



Freedom in the World 2018 - Cyprus

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Freedom Status: Free

Aggregate Score: 94 (0 = Least Free, 100 = Most Free)

Freedom Rating: 1.0 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Political Rights: 1 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Civil Liberties: 1 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Explanatory Note:

The numerical rankings and status listed above do not reflect conditions in Northern Cyprus, which is examined in a separate report.

Quick Facts

Population: 1,200,000

Capital: Nicosia

GDP/capita: \$23,075

Press Freedom Status: Free

OVERVIEW

The Republic of Cyprus is a parliamentary democracy that has de jure sovereignty over the entire island. In practice, however, the government controls only the southern, largely Greek-speaking part of the island, as the northern area is ruled by the self-declared Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, recognized only by Turkey. Political rights and civil liberties are generally respected in the Republic of Cyprus. Ongoing concerns include societal discrimination against minority groups and flaws in the asylum system that lead to prolonged detention and premature deportations.

Key Developments in 2017:

- In January, the government restarted UN-sponsored reunification talks with Northern Cyprus under auspicious conditions. However, the talks broke down in July over the future role of the Turkish military on the island.
- Irregular migrant workers and asylum seekers faced continued discrimination and extended detentions in prison-like facilities.

- Cyprus remains without a freedom of information law – a bill first proposed in 2015 remains stalled in parliament.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 38 / 40

A. ELECTORAL PROCESS: 11 / 12

A1. Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections? 4 / 4

The president is elected by popular vote to a five-year term. The current president, Nicos Anastasiades, won 57.5 percent of the vote in a runoff in the most recent presidential elections, held in 2013. Pledging efficient negotiations with the EU and the IMF over the bailout agreement, Anastasiades defeated Stavros Malas of the Progressive Party of the Working People (AKEL), whose platform opposed austerity.

A2. Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections? 4 / 4

The unicameral House of Representatives has 80 seats filled through proportional representation for five-year terms. The Turkish Cypriot community has 24 reserved seats, which have been unfilled since Turkish Cypriot representatives withdrew from the chamber in 1964. The most recent legislative elections in May 2016 were held in accordance with international standards.

A3. Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies? 3 / 4

Electoral laws are generally fair. Amendments to the electoral laws approved in 2015, just five months ahead of legislative elections, stipulated that a political party must win 3.6 percent of the vote, up from 1.8 percent previously, to participate in the second round of voting, which was widely interpreted as an attempt to shut smaller and newly formed parties out of parliament.

B. POLITICAL PLURALISM AND PARTICIPATION: 16 / 16

B1. Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings? 4 / 4

A wide array of parties compete in the political system. Cyprus's two main parties, the center-right Democratic Rally (DISY) and the left wing Progressive Party of the Working People (AKEL), usually split the largest share of the vote in most elections, but neither has dominated politics, and other parties are often able to play significant roles in legislative coalitions.

Both DISY and AKEL lost seats in the 2016 parliamentary elections. Three new parties entered parliament for the first time: the center-left Citizens' Alliance (SYPOL), the right-wing Solidarity, and the far-right National Popular Front (ELAM).

B2. Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections? 4 / 4

Opposition parties can gain representation in Cypriot elections, and power rotates between parties regularly.

B3. Are the people's political choices free from domination by the military, foreign powers, religious hierarchies, economic oligarchies, or any other powerful group that is not democratically accountable? 4 / 4

People are generally able to express their political choices without undue interference from outside actors.

B4. Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, religious, gender, LGBT, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities? 4 / 4

Three recognized religious minorities – the Armenians, the Latins, and the Maronites – each have a non-voting representative. Members of these minority groups vote in special elections for their representative, as well as in the general elections. The Turkish Cypriot community's 24 unfilled seats remain unfilled.

Women in Cyprus are politically engaged, and in the 2016 parliamentary elections made up 75 percent of the polling stations' staff. However, they are underrepresented in political parties; no party has a woman leader, and parties have failed to meet internal quotas mandating that 30 to 35 percent of candidates be women. Women also hold only 18 percent of the seats in parliament. Sexism and patriarchal attitudes can discourage women from playing a more active role in politics.

C. FUNCTIONING OF GOVERNMENT: 11 / 12

C1. Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government? 4 / 4

The freely elected government is able to make and implement policy.

C2. Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? 3 / 4

Cyprus has strong anticorruption laws that are, for the most part, adequately enforced, but was plagued by a string of high-profile corruption scandals in 2017. In March, for example, former deputy attorney general Rikkos Erotokritou was sentenced to three-and-a-half years in prison for accepting bribes in 2015 while in office.

C3. Does the government operate with openness and transparency? 4 / 4

In general, the government operates with openness and transparency. However, Cyprus lacks a freedom of information law – a draft bill was presented for public comment in 2015, but at the end of 2017 no vote had been scheduled in parliament.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 56 / 60

D. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND BELIEF: 15 / 16

D1. Are there free and independent media? 4 / 4

Freedom of speech is constitutionally guaranteed and generally respected. A vibrant independent press frequently criticizes the authorities. Private and public media compete.

D2. Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private? 4 / 4

Freedom of religion is guaranteed by the constitution and protected in practice. Nearly all inhabitants of the south are Orthodox Christians. Minority religions sometimes experience discrimination. Muslim and Buddhist groups have occasionally faced obstacles in the operation of their religious sites. The government facilitates crossings at the UN buffer zone between north and south to facilitate worship at religious sites.

D3. Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination? 3 / 4

Academic freedom is respected in Cyprus. However, state schools use textbooks containing negative language about Turkish Cypriots and Turkey.

Though a general climate of moderation had recently prevailed, the status quo was upset in February 2017 by the passage of a motion in parliament proposed by the far-right ELAM that requires schools to honor the 1950 plebiscite in which Greek Cypriots voted for unification with Greece. In response, parliament passed a law in April requiring that the education ministry consult with the House education committee on commemorations – a move meant to undercut the controversial provision.

D4. Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution? 4 / 4

People are generally free to engage in political and other sensitive discussions without fear of retribution or surveillance.

E. ASSOCIATIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL RIGHTS: 12 / 12

E1. Is there freedom of assembly? 4 / 4

Freedom of assembly is generally respected.

E2. Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights- and governance-related work? 4 / 4

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) usually operate without government interference. A memorandum of cooperation was signed between the police and 12 NGOs in March 2017 to improve relations and prevent misunderstandings.

E3. Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? 4 / 4

Workers have the right to strike, form independent trade unions, and engage in collective bargaining. The law provides remedies for antiunion discrimination, though enforcement is uneven.

F. RULE OF LAW: 15 / 16

F1. Is there an independent judiciary? 4 / 4

Cyprus's independent judiciary operates principally according to the British tradition. Since ascension to the EU in 2004, the legal system has been harmonizing with EU law.

F2. Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? 4 / 4

Cyprus's legal system generally upholds due process.

F3. Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies? 4 / 4

While Cyprus is free from war and insurgencies, the Council of Europe and other groups have noted occasional cases of police brutality, including the August 2017 beating of a 60-year-old Turkish citizen who crossed a checkpoint without showing his visa. Overcrowding at prisons and migrant detention centers has decreased but remains a problem. Force was sometimes used by authorities to suppress protests at detention centers.

Since the 2015 election of a new, pro-reunification president in Northern Cyprus, Mustafa Akinci, talks between the two sides have raised hopes for a lasting solution to the island's partition, which resulted from a 1974 Turkish invasion of the north following a coup aimed at union with Greece. After resuming UN-sponsored negotiations in January 2017, talks broke down following the Turkish insistence that their military be allowed to remain on the island to guarantee the peace.

F4. Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population? 3 / 4

Antidiscrimination laws prohibit bias based on sexual orientation, but the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community faces societal discrimination in practice. Laws barring incitement to hatred apply to both sexual orientation and gender identity. There are no explicit provisions protecting transgender people.

Despite government efforts to combat prejudice and inequality, non-Greek Cypriot minorities, including migrants and asylum seekers, face discrimination and occasional violence. Authorities' long-term detention of irregular migrants and asylum seekers in prison-like facilities, delays in processing asylum applications, and extremely rigorous conditions for asylum have all drawn criticism from NGO leaders.

Gender discrimination in the workplace is a problem, including in hiring practices and salaries, and laws against it have not been adequately enforced.

G. PERSONAL AUTONOMY AND INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS: 14 / 16

G1. Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education? 3 / 4

Although the UN buffer zone dividing the island remains in place, freedom of movement has improved since 2004 due to a growing number of border crossings.

G2. Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors? 4 / 4

Private property rights are generally respected in Cyprus. However, the status of property abandoned by those who fled north after the 1974 invasion is a point of contention in reunification talks with Northern Cyprus. A 1991 law states that property left by Turkish Cypriots belongs to the state. Under the law in the north, Greek Cypriots can appeal to the Immovable Property Commission (IMP), which in 2010 was recognized as the responsible authority for the resolution of property disputes. As of the end of December 2017, 850 cases out of a total of 6,392 applications have been settled for over \$359,000,000.

G3. Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance? 4 / 4

Sexual harassment is widespread in Cyprus. To address the issue, the ombudsman provides training to public-sector employees. Domestic violence is a growing problem. Two government-funded shelters are open to survivors of domestic abuse.

In 2015, the parliament passed legislation allowing same-sex civil unions, but it did not include adoption rights for same-sex couples.

G4. Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation? 3 / 4

While the government has made genuine progress in combatting human trafficking, migrant workers remain vulnerable to sexual exploitation and forced labor. Migrant workers often have difficulty finding employment and social services for these vulnerable groups are inadequate.

Access to healthcare and employment opportunities are limited for people with disabilities, who experience high levels of unemployment.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

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