



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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134
JULY 23





FES CYPRUS NEWSLETTER

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PODCASTS in AUGUST:
No podcasts in August



PODCASTS in SEPTEMBER:
No podcasts in September

PUBLICATIONS in AUGUST:
No publications in August



PUBLICATIONS in SEPTEMBER:
No publications in September

EVENTS in AUGUST:
No events planned so far



EVENTS in SEPTEMBER:
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Cyprus
“FES Trade Union Monitor 2023” –
Introduction of the Annual Trade Union Monitor
for Cyprus followed by a discussion with the au-
thors and union representatives
Date: Monday, 11th of September 2023
Time: : 6:30 pm to 8:00 pm (EEST / Cyprus time) (tbc)
Location: Home for Cooperation, Nicosia

Hubert Faustmann, Flora Cresswell (Transparency Inter-
national), Sertac Sonan & Christophoros Christophorou
„Knowledge partner of ,Cyprus Forum 2023“
Panel on “The Role of Transparency in Combating
Political Corruption on Both Sides of The Divide”
Date: Friday, 29th of September 2023
Time: : 2:00 pm to 2:45 pm (EEST / Cyprus time)
Location: Home for Cooperation, Nicosia

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CYPRUS PROBLEM

The European Commission's (EC) annual report on the implementation of the Green Line Regulation, which was released at the end of June and was covered by the Turkish Cypriot press in early July, showed that, in 2022, trade increased by 138% to a record value of more than €14.6 million as the island's economy recovered from the economic effects of the Covid-19 pandemic; in 2021, the figure was €6.2 million. Compared to the 2.3 million crossings registered in 2021, the report also showed a significant increase to almost six million Green Line crossings by Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots and nationals of other countries. The figures were released as the EC approved the annual report on the 2022 "Financial Aid Programme for the Turkish Cypriot community". The financing allocated by the EU for 2022 was €33.4 million. The EC said the money funded a number of programmes last year, including the scholarship programme for Turkish Cypriots that has benefited more than 2,000 students since 2007. The 2022 contribution of €5 million has enabled approximately 300 more students to study in the EU, the EC said in the statement. The bi-communal Cultural Heritage Technical Committee, which has restored or protected more than 120 cultural monuments across Cyprus to date, was awarded €2.6 million "to continue its important work". The EC statement added that during 2022 it also continued its work to help Turkish Cypriot hellim/halloumi producers comply with EU standards regarding food safety and animal health so that they can benefit from the registration of the cheese in the EU as a "Protected Designation of Origin" product, which means they can sell to the EU market via the Green Line Regulation.

A flurry of diplomatic activity occurred at the NATO summit held in Vilnius between July 11 to 12 where Greece and Turkey agreed to resume talks and confidence-building measures after more than a year of tensions between them. The Cyprus problem was

among the topics discussed on the sidelines of the summit between Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, European Council President Charles Michel, French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis.

On July 12, the UN Security Council expressed its full support for the UN Secretary General's (UNSG) proposal to appoint an envoy for the Cyprus problem to lead further engagement as soon as possible. It also reiterated the importance for all parties to show flexibility and compromise with a view to returning to negotiations to reach a comprehensive and just settlement based on a bicomunal bizonal federation with political equality, as set out in the relevant Security Council resolutions. The statement was welcomed by the Greek Cypriot side but was condemned by the Turkish side, on the grounds that the UN Security Council continues to insist on a settlement model from which the Turkish Cypriot side has openly withdrawn its support.

On July 13, Secretary General António Guterres released his reports on the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) and the work of the UN Good Offices in Cyprus. The reports covered the period from December 13, 2022 to June 12, 2023. In the UNFICYP report, Guterres called on the leaders of the two sides to take urgent action to address mistrust between them. In his Good Offices report, the UNSG stressed that an important step would be for both sides to agree to appoint a UN envoy to explore ways of reaching common ground and resuming negotiations for a settlement.

An unnamed businessman who claims to have purchased hotels in Varosha announced that from July 18 2023, he would be accepting bookings for the 2025 season. The businessman additionally claimed that he had now purchased a total of four hotels, 86 apartments and 20 donums of land. Plans are re-

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portedly already underway to build an amusement park and a beach club on that land. The development follows the announcement on July 20, 2021 by Turkish and Turkish Cypriot leaders of the reopening of a part of the fenced-off area of Varosha. Varosha, a Greek Cypriot suburb of Famagusta before the Turkish intervention of 1974, has traditionally been used as a bargaining chip by Turkey in the negotiations process.

On July 18, Ergün Olgun, the Special Representative of the Turkish Cypriot leader, announced his retirement to spend more time with his family. Olgun previously worked as an advisor and an undersecretary for Rauf Denktaş and took part in negotiations for the Annan Plan. He later worked under Derviş Eroğlu before being appointed as Special Representative by Ersin Tatar in November 2020.

July 20 marked the 49th anniversary of the 1974 Turkish invasion which resulted in the occupation of the island's northern third following a military coup engineered by the Greek military junta that toppled the government of the Republic on July 15. Events and memorials were held in the south while in the north a military parade took place in the presence of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, in celebration of what is officially considered by Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot side as a peace operation. Erdoğan also attended a ceremony to officially inaugurate the new Ercan (Tymbou) airport terminal. The new airport cost a total of €450m and is considered the largest in Cyprus.

On a more positive note, on July 24, speaking on the Cyprus issue following a cabinet meeting, Erdoğan said that Ankara will not hesitate to take on responsibility to achieve a permanent and fair settlement to the Cyprus problem: "We have demonstrated our sincerity on this matter in all processes, including the Annan Plan, and we will do so again if necessary". He also stressed that they had never shied away

from seeking a solution based on the realities of the island but stated that the Greek Cypriot side should stop insisting on impositions. Earlier in the month, on July 14, the Secretary General of the main opposition Republican Turkish Party (CTP), Asım Akansoy stated that Ankara's recent demand for the resumption of the accession process to the European Union will also affect the process in Cyprus and that the way to rebuild relations with the West is to return to the realistic grounds on the Cyprus problem. Claiming that the new position regarding the solution of the Cyprus problem was not accepted by the international community, Akansoy said, "If you want a solution, you should not adopt a separatist attitude. What needs to be done is to start negotiations within the framework drawn by the UN."

On July 22, the Standing Rapporteur on the missing persons in Cyprus, MEP Isabel Santos, visited the island. Santos held a series of meetings including Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot relatives of missing persons. She also met with members of the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus (CMP) and the CMP Anthropological Laboratory.

On July 28, the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders, Nikos Christodoulides and Ersin Tatar, made a joint visit to the Anthropological Laboratory of the CMP. They expressed their full support to the CMP operations and appreciated the work carried out by the Committee and its personnel. They also made a public call for information on potential burial sites. Tatar reacted positively to a proposal by Christodoulides to hold a joint meeting with the UNSG on the sidelines of the upcoming UN General Assembly in September 2023. Christodoulides also proposed to Tatar the establishment of a truth commission, which could operate alongside the CMP, an idea which was first brought up by lawyer and member of non-governmental organisation Truth NOW, Achilleas Demetriades.

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On July 31, Christodoulides met with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis during the latter's visit to the island. Christodoulides said that he had a very constructive discussion with Mitsotakis on bilateral issues, the Cyprus problem, Greece-Turkey relations and the European-Turkish agenda. They also discussed energy issues and the migration issue.

From July 22 to 29, teens from across the divide met and participated in the Cyprus Friendship Programme intercommunal student camp in Kormakitis. The camp took place in the Maronite community for the first time and students followed trainings in Greek and Turkish. They also attended interactive workshops on addressing stereotypes and developing a better understanding on diversity and identity. A second camp will be taking place in Troodos in August 2023.

Left-wing Turkish Cypriot politician Doğuş Derya claimed that a masjid, a Muslim place of worship, is planned to be built on the grounds of the Apostolos Andreas Monastery in Karpasia. Derya described the plans as "a political provocation".

HYDROCARBONS

On July 18, the government said that the recent appraisal well drilled at the Aphrodite reservoir appears to confirm previous estimates on the amount of recoverable gas there. The drill reportedly confirms Chevron's prior estimates of 4.2 trillion cubic feet of natural gas in place, with possibly a slight increase in that number, Energy Minister George Papanastasiou stated.

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 internation-

ally 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).

On July 18, an agreement was signed between Turkey and the TRNC,¹ for the construction of a new two-way undersea electric cable. The agreement codifies a plan to connect the north to Turkey's electricity system, a move which is touted as a solution to the regular electricity shortages faced by the north. The planned cable will have a capacity of 800 megawatts and will cost Turkey \$400m. It is due to be completed in 2028.

On July 19, Nexans announced that it had won the contract to construct the section of the EuroAsia Interconnector that will connect Cyprus with Greece. According to Energy Minister George Papanastasiou the project's costs had jumped 23%. The project is now slated to cost €1.97bn, up from the initial €1.57bn, due to the increase in the cost of raw materials. The electricity interconnection connecting Cyprus, Israel and Greece is considered a critical project for Cyprus' energy plans, as it aims to end the country's energy isolation. The EU has designated it as a Project of Common Interest (PCI) and, as such, it has received €657m in funding, with an additional €100m in funding from the Recovery and Resilience Fund. The interconnector will deliver up to 2,000 MW of energy to Europe and will be the largest submarine electricity interconnector in history, supplying over three million homes with electricity.

GREEK CYPRIOTS

Economic Developments

Cyprus has recorded a fiscal surplus of €155.5m, equivalent to 0.5 % of GDP, during the first half of 2023. The surplus is a notable improvement com-

ally 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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pared to the same period in 2022 when Cyprus recorded a deficit of €92.4m, accounting for 0.3 % of GDP.

Deposits in the Cypriot banking system experienced a notable surge in June 2023, reaching a total of €52.3bn. According to data released by the Central Bank of Cyprus (CBC) for June 2023, total deposits recorded a net increase of €399.2m. This marked the second consecutive month of net increase in deposits, with loans also witnessing a net rise, reaching a balance of €25.1bn in June 2023.

The housing market in Cyprus experienced a notable upswing during the first quarter of 2023, as property prices continued to soar, particularly in the apartment segment, primarily driven by increased demand. The CBC reported a substantial acceleration in the House Price Index (HPI) compared to previous quarters. The HPI recorded a quarterly increase of 2.1% during the first quarter of 2023, compared to 1.6% in the previous quarter. On an annual basis, there was also a 7.7% increase in house prices during the first quarter of 2023, compared to 6.6% in the fourth quarter of 2022. Foreign buyers contributed significantly to the annual surge, accounting for approximately half of the total buyers in 2022 and the first quarter of 2023.

Tourist arrivals in Cyprus experienced a significant increase of 22.7% in June 2023 compared to the same period last year, although they remained 10.6% lower than the record-breaking arrivals of June 2018. According to a report released on July 17 by the statistical service, tourist arrivals for the period of January to June 2023 reached 1,613,690, marking a 32.1% increase compared to the corresponding period in 2022, which recorded 1,221,382 arrivals. Tourist arrivals in June 2023 amounted to 456,985, compared to 372,324 in June 2022.

On July 31, the Bank of Cyprus Group released a statement in which it confirmed that it has successfully completed the EU-wide stress test for 2023.

Domestic Developments

On July 9, George Solomou was elected as the new General Secretary of centre party DIKO following in-house elections. Party Chair Nicolas Papadopoulos, Deputy Chair Christiana Erotokritou, and general organiser Phytos Constantinou were all reelected after running uncontested. Chrysanthos Savvides, Michalis Damianou and Neophytos Charalambides were elected or reelected to the position of vice-presidents.

On July 14, Vasiliki (Lina) Kassianidou was sworn in as the new deputy culture minister, replacing Michalis Hadjiyiannis who resigned on July 11. Hadjiyiannis stated that he had achieved the three main goals he wanted to achieve in office. Those goals included the professional recognition of artists, with around 2,500 being included in social security payments, prepaid youth cards worth €200, and tax exemptions on funds provided as scholarships for cultural events. Kassianidou has been teaching environmental archaeology and archaeometry at the University of Cyprus since 1994.

Investigations are underway at the land registry over the procedures followed by Afik Group, which has been selling Greek Cypriot property in the north, and whose CEO has a company registered in the Republic. Afik Group describes itself as an international development and construction company, which has over 8,000 property units for sale in the north, across Famagusta, Karpasia and Kyrenia. The firm operates in Israel, Turkey, Cyprus, Germany and Greece. It has offices in the TRNC, Turkey and Germany.

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Labour Relations and Trade Unions

On July 3, the POVEK (Cyprus Confederation of Professional Craftsmen and Shopkeepers) General Assembly submitted a memorandum to the Minister of Labour and Social Insurance with five basic positions and suggestions. The issues concern POVEK's participation in the Labour Advisory Body and on the Board of Directors of the Human Resources Development Authority (ANAD), the rights of the self-employed, the employment of personnel from third countries and the opening hours of stores and shops. Regarding its participation in the Labour Advisory Body, according to the memorandum, the Confederation states, "The fact that the voice of thousands of small and medium-sized enterprises is not heard in the Labour Advisory Body, which by all accounts acts as a catalyst institution in the promotion of issues that concern them and directly affect them, constitutes discrimination and injustice against them". In relation to POVEK's inclusion on the Board of Directors of Human Resources Development Authority, they state that over time they have raised and submitted their proposals to the Board of Directors. With regard to the opening hours of stores and shops, they state in the memorandum that "the current situation can be characterised as scandalous and unjustified", and they request, among other things, that the opening hours of the stores be regulated by law throughout Cyprus and the operation of the stores should be on a six-day basis with closing times for the winter period at 7.00 p.m. and for the summer period at 8.00 p.m. They also request that Sunday be a holiday, except for some very specific touristic areas. In relation to the rights of the self-employed, the Confederation states that they should equal to those of employees. They also demanded that the self-employed had a right to be paid sickness allowance as it applies to other workers and employees and that, upon payment of the corresponding fee, the self-employed must participate in human resources training programmes. They also request that the issue of unemployment benefits be

considered for the self-employed based on specific criteria. In relation to the employment of workers from third countries, POVEK agrees with the new strategy for the employment of personnel from third countries, but notes that there are "problems related to the procedures, bureaucracy and the time of examination by the competent departments that accept and examine applications".

On July 11, the employees in the Union of Hotel and Leisure Centres of PEO (SYXKA PEO) held a protest demanding access of union representatives to the workplace and the application of the constitutional right to unionise. According to an announcement by the trade union, employers in the sector bear the full responsibility for the protest, because they have maintained a nonchalant attitude for the last five years, "denying trade union representatives to access workplaces, which is clearly provided for by the relevant legislation". In practice, they say, "The employer despises the institutions and the Laws of the Republic of Cyprus". As stated in the announcement, SYXKA PEO expect the Labour Relations Department, to which they have already referred their complaints, to immediately act to ensure the right of trade union representatives to access workplaces based on the provisions of the relevant legislation. The employer side maintains that it has the right, on the basis of relevant legislation, not to allow trade union representatives access to workplaces where they do not have members, while the trade unions invoke relevant provisions of the legislation that allow free access to workplaces regardless of the existence of members. The Ministry of Labour may request an opinion from Legal Services or from the International Labour Office.

On July 13, in a letter sent to the Ministers of Finance and Public Order, the Branch Council of Prison Guards of the All-Cypriot Union "Equality" demanded an increase in the prison guards' allowance from €120 to €240. In its letter, the union expressed

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its assessment “that the increase of the allowance to €240 will be a strong incentive to attract new prison guards and prevent the tendency of serving prison guards to resign”.

On July 21, pensions were on the agenda of the Labour Consultative Body (ESS) with the social partners expecting information from the Ministry of Labour regarding the results of the actuarial study. Based on some assumptions of that study, there may be room for a downward adjustment of 12% for employees that choose to retire earlier at the age of 63. Moreover, for workers who, at the time of their retirement at age 63, have completed 40 or 41 years of employment in the private or public sector and their social insurance contributions were continuous, the downward adjustment may be completely abolished.

TURKISH CYPRIOTS

Economic Developments

According to the Statistical Institute, the consumer price index was 72.8% higher in July 2023 compared to July 2022. Consumer prices had risen by 9.9% in July alone. The biggest monthly inflation was in healthcare, where an increase of 16.3% was recorded. Prices in housing and utilities, transportation, and communication categories went up by 15.7%, 15.2% and 10.4% respectively. The monthly food inflation was recorded as 6.3%.

According to the Central Bank's first quarterly bulletin for 2023, foreign currency makes up 81% of all bank deposits. The bulletin also showed that the government ran a budget deficit of TL80.2 million (€3.8 million) in the first three months of 2023.

The Electricity Authority's (Kib-Tek) debt to the Turkish private energy company Aksa has exceeded TL1 billion (€33.8 million). In response to a question

from daily Kibris (which is also owned by Aksa) the company's director said that Kib-Tek made a large debt payment to Aksa Energy in April with the support of Turkey but noted that they had not received any significant payment from Kib-Tek for the last three months. “It should not be forgotten that we currently supply nearly 50% of the country's electrical energy needs. We also need funding so we can continue production and provide uninterrupted service ... during these summer days, therefore our debts must be paid as soon as possible. ... We show dedication and support Kib-Tek but we think it is time for the accumulated debts to be paid to us,” the director added.

Relations with Turkey

The new terminal building and runway of Ercan (Tymbou) Airport were inaugurated on July 20 as part of celebrations marking the 49th anniversary of Turkey's military intervention. The plane carrying Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who arrived in the TRNC to take part in the celebration, was the first to land at the new airport. Following his arrival, an opening ceremony was held at the new terminal. Speaking at the ceremony, Erdoğan stated, among other things, that the new Ercan Airport terminal and runway were located close to international flight routes, and reminded that there was no UN document justifying the isolation and restrictions imposed on the Turkish Cypriot community. He called on the UN to lift these restrictions and invited support for a policy based on the coexistence of two equal states. The new terminal cost a total of €450 million. It has a 3,100m runway, making it the longest commercial runway on the island. There is parking capacity for 30 aircraft, including nine gates that are equipped with jet bridges, 60 check-in desks, and 44 passport control desks. Construction of the new terminal and runway began in 2016 (for criticisms see the Labour Relations and Trade Unions section).

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On July 19, the Turkish company Aksa Energy signed a new 15-year contract with the TRNC to build an “energy bridge” between the TRNC and Turkey using a sub-sea interconnector cable. Aksa will also increase the installed capacity of its Kalecik Power Plant in the TRNC from 35 megawatts to 188 megawatts. Aksa Energy CEO Cemil Kazancı said that steps will be taken to implement the “giant project” as soon as feasibility studies are completed. Kazancı also noted that Aksa Energy has been supplying power to the TRNC for 20 years and meets half of the country’s energy needs.

On July 17, Minister of Interior, Ziya Öztürkler, and Turkish Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Yasin Ekrem Serim, held a press conference following a meeting entitled “Combating Irregular Migration” where they announced that they would step up the efforts to combat irregular migration. Referring to the recent steps taken to maintain public security, Öztürkler said that an agreement had been reached to establish a migration centre within the Ministry of Interior focusing on irregular migration, aiming to identify the situation of those who come to the country with a student visa or work permit and have an irregular status. Öztürkler also said that they reached the final stages of the e-visa automation system and that the embassies and consulates of the Republic of Türkiye and TRNC will be carrying out work to ensure that the system functions properly. He also added that they decided to increase the number of countries subject to visa requirements, because of the increase in the number of people arriving in the country. Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Serim, for his part, said that they reached the stage of signing an agreement regarding consular assistance to TRNC citizens and added that they did not see citizens of the TRNC different from their own citizens. During his visit to the TRNC, Erdoğan announced that Türkiye and TRNC signed the related agreements.

Domestic Developments

On July 11, the single-use plastic ban came into force. According to the new law, it is forbidden to provide single-use plastic products at any point of sale without a fee, while a whole host of single-use plastic items have been banned outright. The list of prohibited items includes plastic earbuds (except for those supplied for medical use), as well as single-use plastic forks, spoons, knives, plates, cups, stirring sticks, straws, balloon stems, and takeaway meal packages made of plastic and polystyrene. The law envisages a six-month transition period wherein companies are allowed to use their remaining stocks before entirely switching to alternatives by 11 January next year. The Department of Environmental Protection called on members of the public to report businesses and establishments violating the new regulation to the environmental complaints hotline. A group of 13 companies that import or manufacture single-use plastic products have issued a joint statement calling for the ban to be lifted and delayed by two years. The companies presented a four-point proposal: postpone the current law in effect by at least two years; allow supplier companies to sell their existing stock; products that the EU does not ban should not be banned in the TRNC; and share the full list of banned products, and open communication channels regarding the infrastructure of banned and alternative products.

Once again, rolling power cuts occurred due to a “malfunction” at Teknecik power station on July 16. The electricity authority’s (Kib-Tek) board of directors’ chairperson said that the power cuts had been planned to alternate between different districts “so that people do not suffer”. He added “we are trying to have energy supplied from the south to close the gap between output and consumption”.

On July 25, the Ercan Airport faced a disruptive four- to five-hour power outage, affecting around 3,000 passengers and 20 flights. The problem led to

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the suspension of services such as jet bridges, luggage belts and x-ray machines, resulting in delays to arrivals and departures. Civil Aviation Department director Mustafa Sofi explained that a malfunction had caused power cuts in certain areas of the newly opened Ercan Airport terminal, leading to “operational difficulties”. The situation at Ercan grew tense as stranded passengers expressed their frustration on social media and endured lengthy waits in the sweltering heat. Tensions occasionally flared between irritated travellers unable to complete their procedures and airport staff trying to manage the situation.

On July 31, the Minister of Public Works and Transportation Erhan Arikli said that the fibre optic cable that had broken has been repaired and that the meteorology device has been activated. He also said that flights could be made from the old runway or from the new runway in line with the request from the Civil Aviation Department. He added that it was only natural that some problems may occur in the near future but that he was adamant that everything would be resolved within a month.

Labour Relations and Trade Unions

On July 10, KTAMS (Public Servants’ Trade Union), Kamu-IS (Public Workers’ Trade Union) and Kamu-Sen (Public Employees’ Trade Union) made a press statement in front of the Ministry of Public Works and Transport, arguing that the technical infrastructure in new Ercan Airport was incomplete and therefore it was not ready for opening. The trade unions expressed their criticism on this issue, emphasising that they were not against the opening of the airport, but that they wanted it to be safe. Particularly, they pointed out problems in the electricity and the automatic weather observation systems.

On July 12, the Minimum Wage Determination Commission set the new monthly net minimum wage at TL15,750 [€532] (gross TL18,103 [€612])

after a meeting between representatives of employers, workers and the Minister of Labour, Hasan Tacyoy. The workers’ representative, Hur-Is Federation, voted against on the grounds that the proposed figure fell short of meeting the rise in the cost of living in the country. On July 26, the Commission reconvened to discuss the objection made by the Hur-Is Federation, but the result did not change. The new minimum wage came into force as of July 1. Hur-Is President, Ahmet Serdaroğlu, pointed out the price increases and stated that even a 42% increase to the minimum wage was not sufficient to meet the rise in the cost of living. He also expressed his criticism of the government after the meeting, asking the government, “When will you fulfil the obligation of being a welfare state?”, and he demanded that the cost of living be reflected in salaries every two months due to the unstoppable price hikes. Meanwhile, Employers’ Association deputy chairperson, Metin Arhun, defended the Commission’s decision. Arhun also highlighted the opportunities available to Turkish Cypriots who have the right to work abroad, saying: “With the EU passport we have, we can go to different places and work. Therefore, while we are determining this minimum wage, we don’t have those born here in mind but rather the foreign workforce. We cannot find the kind of employees we want; we are forced to bring workers from abroad.” He also pointed out that the new minimum wage, in euro terms, is higher than the minimum wage rates of Romania and Bulgaria.

On July 14, public sector trade unions made a seven-point proposal to the Minister of Finance regarding the economic situation of the country. In the written statement made by Burak Mavis, Secretary General of the Primary School Teachers’ Trade Union (KTOS), on behalf of the five trade unions organised in the public sector, it was stated that a preliminary meeting was held between them and the Ministry of Finance officials following the call of the Minister of Finance. In the meeting held be-

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tween the Minister of Finance, the Undersecretary of the Ministry, and KTAMS (Public Servants' Trade Union), KTOEOS (Secondary School Teachers' Trade Union), KTOS, Kamu-Sen (Public Employees' Trade Union) and Kamu-Is (Public Workers' Trade Union), the trade unions submitted the following measures: "(1) reflect the cost of living allowance (COLA) in salaries every two months; (2) update tax brackets and exemptions; (3) award an additional increase to the salaries of employees subject to the "Emigration Law", which reduced the entry level salaries of public employees; (4) reflect welfare share in the salaries and wages of all employees, including minimum wage earners; (5) enforce the law regulating the collection of taxes from online and virtual gambling; (6) put time limitations on government incentives; (7) take steps to ensure tax justice and prevent the informal economy by especially expanding the use of debit and credit cards."

On July 21, El-Sen, the trade union for employees of the Electricity Authority (Kib-Tek), announced that it would not respond to any malfunctions until the police presence is removed from outside the Tekne-cik Power Plant and electrical substations across the TRNC. Police officers were put on guard at the sites to prevent potential "sabotage" following the signing of the agreements in the previous week for the establishment of an interconnector cable between the TRNC and Türkiye. "Kib-Tek workers are treated as a terrorist organisation", the Kib-Tek leadership said. The move was made to prevent a repeat of alleged sabotage that occurred in April when Parliament was discussing a bill to allow electricity to be purchased from the private sector without issuing a tender.

The Social Security and Labour Department imposed a ban on working outdoors between the hours of 12pm and 4pm between July 17 and 21 as temperatures rose above 40 degrees. Meanwhile, the Occupational Health and Safety Experts Associa-

tion president, Guvenc Yuksel said that employers should take steps to protect their workers, adjust working hours to coincide with the cooler morning and evening hours, provide employees with breaks to prevent excessive fatigue, and train employees on the risks of heat stress. Yuksel also stressed the importance of being prepared for emergencies such as heat stroke. He urged employers to update their contingency plans and to train employees on how to deal with these emergencies, adding that employers should take steps to protect their workers from the heat, even if temperatures are not so extreme.

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SHORT BIOGRAPHIES OF AUTHORS

Yiannis Charalambous

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