

Freedom in the World 2014 - Cyprus

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2014 Scores

Status: Free

Freedom Rating (1 = best, 7 = worst): 1.0

Civil Liberties (1 = best, 7 = worst): 1

Political Rights (1 = best, 7 = worst): 1

Explanatory Note:

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

OVERVIEW

Presidential elections in February resulted in the triumph of the Democratic Rally (DISY). Nicos Anastasiades replaced Demetris Christofias of the Progressive Party of the Working People (AKEL), who opted not to run for reelection.

Cyprus's recession continued to intensify in 2013 as the banking crisis worsened, necessitating a European Union (EU)-funded bailout. The country entered into intense negotiations with the EU and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in March, shortly after Anastasiades took office. In return for €10 billion (\$13 billion) in emergency loans, Cyprus agreed to close its second largest bank, the Cyprus Popular Bank, and use uninsured deposits – those over €100,000 – to pay for poorly performing investments. It is estimated that larger depositors, many of whom are Russian, may lose 47.5 percent of their holdings. The terms of the loan also required Cyprus to implement austerity measures, including tax increases, pension reductions, and a cut in welfare benefits. This provoked mass protests that, while peaceful, led to concerns of extreme nationalism, xenophobia, and racism taking hold on the island. In face of its economic troubles, the government of Cyprus continued the development of natural gas reserves in its territorial waters, further increasing tensions with Turkey and Northern Cyprus.

POLITICAL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

Political Rights: 37 / 40 (-1)

A. Electoral Process: 11 / 12

Cyprus's president is elected by popular vote to a five-year term. 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 not been occupied since Turkish Cypriot representatives withdrew from the chamber in 1964.

Presidential elections were held in February 2013. Anastasiades of the conservative DISY party emerged as the victor, winning 57.5 percent of the vote in the run-off phase. Running on a platform of efficient negotiations with the EU and the IMF over the bailout agreement, Anastasiades defeated AKEL's Stavros Malas, whose platform opposed austerity.

In the most recent legislative elections, which were held in May 2011, DISY took 20 seats, AKEL won 19 seats, and the Democratic Party (DIKO) took 9 seats; 3 small parties captured the remaining 8 seats. AKEL and DIKO originally formed a coalition government, but DIKO withdrew in August 2011 following a massive explosion on a naval base that killed 13, called into question the competence of AKEL leadership, and brought to a head differences between DIKO and AKEL over reunification talks with Northern Cyprus.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16

Democratic governance in Cyprus remains healthy. Elections feature a diversity of parties, and the system is open to their rise and fall – as demonstrated by the 2013 elections, which saw the presidency change hands from AKEL to DISY.

Minority groups participate fully in the political process in Cyprus. Following a 2004 ruling against Cyprus by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), a law was passed allowing Turkish Cypriots living in the south to vote and run for office in Greek Cypriot elections. Turkish Cypriots cannot run for president, as the constitution states that a Greek Cypriot should hold that post and a Turkish Cypriot should be vice president (the vice presidency remains vacant). The Maronites (Levantine Catholics), Armenians, and Latins (Roman Catholics) elect special nonvoting representatives.

C. Functioning of Government: 10 / 12 (-1)

The banking and sovereign debt crisis has limited the ability of Cyprus's president and legislature to determine the country's policies. External powers – the EU and the IMF – increasingly influence the legislative process and restrict the ability of the governing party to act autonomously.

The influence of the EU and IMF over democratic decision making was particularly evident in the March 2013 negotiations surrounding the €10-billion loan package. The EU and IMF were able to use the loan to insist that depositors bear the major brunt of the bank bailout and to force the government to pass austerity measures. The Anastasiades government struggled to find solutions that balanced the demands of external creditors with the desires of its populace.

Corruption is not a major problem in Cyprus, but there is evidence that its banking system has served as a tax haven and has permitted the laundering of illegally obtained money from Russia and other countries. Parliamentary hearings on freedom of information in May 2009 indicated that many legal requests for information are not fulfilled, mostly due to lack of resources. Research by the Open Cyprus Project in 2010 suggests that this problem continues: 72% of their requests for information were met with complete administrative silence and only 7% resulted in full disclosure. Cyprus was ranked 31 out of 177 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2013 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Civil Liberties: 55 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 15 / 16

Freedom of speech is constitutionally guaranteed and generally respected. A vibrant independent press frequently criticizes the authorities, and several private television and radio stations compete effectively with public stations. Although Turkish Cypriot journalists can enter the south, Turkish journalists based in the north have reported difficulties crossing the border. Access to the internet is unrestricted.

Freedom of religion is guaranteed by the constitution and protected in practice. Nearly all inhabitants of the south are Orthodox Christians, and some discrimination against other religions has been alleged. State schools use textbooks containing negative language about Turkish Cypriots and Turkey.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 11 / 12

Freedoms of association and assembly are generally respected. Doros Polycarpou, director of the local human rights group KISA, was tried but acquitted for rioting and illegal assembly after organizing a multicultural unity festival in December 2010 at which violent clashes took place. Cyprus's frequent austerity protests have been almost uniformly peaceful. Nongovernmental organizations generally operate without government interference. Workers have the right to strike and to form trade unions without employer authorization.

F: Rule of Law: 15 / 16

Cyprus's independent judiciary operates according to the British tradition, upholding due process rights. However, the ECHR ruled against Cyprus in 2009 for failure to provide a timely trial in a case that lasted nearly six years. The problem of indefinite detentions of asylum seekers has improved somewhat since the country's ombudsperson filed complaints on the matter in 2008, but long-term detention of migrants continues. The Council of Europe and other groups have noted cases of police brutality, including targeted beatings of minorities. Prison overcrowding has decreased but remains a problem.

The economic crisis has bolstered the fortunes of far-right, anti-immigration elements in Cypriot politics, including the National Popular Front (ELAM) party. Attacks on immigrants have become more frequent, including the firebombing of a building in which farmworkers from Egypt were sleeping. There have also been allegations that ELAM uses summer camps to indoctrinate young

people and conduct military training activities. In response, the justice minister has announced that the police are investigating the organization.

A 1975 agreement between the two sides of the island governs treatment of minorities. Asylum seekers face regular discrimination, especially in employment, and KISA has warned of racially motivated attacks.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 14 / 16

Since 2004, all citizens have been able to move freely throughout the island using a growing number of border crossings. While the Greek Cypriots have thwarted attempts to lift international trade and travel bans on the north, trade has increased between the two sides.

The status of property abandoned by those moving across the Green Line dividing the two sides of the island after the 1974 invasion is a point of contention in reunification talks. 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, which in 2010 was recognized by the ECHR as an adequate local authority for the resolution of property disputes. As of the end of 2013, a total of 5,704 applications have been lodged with the commission and 594 had been settled; approximately \$235 million has been dispersed.

Gender discrimination in the workplace, sexual harassment, and violence against women are problems in Cyprus. Women are underrepresented in government, with only one woman in the cabinet and seven in the legislature. While the government has made genuine progress in preventing human trafficking and launched a new antitrafficking plan in 2010, Cyprus remains a transit and destination country, and prosecution is weak. Though the LGBT community in Cyprus is protected by a variety of antidiscrimination measures, they are not protected from rhetorical violence. Same sex couples also do not have the right to enter into either marriages or civil unions, and transgender individuals are not allowed to officially change their sex.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

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