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1. Cyprus Problem

In March UN Special Advisor on Cyprus, Espen Barth Eide engaged in shuttle diplomacy in order to explore avenues to resume the stalled negotiations following their breakdown in February due to a controversial vote of the Greek Cypriot Parliament to commemorate the 1950 Enosis (Union with Greece) plebiscite. The decision prompted Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci to withdraw from the reunification talks until the decision was revoked.

On March 3, Akinci said that the Greek Cypriots would have to accept the reality of a two-state solution in Cyprus unless the Greek Cypriot parliamentary vote to mark 1950 Enosis plebiscite in schools was rectified. Touching upon the issue of being perceived as a minority, Akinci said "They are claiming that they are granting us privileges even though we are a minority. I strongly reject this notion. We do not want privileges, we want political equality. Political equality in federations is not a privilege...it is a principle". On a different occasion, Akinci said "we did not give up on our will for a solution. We were given authority by the people to find a solution."

On March 15, Eide held separate meetings with the two Cypriot leaders Mustafa Akinci and Nicos Anastasiades. He also had the opportunity to discuss the resumption of the peace talks with representatives of civil society. An informal dinner was hosted between DISY leader Averof Neophytou and Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa

Akinci on March 14. The dinner was arranged by the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry chairman, Phidias Pilides and his Turkish Cypriot counterpart, Fikri Toros. A significant step towards the end of bringing the two leaders back to the negotiations table was taken on March 22, when a bill tabled by ruling DISY for a legislative amendment to shift decision-making power on school celebrations from parliament to the education ministry was approved by the House education committee with the backing of AEKL and DISY. The bill is understood to be an indirect way for the government to revoke parliament's decision with regards to the Enosis vote commemoration. Turkish Cypriot spokesman Baris Burcu who welcomed the education committee's decision stated: "We would like to indicate that the necessary steps to be taken shortly in the plenum, and the elimination of the celebration of Enosis plebiscite in schools, will pave the way to the resumption of the talks".

According to Burcu, Akinci informed the UN Special Advisor, Espen Barth Eide that he will be ready to meet Anastasiades in a social setting at the end of March following the decision of the committee. Burcu clarified however that talks could only resume when the House decision was completely overturned.

On March 27, UN Special Advisor Espen Barth Eide, announced that he will host a dinner for the two leaders, Nicos Anastasiades and Mustafa Akinci on April 2. According to a brief UN Statement, the dinner will be held at the

Ledra Palace Hotel within the UN buffer zone in Nicosia. On March 28, Anastasiades remained closed to the possibility of discussing any confidence building measures during the dinner, a suggestion floated by Akinci. "Sunday's social dinner provides an opportunity to decide on the way forward...I want to make clear that, if the goal or the aim is to discuss confidence-building measures, the effort by those who seek to create the conditions for a fruitful dialogue to restart is doomed," the Greek Cypriot leader stated.

On March 29, Turkey donated €92,000 to the project of exhumation, identification and return of remains of missing persons in Cyprus. According to the Committee on Missing Persons (CMP), the donation brings the Turkish financial assistance to the CMP to a total of €826,000 over the past ten years. A further €124,000 were donated by the British government on March 31. It also granted access to its archives for the period between 1963 and 1974 to assist in the committee's task of locating burial sites. The donation brings direct British financial assistance to the CMP to a total of €297,000 over the past ten years. So far, the remains of 750 missing persons have been identified and returned to the families for a dignified burial.

Under the title "Turkey's vision for Cyprus", Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu, in an op-ed published in the Washington Times on March 19 described the terms under which a solution is possible. The Turkish FM stressed that a Cyprus solution would contain the EU's

four freedoms and the 1960 guarantees would remain. "The EU will ensure that the basic parameters of the settlement are legally anchored within its primary law. A balance between Greece and Turkey will be struck, meaning that Turkish nationals will be treated on an equal footing with Greek nationals exclusively on the Island," Cavusoglu wrote. The Greek Cypriot side has rejected both notions on numerous occasions based on the argument that Greeks have the four freedoms in Cyprus by virtue of being EU members and that it cannot apply to Turkish nationals in Cyprus. Cavusoglu also wrote that the two sides on the island must be politically equal.

Meanwhile, the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker expressed his conviction on March 9 that Turkey's demand that the four freedoms bestowed by the acquis to be applied to Turkish nationals after a solution could not be accepted under any circumstances. According to the Cyprus News Agency which quoted a representative of the European Commission, Juncker, who received President Nicos Anastasiades in Brussels, said that Turkey's demand was not a bilateral issue, but a question concerning the whole of the EU, and that it would not be accepted under any circumstances.

On the occasion of the International Women's Day, the Office of the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process under the Auspices of the Embassy of Sweden in Nicosia, hosted the official ceremony to release the joint statement of the

religious leaders of Cyprus condemning all forms of violence against women and girls. “We are delighted that for the first time in the history of Cyprus the religious leaders of the Church of Cyprus, the Muftiate, the Armenian, Maronite and Latin Churches of Cyprus agreed to jointly address issues of violence against women,” said Salpy Eskidjian, the Executive Coordinator of the Office of RTCYPP and one of its co-founders. “We are deeply honoured to work with them in this regard and encouraged with their commitment to continued dialogue and peacebuilding,” Eskidjian added. The statement is available at:

<http://www.religioustrack.com/joint-statement-condemning-violence-against-women-and-girls.html>

A convict who had escaped from prison in the southern part of Cyprus was captured in the north and handed over to UN officials after the intervention of the Bi-communal Technical Committee on Crime. This is still not common practice between both sides and therefore a remarkable achievement.

Activists from both sides of the island held a march to call for a “reunited demilitarized Cyprus” on March 4. During the march they violated the UN line and spent some time in the UN controlled buffer zone playing and sunbathing.

2. Hydrocarbons

On March 7, Energy Minister Yiorgos Lakkotrypis announced that Cyprus has success-

fully completed negotiations with the selected bidders for the offshore hydrocarbon exploration licences in the island’s exclusive economic zone (EEZ) as part of the island’s third licensing round announced in May 2016. The applicants selected were a consortium of Italy’s ENI and France’s Total for Block 6, ENI for Block 8, and a consortium consisting of US’ ExxonMobil and Qatar Petroleum for Block 10. Lakkotrypis described the development as very important for Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean in general.

On March 17, the cabinet approved the contracts with the winners of the third oil and gas licensing round for blocks 6, 8 and 10. The signing of the contracts is expected to take place on April 5-6. According to Lakkotrypis the government will receive a total of €103.5 million as a signatory bonus. It is understood that the successful conclusion of talks with ExxonMobil and Qatar Petroleum further strengthens Cyprus’s access to the administration of US president Donald Trump, after the latter appointed the former ExxonMobil top executive Rex Tillerson as Secretary of State. The US interests in the area, as well as those of France and of the UK via Royal Dutch Shell which is partner with Noble in Aphrodite, may help deal with the probable reactions of Turkey which opposes Cyprus’s oil and gas exploration with the Cyprus problem unresolved. This is at least what the Greek Cypriot side clearly hopes.

With regards block 11, Lakkotrypis confirmed that the cabinet approved on March 7 Total’s

application to grant 50% of its rights to ENI. He said this was a very important development because it strengthened the joint venture in Block 11.

Speaking at the fourth Eastern Mediterranean Gas Conference in Nicosia on March 14 ENI's Chief Exploration Officer, Luca Bertelli stated that a second super-giant gas field like Zohr could be awaiting discovery in the eastern Mediterranean, perhaps off the coast of Cyprus. ENI discovered the Zohr prospect, in Egypt's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in 2015. The field holds an estimated 30 trillion cubic feet of gas in place, and is the largest ever natural gas find in the Mediterranean surpassing Israel's Leviathan. A geological map of the Cyprus-Egypt maritime border area shows a large 'carbonate platform' existing in the island's southern off-shore blocks of 10, 11 and 12, and in blocks 7 and 8. Cyprus' Block 11, operated by France's Total since February 2013, lies about 6 kilometres from the Zohr discovery. Bertelli confirmed that Total plans to drill its first "Zohr-type prospect" in Block 11 in June. Currently, ENI holds concessions on blocks 2, 3 and 9.

Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci, said that if the negotiations about a solution of the Cyprus problem succeeded, Mediterranean gas reserves would help bring lasting peace to the island. Speaking to Anadolu Agency, Akinci also warned, "If there is no solution and compromise on the island, the natural gas deposits will be an element of tension ... Cyprus' natural gas deposits are ours, too". On plans by Israel,

Greece, and the Greek Cypriot administration to build underwater electricity networks, Akinci said, "Instead, an Israel-Cyprus-Turkey route could be less expensive and easier". He also stated that if a settlement was reached, water coming from Turkey to the island's north would be shared with the south.

On March 24, the Turkish foreign ministry issued a statement threatening to take "all necessary measures" to protect its interests in the Eastern Mediterranean. The statement came in response to the launch of the third licensing round of hydrocarbons exploration by the Cypriot Government but also as a reaction to Anastasiades' visit to New York and the meetings he held with representatives of one of the hydrocarbon companies that took part in the international tender, Exxon Mobil. The statement accused the Greek Cypriot side of failing to accept Turkish Cypriots as politically equal partners and disregarding their "inalienable rights as co-owners of the island". It asked the Greek Cypriots to "refrain from acting as though it were the sole owner of the Island's natural resources and to cease its hydrocarbon-related activities". Ankara "will take all necessary measures to protect its interests in the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as the rights of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC)¹", the statement added.

¹ The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) is only recognised by the Republic of Turkey. While for Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots, Mustafa Akinci serves as President of the TRNC, the international

Turkey will begin seismic exploration of oil and natural gas resources in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea this year, Turkish Energy and Natural Resources Minister Berat Albayrak said. "We will take steps this year towards exploring and drilling in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea," the minister told Anadolu Agency at the IHS CERA Week 2017 energy conference in Houston. "After our first seismic exploration vessel Barbaros Hayrettin Pasa, our second vessel will actively conduct 2-D and 3-D seismic exploration in both of our seas," he added. Barbaros explored oil and natural gas resources two years ago off the coast of Cyprus leading to the collapse of talks between the two sides.

3. Greek Cypriots

Economic Developments

The finance ministry announced on March 31 that it generated a budget surplus of €133million on a cash basis in the first two months of the year compared to a surplus of €38.6m in the respective period of 2016. According to the ministry the improved fiscal

community considers him the communal leader of the Turkish Cypriots. As the government of the Republic of Cyprus remains internationally 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).

results are mainly due to an €84m increase in total revenue reaching €1.1bn in January to February of 2017 compared to 2016. The increase in revenue is mainly on a €62 million increase to €439.5 million in indirect tax revenue, including €31 million in additional value added tax revenue to €248.7 million. Total expenditure fell in the first two months of the year by €36 million to €935.6 million compared to the respective two-month period of 2016 mainly on reduced subsidies and current transfers.

On March 17, Standard & Poor's (S&P) announced that it upgraded Cyprus's sovereign rating to BB+ from BB which is still one notch below investment grade and placed it on stable outlook citing better than expected economic and fiscal performance.

On March 31, a Troika² delegation completed its second post program surveillance of the Cypriot economy. According to a statement issued on the European Commission website, while structural reforms carried out in recent years have helped Cyprus exit recession, the weakened reform momentum undermines the economy's future growth prospects while the reduction of bad loans remains slow. The mission encouraged the authorities and other key stakeholders to "renew their efforts to improve Cyprus's growth potential and attract more productivity-enhancing investment," the statement said in

²The Troika is comprised of the European Commission (EC), the European Central Bank (ECB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)

reference also to the rejection by parliamentary fractions of the plan to privatise state-owned companies such as the Cypriot telecom CYTA. “To further improve the business environment and attract more investment, progress needs to be made in several essential areas, most notably the modernisation of the justice system, including by establishing a commercial court. Other priorities include a more forceful implementation of the government’s action plan for growth, the reform of the electricity market, and the creation of a sustainable and efficient title deeds issuance and transfer system”. While the drop in non-performing loans has been “important” the progress was “uneven,” the Commission said adding that “more forceful” restructuring efforts are necessary to speed up their further reduction following the modernisation of the legal framework on foreclosures and restructurings.

Domestic Developments

On March 12 Socialist EDEK leader, Marinos Sizopoulos called for a referendum before the resumption of the Cyprus negotiations: “Before the resumption of talks and before the conclusion on substantive issues that are pending, President Nicos Anastasiades is obliged to call a referendum asking the people whether they accept a rotating presidency, the stationing of the Turkish military on the island for a transitional period and whether they accept Turkish settlers remaining...These are key issues that will determine largely the final form of the solu-

tion...The people cannot remain on the sidelines and be asked under extortionate conditions and timeframes to accept or reject a unilateral solution” Sizopoulos argued. EDEK has disavowed the notion of a bicommunal, bizonal federation, the commonly accepted basis for a solution of the Cyprus problem.

On March 1, DIKO’s Nicolas Papadopoulos announced a new strategy on the Cyprus problem, adding that the party will seek cooperation with other likeminded parties in a bid to rid the country of the current government. Papadopoulos was speaking at a workshop for party members in Paphos, co-organised with the other hard-line parties of the so-called center – EDEK, Solidarity, and the Green party. Likewise, Giorgos Lillikas of the Citizens Alliance embarked on efforts to find a common candidate between DIKO, EDEK the Greens and the Solidarity Movement although setting himself as a candidate. In a letter sent to the other parties on March 28, Lillikas sought to lay down the conditions and criteria of a potential co-operation. Lillikas said the objective would be to get rid of Anastasiades and his policy and that could be achieved by electing a president who would implement a new, assertive strategy capable of bending Turkish, intransigence.

On March 31, DIKO leader Nicolas Papadopoulos and the Greens’ leader Giorgos Perdakis agreed that the two parties share views on the main issues and want to join forces ahead of 2018’s presidential election “We seek to change Cyprus, through elections, for the better, we

seek to support society, improve the economy, and a more assertive Cyprus-problem policy,” Papadopoulos stated. Perdikis stressed that his party’s proposal for the five ‘centre’ parties to run a single candidate is the only one that can be credible and present the electorate with hope in the next election.

Foreign policy

On March 19, Anastasiades travelled to the US as part of a four-day visit. The visit was designed to cover three thematic entities: the Cyprus Problem, Energy and Foreign Investment. On the Cyprus problem, through meetings with UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres and the British Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, Anastasiades presented the state of affairs with regards to the stalled negotiations process. The meeting was described by the Greek Cypriot president as very constructive. On March 21, Anastasiades marked the end of the trading day at the New York stock exchange. He also addressed an investment forum on Cyprus on March 22. The forum was attended by big business and also by energy giants such as ExxonMobil.

Labour Relations and Trade Unions

According to a comparative European research conducted by the Cologne Institute for Economic Research, poverty in Cyprus has risen between 2008 and 2015 by 28.2%. This research has used a multi-dimensional poverty indicator,

taking into account not only income but also lack of material goods, level of education, underemployment and restrictions in health care. The biggest rise in poverty in Europe was in Greece reaching 40%.

A modest decrease in the number of registered unemployed took place as there were 3.635 less in February 2017 compared to February 2016. Unemployment remains high at 14.1% with 61.000 unemployed. In the period 2013-2016 the state implemented 12 schemes with 19.839 unemployed persons participating in funded employment and/or training.

The Ministry of Labour has initiated six schemes for the employment of recipients of Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI). According to the legislation, GMI recipients fit for work, who do not respond to calls for work or training will stop receiving the benefit. One of these schemes targets to employ 2.000 GMI recipients in the broader public and NGO sectors on a part-time basis of 25 hours per week, with the workers continuing to receive their GMI benefit and an additional 90€ per month. It is also preparing another scheme specifically targeting to employ 800 young persons (aged 25-30) who are unemployed.

Cyprus ranks in the last place along with Germany and Italy with respect to the proportion of women in managerial positions which stands at 22%. The EU average according to Eurostat figures stands at 35% and takes into account firms employing 10 or more persons. There is a

pay gap in this category as well with women managers earning 23.4% less than male managers.

The promotion freeze in the public sector imposed since 2012 has now been lifted and 1.575 employees are awaiting to be promoted gradually in the coming period. Many of them are also expected to proceed to early retirement after that. The cost is not expected to be significant because of the many regular and early retirements that will occur.

The European Commission in the context of its promotion of labour mobility has initiated the programme “ReActivate 35+” with two target groups: the unemployed over 35 in order to find work or training in another EU country and the employers of firms below 250 personnel that are funded if they offer at least six month contracts out of which three months will be for training purposes.

EKYSY (the pensioners’ trade union affiliated to PEO) staged a protest outside the Parliament demanding the regaining of all their rights and benefits lost during the crisis. They claimed that the Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI) did not improve their conditions and that overall the pensioners’ living standard has deteriorated by 30% while an estimated 40 million Euro were cut in the last four years. The protesters demanded the return of the Easter bonus, the change of GMI legislation, free health care and public transport.

According to a study of the Institute of Economic Research of the University of Cyprus the crisis has produced a surge of informal and flexible labour. Temporary and part-time work has increased affecting women more than men while about 90% of temporary employment and 60% of part-time employment is involuntary and thus effectively “a product of a malfunctioning labour market”.

4. Turkish Cypriots

Economic Developments

Based on data from the Turkish Cypriot Central Bank’s Risk Unit, Turkish Cypriot daily Kibris reported that consumer loans have been increasing continuously since 2010 reaching 3.834 billion TL in the first six months of 2016. In per capita terms, debt has risen from 6.759 TL in September 2010 to 18.831 in 2016.

Turkish Cypriot daily Havadis reported that according to the data provided by the Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Shopkeepers and Artisans, 1.500 small businesses went out of business in 2016 due to economic problems. A further 145 stopped their activities in the first 2,5 months of this year. 70% of these businesses were active for more than five years in their respective sectors. The chamber chairman, Mahmut Kanber attributed this series of bankruptcies to devaluation of Turkish lira. Sales have plum-

meted by 30% due to falling purchasing power of consumers, Kanber said.

The Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce (TCCC) sent a letter to the government demanding urgent measures to stimulate the economy, which has been badly affected by the 17% rise in the cost of living in the northern part of Cyprus due to devaluation of Turkish lira.

The TCCC also released the ninth Competitiveness Report. The report “demonstrates that North Cyprus economy continues to suffer from structural issues despite the change in governments over the years,” wrote Fikri Toros, the president of TCCC in the preface of the report. “In view of our prosperity and education, ranking at 114th position amongst 138 economies, can be considered as a paradox” Toros said, adding that “it goes to show that our wealth is underutilised in generating economic growth. Wealth is not sustainable unless it is generated by the economy”.

Relations with Turkey

The Turkish Prime Minister, Binali Yildirim attended a rally in Nicosia as part of the referendum campaign in Turkey. He also held meetings with Turkish Cypriot officials including the president, speaker of the parliament and prime minister. “We will continue efforts to find a fair, permanent, comprehensive solution to the Cyprus problem,” said Yildirim in a joint press conference with President Mustafa Akinci.

Yildirim described the Enosis vote as “unfortunate,” and said it came at a sensitive time when the “Greek Cypriot side should have put forward a strong desire for a comprehensive solution.” “A comprehensive solution is possible only if the idea of an equal partnership and faith in a common future are embraced. It is important that this understanding is instilled in the minds of younger generations” Yildirim added. He also said that the talks could not continue open-ended and that the time had come to exercise a clear will on the matter.

Domestic Developments

On March 2, the main opposition Republican Turkish Party (CTP) tabled a motion of no confidence while Social Democratic Party (TDP), which has two seats in the parliament, submitted a motion for early election. On March 3, CTP submitted a separate motion, which proposed to hold early election on July 2. The motions were submitted after the parliament failed to achieve quorum three times in one week when the deputies from the ruling coalition between National Unity Party (UBP) and Democratic Party (DP) failed to turn up. The motion of a no confidence failed as the three independent deputies voted against the motion along with the UBP and DP deputies. Meanwhile, the DP came up with a new alternative date proposing to hold early election in April 2018. TDP, CTP and DP’s early election proposals will be discussed in the committee of legal and political affairs. Prime Minister, Huseyin Ozgurgun said

that his party would vote in favour of all proposals. "We will go to elections on whichever date the committee decides," he added.

Hard-line Foreign Minister, Tahsin Ertugruloglu commented on the crises in the talks by stating, that it was the Greek Cypriot leader who had left the table by slamming the door behind him and that this was an insult to President Akinci. He also reminded that the UN Secretary General's Special Adviser to Cyprus Espen Barth Eide had made a statement that contradicted President Akinci. "If the President can stomach all of these insults and can accept the so-called rectification of the Enosis decision then I want to let him know that he does not have the right to make the Turkish Cypriot people live through this ridiculousness," said Ertugruloglu.

Labor Relations and Trade Unions

Prime Minister, Huseyin Ozgurgun announced a pay raise for medical doctors. The announcement came after threats received by doctors who have long demanded higher salaries and better working conditions as well as more recruitment to overcome staff shortages. A crisis in public hospitals escalated following a supreme court ruling last month which ordered the government to enforce a ban on doctors having second jobs in the private sector, sparking fears of mass resignations. The ruling gave the Health Ministry six months to comply. Turkish Cypriot weekly Cyprus Today reported that there was a lukewarm reception from doctors' representatives, who said salaries were not the

only problem facing the country's public health sector. They warned of a new wave of resignations unless the government addressed "systemic problems" in the health sector which they said included "inadequate employee rights, poor working conditions, staff shortages and infrastructural problems". Sila Usar Incirli, chairman of the Cyprus Turkish Physicians' Union, said: "The state health sector has collapsed. We cannot even find antifebrile medicines . . . when children with high fever are admitted to hospital." Incirli criticised "all the governments that have created the existing public health sector that is based on too few staff with low salaries and huge workloads", saying five doctors had resigned from state hospitals and the posts remained vacant due to lack of recruitment.

Foreign Policy

Turkish Cypriot leader Akinci attended the 13th Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) Summit in Islamabad. Speaking to Anadolu Agency on his way back from Pakistan, Akinci said that his country had applied for full membership in the ECO, the 10-nation Eurasian intergovernmental organization which has among others Turkey, Pakistan, and Iran as its members. Akinci said that the TRNC currently had observer status in the organization, adding, "There is no need to wait for the resolution process to cooperate" with countries in the region.

5. FES Cyprus Events

April

Saturday 22.04.2017

Centre for Dialogue/CAD/FES
Workshop

**'Media in Cyprus: Role and Responsibility,'
3rd Cyprus Dialogue**

Nicosia, Cyprus

Not open to the Public



Monday 24.04.2017 6 pm – 8 pm

FES
Workshop

**Good Governance and the Impact of the
Economic and Financial Crises in Cyprus**

FES office,
Nicosia, Cyprus

Not open to the Public



Friday 28.04.2017 7 pm

World Vision MEERO/FES
Launch

White Book of Best Practices Launch

IsnotGallery, Odysseos Str.11,
1017 Nicosia, Cyprus

Open to the Public



Saturday 29.04.2017

Cyprus Academic Dialogue/FES
Workshop

CAD workshop on PEACE PROCESS in Cyprus

Nicosia, Cyprus

Not open to the Public



May

Friday 05.05.2017 5 pm – 9 pm

East West Bridge/FES
conference

**Federal Yugoslavia and its Successor States:
Lessons for Cyprus on Federalism and Power
Sharing**

Home for Cooperation, Buffer-Zone
Nicosia, Cyprus

Open to the Public



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