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FES CYPRUS NEWSLETTER

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 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)



PODCASTS in JULY:

No podcasts in July

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)



PUBLICATIONS in JULY:

No publications in July

Hubert Faustmann, Gianna Chatzigeorgiou, Sertac Sonan

Trade Union Monitor Cyprus 2021
(In English, German)

EVENTS in JUNE:

No events planned



EVENTS in JULY:

No events planned so far

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CYPRUS PROBLEM

In May, Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders, Nicos Anastasiades and Ersin Tatar, shared letters with the UN Secretary-General (“UNSG”), Antonio Guterres, briefing him on developments of the Cyprus problem and their approaches. The letters followed the two sides’ failure to reach common ground and restart negotiations in the informal five-party summit, held in Geneva at the end of April.

In his letter to Guterres, Anastasiades stressed that Turkey’s positions are unacceptable and do not contribute to creating a common ground for the resumption of the Cyprus talks. He reiterated his political will and determination to participate in a new informal conference that will be compatible with the UN decisions and resolutions and the terms of the Good Offices mandate of the UNSG. In addition to Guterres, Anastasiades sent his letter to the UN Security Council’s permanent and non-permanent members, EU institutions as well as EU heads of state. A separate letter was also sent to US President, Joe Biden, who thanked him for his warm approach on the Cyprus problem.

Tatar sent his letter to Guterres laying out the Turkish Cypriot’s position to the Cyprus issue and how he sees the way forward, which involved a ‘bottom-up’ concept with two sovereign states existing side by side. Tatar said he would publicize the letter, which he also sent to certain heads of EU states.

According to Turkish Cypriot newspaper, Kibris Postasi, the next informal meeting on the Cyprus problem is expected to take place in September or October 2021. The newspaper reported that the Greek Cypriot side was aiming for the meeting to take place before July 20, which will reportedly be difficult to arrange, as preparations will not be completed by that time. The UNSG’s special representative, Jane Holl Lute, is expected to return to the island for consultations with the Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders in June. Lute visited Greece and Turkey in the last week of May.

Home for Cooperation (H4C), which is located in the UN-controlled buffer zone in Nicosia, marked its 10th anniversary on May 6. In a written statement, the H4C said: ‘A decade was filled with innumerable friendships and memories... dedicated to challenging all physical and mental barriers between the communities of Cyprus supporting a vast number of artists, academics, students, NGOs and initiatives.’ Established in 2011 as an educational and research centre by the Association for Historical Dialogue and Research (AHDR), the H4C was transformed into an intercommunal community centre, with its multicomunal team. The mission statement ‘Home is a hub,’ emphasizes that the H4C welcomes all communities of the island.

On May 19, the European Parliament’s (EP) 2019-2020 Report on Turkey was adopted by the plenary. The report called for the formal suspension of accession negotiations with Turkey, which prompted a strong reaction by Ankara, rejecting it as “a biased text with false allegations”. The EP expressed serious concern that in recent years, despite being a candidate country, Turkey’s government has pursued a continuous and growing distancing from EU values and standards. The EP also referred to Turkey’s unilateral actions in the eastern Mediterranean and expressed concerns as regards a confrontational and hostile foreign policy, towards the EU and its member states, especially Greece and Cyprus.

On May 25, Anastasiades held a meeting with EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, on the sidelines of his visit to Brussels where he was attending a special meeting of the European Council. The President stated that Cyprus’ positive stance at the upcoming European Council (EUCO) in June that will discuss EU-Turkey relations will depend on various factors including Ankara’s behaviour on the Cyprus issue and Varosha; refraining from provocative actions at sea and on land; and whether Ankara will fulfil its contractual obligations to the EU and all its member states.

Assessing the Greek Cypriot parliamentary election

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results, Tatar stated that the rise of far-right, ELAM justifies the Turkish side's position for a two-state solution. Tatar argued that nationalist extremism was on the rise in the south, while left wing AKEL, which supports a federal solution, has retreated.

The Cyprus issue and the outcome of the informal Geneva meeting were part of the agenda during a meeting between Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu and his Greek counterpart, Nikos Dendias, in Athens on May 31.

On May 24, the Turkish Cypriot shopkeepers who run businesses around the Ledra Street/Lokmaci crossing point marched to the check point and called the leaders of the two communities to open the crossing points immediately. The protest was organised by the Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Shopkeepers and Artisans (KTEZO). Elsewhere, speaking to the Turkish Cypriot daily Yeniduzen, the KTEZO president Mahmut Kanber said that unemployment was on the rise and the number of businesses that shut down has been growing by the day. Kanber added: 'Until the pandemic, the two communities created an island economy ... Most of the hot money circulating in the north came from the south. We have always advocated the opening of more crossings and more trade, and we still do ... People in the south are better off ... the value of their currency is also much higher than ours. The crossing points need to be opened immediately so that they will be able to benefit from cheaper prices, and we from higher demand'.

For the first time since February 2020, crossing points are expected to reopen on June 4 under the following conditions: Level 1 (green) no restrictions, level 2 (orange) seven day negative rapid or PCR test and, finally, level 3 (dark red) closed to the general

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

public. The reopening of the crossing points was delayed as they were expected to reopen on May 31, as announced by TRNC¹ prime minister Ersan Saner.

HYDROCARBONS

There were no significant developments in May.

GREEK CYPRIOTS

Economic Developments

On May 11, Moody's Investors Service warned that the loans on the books of EU banks that remain under long-running moratoria are more likely to underperform, with credit quality particularly uncertain in Cyprus, Italy, Portugal and Hungary. The Moody's report comes on the back of similar warnings from the Central Bank of Cyprus, whose governor last month spoke of an impending increase in non-performing loans. The moratoria apply to primary residences of up to €350k and small business property for businesses with turnover up to €2bn.

On May 12, the main findings of the European Commission's spring economic forecast for Cyprus were presented in Brussels. According to the report, the tourism sector has been severely affected, while the impact on domestic demand and the labour market has been cushioned by temporary income support measures. Gradual recovery in economic activity is forecast for 2021 and 2022, driven mainly by domestic demand. Public finances worsened significantly in 2020, due to the crisis but are set to improve in 2021 and 2022. According to the European Commission, the Cypriot economy shrank by 5.1% in 2020. It is forecast to grow by 3.1% and 3.8% in

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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2021 and 2022. Unemployment was 7.6% in 2020 and is seen at 7.5% in 2021 and 7.2% in 2022.

On May 17, President Anastasiades unveiled the government's recovery and resilience plan dubbed, "Cyprus Tomorrow". The scheme which aims at strengthening the resilience of the economy through a series of actions, investments and reforms will be funded through €1.2bn from the EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility, €1.8bn from the Policy Coherence Fund, and €1.4bn from private investment or private-public partnerships. In return for the funds, EU members must roll out broad reforms that will change current growth models. The plan is organised in five Pillars: Public healthcare, quick transition to Green Economy, improvement of economic resilience and competitiveness; moving towards a digital age; employment, education and human resources. Some examples of funding included:

€40m will go to small and medium sized enterprises, councils and communities;

€20.5m for energy efficiency for homes and renewables;

€78.4m for improvement business competitiveness;

€96m for improvement of justice system, fighting corruption, and local government;

€44.5m for the management of crises at financial institutions;

€94m for education and improvement of professional skills;

€78.9m for job market integration and employment;

Through a statement dated May 25, Bank of Cyprus announced first quarter revenue of €136m, and operating profit of €45m. Profit after tax was €8m but organic profit (from the operations of the bank) after tax, amounted to €14m. This is up from a loss of €49m after tax in the last quarter of 2020. The bank continues to make progress in improving the quality of the NPL portfolio. In total, from their highest level in 2014, the bank has reduced NPLs by €13.3bn or 89%, to €1.7bn. Liquidity also remains strong

and the bank continues to operate with a significant liquidity surplus of almost €5bn, with the Liquidity Coverage Ratio (DPR) amounting to 284%.

On May 25, the European Commission announced through a press release that it has loaned Cyprus €124m under the Support to Mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE) Program. The funds are intended for emergency support of businesses and employment. The SURE funds are the result of bonds issued by the EU Commission on the international credit market, the first time the EU Commission has ever issued debt. Member States will have to repay these loans over time, thereby financing the repayment to creditors.

Cyprus' battered tourism industry is anxiously awaiting a positive announcement from the British government's updated country travel list, as some hotels have yet to reopen. Hoteliers are concerned that the summer of 2021 could be another lost season, despite government support schemes. The new travel list will come into force on June 7. Deputy Minister for Tourism, Savvas Perdios was expected to travel to London and Moscow in early June in an attempt to push for tourist arrivals from Cyprus' two biggest markets. Perdios will head a delegation that will visit these two capitals for contacts.

Domestic Developments

In May the COVID-19 cases increased from 65,909 to 72,457. The number of deaths attributed to the virus increased from 312 to 360. The improvement of the country's epidemiological picture, with the drop in daily coronavirus cases to double digits, allowed the health ministry to announce the relaxation of certain restrictions including the ending of the SMS system, the extension of the evening curfew to midnight and the implementation of a SafePass system, allowing access to indoor venues by people who were negatively tested for the virus in the last 72 hours. Further relaxations were expected to take place from June 1st. The vaccination program is progressing well with more than 234k people been fully

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vaccinated, which translates to 26% of the Greek Cypriot population. Almost 50% of the Greek Cypriot population have been vaccinated at least with the first dose.

On May 30, Greek Cypriots went to the polls to elect the new House of Representatives. The changing political landscape, abstention and the losses of mainstream parties, stand out as the big takeaways from the elections. Ruling DISY retained its position as the largest party in the House, although it saw its number of seats reduced, as did the other large party, opposition and left wing AKEL. In particular, DISY, AKEL and center right DIKO, together lost approximately 35k votes, whereas socialists EDEK made slight gains. Far right ELAM achieved big gains, almost doubling their support base since 2016, also translating into a doubling of their seats. Marios Garoyian's newly established DIPA, which split out from DIKO, was also considered among the big winners.

The results will see seven parties in the new parliament, compared to eight previously. Ruling DISY garnered 27.77% of the vote (-2.9%); AKEL 22.34% (-3.3%); DIKO 11.29% (-3.2%); ELAM 6.78% (+3%); EDEK 6.72% (+0.5%); DIPA 6.10% (first House election) and Greens 4.41% (-0.4%). Solidarity and the Citizens Alliance were unable to secure the 3.6% threshold required to gain seats in the House.

As far as the breakdown of seats goes: DISY got 17 (one less than 2016); AKEL 15 (one less than 2016); DIKO nine (no change); the Greens went from two to three; EDEK from three to four; new entrants DIPA got four seats; and ELAM four seats from two.

The abstention rate of 34.2% was high (to 33.2% in 2016). Only eight women gained one of the 56 seats in parliament, translating to a female representation of 14%, down from 17% in 2016. The house president is expected to be elected once the new parliament convenes for the first time, on June 10.

Head of DISY, Averof Neophytou, applauded his party's success in remaining the leading political force of the country despite the losses. AKEL leader, An-

dros Kyprianou, said his party was saddened by the results and its collective bodies would reflect on this outcome. The party's political bureau was expected to convene in early June and his resignation was a possible outcome.

The MPs are:

DISY 17 (27.8%)

Nicosia: Averof Neophytou, Demetris Demetriou, Nicos Tornaritis, Haris Georgiades, Savia Orphanidou

Limassol: Efthymios Diplaros, Fotini Tsiridou, Nikos Sykas

Famagusta: Kyriakos Hadjiyiannis, Giorgos Karoulas, Onoufrios Koulla, Nikos Georgiou

Larnaca: Annita Demetriou, Prodromos Alambritis

Pafos: Charalammbos Pazaros

Kyrenia: Marios Mavrides, Rita Theodorou Superman

AKEL 15 (22.3%)

Nicosia: Andros Kyprianou, Irini Charalambidou, Stefanos Stefanou, Aristos Damianou, Giorgos Loukaides, Christos Christofides

Limassol: Costas Costa, Andreas Kafkalias, Marina Nicolaou

Famagusta: Nicos Kettyros, Giorgos Koukoumas, Giannakis Gavriel

Larnaca: Andreas Pashiourtides

Pafos: Andreas Fakontis

Kyrenia: Christos Christofias

DIKO 9 (11.3%)

Nicosia: Nicolas Papadopoulos, Christiana Erotocritou, Chrysis Pantelides

Limassol: Pavlos Milonas, Panicos Leonidou

Famagusta: Christos Senekis, Zacharias Koulias

Larnaca: Christos Orfanides

Pafos: Chrysanthos Savvides

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ELAM 4 (6.8%)**Nicosia:** Christos Christou**Limassol:** Andreas Themistocleous**Famagusta:** Linos Papayiannis**Larnaca:** Sotiris Ioannou**EDEK 4 (6.72%)****Nicosia:** Constantinos Efstathiou**Limassol:** Marinos Sizopoulos**Larnaca:** Andreas Apostolou**Pafos:** Elias Myrianthous**DIPA 4 (6.10%)****Nicosia:** Alecos Tryfonides, Marinos Moushiouttas**Limassol:** Marios Garoyian**Famagusta:** Michalis Yiacoumi**Greens 3 (4.41%)****Nicosia:** Charalambos Theopemptou, Alexandra Atalidou**Limassol:** Stavros Papadouris

On May 27, Nicos Rolandis passed away at the age of 86. Rolandis served as Foreign Minister from 1978 to 1983, when he resigned his post over a dispute with then President Spyros Kyprianou's hard-line stance on the Cyprus problem. He also served as an MP from 1991 through to 1996, later merging his Liberal Party with DISY in 1998. In the 1998 election, Rolandis launched his own campaign to become president but later supported the eventual winner Glafcos Clerides, who in turn appointed Rolandis as commerce minister, a position he fulfilled until 2003. He oversaw and pioneered significant policy initiatives such as the oil and gas exploration in the seas surrounding Cyprus. In 2003, he signed an agreement in Cairo establishing the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of Cyprus and Egypt, the first EEZ agreement signed in the Mediterranean.

Labour Relations and Trade Union

On May 6, all garbage collection crew employees of the Kokkinochoria region went on a spontaneous strike to express their strong protest against the refusal of the Regional Council to implement their Collective Agreement. Some of the problems voiced concerned:

- adjusting the workload which suffers from serious problems stemming from the accumulated number of overtime hours,
- the issue of working hours and the lack of a weekly work schedule,
- the refusal to compensate "stand by" shifts to employees,
- the long delay in starting the dialogue on the renewal of the collective agreement.

It is worth noting that employees demanded solutions to the above issues for the last two years without any significant results. At the same time, the employees expressed their support and solidarity with the workers of the Municipality of Sotira who were not included in the regular staff of the Municipal Council of Sotira. This is contradicting the Collective Agreement on the one hand, and clear decisions on the issue by the Department of Labor Relations of the Ministry of Labor, the Joint Committee of the Union of Municipalities and the Ministry of Interior. According to these decisions and guidelines, the workers in the Municipality of Sotira should become regular employees.

On May 11, the teachers working in the afternoon/evening educational programs of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth went on an indefinite strike, over the Ministry's decision to change their employment status into service providers, as opposed to employees. The strike began in all cities simultaneously. The teachers had shared an ultimatum with the Ministry an ultimatum, according to which, the issue should have been resolved by the

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end of March. After the deadline expired, they went on a strike, demanding the abolition of their new employment status.

In a resolution to the President of the Republic, they ask the government:

- to cancel the new employment regime in the educational programs that employ thousands of teachers, as it also deprives them of the right to unemployment benefit during the period when they are not employed.
- to create a flexible way for employing regular employees, which will also give the employer the opportunity to hire according to the justified needs that exist from time to time in the various programs.

The protests continued throughout the month where they escalated with nationwide mobilizations. On May 19, a meeting of the trade unions representing the employees of OKYPY (Cypriot Organization of Health Services) was held according to their joint announcement, the organizations do not intend to allow public health to be transformed into a commodity and to protect the role and mission of Public Hospitals as the main pillar of support of the Health System. The purpose of the meeting was to assess the state of labor relations in the services of OKYPY, to formulate a joint strategy regarding regulatory issues and to coordinate action between the different trade union organizations in a spirit of unity and solidarity to ensure quality employment in the Organization. The meeting unanimously concluded that only regulated employment under the provisions of agreed collective agreements is acceptable.

A letter to the company Nicosia Public Transport Services and Operations Ltd was sent on May 24 by SEK and PEO. They bring to the management's attention that one year will soon pass from the day the company undertook Public Passenger Transport in the Province of Nicosia and that despite their efforts the employees' problems are constantly increasing. According to the letter, the employer's side carries

out continuous unilateral actions against employees. An example is the dismissal of employees without sufficient explanations and prior warnings with their representatives as well as violations of the Collective Agreements. Trade Unions warn the management that there will be immediate reactions if these issues are not addressed swiftly.

TURKISH CYPRIOTS

Economic Developments

According to the Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce's (KTTO) quarterly bulletin, which covers the period from January to March 2021, the 12-month inflation rate which was 15,03% by the end of 2020, dropped slightly to 13,97% in the first quarter of 2021. The KTTO chairperson Turgay Deniz, who shared the findings presented in the bulletin with the public, said that because of the sharp devaluation of the Turkish lira, the inflation rate in the second quarter was likely to be higher. Deniz also said 'due to losses in tourism and higher education sectors', the TRNC economy is predicted to shrink 11,04% in 2020 (which is the estimation of the State Planning Organization).

According to the Standard Kibris economy portal, the Ministry of Finance, (via two separate tenders organized by the TRNC Central Bank) borrowed 202,96 million (€ 20,2 million) TL in May from the domestic market (for the 10th time during the COVID-19 outbreak). The amount of domestic debt taken by the Ministry of Finance in the period of February 2020-May 2021 reached approximately 645 million TL. The domestic debt stock rose from 40 million TL in the end of February 2020 to 356 million TL (€35,5 million) by the end of May 2021.

Relations with Turkey

On May 19, the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said he will be in the TRNC to attend the ceremonies to mark the July 20 military intervention.

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He said he will give 'a strong message to the entire world' during his visit, adding that 'Ankara's determination will be seen by all.' The Turkish president had pointed out that there are two airports in the north: 'The first one is the Ercan (Tymbou) airport, which is known by all. The second one had been there, but we are upgrading it and will have a new name soon. This airport is the one that accommodates our armed and non-armed unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs),' Erdogan said. He also noted that Turkey has stationed its UAVs in the north to be prepared for any possible attacks in the region.

The Turkish Vice President Fuat Oktay held a series of contacts in the TRNC over the weekend of May 22-23. In addition to inaugurating an irrigation tunnel, Oktay attended a gathering of TRNC-Turkish youth in Famagusta. The event was also attended by President Ersin Tatar and Prime Minister Ersan Saner too.

Tatar and Saner received the heads of Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP) Youth Branches from 81 provinces who were in the TRNC to attend a youth gathering.

The Turkey-TRNC Inter-parliamentary Friendship Group delegation visited the TRNC.

The Minister of Agriculture and Natural Resources Nazım Cavusoglu visited Ankara to meet Fuat Oktay and Turkish Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Bekir Pakdemirli.

Domestic Developments

It turned out that a majority of the members of the Turkish Cypriot delegation which tabled a two-state solution in Geneva (as well as nine members of the eleven members of the cabinet including Prime Minister Ersan Saner and Minister of Foreign Affairs Tahsin Ertugruloglu) were also Republic of Cyprus (RoC) citizens. Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar said he would return his RoC ID and passport if he could after it emerged that he was a registered citizen of the RoC too. 'If there is a way, I will return it,' Tatar told Kibris Postasi TV.

The Secretary General of the National Unity Party (UBP) Oguzhan Hasipoglu said that a by-election to fill the seat vacated by Ersin Tatar would not be held this year, and that the general election would be held in April 2022 and not in October 2021 as originally envisaged in the coalition protocol.

According to a survey carried out by the Metron polling company majority of people find Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar 'unsuccessful'. Metron asked the participants how they would rate Tatar's performance in office: While 53% responded 'unsuccessful', 21% said they find him 'successful', 13.5% said he was neither successful nor unsuccessful, and 12.5% refrained from expressing an opinion on the question. The survey was carried out via telephone with a representative sample of 650 respondents between May 14 and 16.

The main opposition Republican Turkish Party (CTP) did not attend the special session of parliament where Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar briefed deputies on the Geneva talks. In a statement, the CTP said that the briefing would only be for show: 'The debriefing meeting on the Geneva talks is meaningless as Tatar went ahead with his policies without consulting anyone.'

The head of the Higher Committee for Infectious Diseases, and Health Ministry Undersecretary Duriye Deren Oygur said that 22% of the TRNC's population has been vaccinated: 127,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been administered so far; 75,000 people had received both doses while 52,000 people had received the first jab. Meanwhile, in May, 6,000 AstraZeneca vaccines were delivered to the TRNC, as part of the EU jabs reserved for Turkish Cypriots. The latest delivery brought the total number of vaccines sent by the EU to 30,050.

Labour Relations and Trade Unions

Since early April, an indefinite strike by public healthcare employees over pay and working conditions ended on May 6. The Minister of Health said that doctors who have been working on a contractu-

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al basis since 2017 will be transferred to permanent staff status and the overtime payments due to them would be made in the coming days. The Tip-Is (Cyprus Turkish Doctors Union) leader Dr Ahmet Varis said that job security is the most basic requirement of doctors that have been waiting for a solution to the problems for many years. The strike action had affected non-urgent only procedures.

An indefinite strike called by the Cyprus Turkish Electricity Authority Workers Union (El-Sen) launched on May 10 was brought to an end two days later following an agreement struck between the Electricity Authority (Kib-Tek) and the trade union. El-Sen members who held a protest outside the Kib-Tek headquarters in Nicosia on May 12 tried to enter the building but were stopped by the police. The demonstrators held placards and banners reading 'No to privatisation', 'We will win by resisting, not by begging', 'Kib-Tek is the last fortress, our war for survival will not end', and 'No to AKSA (the private company that operates the power station in Kalecik (Gastria, Trikomo)'. There were also chants calling for the Minister of Economy and Energy to resign. After the protest, the Kib-Tek and El-Sen officials came together and reached a compromise, which led to the signing of a collective agreement and a protocol between the two sides. The protocol comprised six articles where the Kib-Tek administration pledged to make more investments, reverse price hikes, recruit more employees and collect all unpaid bills.

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Layout:
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