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Cyprus

Country:

Cyprus

Year:

2016

Freedom Status:

Free

Political Rights:

1

Civil Liberties:

1

Aggregate Score:

94

Freedom Rating:

1.0

Overview:

Cyprus made progress during 2015 in its recovery from a banking crisis that had forced it to accept a bailout loan from the European Union (EU) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 2013. The economy returned to modest growth following nearly four years of recession, and unemployment, though still high, began to fall after increasing significantly due to the austerity measures that the bailout required. The last controls on capital transfers were lifted in April, and the country was expected to fully exit from the bailout program in early 2016.

Economic hardship in recent years has stoked fears of rising nationalism. As an island that is not part of the EU's passport-free Schengen Area, Cyprus largely avoided the massive influx of migrants and refugees that stimulated nationalist sentiment in other EU member states in 2015, but the government was criticized for holding asylum seekers who did arrive on its shores in prison-like conditions for lengthy periods.

The April 2015 election of a new, pro-reunification president of Northern Cyprus, Mustafa Akıncı, 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. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is recognized only by Turkey. Reunification talks, which had stalled in October 2014 over a maritime territorial dispute, resumed in June.

Explanatory Note:

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

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Political Rights: 38 / 40 (+1) [Key]

A. Electoral Process: 11 / 12

The Republic of 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.

In the 2013 presidential election, Nicos Anastasiades of the conservative Democratic Rally (DISY) party emerged as the victor, winning 57.5 percent of the vote in the runoff. 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.

In the most recent legislative elections, held in 2011, DISY took 20 seats, AKEL won 19, and the Democratic Party (DIKO) took 9; three small parties captured the remaining 8 seats.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16

Elections feature a diversity of parties, and the system is open to their rise and fall, leading to regular rotations of power. Minority groups participate fully in the political process. 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 Republic of Cyprus 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). Three religious minorities—the Maronites (Levantine Catholics), Armenians, and Latins (Roman Catholics)—each elect a special nonvoting representative to the parliament.

Cyprus's economic crisis has bolstered the fortunes of nationalist, anti-immigration elements in the political arena in recent years. The far-right National Popular Front (ELAM) remains politically weak, winning just 2.69 percent of the vote in the 2014 European Parliament elections, but that was a substantial increase from the 0.22 percent it received in 2009.

C. Functioning of Government: 11 / 12 (+1)

The banking and sovereign debt crisis limited the ability of Cyprus's president and legislature to determine the country's policies. In exchange for their bailout loan, the EU and the IMF imposed harsh terms on depositors and compelled the government to adopt austerity measures. The Anastasiades government struggled to find solutions that balanced the demands of its external creditors with the desires of its citizens.

However, this pressure on Cypriot officials' autonomy eased as the country moved toward an exit from the bailout program in early 2016.

Corruption is not a major problem in Cyprus, but there is evidence that its banking system has served as a tax haven and permitted the laundering of illegally obtained money from Russia and other countries. There is no freedom of information law, and a draft bill presented by the government for comment in 2015 was criticized for its large number of exemptions. Cyprus was ranked 32 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Civil Liberties: 56 / 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. 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 adherents of other religions has been alleged. The government facilitates crossings of the UN buffer zone between north and south for the purpose of worship at religious sites.

State schools use textbooks containing negative language about Turkish Cypriots and Turkey, though a general climate of moderation has prevailed in recent years. There are no restrictions on open and free private discussion.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

Freedoms of association and assembly are generally respected. Cyprus's frequent protests against austerity policies have been almost uniformly peaceful. Nongovernmental organizations generally operate without government interference. 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

Cyprus's independent judiciary operates according to the British tradition, upholding due process rights. The Council of Europe and other groups have noted cases of police brutality, including beatings of minorities. Prison overcrowding has decreased but remains a problem.

Despite some government efforts to combat prejudice and inequality, non-Greek Cypriot minorities as well as migrants and asylum seekers face discrimination and occasional violence. The authorities' long-term detention of irregular migrants and

asylum seekers has drawn criticism from human rights organizations and prompted hunger strikes by detainees. The law bars detention exceeding 18 months for such individuals, though this rule has reportedly been violated in a number of cases.

Antidiscrimination laws prohibit bias based on sexual orientation but do not explicitly protect transgender people; laws barring incitement to hatred apply to both sexual orientation and gender identity. There is no provision for official recognition of transgender people. The LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community faces societal discrimination in practice.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 14 / 16

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.

The status of property abandoned by those who fled north 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 (IMP), which in 2010 was recognized by the ECHR as an adequate local authority for the resolution of property disputes. The Turkish government informed Cyprus in 2014 that it would no longer fund the IMP, casting doubt on its future. It continued to operate as of 2015.

Gender discrimination in the workplace, sexual harassment, and violence against women are problems in Cyprus. Women are underrepresented in government. In November 2015, the parliament passed legislation allowing same-sex civil unions, but it did not include adoption rights for same-sex couples.

While the government has made genuine progress in combatting human trafficking, migrant workers remain vulnerable to sexual exploitation and forced labor.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

Full Methodology

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