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1. Cyprus Problem

In November, President Nicos Anastasiades informed the public about his proposal for a decentralised federation as a reunification model for Cyprus.

During his address to the public on November 6, Anastasiades argued that his proposal for a decentralised federation intended to address the concerns of both the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities and pushed for a functional and viable solution to the Cyprus problem. Concerns were raised by Anastasiades' objection to the need of a positive Turkish Cypriot vote in every decision and therefore one of the core demands of the Turkish Cypriot side in the context of power sharing and political equality between both communities. According to Anastasiades, a decentralised federation is different than a loose federation and should not question the single international legal personality, sovereignty and citizenship of the state, its territorial integrity, people, the economy and natural wealth, defence and security, and the guarding of the borders of the Federal State. Instead, the President argued that a decentralised federation would safeguard the exclusive and effective representation and participation of the Federal State in the EU, the UN and other international organisations. Anastasiades lastly, called on all political leaders to engage in dialogue with him to develop joint positions which will lead to a new round of talks and a solution acceptable to both communities.

Greek Cypriot opposition parties and Turkish Cypriot parties were quick to disagree with Anastasiades' public proposal for a decentralised federation arguing that he failed to address crucial power-sharing issues and accusing him of trying to cover up his failed policy on the Cyprus problem. In particular, Turkish Cypriot spokesman, Baris Burcu stated that Anastasiades indicated that he was unable to digest the political equality of the Turkish Cypriot side, part of which is effective participation in decision-making.

On November 12, Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci stated at a news conference that his side was open to the idea of reducing the federal government's powers post-solution. He clarified however, that the Turkish Cypriots would never accept decisions to be taken on the basis of a majority. Akinci, also noted that the Turkish Cypriot side was not opposed to the idea of a decentralized or loose federation as long as a concrete proposal is set on the table so that it can be evaluated in a procedure that would not be open ended, but rather result oriented.

Following the UN Secretary General's October report calling on all interested parties to agree on the terms of reference leading to the resumption of substantive negotiations, Anastasiades stated on November 13 that these must be drafted by the end of the year. The UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy, Jane Holl Lute, is expected to hold a new round of contacts in the month of December.

On November 16, Anastasiades held a meeting with representatives of the Republican Turkish Party (CTP). According to the government spokesperson, Prodromos Prodromou, the President reaffirmed that the Greek Cypriot side would rely on the framework and the six parameters set out by Guterres, during the Crans-Montana conference on Cyprus in 2017, as well as on all past convergences, to resume comprehensive negotiations that will address all issues.

On November 22, AKEL leader Andros Kyprianou met for dinner with Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu at the latter's home in Ankara. Kyprianou stated he would brief Anastasiades about his meeting with Cavusoglu, but that he would only make public what was said if it was deemed necessary. Kyprianou travelled to Ankara to participate in a discussion on November 23 organised by the Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (Tepav) on geopolitical developments in the Eastern Mediterranean and Cyprus. He was escorted to the dinner by AKEL member Toumazos Tsielepis. Kyprianou and Cavusoglu reportedly discussed the aspects of the Cyprus problem that continue to be stumbling blocks to a settlement.

Two new crossing points, one in Dherynia (Derinya), just a few kilometers from Famagusta, and the other in Apliki/Aplic, near the western town of Lefka were finally opened on November 12 bringing the total number of crossings to nine. According to Cyprus Today, Turkish Cypriots greeted Greek Cypriots arriving

through new checkpoints with citrus fruits and olive branches. A joint-statement by 12 Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot NGOs was read out by Famagusta Initiative spokesperson Okan Dagli, who said: *"we see the opening of the Dherynia checkpoint as a new start towards the reunification of our country and reconciliation of the communities."* Elizabeth Spehar, UN Secretary-General's Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), said this was *"a good day for Cyprus."* Turkish Cypriot daily Kibris newspaper reported on November 23 that there had been 21.252 crossings during the first 10 days of the opening of the new crossing points. However, the opening of more crossings between the two sides has not been welcomed by all. Some disgruntled Greek Cypriots carried out a protest calling for the closing of the borders, and on November 25th blocked the crossings for 3 hours in the newly opened checkpoints.

Within the framework of the efforts carried out by the Republican Turkish Party (CTP) Cyprus Working Group and the AKEL Cyprus Committee, a conference titled 'A Federation in Cyprus' was held in Trikomo/Iskele. AKEL Political Bureau member and Head of the Cyprus Problem Office of the Central Committee Toumazos Tsielepis, and Stavri Kalopsidiotu – a member of the Central Committee and the Cyprus Problem Office, delivered speeches at the conference. The conference's opening speech was delivered by the CTP Foreign Relations Secretary and MP Armagan Candan.

During the month grassroots movement UniteCyprusNow held meetings in Limassol Famagusta and Nicosia on how to prevent partition and how to find ways to build a common homeland.

In an interview with daily Politis on November 25, Cavusoglou stated that Turkey is open to all alternative types of solution concerning the settlement of the Cyprus problem but does not reject the federal solution. With regards to Ananastasiades' proposal for a decentralised federation Cavusoglu stated that Turkey does not reject the notion of a "loose federation". He also noted that the procedure will be under the umbrella of the UN.

On November 1, Turkish Cypriot presidential spokesperson, Baris Burcu announced that the annual Toros military exercise (carried out jointly by the Turkish Forces in Cyprus and the Turkish Cypriot Security Forces) would not be conducted this year. The military exercise has been cancelled for a number of years as an act of good will by the Turkish Cypriot side.

The European Commission has adopted a new Annual Action Programme for a total amount of €34.5 million to facilitate the reunification of Cyprus. This will be achieved by encouraging the economic development of the Turkish Cypriot community with particular emphasis on the economic integration of the island, on improving contacts between the two communities and with the EU, and on preparation for the acquis communautaire.

The UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres appointed Major General Cheryl Pearce of Australia as the Commander of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP). Pearce succeeds Major General Mohammad Humayun Kabir of Bangladesh, who completed his assignment in October 2018.

A veteran footballer Sevim Ebeoglu, who played for Limassol sides AEL and Dogan Turk Birligi (DTB, now based in Kyrenia) has passed away. Ebeoglu won three championships with the Greek Cypriot team AEL, which was represented at the funeral by its general manager Demetris Yiannelis. During the funeral, the casket was draped by the jerseys of both AEL and DTB.

The Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus (CMP) congratulated four of its Cypriot anthropologists from both communities on their successful passing of the rigorous theoretical and practical examinations of the Latin American Directory of Forensic Anthropology (DALAF), which is the world's oldest anthropology federation. *"With this achievement, CMP demonstrates its vision of maintaining high scientific standards and providing ongoing education and specialized training to its staff. This will allow that they have direct knowledge of scientific developments in forensic science"* said the statement released by the CMP.

2. Hydrocarbons

On November 14, US based EXXONMOBIL commenced exploratory drilling in the Delphine

target of Block 10 of Cyprus's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The drilling is expected to last around two months. After finishing with Delphine, the rig is expected to move to either 'Glaftos' or 'Anthea' targets. During the month American diplomats and State Department officials reaffirmed the US long-standing position of recognising the right of the Republic of Cyprus to develop resource wealth in its EEZ but also stressed the importance of sharing the wealth on an equitable basis.

On November 13, the government rejected reports in the Turkish press that Anastasiades expressed his willingness to agree on a deal with Ankara for Cyprus' natural gas to flow to Europe through Turkey. The government was responding to reports that despite its strong public pronouncements, Ankara has no intention of hampering the US based company as it explores for natural gas off the coast of Cyprus following a secret pact between Anastasiades and Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu.

In a statement dated November 18, Ankara repeating its warning to companies and countries involved in hydrocarbon exploration in Cyprus' EEZ, suggesting that drilling by US EXXONMOBIL could change the delicate balance on the Cyprus problem. Furthermore, Ankara warned it would launch its drilling activities in areas where it had been licensed by the Turkish Cypriot authorities. The Turkish Cypriot side and Turkey have laid claims to almost all of the blocks in Cyprus' EEZ, besides Block 10, licensed

by Cyprus to EXXONMOBIL. The TRNC¹ foreign ministry also issued a statement on similar lines.

Greece, Italy, and Cyprus reached an agreement with Israel to lay a pipeline connecting the latter's gas reserves to the three countries to supply natural gas from the Eastern Mediterranean to Europe. The East Med Pipeline will be the deepest underwater gas pipeline in the world estimated at over \$7bn. The EU reportedly agreed to invest \$100m in a feasibility study for the project. The pipeline will start about 170 km off Cyprus' southern coast and stretch for 2.200 kilometres to reach Otranto, Italy, via Crete and the Greek mainland. The pipeline will have the capacity to carry up to 20bn cubic meters of natural gas per year. As part of the agreement, Israel and Cyprus will be granted preference over other countries in exporting gas to the European market.

On November 26, French TOTAL and Italy's ENI applied for an exploration licence in Block 7 of Cyprus' EEZ. The government invited in October

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 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).

bids from companies already licensed to explore offshore Cyprus to express an interest in Block 7, instead of launching another licensing round.

3. Greek Cypriots

Economic Developments

Following recent upgrades from Standard & Poor's and Fitch Ratings, Cyprus was upgraded back to investment grade on November 23 by DBRS Ratings Limited. According to a DBRS report, the agency upgraded Cyprus' long-term foreign and local currency-issuer ratings from BB to BBB (low) and its short-term foreign and local currency-issuer ratings from R-4 to R-2 (middle). DBRS also changed the trend from positive to stable. According to the report, the upgrade is driven by the material reduction in Cypriot banks' non-performing loans (NPLs) in recent months, reflecting the government's and the banks' stepped-up efforts. Reportedly, the orderly liquidation of Cyprus Cooperative Bank and the banks' sale of NPLs have almost halved the stock of the banking sector's NPLs in 2018. While NPLs remain high, the decline in NPLs and a strengthened legal framework are reducing risks to financial stability.

Foreign Policy

On November 7, Foreign Minister, Nicos Christodoulides and Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, Wess Mitchell, signed a

statement of intent in Washington to strengthen and develop bilateral security relations. The statement defines for the first time, the framework of cooperation between the US and Cyprus on security issues. It also promotes mutual interests in combatting terrorism, strengthening security at sea and borders and in improving regional stability. While in US, Christodoulides also met with US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo.

Domestic Developments

With the exception of ruling DISY which supported Anastasiades, opposition parties did not appear impressed by the President's decentralization proposal presented to the public on November 6. AKEL spokesman, Stefanos Stefanou argued that Anastasiades' only achievement was to add to the existing confusion. DIKO leader, Nicolas Papadopoulos, said that Anastasiades had given no answer to any of the questions his party raised at the National Council and failed to explain what he meant by "decentralised federation". EDEK via a statement argued that Anastasiades confirmed that his proposal for a decentralised federation does not change the essence *"of the dangerous and failed process that has been going on for four decades"*. Solidarity leader Eleni Theocharous stressed that Anastasiades' speech marked the end of an era for the model of a bizonal, bicomunal federation and that the president had admitted the failure of his policy.

The President was faced with mounting opposition and distrust after DIKO leader Nikolas Papadopoulos (center right) and AKEL leader Antros Kyprianou (left wing) met on November 27. Although coming from different political spectrums the two parties agreed to join forces on aspects they could find common ground on, in order to pressure the President to support a bizonal bicomunal federation (BBF) and abandon his thoughts for a decentralised federation. They accused him of still not coming clean on what a decentralised federation means, and of wheeling and dealing behind closed doors with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, on tabling an alternative to a BBF. The two party leaders agreed that neither partition, nor confederation should be an option but insistence on a BBF settlement that would rid Cyprus of occupying forces and guarantees.

Meanwhile the government agreed to implement a package of measures proposed by DIKO and designed to help vulnerable groups. The package is expected to cost some €100m and involves an increase of some €50 to low pensions, a five-cent cut in fuel tax and heating fuel subsidies for people living in higher areas. There will also be a €33m scheme to assist people who have been punctual with the repayment of their loans.

Labour Relations and Trade Unions

The employees of the company “Ten Group Services and J&P Overseas”, continued their strike of indefinite duration that began on

31st of October 2018. The strike which also included the staging of several street protests, concerns salaries and benefits owed to the 570 employees. Their aim is to continue the strike, till demands are met by the company. The strike is also connected to similar issues that overseas employees of the company have been experiencing. A number of employees who returned to Cyprus are not entitled to unemployment benefits, as the company has not paid its social insurance contribution, since December 2016. On November 5, employees at the construction site of the new library of the University of Cyprus began a solidarity strike in support of the other striking employees of the company, supported by PEO, SEK, DEOK and POAS. The solidarity measures will possibly be extended amongst other construction sites of the company group's, as the strike continues.

On November 22, the workers of the construction industry of Larnaca decided during their General Assembly to authorise the Board of their Trade Unions to undertake measures for the implementation of collective agreements and for claiming workers' rights, as the agreements made between Trade Unions and the Federation of Associations of Building Contractors have been violated. The agreements were originally made under the auspices of the Mediator Service of the Ministry of Labour, after long term consultations between the two sides for a new Collective Agreement. The employers decided to reject the agreement and are asking from the Trade Unions to re-enter discussion for the renewal of the Collective Agreement.

On November 20, hundreds of hotel workers protested to express their opposition to the new proposed law in regards to hotels, supporting that overall it deregulates further the employment relations, opens the way to outsourcing of services to third parties and abolishes all the provisions of existing legislation, which was obliging hotels to employ a sufficient number of employees in all specializations. Trade Unions stated that they were not consulted prior the drafting of the new proposed law which re-regulates the establishment and operation of hotels, leaving 20.000 hotel workers in a vague employment status, with a risk of losing their jobs. Protesters marched from the Ministry of Finance to the Parliament. The Secretaries General of PEO and SEK, Pambis Kyritsis and Andreas Matsas respectively, made welcoming speeches in the protest expressing their support to the hotel workers fight. The leadership of SEK and PEO handed resolutions to the Ministers of Interior and Labour as well as to the President of the House of Cyprus Parliament. Beyond the protest, further actions by the Trade Union Hotel Workers are planned such as meetings with political party leaders to explain their concerns about the new law, petition campaigning for support of hotel workers and for the promotion of a law that would protect workers and their rights and publication of an information leaflet for the public and the workers.

Trade Unions PEO, SEK and DEOK issued a statement addressed to the bus company 'Zenon' and the Ministries of Transport and

Labour, in regards to non-payment of salaries. According to the law each employer has to pay salary without delays. Beyond the non-payment matters, employees reported also other issues like: mechanical problems of buses, absence of proper air-conditioning and strenuous working conditions due to the weather (especially during summer and winter) and demand to be paid timely and to be treated with respect. Trade unions warned with legal and strike action.

On November 5, the General Assembly of PEO met and assessed the results of the renewal of collective agreements that ended in the fall of 2017 - beginning of 2018 and set out the policy to be followed for agreements under renewal as well as the wider social claims of PEO. In 2018, 237 collective agreements or special agreements involving 48.550 employees were in process of renewal. The results to date from the renewal of collective agreements record that 2018 was a decisive year to promote the policy of re-establishing wages and benefits that had been reduced as a result of special agreements. In addition to wage resettlement, in a significant number of agreements which were renewed, there has been also an increase in wages. Based on PEO trade union figures, 205 collective agreements covering more than 78.000 employees will be in the process of renewal.

The Committee on Financial Affairs of the House of Parliament examined the budget of the Ministry of Labour in the context of which Estia project was mentioned. Additionally, this

also included the promotion of bills and actions on behalf of the Ministry on issues such as the reconstruction of social welfare services, the implementation of national minimum wage and the strengthening of employment. The Secretary General of PEO Pambis Kyritsis, stated the importance of the introduction of a minimum wage, as long as it covers workers who work in sectors which are not covered by collective agreements.

Based on the results of the Labour Cost Survey for 2016, conducted by the Statistical Service hotel workers are receiving very low wages. According to the survey results, the average hourly labour cost in hotels is €7.50 gross, while in the whole economy it is €16.30. As the Secretary General of trade union SYXKA of PEO, stressed hotel workers are experiencing unregulated work, extremely low wages, long working hours, psychological stress, and work-related stress.

The Department of Labour Inspection expressed great concern about the increase of the number of work-related accidents. The issue has been discussed twice this period in the meetings of the Pancyprian Council of Safety and Health. An Action Plan with specific measures for combating the situation has been drafted. During 2016-2017, there was an increase of 8.7% in labour accidents (the numbers are the one reported in the Department of Labour Inspection), whereas the increase during 2015-2016 was 19.4%. This increase has been observed mainly in these fields of economic activity: a) construction:

46.5% (2016: 172 accidents, 2017: 252 accidents) b) Transportation-Storage: 14.4% (2016: 132 accidents, 2017: 151 accidents) c) Hotels-Restaurants: 9.3% (2016: 518 accidents, 2017: 566 accidents). SEK issued a statement expressing the need for improvement of levels of security and health in the workplace, in order to minimize the risks from labour accidents. SEK brought as an example the recent labour accident which happened in Limassol, when a worker fell down from a multi-level building, was trapped on the 13th floor and the Fire Department due to the height of the building couldn't intervene. SEK expressed its concerns about the health and security risks for the workers in the construction of those buildings.

4. Turkish Cypriots

Economic Developments

The inflation rate was recorded as 1.58% in October and 34.08 % in the first 10 months of 2018.

A three-month freeze on cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for pensioners and public employees, (which had been imposed with a government decree in October 2018) should be *“reviewed and ultimately revoked”*, Ombudsman Emine Dizdarli has ruled. Dizdarli said the decree should be cancelled *“in light of the principles of public interest, equality and non-discrimination”* as enshrined in the TRNC Constitution. She said that while one section of

society was *“aggrieved”* by withholding of the inflation-linked allowance, ministers *“kept taking decisions”* to make lump-sum payments elsewhere. *“That is contrary to the principle of equality,”* she said. Finance Minister Serdar Denktas defended his government’s decree saying Dizdarli was *“not an economist”* and criticizing her for failing to obtain the views of an expert in the field before issuing her ruling. *“Due to the current economic crisis, withholding COLA for three months was necessary,”* he said.

According to figures released by the Turkish Cypriot Ministry of Tourism, the members of Turkish Cypriot diaspora in the UK are opting to take advantage of ‘cheaper and more convenient’ flights to airports in the southern part of Cyprus instead of flying to the north. Turkish Cypriot weekly Cyprus Today reported that in the period from January to October, the number of arrivals through the TRNC’s airport and ports had fallen by 17.8% to 17.792 arrivals in the first 10 months of 2018, from 21.636 during the same period in 2017, while arrivals via Paphos and Larnaca airports rose by 4,3% -to 41.874 compared with 40.155 in the same period last year.

According to the data from the Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce, €2,3 million worth of goods were sold to the southern part of Cyprus within the first half of 2018. This represented a 5,42% drop compared to the same period of 2017. The monthly average stood at €387.694, which is the second lowest monthly average within the past eight years. In the 14-years of

trade, the north sold goods worth above €89 million to the south. The trade from the north to the south is regulated by the Green Line Regulation, which was passed by the European Union in 2004.

Relations with Turkey

The newly appointed Turkish Ambassador to Nicosia, Ali Murat Basceri, presented his letter of credentials to the Turkish Cypriot president Mustafa Akinci on November 1. Basceri had served in the TRNC two times before; between 2001 and 2005, and between 2011 and 2013. Before he was appointed as the ambassador to Nicosia, he had served as the Deputy General Director for the Northeast Mediterranean at the Turkish Foreign Ministry in Ankara. After officially assuming his new post, Basceri embarked on a series of courtesy visits. On December 2, he was received separately by the Speaker of the Parliament, Prime Minister, Finance Minister, and the Minister of Education.

The Turkish Vice President Fuat Oktay who was in the TRNC to take part in the celebrations of the 35th anniversary of the TRNC was received by President Mustafa Akinci. The Deputy Speaker of the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM) Celal Adan and the head of the TRNC Friendship Group Orhan Erdem also paid visits to the Turkish Cypriot officials as part of the 35th anniversary celebrations of the TRNC.

The first meeting of the Turkey-TRNC Chamber of Commerce Forum took place in Ankara. The

meeting was attended by the Turkish Minister of Commerce Ruhsar Pekcan and the Turkish Cypriot Minister of Economy Ozdil Nami.

The Speaker of Parliament Teberruken Ulucay addressed the members of the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkish Speaking Countries (TURKPA) in Izmir as the guest of the Speaker of Turkish Grand National Assembly Binali Yildirim. Ulucay also attended the 11th Plenary Session of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly in Istanbul as the guest of Yildirim.

Domestic Developments

The 35th anniversary of the establishment of the TRNC was marked on November 15.

According to a survey conducted by the Centre on Migration, Identity and Rights Studies (CMIRS), which was carried out in September, the economic crisis triggered by the Turkish lira devaluation has created a *“dangerously”* polarized *“community without hope”* and an unprecedented level of pessimism about future prospects. According to the report of the Turkish Cypriot weekly Cyprus Today, the survey showed that 80% of respondents could foresee no improvement in their economic prospects within two years – compared to 17.98% at the last survey in June – and only 4% expected any improvement. 85% believed the country was *“moving in the wrong direction”* economically, up from 77.9% in June. Furthermore, the survey showed that rising crime and the economic crisis have made more people anxious and fear-

ful, particularly women. The survey also found that the level of general *“happiness”* reported by respondents had fallen to 5.43 out of 10, compared with 6.59 in June and 6.80 in February. Women reported a drop in their *“personal security and safety”* in the face of rising crime, from 2.48 to 1.71, while that of men showed a decline from 3.42 to 2.48.

Tighter controls aimed at tackling rising crime have resulted in more than 2.500 people being denied entry to the TRNC since January, Interior Minister Aysegul Baybars Kadri has disclosed. The country’s *“rising and changing”* population is seeing an increase in crime, and more rigorous screening of people wanting to enter is one way that the problem is being tackled, said Baybars Kadri, who added that other measures included a new security camera network. Referring to people arriving at TRNC ports of entry as tourists, she said immigration officers were routinely questioning them about the planned duration of their stay to establish if they could subsist on money, they had with them or on their declared income. TRNC officials were also in talks with their Turkish counterparts about the use of passports or ID cards with chips by those arriving from that country, she said.

The 6th ordinary congress of the ruling coalition partner, Social Democratic Party (TDP) was held under the slogan of *“we are working for our country and preparing for peace”*. The incumbent leader Cemal Ozyigit was re-elected unopposed.

Labour Relations and Trade Unions

A decision to freeze cost-of-living increases for pensioners and civil servants in October, November and December has drawn fierce criticism from trade unions. Two public sector unions, KTAMS and Kamu-Sen, said they would take legal action against the Council of Ministers' decree on the basis that it violated the Constitution by being issued when Parliament was in session but had not been consulted about it. Trade unions argue that under the Constitution, the cabinet may issue a decree under urgent conditions – but that it must then be submitted to Parliament on the same day, when it would be given priority to be debated and adopted or rejected within 90 days. *“This illegal decision was also made at a time when there was a continuing economic crisis and the purchasing power of people needed to be protected”*, said a joint statement from the unions.

5. FES Cyprus Events

December 2018

--- no events ---



January 2019

--- no events ---



The FES-Newsletter team and the FES office in Cyprus wish you all a Merry Christmas and all the best for 2019.



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