security in energy generation, transmission and distribution and for uninterrupted and reliable production”. Ahead of the announcement of the bill, the Minister of Public Works Erhan Arikli said that Kib-Tek is a “bankrupt institution with a debt of TL2 billion (€93 million)”. Arikli also said that supplying energy from Turkey via cable is a condition for the extension of the contract with Aksa and noted that the aim of an amendment the government wants to make to the Public Procurement Law is to “obtain authorisation and negotiate”.

On April 10, members of El-Sen protested in front of Parliament against the bill that sought to amend public procurement laws. Police took extensive security measures and put up a barrier in front of Parliament during the protest. In support of El-Sen’s protest, the Cyprus Turkish Civil Servants Union (KTAMS) went on strike on the same day at the Motor Vehicles Division’s Nicosia branch. The Cyprus Turkish Teachers Union (KTOS) also supported El-Sen by going on strike at a primary school in Nicosia between 9 am and 12 pm. Earlier, the parliamentary debates were scuppered after Parliament stenographers who are KTAMS members refused to work overtime.

Also on April 10, the government postponed a strike initiated by the Air Traffic Controllers Union at Er-can (Tymbou) Airport for 60 days, on the grounds that it would “disrupt national security, public safety, essential services, civil aviation services and airports services”. The strike had been called by the Air Traffic Controllers Union in support of the El-Sen protest outside Parliament.

On April 14, El-Sen announced that they suspended their “civil disobedience” action adding that if the bill concerned is passed in the parliament then they would take the matter to the Constitutional Court. The government welcomed the decision. The PM said that after passing the bill in the parliament, the government “will come together with scientists, chambers, economic organisations and stakeholders and carry out necessary consultations”. He continued: “We will discuss our National Energy Vision, which includes quality, affordable, uninterrupted, environmentally friendly electricity with supply security provided by [an undersea] cable and transiting to an interconnected system, as well as increasing the capacity of our existing production plants to meet our growing energy needs, together with all stakeholders soon. Just like the water problem, we will eliminate the energy issue in the country”.

According to the Cyprus Turkish Civil Servants (KTAMS), the minimum wage, which is TL11,800 (€550) fell below the hunger line, which according to the KTAMS calculation reached TL13,247 (€618). Hur-Is Federation leader Ahmet Serdaroglu called for the raising of the minimum wage as the government failed to “take measures against the high cost of living”.

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