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Cyprus

The island of Cyprus is located in the Eastern Mediterranean, 65 miles off the southern coast of Turkey. After gaining independence from Great Britain in 1960, Cyprus's success as a politically stable, united republic began to unravel in 1963, as relations between the Greek Cypriot majority and the Turkish Cypriots deteriorated. In 1964, the Turkish Cypriots, objecting to revisions made to the constitution by the majority, withdrew from most national institutions and began to administer their own affairs. Sporadic, and sometimes intense, intercommunal violence prompted the United Nations Security Council to order a U.N. peacekeeping force to the island. In 1974, a coup against the Greek Cypriot government, intended to unify Cyprus with Greece, led to the deployment of Turkish military forces to northern Cyprus. Since then, the island has been politically and physically divided; the internationally recognized Republic of Cyprus (Republic) governs about two-thirds of the island, and the Turkish Cypriots administer an area in the northern third of the island. In 1983, the Turkish Cypriots declared their independence and established the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). The TRNC is recognized only by Turkey.

Cyprus: Basic Facts

Area: Approximately the size of Connecticut.

Political Division: Republic of Cyprus controls the southern two-thirds of the island. Turkish Cypriots administer the northern one-third of the island.

Population: Approximately 1.2 million; some 860,000 Greek Cypriots and some 351,000 ethnic Turkish Cypriots and mainland Turks. Maronites and Armenians represent very small minorities.

Capital: Nicosia (for both the Republic of Cyprus and Turkish Cypriots).

Languages: Greek and English in the Republic of Cyprus and small communities in the North; Turkish and English in the North.

Religion: Greek Orthodox in the South and small communities in the North; secular Islam in the North.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP): In the Republic, GDP is \$22 billion; per capita GDP is \$30,000; In North Cyprus, GDP is \$3.9 billion (approx.); per capita GDP is \$14,100 (approx.).

Political Leaders: Republic of Cyprus: President Nicos Anastasiades, Foreign Minister Nicos Christodoulides, Energy Minister Giorgos Lakkotrypīs.

Leaders of Turkish Cypriots: "President" Mustafa Akinci, "Prime Minister" Tufan Erhurman, "Foreign Minister" Kudret Ozersay.

Sources: Economist Intelligence Unit; International Monetary Fund.

The U.N. monitors a buffer zone (Green Line) across the island between the two sides. Over the past 45 years, the U.N. has facilitated unsuccessful negotiations to unite the two Cypriot communities under a new federal system overseeing two constituent states. (For more on the unification negotiations, see CRS Report R41136, *Cyprus: Reunification Proving Elusive*.)

The Republic entered the European Union (EU) on May 1, 2004. Although the entire island of Cyprus is considered part of the EU, only Greek Cypriots enjoy the full benefits of EU membership. The EU's *acquis communautaire*, the union's rules and procedures, has been suspended in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots pending a political settlement. Turkish Cypriots may enter the South and apply for EU citizenship and passports. The Republic adopted the euro as its currency in January 2008; the Turkish lira is the official currency of the Turkish Cypriot area, although the euro is accepted.

Political Situation

The Republic is governed by a president and a 56-seat unicameral House of Representatives, both elected for five-year terms. Nicos Anastasiades of the Democratic Rally (DISY) Party was elected president of the Republic in February 2013 and reelected in February 2018. After the 2016 parliamentary elections, eight political parties sit in the House; the DISY party is the largest. The next presidential elections will take place in 2023 while the parliamentary elections will be held in May 2021.

In the north, the Turkish Cypriots administer their own institutions with an elected "president," "prime minister," and "National Assembly," which exercise joint executive powers. Mustafa Akinci was elected "president" for a five-year term in April 2015. Parliamentary elections were held in January 2018. Although the conservative National Unity Party (UBP), which led the previous coalition government, won the most seats, the new government is led by the Republican Turkish Party without UBP participation.

The Greek Cypriots do not recognize the TRNC or the elections in the North. They do not refer to Akinci as president, and they refer to the North as the "occupied area." Similarly, the Turkish Cypriots do not recognize the Republic and refer to it as "South Cyprus."

The Republic's foreign policy generally follows that of the EU, although it historically has been tied closely to Greece and its policies. The Republic's close relations with Russia, a major source of tourism, investment, and offshore banking, has declined somewhat recently. The Republic has supported EU sanctions on Russia in reaction to the Ukraine crisis. More recently, relations with Israel and Egypt, by virtue of a mutual interest in energy exploration

and development in the Eastern Mediterranean, have expanded. Relations with Turkey, Cyprus's largest regional neighbor, have been tense. Turkey does not recognize the Republic, has opposed the Republic's energy exploration, and has been a decisive player in the island's reunification negotiations.

Turkish Cypriot foreign policy generally mirrors that of Turkey, although the Turkish Cypriots have long sought increased diplomatic and trade relations with other countries. An estimated 25,000 Turkish military forces are stationed in the North.

Economic Conditions

The Republic has an open, free-market economy. The services sector, including a large tourist industry, contributes approximately 75% to the GDP and employs about 72% of the labor force.

The Greek Cypriot economy traditionally has been linked to the Greek economy. In 2011, during the Eurozone crisis in Greece, Cypriot banks ran into liquidity problems as the number of nonperforming loans in both Cyprus and Greece began to increase. In 2012, representatives of the European Commission, European Central Bank, and International Monetary Fund (IMF) began work on an assistance program for the Republic that included implementing austerity and reform initiatives. The rescue program included a loan of €10 billion to cover maturing debt held by foreign institutions and the recapitalization and merger of weakened banks. Cyprus emerged from its financial crisis and the EU/IMF-backed bailout program in March 2016. According to Eurostat, real GDP grew by about 4.0% in 2018. The Economist Intelligence Unit indicates that economic growth will hover around 3% in 2019 and continue on a healthy pace through 2021.

The economy of the Turkish Cypriot-administered area is dominated by the services sector, including tourism, and education, with smaller trade, agriculture, and light manufacturing sectors. The economy operates on a free-market basis but remains highly dependent on financial assistance from Turkey, including low-interest loans mostly to Turkish entrepreneurs in support of export-oriented industrial production and tourism. Economic growth (5% in 2018) has been handicapped by the political isolation of Turkish Cypriots, the lack of private and public investments, high freight costs, and skilled-labor shortages. In 2018, exports amounted to \$105 million and imports totaled around \$1.7 billion. Turkey remains the Turkish Cypriots' main trading partner, supplying 60% of imports and absorbing around 40% of exports. A pipeline transporting fresh water from mainland Turkey to north Cyprus opened in late 2015. An electrical cable from Turkey will supply additional electricity to North Cyprus.

Direct preferential trade between North Cyprus and EU member states is restricted. However, since August 2004, EU rules have allowed goods produced or substantially transformed in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots to be sold duty-free to consumers in the Republic and, through the Republic, to the rest of the EU. Under these rules, the EU has become the Turkish Cypriots' second-largest trading partner.

Energy

The Republic claims an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) off its southern coast that includes a 200-mile stretch of the Eastern Mediterranean extending southward toward Israel, Egypt, and Lebanon. In December 2011, Noble Energy, a Texas-based energy company, announced the discovery of natural gas in Cyprus's Aphrodite gas field. Many felt at the time that the discovery would place Cyprus on Europe's energy map. In March 2019 ExxonMobil announced that it had located a new and significant amount of gas. Cyprus, Israel, Greece, and Italy have moved forward on a potential gas pipeline to Europe. In addition, Cyprus and Egypt have also considered piping future Cypriot/Israeli gas to Egypt's liquefied natural gas facilities for possible future export to outside markets. A more economical and technically practical gas pipeline across Cyprus to Turkey and into Europe would depend on an overall solution to the island's division.

Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots have objected to the gas exploration and consistently threatened to take action if it continues. In September 2011, Ankara and the Turkish Cypriots signed an agreement authorizing the Turkish Petroleum Corporation to explore for energy resources in areas off the coast of Cyprus, including parts of the Republic's EEZ that Turkey claims as part of its EEZ. Turkish naval vessels have continually conducted operations in the Republic's EEZ and have harassed other gas-exploration operations, raising tensions between Ankara and Nicosia and having a negative impact on the settlement negotiations.

U.S.-Cyprus Relations

U.S. relations with the Republic, long considered good, are expanding. Both governments have signed new security and energy-related initiatives and the U.S., at the urging of some in Congress, is considering eliminating current restrictions on arms sales to the Republic.

Relations with the Turkish Cypriots are considered unofficial but cordial. The United States regards the current division of Cyprus as an issue in need of a solution and has supported negotiations to achieve a fair and permanent settlement. Although offshore banking operations and relations with Russia have raised concerns about money laundering and Russian influence, the United States has expressed its satisfaction with the Republic's anti-money laundering policies. The United States also supports the Republic's policies toward the prevention of human trafficking.

The United States has taken the position that the Republic has the right to explore for natural resources within its EEZ but that any revenues that may result from the discovery of natural gas should benefit both the Greek and the Turkish Cypriot communities. The United States hopes that tensions between Cyprus and Ankara over the energy issue do not pose significant problems in the regional attempt to establish the Eastern Mediterranean as a new energy area.

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