

THE CYPRUS ISSUE: DID YOU KNOW?

Throughout history, many civilizations have ruled Island of Cyprus in the Eastern Mediterranean, including the Ottoman Turks (for over three hundred years) followed by British colonization until 1960. The island is home to two distinct peoples: Turkish Cypriots (400,000) and Greek Cypriots (850,000). However, Turkish Cypriots have faced decades of denial of rights and international isolation, putting stability and security on the island, as well as in the surrounding region, in jeopardy. Today, Turkish Cypriots seek to become sovereign equals with Greek Cypriots with equal international status: one island, two states.

Key Events that led to the Cyprus Issue:

- In the 1950s, Greek Cypriot ambitions of “Enosis” (unification with Greece) led to violent riots against the British, who ruled the island at the time.
- Turkish Cypriots, who were against the Hellenization of the island (i.e. making it more “Greek”), sought “Taksim” (partition of the island between Turkey and Greece).
- In 1960, the independent Republic of Cyprus was established as a compromise from the London and Zurich Agreements — recognizing Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots as sovereign equals.
- The independent Republic of Cyprus was short-lived — destroyed after only three years in 1963 — because Greek Cypriots sought to use the new Republic as a steppingstone towards Enosis.

Greek Cypriots’ Attacks on Turkish Cypriots’ Rights & Existence:

From 1963-1974, Greek Cypriots launched the *Akritis Plan* — an ethnic cleansing campaign—that took away Turkish Cypriots’ constitutional rights and purged them from all government institutions. Left without a seat in government or any form of representation, Turkish Cypriots established their own provisional government, all while being subject to violent killings by the Greek Cypriot militia. By 1964, a UN Peace Keeping Mission for Cyprus was established to end the escalating violence. However, despite the UN presence, massacres against Turkish Cypriots perpetrated by Greek Cypriots (with the help of the military Junta regime in Greece) continued until 1974. Later that year, the Greek Junta’s staged coup on the island prompted Turkey’s intervention under Article IV of the Treaty of Guarantee of 1960, putting an end to the bloodshed.

In 1975, an agreement was signed in Vienna, allowing the voluntary transfer of Turkish Cypriots to the north and Greek Cypriots to the south of the island. Still disenfranchised without any representation in the island’s government, Turkish Cypriots exercised their right to self-determination as enshrined in the UN Charter by creating a full-fledged democratic state called the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) on November 15, 1983. Since the creation of the TRNC, Turkish Cypriots have been open to a settlement with Greek Cypriots in the form of a bi-zonal bi-communal federation, though UN-facilitated settlement negotiations have been unsuccessful.

Greek Cypriots’ Sabotage of Settlement Negotiations:

- In 1985-86, Greek Cypriots rejected UN Secretary-General De Cuellar’s “Draft Framework Agreement” with Turkish Cypriots.
- In 1992, Greek Cypriots rejected UN Secretary-General Ghali’s “Set of Ideas”.
- In 1994, Greek Cypriots rejected the UN’s proposed “Package of Confidence Building Measures”.
- In 2004, the UN’s “Comprehensive Settlement of the Cyprus Problem” (known as the Annan Plan) was rejected by Greek Cypriots in a referendum held that year, while Turkish Cypriots voted overwhelmingly in favor. Promises made to Turkish Cypriots by the international community to end their isolation evaporated after Greek Cypriots’ overwhelming rejection of the Annan Plan.
- The 2017 Cyprus Conference in Crans-Montana, the so-called “final chance” for a federal settlement, was sabotaged by the Greek Cypriots.

Turkish Cypriots’ Vision for the Future:

The Turkish Cypriot people in Northern Cyprus have been isolated for decades by embargoes and international political restrictions. Despite repeated calls and promises by the international community, the economic, political, and humanitarian isolation for the Turkish Cypriots continues. There are many things that can be done to remedy these issues; but the accurate comprehension by the U.S. leaders, of the historical events and the factual current situation of the Turkish Cypriot population on the Island, is a momentous step forward.

The Turkish Cypriots are committed to good neighborly relations with Greek Cypriots and remain unwavering in their good faith and hope for stability, security, and cooperation in and around Cyprus. In July 2022, the TRNC offered numerous proposals to Greek Cypriots to address areas of mutual concern and challenges, such as “Hydrocarbon Resources”, “Electricity Interconnectivity”, “Transition to Green Energy from Solar Utilization”, “Water Rationing and Development of Water Resources”, “Irregular Migration”, and a “Mine-Free Island.” The Greek Cypriots largely ignored the proposals.

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Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.