

# 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!

Newsletter No. 150 NOVEMBER 24

The FES-Newsletter Team wishes all our readers a Merry Christmas and a wonderful 2025!







# **HEADLINES**

President Nikos Christodoulides discusses the Cyprus problem in person with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan on the sidelines of the European Political Community's summit held in Budapest.

Christodoulides states that Cyprus is getting ready to join NATO if and when Turkey withdraws its objections to Cypriot membership.

ExxonMobil is to begin drilling for natural gas in the Electra reservoir of Block 5 of Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone in January 2025.

A European survey on violence against women showed that, in Cyprus, 30% suffered physical and sexual violence by a partner.

The Turkish Cypriot Statistics Institute projected that the population had reached 476,214 by the end of 2023. It also announced a growth rate of 7.3% and a GDP per capita of €13,490 for the same year.

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PODCASTS in DECEMBER: No podcasts in December **₽** 

PODCASTS in JANUARY: No podcasts in January

### PUBLICATIONS in DECEMBER: No publications in December



PUBLICATIONS in JANUARY: *No publications in January* 

EVENTS in DECEMBER: No events planned so far



EVENTS in JANUARY: No events planned so far

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# CYPRUS PROBLEM & INTERCOMMUNAL RELATIONS

On November 6, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar attended the Organisation of Turkic States (OTS) meeting in Kyrgyzstan capital, Bishkek. During his address at the meeting, Erdoğan stated that the Turkic world is responsible for a fair solution in Cyprus. Tatar's attendance at the event drew the ire of the European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs Josep Borrell, who stated that the EU rejects efforts to legitimise the TRNC by granting it OTS observer status.<sup>1</sup>

The European Political Community's summit held in Budapest provided the opportunity on November 7 for Republic of Cyprus President Nikos Christodoulides to meet in person with Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan to exchange views on the Cyprus problem. Christodoulides was photographed sitting around a coffee table with Erdoğan, Fidan, Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and a member of Erdoğan's communications team. Christodoulides reportedly stated that he and Erdoğan had an informal discussion, during which he mentioned several times to the Turkish President that the resumption of Cyprus talks can only be based on relevant UN resolutions. Christodoulides also noted that Cyprus is ready to play a constructive role in EU-Turkey relations, but he clarified that Turkey's path to joining the bloc must go through substantive developments on the Cyprus issue.

<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 November 9, Tatar ruled out the possibility of a resumption of talks to solve the Cyprus problem and reiterated his position for a two-state solution.

On November 11, Christodoulides was again pictured in a conversation with Fidan on the sidelines of the Cop29 climate meeting in the Azeri capital Baku. A brief discussion was also held between United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG) António Guterres and Christodoulides in which the UNSG reportedly informed Christodoulides of progress in the sense that all parties had given their consent to hold an enlarged meeting on Cyprus.

On November 14, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Europe, Central Asia and Americas, Miroslav Jenca, stated that the UNSG's new initiative on Cyprus is likely to take place at the beginning of 2025, adding that the expanded conference on Cyprus will include the guarantor powers Greece, Turkey and the United Kingdom. Christodoulides is reportedly in favour of a meeting involving the leaders of both communities and all three of Cyprus' guarantor powers, as well as the UN, while Tatar has opposed British involvement. Jenca assured that the UN was committed to acting within the framework established by the resolutions on Cyprus regarding the content of the solution. He also noted that the UNSG wants and seeks to prepare the new conference on Cyprus as best as possible so that it has increased chances of success. Meanwhile, a date has not yet been announced for the visit of UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacebuilding, Rosemary DiCarlo.

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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On November 27, the second intergovernmental summit between Greece and Cyprus was held in Nicosia where the two countries reaffirmed their commitment to institutionalise intergovernmental summits, thus contributing to stability in the eastern Mediterranean and enhancing bilateral cooperation. Referring to the Cyprus problem, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said the aim was a just and viable solution. Mitsotakis also noted that Greco-Turkish relations could facilitate the resumption of talks for Cyprus, but he clarified that this improvement would not automatically mean that Turkey will shift from its positions. In a joint communiqué issued after the summit, Christodoulides and Mitsotakis reaffirmed that a solution must be in line with UN Security Council resolutions and expressed hope that Turkey would contribute towards resuming talks.

On November 27, Turkish Cypriot Foreign Minister Tahsin Ertuğruloğlu argued that opening additional crossing points would render the border "meaningless". Speaking before a parliamentary committee reviewing his Ministry's 2025 budget, Ertuğruloğlu voiced his opposition to new crossings, stating that the current nine are sufficient, and he warned of potential security risks. He attributed congestion at existing crossings to practices on the Greek Cypriot side and stressed the importance of addressing the issue beyond mere economic considerations. On the wider Cyprus issue, Ertuğruloğlu expressed scepticism about the prospects of an informal "4+1" format meeting, stating that it would not yield results. He criticised the UNSG for failing to act appropriately after declaring in October that "there is no common ground" between the leaders of Cyprus. According to Ertuğruloğlu, Guterres should have referred the UN's Goodwill Mission in Cyprus back to the United Nations Security Council following this statement. Ertuğruloğlu also addressed the "3D" issue (direct transport, direct trade, and direct contact), which Tatar presented as a precondition to starting talks, and he stressed that the only way to achieve these is through advancing recognition of the TRNC.

On November 28, Christodoulides stated that Cyprus is getting ready to join NATO if and when Turkey withdraws its objections to Cypriot membership. Christodoulides comments came after Greek newspaper Kathimerini had claimed that the President had presented a plan of Cyprus' future accession to NATO to US President Joe Biden during their meeting in October. Meanwhile the Turkish Defense Ministry responded via a statement that Cypriot NATO membership would be unacceptable and that such an attempt would disrupt the delicate balance on the Cyprus problem and negatively affect the process of working towards a solution. Foreign Minister Constantinos Kombos clarified that public debate over whether Cyprus should join NATO is premature, and he clarified that the government is currently working to increase compatibility with NATO member states, including Greece and France.

On November 29, the UK's new High Commissioner to Cyprus, Michael Tatham, met with House President Annita Demetriou, whom he reassured of his country's continued constructive role for peace and security in Cyprus. The UK reaffirmed its steadfast support to a solution of the Cyprus problem within the UN framework and is clear on not recognising the TRNC.

According to figures released by the TRNC central bank, the number of crossings that Greek Cypriots made between the south and the north fell by almost 4.5% in the first nine months of the year compared to the same period last year. However, the number of crossings made by Turkish Cypriots grew by 17% in the first nine months of 2024. In total, 2,198,533 crossings were made by Greek Cypriots across the island's nine crossing points between the start of January and the end of September, down from a total of 2,302,065 over the first nine months of 2023. Meanwhile, 2,158,150 crossings were made by Turkish Cypriots during the nine months, up from a total of 1,840,404 between the start of January and

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the end of September last year. Many Turkish Cypriots cross to the south for shopping, which largely explains the rise in the number of crossings. With the cost of living increasing in the north and the TL-Euro exchange rate remaining stable, groceries and other consumer goods have become cheaper in the south.

### **HYDROCARBONS**

On November 22, Energy Minister George Papanastasiou stated that ExxonMobil's decision to begin drilling for natural gas in the Electra reservoir of Block 5 of Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) constitutes a milestone and would hopefully open new horizons. The comment was made after a meeting attended by the US firm's Vice President for Global Exploration, John Ardill, Christodoulides, and Papanastasiou. Ardill stated that he had informed Christodoulides about plans to drill in both Block 5 and Block 10, which contains the Glaucus natural gas deposit, with hopes to find new natural gas resources which will support the rapid development of both onshore and domestic gas supply, and, potentially, of liquefied natural gas (LNG). Ardill confirmed his company would begin drilling off the coast of Cyprus in January 2025. Papanastasiou added that a prospect named Pegasus, which is located close to the Glaucus deposit in Block 10, will be connected to Glaucus if drilling into the area finds sufficient deposits. He added that ExxonMobil are already in consultation with Italian energy company Eni, with the aim of incorporating the Kronos reservoir, which is located in Block 6, into a combined development. Regarding other blocks in Cyprus' EEZ, Papanastasiou stated that the revised plan for the Aphrodite deposit in Block 12 that Chevron submitted in September 2024 is now being discussed at a technocratic level. The new plan, Papanastasiou said, would see the gas extracted from the Aphrodite deposit connected to a floating production unit (FPU) directly above it in Cypriot waters, which would then be connected to liquefaction infrastructure in Egypt, instead of creating new such infrastructure in Cyprus.

# FRIEDRICH EBERT STIFTUNG

### FES CYPRUS NEWSLETTER

### **GREEK CYPRIOTS**

### **Gender Developments**

On November 25, the Commissioner for the Protection of Human Rights, Maria Stylianou Lottides, stated that more than one third of women from Cyprus who took part in a European survey said they had experienced physical violence, sexual violence or the threat of it during their lifetime. Lottides noted that the actual number stood at 36.1% as the survey showed that Cyprus continues to have high rates of gender-based violence. The survey on violence against women was conducted jointly by Eurostat, FRA and the EU Agency for Gender Equality (EIGE) for all European Union countries among women aged between 18 and 74. The survey showed that, in Cyprus, 30% suffered physical and sexual violence by a partner, while physical and sexual violence or threat from a third person from the age of 15 years was at 14.6%. Sexual harassment in the workplace throughout their lives was at 39.9%, Lottides added. In her statement on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, Lottides also referred to the provisions of the new EU directive on combating violence against women and intimate violence, which should be incorporated into the domestic legal order of states by June 2027.

# Economic Developments in Times of Green Transition

European authorities confirmed Cyprus' financial and economic stability in their 17th post-programme surveillance mission. The latest report, released on November 26 from the European Commission, the European Central Bank (ECB), and with input from the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), praised Cyprus' solid fiscal framework. The report however cautioned about significant risks in key sectors of the economy and potential threats arising from global geopolitical tensions. Energy dependence was one of the areas of concern. According to the report,

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Cyprus relies heavily on fossil fuels and has limited integration into the European electricity market, making it susceptible to energy price volatility.

Speaking at an intergovernmental summit between Greece and Cyprus on November 27, Greek Energy Minister Theodoros Skylakakis stated there is clear support from the US for the Great Sea Interconnector, which is set to link the electricity grids of Cyprus, Greece, and Israel. Cypriot Energy Minister George Papanastasiou pointed out that when the cable is complete, it will connect Cyprus to Europe's electricity grid, which is a European goal. Skylakakis said the project now has a regular cash flow and that cables have begun to be laid off the coast of Crete. On this point, Papanastasiou acknowledged the technical, geopolitical, and financial risks of the project, but said the geopolitical risks can be managed through diplomacy, operational monitoring, and financial alliances with investors from major countries. Cyprus has long been weighing up its options on whether or not it will buy into the project's holding company, with Greece's independent power transmission operator Admie, a 51% stakeholder, having requested the Cypriot government pay €100m to buy in. The Cypriot government has demanded access to a cost-benefit analysis and time to evaluate it before coming to a final decision.

#### Domestic Developments

On November 27, Costas Kadis was elected European Fisheries Commissioner after a plenary session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg. Kadis stated he would work to support the well-being of Europe's coastal communities and fishermen, as well as for the protection and sustainable management of the oceans at both European and global levels. Kadis will take up his new role on December 1.

#### **Foreign Relations**

No notable developments occurred during the month of November.

## Future of Work, Labour Relations & Trade Unions

On November 1, a preliminary agreement was reached after months of negotiations between trade unions and hotel associations on the collective agreement. The agreement provides, among others, salary increases, the inclusion of a 13th salary in the hotel employment regulations, increase in employer contributions to the provident fund, and the establishment of a committee to streamline and update salary scales and sector regulations.

On November 5, workers at ready-mix concrete factories began an indefinite strike after rejecting the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance's mediation proposal for renewing their collective agreement. According to the trade unions, the main reason for the workers dynamic strike action is the employers' refusal to fully restore the overtime allowance after 10 years, which was decreased due to the 2013 financial crisis.

On November 6, the Minister of Labour and Social Insurance announced a new policy package for demographic recovery aiming to reconcile family and work life, boost fertility rates, and improve the worker-to-retiree ratio. The measures include support for families balancing work and childcare, economic assistance for new mothers, expanded eligibility for parental leave, and initiatives to promote employment for the unemployed.

On November 7, Eurostat released data demonstrating that the average annual salary of employees in Cyprus remains below the EU average. According to Eurostat, the average annual salary in Cyprus reached  $\leq 26,430$  in 2023 while the average annual adjusted salary in the EU was  $\leq 37,900$ . Concurrently, according to the Statistical Service, there is a 6.0% increase in the average monthly gross earnings based on the preliminary data from 2024 compared

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to 2023. Noteworthy, the increase is higher in men's salaries compared to women's salaries.

On November 8 and after three years of negotiations, trade unions and State Health Services Organisation (OKYPY) signed the first collective agreement for employees hired on individual contracts. The agreement, covering the years 2023–2025, establishes employment terms for administrative, secretarial staff, nurses, doctors, and other personnel.

On November 11, Cyprus Union of Bank Employees (ETYK) and Hellenic Bank signed a collective agreement concluding a long period of disputes that created uncertainty for the bank and its employees. The agreement abolishes the distinction between the employees from the former Cooperative Bank – which was bought by Hellenic Bank – and Hellenic Bank employees. Additionally, the collective agreement extends and endorses the terms of the prior agreement, ensuring that all Hellenic Bank employees are integrated into the ETYK-Hellenic Bank salary scales and benefit schemes.

On November 13, government doctors announced a 48-hour strike for the end of November, escalating tensions in public hospitals. The decision followed their rejection of the financial incentives OKYPY had proposed in 2023. The announcement of the strike reignited discussions about the regulation of strikes in essential services.

On the same day, bus drivers in Paphos announced a 24-hour strike for November 25 in response to ongoing disputes over the renewal of their collective agreement. The workers rejected the second mediation proposal from the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, however, the trade unions remain open to social dialogue in order to achieve a mutually accepted solution that will ensure worker's rights. However, the workers decided to postpone the 24hour strike, following the Department of Labour Relations' invitation to attend a meeting to make a final attempt at finding a mutually acceptable solution.

On November 18, the Minister of Labour and Social Insurance submitted a mediation proposal for the renewal of the collective agreement in the readymix concrete production sector. However, trade unions rejected the proposal while the employers' representatives had accepted it. On November 21, the Minister called a high-level meeting to resolve the ongoing labour dispute, which has led to prolonged strikes.

On November 21, although hotels' association had accepted the preliminary agreement to renew the collective agreement in the hospitality sector, they rejected the mediation proposal because it included a lump-sum payment provision. They had previously indicated that if this addition were made, their request for a mandatory six-month employment period in a hotel before an employee qualifies for the 13-month salary would also need to be addressed.

On November 26, government doctors in public hospitals announced a 48-hour strike following a failed meeting between OKYPY and trade unions. During the meeting, OKYPY insisted on a "holistic solution" and proposed reaching an agreement on financial incentives for doctors covering the period 2023-2027. Trade unions suggested prioritising the payment of amounts owed for 2023-2024, promising to promptly discuss terms for 2025-2027. However, on November 18, the two sides reached an agreement ensuring that no strikes will occur until December 5.

On November 28, a sectoral collective agreement was signed for ramp workers at Larnaca and Paphos airports. The Labour Relations Department was present for the signing of the agreement between trade unions PEO, SEK, and DEOK and companies Skyserv, Swissport, and Goldair. The agreement covers all ramp workers at the airports and includes

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significant salary and benefit increases such as improved work schedules and conditions and enhanced overtime provisions.

On November 29, OELMEK (the Cyprus Secondary Education Teachers' Union) sent a letter to the Minister of Education, granting a deadline until January 10, 2025, to provide clear responses to a series of issues. The organisation warned of strong reactions if the Ministry continues its "unproductive stance". OELMEK asserted that the proposals submitted by the Ministry regarding teacher evaluations lack detail, are ambiguous, and fail to address core issues. The union also raised broader issues in education, such as student misconduct, security guards and camera installations, and teacher recruitment practices.

The strike in the ready-mix concrete production sector, which persisted for 25 consecutive days, has significantly impacted the construction sector. According to the Federation of Associations of Building Contractors of Cyprus (OSEOK), the damage directly linked to concrete work due to the ongoing strike amounted to approximately €80m to €100m and therefore construction companies increased pressure to reach an agreement as the risk of job losses and company closures had become increasingly apparent. In light of potential progress, on November 29, the Minister of Labour and Social Insurance was expected to present a new mediation proposal to OSEOK and trade unions SEK and PEO. According to the relevant announcement, the Ministry was prepared to formalise an agreement, with responses from both parties expected by Saturday, November 30, 2024.

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### FES CYPRUS NEWSLETTER

### **TURKISH CYPRIOTS**

#### Gender Developments

No notable developments occurred during the month of November.

# Economic Developments in Times of Green Transition

According to the Statistical Institute, the consumer price index was 59.9% higher in November 2024 compared to November 2023. Consumer prices rose by 0.78% in November alone; the inflation rate in the first 11 months of 2024 reached 51.6%. The monthly food inflation was 2.83%. The highest monthly inflation was in the "clothing and shoes" segment, where an increase of 9.98% was recorded; the second highest was in the "alcoholic beverages and tobacco" segment with 3.7%.

According to the Statistical Institute, GDP grew by 7.3% in 2023 to reach  $\in$  5.09 billion [calculated based on the average Euro-TL rate in 2023]; GDP per capita was calculated at US\$14,599. In terms of sectoral shares of GDP at current prices, trade and tourism accounted for 25.8%, public services 12.9%, transportation and communication 10.4%, professional services 10.2%, financial institutions 9.1%, import taxes 9%, construction 6%, home ownership 5.7%, industry 5.6%, and agriculture 5.3%.

According to the "2023 Balance of Payments Statistics", jointly prepared by the TRNC Central Bank and the Statistical Institute, exports increased from \$144.7 million in 2022 to \$176.2 million in 2023, representing a 21.8% rise. Meanwhile, imports grew by 25%, rising from \$2.28 billion to \$2.85 billion. As a result, the foreign trade deficit widened by 25.2%, reaching \$2.67 billion in 2023. Net income from tourism, which was \$1.16 billion in 2022, increased by 46.9%, compared to the previous year, reaching \$1.7 billion in 2023. This increase was influenced

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by the rise in the number of passengers entering via crossing points as well as through air and sea routes, in addition to higher spending by those entering through crossings. Net income from higher education, on the other hand, rose from \$644.8 million in 2022 to \$741.2 million in 2023, marking a 14.95% increase. Through direct investments, \$418.5 million flowed into the TRNC economy in 2022, rising to \$843.6 million in 2023. In both years, real estate investments ranked first, totaling \$394.6 million in 2022 and \$843.2 million in 2023. The current account surplus, which was \$123.1 million in 2022, increased to \$412.2 million in 2023.

T&T, the private company operating Ercan (Tymbou) Airport, reported a significant increase in passenger and aircraft traffic during the first ten months of 2024 compared to the same period in 2023. According to the company, October 2024 recorded the highest passenger numbers of the year, with 462,646 passengers passing through the airport – a 13.4% increase over October 2023. Overall, the airport served 3,267,171 passengers in the first ten months of 2023. This number rose significantly in 2024, reaching a total of 3,936,745 passengers over the same period.

The Parliamentary Committee on Economy, Finance, and Budget has begun deliberations on the 2025 budget. In her opening address, National Unity Party (UBP) MP Resmiye Canaltay highlighted the widening budget deficit, while Finance Minister Berova announced that the cost-of-living adjustment would be applied twice instead of three times, as it was in 2024. The budget, approved by the Council of Ministers, sets expenditures at 136.3 billion TL [€3.7 bn], revenues at 118.7 bn TL [€3.2 bn], and a deficit of 17.6bn TL [€0.5 bn]. Berova also laid out plans to transition to a digital economy to minimise unregistered activities, streamline the tax system, and align with global economic shifts.

### Relations with Turkey

There was nothing to report on this topic.

### Domestic Developments

After weeks of deadlock in Parliament over the election of a new speaker, the impasse ended on November 18 with the election of Ziya Öztürkler from the National Unity Party (UBP) as Speaker of Parliament. Fazilet Özdenefe from the main opposition Republican Turkish Party (CTP) was re-elected as Deputy Speaker. Before the vote, Öztürkler, who had initially assumed the role on October 18, announced his resignation, stating that he had stepped down voluntarily to facilitate budget negotiations and resolve the ongoing dispute. The CTP had previously contested his election, arguing that three of the 26 votes Öztürkler received in the 50-seat Parliament should have been invalidated due to being stamped more than once. Following his resignation, the UBP renominated Öztürkler, who was ultimately elected with 27 votes in favour and 21 against.

Based on the latest data, the Statistics Institute projected that the population had reached 476,214 by the end of 2023, comprising 257,789 men and 218,425 women. This projection was prepared using assumptions derived from the 2011 Housing and Population Census and adjustments based on migration data obtained from registration systems.

On November 27, Hasan Tosunoğlu, a Nicosia MP elected on the Democratic Party (DP) ticket, resigned from his party, citing dissatisfaction with its leadership and direction. The DP is one of two junior partners in the three-party coalition government led by the National Unity Party (UBP). With this resignation, the number of independent MPs increased to three, reducing the coalition government's majority in Parliament to three.

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## Future of Work, Labour Relations & Trade Unions

On November 22, the government introduced a controversial bill granting itself greater authority over collective agreements. The proposed law would require a "positive written opinion" from the Ministry of Finance for any public sector collective agreement to take effect, effectively giving the government veto power over deals negotiated between trade unions and workplaces such as municipalities and semi-governmental organisations. The opposition and trade unions reacted strongly: While CTP MP Devrim Barçın called the bill a "fascist attack on unionised life", another CTP MP, Ürün Solyalı, cited a 2017 Supreme Court ruling that essentially declared third-party interference in collective bargaining unconstitutional. Dev-Is Federation Chairperson Semih Kolozali criticised the bill, pledging resistance to any unconstitutional intervention. Meanwhile, municipal workers' union (BES) Chairperson Mustafa Yalınkaya argued that the proposed law undermines the autonomy of municipalities, which have separate budgets and elected officials. "Who is the government to intervene in municipal agreements?", he asked.

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### SHORT BIOGRAPHIES OF AUTHORS

#### **Yiannis Charalambous**

Yiannis Charalambous has been a Research Assistant for FES Cyprus contributing to the writing of the monthly FES Cyprus Newsletter since July 2012. Yiannis obtained a Bachelor's degree in Turkish Studies from the National Kapodistrian University of Athens and an MA in International Relations and European Studies from the University of Nicosia. The subject of his dissertation focused on evaluating the catalyst effect in resolving the Cyprus problem, by comparing the factors of EU membership and the discovery of hydrocarbons. Yiannis speaks Greek, English and Turkish.

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#### Stavros Stavrou

Stavros Stavrou holds a Bachelor's degree in History from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, a Master's degree in International Relations from the University of Warwick and a Master's in Industrial and Employment Relations from International Training Centre of the ILO in collaboration with University of Turin. His research focuses on the employment relations of migrants and refugees, trade unions, and social inequalities.

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