



Freedom in the World 2015 - Cyprus

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2015 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

Cyprus has seen an influx of refugees and asylum seekers since the beginning of the Syrian civil war. Human rights organizations accuse the government of being unresponsive to these refugees, holding them for long periods of time in detention centers and refusing to allow them to apply for asylum and citizenship.

Cyprus's recession continued in 2014. The country was required to implement austerity measures, including tax increases, pension reductions, and a cut in welfare benefits, as a condition of the €10 billion (\$13 billion) bailout loan that it received from the European Union (EU) in 2013. These measures have increased unemployment and household indebtedness and raised fears of rising nationalism.

A new round of negotiations to reunify the island began in February 2014. The talks collapsed in September after Turkey began energy explorations in Cypriot waters. In May, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) had ordered Turkey to pay Cyprus €90 million (\$100 million) in compensation to victims of the 1974 invasion that split the island in two. Turkey has refused to recognize the legitimacy of this ruling.

POLITICAL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

Political Rights: 37 / 40

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.

In legislative elections held in May 2011, the Democratic Rally Party (DISY) took 20 seats, the Progressive Party of the Working People (AKEL) won 19 seats, and the Democratic Party (DIKO) took 9 seats; and 3 small parties captured the remaining 8 seats. AKEL and DIKO originally formed a coalition government, but DIKO withdrew in August 2011 following an explosion on a naval base that killed 13 and called into question the competence of AKEL leadership.

Presidential elections were held in 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 International Monetary Fund (IMF) over the bailout agreement, Anastasiades defeated AKEL's Stavros Malas, whose platform opposed austerity.

In May 2014, Turkish Cypriots from Northern Cyprus attempting to vote in European Parliament elections in the Republic of Cyprus were turned away from the polls. Republic of Cyprus officials claimed that the Northern Cypriots did not have valid addresses on their registration forms, and estimated the number turned away was only 150. Because the EU does not recognize Northern Cyprus, Turkish Cypriots are required to vote in the south to participate in EU elections.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16

Elections feature a diversity of parties, and the system is open to their rise and fall. Minority groups participate fully in the political process. Following a 2004 ECHR ruling against Cyprus, 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). The Maronites (Levantine Catholics), Armenians, and Latins (Roman Catholics) elect special nonvoting representatives.

Cyprus's economic crisis has bolstered the fortunes of far-right, anti-immigration elements in the nation's politics, including the National Popular Front (ELAM) party. ELAM remains politically weak, winning just 2.69 percent of the vote in 2014 European Parliament elections. In March 2014, members of ELAM attacked an event in Limassol at which Mehmet Ali Talat, former president of Northern Cyprus, was speaking.

C. Functioning of Government: 10 / 12

Cyprus's banking and sovereign debt crisis has limited the ability of the government to determine the country's policies. The influence of the EU and IMF over democratic decision making was particularly evident in the 2013 negotiations surrounding the €10-billion (\$11-million) 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. In December 2014, the IMF withheld about €88 million (\$98 million) in bailout funds from Cyprus due to the country's failure to establish new rules that would streamline its foreclosure process.

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. Cyprus was ranked 31 out of 175 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2014

Corruption Perceptions Index. Cyprus is one of only two countries in the EU without a freedom of information law.

Civil Liberties: 56 / 60 (+1)

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 members of other religions has been alleged. State schools use textbooks containing negative language about Turkish Cypriots and Turkey.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12 (+1)

Freedoms of association and assembly are generally respected. Cyprus's frequent austerity protests have typically been peaceful. An exception was in February 2014, when hundreds of demonstrators marched in Nicosia against the planned privatization of Cyprus's state-owned electric utility, as required under the 2013 rescue plan. Two protesters were injured in clashes with police. Nongovernmental organizations generally operate without government interference. However, in May 2014, Doros Polycarpou, director of the local human rights group KISA, was arrested for an unpaid parking ticket while attempting to visit unaccompanied immigrant minors at the Menogeia Detention Center; KISA interpreted the arrest as an attempt to intimidate and silence the organization.

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. 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 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. In October 2014, refugees at a detention center in Menoyia went on a hunger strike to pressure the government to conduct residency hearings; some of the detainees claimed to have been held at the facility for more than a year.

A 1975 agreement between the two sides of the island governs treatment of minorities. Asylum seekers and internally displaced people face regular discrimination, especially in employment, and KISA has warned of racially motivated attacks. The LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community in Cyprus is protected by a variety of antidiscrimination measures.

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. All Cypriots are required to show identification when crossing the so-called Green Line, the demilitarized zone separating the two parts of the island.

The status of property abandoned by those moving across the Green Line 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. As of the end of 2014, a total of 6,079 applications had been lodged with the commission and 619 had been settled; approximately \$289 million had been dispersed. In June 2014, however, the Turkish government informed Cyprus that it would no longer fund the IMP.

Gender discrimination in the workplace, sexual harassment, and violence against women are problems in Cyprus. Same sex couples do not have the right to enter into either marriages or civil unions, and transgender individuals are not allowed to officially change their sex. 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.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

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