

Research Briefing

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Cyprus: recent developments and peace talks



Summary

- 1 Background
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Summary

Background: independence and division

Cyprus became independent from the UK in 1960. Under the Treaty of Guarantee that forms part of the constitution, Greece, Turkey and the UK are “guarantors” of the Republic of Cyprus. The constitution set up a system of power sharing between the Greek and Turkish communities, but the Turkish community stopped participating in the government in 1963. In 1974, a military coup in Cyprus supported by the Greek military junta raised fears of a Greek annexation of the whole island. This led to Turkish troops occupying the northern part of the island. The island has been divided since, with a “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” established in 1983 (TRNC). The TRNC is not recognised internationally, other than by Turkey.

The Turkish occupied part of Cyprus is separated from the Republic of Cyprus by a UN buffer zone, overseen by a UN force of around 750 troops. The UK contributes around 250 troops. Under the Treaty of Guarantee, the UK also retains sovereignty over two military bases in Cyprus (known as the Sovereign Base Areas).

Peace talks

UN-sponsored peace talks have taken place on and off for many years. In 2004, a peace plan was put to the Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities in separate referendums. The plan would have reunified Cyprus as a federation of two politically equal states, prior to the island joining the EU. Turkish Cypriots voted in favour, but the Greek Cypriots rejected the plan. Cyprus subsequently joined the EU. While the whole island is technically part of the EU, EU law does not apply in the north.

There have been attempts to revive peace talks since 2004. These included UN-sponsored talks launched in 2017. These talks collapsed after the Greek foreign ministry said it was impossible for the Greek side to countenance an envisioned federal Cyprus with occupation troops on its soil, while Turkey insisted on its right to unilateral intervention in Cyprus.

Cyprus has an elected president who heads the government. The current president (since 2013) is Nicos Anastasiades of the conservative Democratic Rally (DISY). He supported the 2004 plan. The TRNC is a semi-presidential republic. Ersin Tatar, formerly Prime Minister at the head of the right-wing nationalist National Unity Party (UBP), was elected President in 2020. Backed

by President Erdoğan of Turkey, Tatar rejects the UN model of a federal Cyprus and supports a “two-state solution” formalising the current division of the island. President Erdoğan also backs Tatar’s plans to open up the resort of Varosha. This has been condemned by the UK and EU as a provocative step in breach of a UN resolution.

An informal five-party summit (Turkey, Greece, the UK, and the Greek and Turkish Cypriots) took place in April 2021. According to reports, Tatar said there was no point in holding formal talks without recognition of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus as a state and that he would not drop the two-state proposal. Cypriot President Anastasiades said that this proposal would never be accepted. In January 2022, Tatar said that he asked the UK to host fresh talks between himself and President Anastasiades.

Tensions over gas drilling

Tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean have intensified since 2018 as Turkey has sought to block drilling operations by Cyprus in waters around the island, and to launch its own exploration activities. Turkey disputes Cyprus’s claims to exclusive exploration rights in these waters. The EU imposed limited sanctions against individuals involved in the Turkish operations in 2019. The UK participated in these sanctions and continued them when it left the EU in 2020. Greece and Turkey have held talks to defuse the tensions, but Turkish drilling operations have continued.

Response to Russian invasion of Ukraine

Prior to 2022, Cyprus enjoyed good relations with Russia. It purchased military equipment from Russia and had an agreement allowing Russian navy access to its ports. It also attracted high levels of Russian investment, and gave close to 3,000 Cypriot passports to Russian nationals under a controversial scheme granting citizenship in return for large investments in Cyprus. Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Government of Cyprus has revoked the passports of Russians listed under EU sanctions targeting individuals close to the Russian leadership.

The Cypriot Government has reportedly been reluctant to back some of the EU sanctions against Russia, although it has been obliged to implement them once adopted. The EU sanctions on Russia were projected to have a significant impact on Cyprus given the large number of Russian investors and dual passport holders, and income from Russian tourism. Cyprus has also expressed concerns about the impact on Cyprus’s maritime industry of EU proposals to ban all Russian owned ships from docking in EU ports and to ban all EU-controlled oil tankers from transporting Russian oil.

1 Background

1.1 Independence

Cyprus became independent from the UK on 16 August 1960. The new republic's constitution provided for a system of government in which power would be shared by the Greek and Turkish communities in proportion to their numbers, and a set of Treaties of Alliance and Guarantee that gave both Greece and Turkey a right to intervene to guarantee Cyprus's constitutional order and to keep troops on the island. However, long-running frictions between the Turkish and Greek communities remained, with the Greek community tending to favour a unitary state (or even at several points unification with Greece) and the Turkish community seeking a federation with a high degree of autonomy, or outright independence.

The Treaty of Guarantee 1960

The [Treaty of Guarantee](#) is a treaty between the Republic of Cyprus, Greece, Turkey and the United Kingdom, concluded and entering into force in 1960. It forms part of the constitution of the Republic of Cyprus, and makes Greece, Turkey and the UK “guarantors” of the Republic of Cyprus.

Article I bans Cyprus from participating in any political union or economic union with any other state. The UK has obligations under Article II, which requires Greece, Turkey and the UK to guarantee the independence, territorial integrity and security of Cyprus. Finally, and controversially, Article IV reserves the right of the guarantor powers to take action to re-establish the current state of affairs in Cyprus, a provision which was used as justification for the Turkish invasion of 1974 after a Greek coup. The treaty also allowed the UK to retain sovereignty over two military bases under Article III.

There has been disagreement as to what exactly the UK's obligations under Article II require. Some Cypriots have argued that the UK has the power and obligation to unilaterally put an end to the Turkish presence in Northern Cyprus and thus restore the 1960s state of affairs in the Republic of Cyprus.

The UK, on the other hand, interprets its obligations more narrowly. In May 2018 when asked in the House of Lords what actions it was taking to continue to honour the UK's responsibilities as a guarantor power under the 1960 Treaty of Guarantee, the Government responded:

The Government considers the Treaty of Guarantee to be binding on all its signatories. The UK's principal responsibility under the Treaty of Guarantee is to recognise and guarantee the independence, territorial integrity and security

of the Republic of Cyprus. The Government fulfils this responsibility through supporting the UN-facilitated settlement process, which is aimed at achieving a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation with political equality as defined by the relevant Security Council resolutions.¹

1.2 Tensions followed by 1974 invasion and division

The Turkish community stopped participating in 1964, following intercommunal tensions. The island has been divided since 1974, when Turkish troops occupied the north to protect the Turkish community from a feared Greek takeover. The Turkish invasion followed a military coup in Cyprus, backed by the Greek military junta, sparking fears of a Greek annexation. A de facto Turkish Cypriot government was established in the north the following year, divided from the rest of the island by the 'Green Line' (the UN buffer zone) which is patrolled by UN forces (UNFICYP – the United Nations Peace-Keeping Force in Cyprus).

Although the 1960 constitution remains nominally in force for the Republic of Cyprus, each community administers its own affairs, refusing to recognise the authority of the other's government.

The Republic of Cyprus officially includes the whole island, but usually refers to the (Greek Cypriot) government-controlled south.

Northern republic declared in 1983

On 15 November 1983 the 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus' (TRNC) was established following a unilateral declaration of independence. It is recognised only by Turkey, which provides significant economic and political support, and the declaration of independence was condemned by the UN Security Council.

1.3 UN buffer zone and UK presence

The UK retains sovereignty over two military bases on Cyprus (known as the Sovereign Base Areas). In the eastern part of the island, the Buffer Zone is interrupted by the British Sovereign Base Area of Dhekelia, where the UN does not operate.

There are several villages or special areas (called Civil Use Areas) within the Buffer Zone, where more than 10,000 people live and/or work. Civilians may enter these areas freely. Elsewhere in the buffer zone, civilian movement or

¹ [HL 8133, tabled on 22 May 2018](#)

activity requires specific authorisation from UNFICYP. UNFICYP keeps permanent watch over the buffer zone.

Since April 2003, a number of crossing points have opened up between the north and the south. These include two in the British Sovereign Base Area at Pergamos and Strovilia.²

Troops in UNFICYP serve on a rotating basis. According to the most recent update on numbers in November 2021, there are [745 troops in UNFICYP](#). Alongside civilian and police staff they form a contingent of just over 1,000 UN staff. The largest troop contributors are the UK ([with approx. 252 troops](#)) and Argentina, followed by Slovakia.³ UK troops serve on an unaccompanied six-month deployment and are operationally separate to personnel who are deployed (and can be accompanied by family) to the Sovereign Base Areas. Soldiers with [UNFICYP](#) wear UN (blue) berets and the British contribution is known as Op Tosca. It is one of the British army's [longest running continuous operations](#).⁴

1.4 Constitution and political system

Republic of Cyprus

The Republic of Cyprus officially includes the whole island, but usually refers to the (Greek Cypriot) government-controlled south.

The constitution of the Republic of Cyprus provided for a system of government in which power would be shared by the Greek and Turkish communities in proportion to their numbers. However, the positions reserved for the Turkish community have not been filled since the Turkish community withdrew from them in 1964.

The Cypriot President is both the head of state and head of government. Presidents are elected by an absolute majority of the popular vote (with two rounds if necessary) and serve a five-year term. The President appoints the Council of Ministers (government).

The constitution provides that the President of Cyprus shall come from the Greek community, and the Vice President from the Turkish community. The Vice President post has remained vacant since 1974, when the Vice President was deposed after the [Greek-supported military coup](#).

Cyprus has a unicameral legislature, the Vouli Antiprosopon (House of Representatives). This consists of 80 seats: 56 assigned to Greek Cypriots and

² See UNFICYP, [About the buffer zone](#)

³ UNFICYP Fact Sheet, [United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus](#), accessed 23 May 2022

⁴ Forces News published a six minute film of the buffer zone and the UK deployment in October 2021. See Forces News, [Watch: UK's UN buffer zone mission – as you've never seen it before](#), 4 October 2021.

24 to Turkish Cypriots. Since 1964, only those seats assigned to Greek Cypriots have been filled. Members are directly elected for five-year terms. Government Ministers cannot be members of the House of Representatives.

Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus

The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), a semi-presidential republic, elects its own unicameral 50-member Legislative Assembly by proportional representation for a term of five years. Voters may either vote for a party – in which case their votes go for every candidate on the party’s list – or they may split their votes among several candidates from different parties. Legislators are elected in five multi-member constituencies corresponding to the five administrative districts of North Cyprus.

The Prime Minister is accountable to the legislature, and controls almost most all domestic policies. The Prime Minister forms a 10-member Council of Ministers.

The [President of the TRNC](#) is directly elected for a term of five years. The President appoints judges and nominates the Prime Minister, but he has no veto power over legislation. However, the President of the TRNC is the Republic’s main representative in foreign affairs and diplomatic relations, including the peace talks.

Presidential elections have two rounds. Only one is required if a candidate achieves more than 50% of the vote. If not, the two best-placed candidates go into a run-off election a week later.

1.5

2004: the ‘Annan plan’ and the joint referendums

UN-sponsored peace talks have taken place on and off for many years, with various plans rejected by one or other community. The prospect of EU membership for Cyprus concentrated minds towards a settlement, and from 1999 to 2003 the then UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, worked on [a plan](#) for the reunification of Cyprus which provided for a federation of two politically equal states. He wrote into the plan that it would have to be adopted by referendum in both parts of Cyprus and so, following negotiations between the governments of Greece and Turkey on the plan, a revised version was put to twin referendums in Cyprus on 24 April 2004.⁵

The Turkish Cypriot community voted in favour but the Greek Cypriot community voted against the plan, meaning that it could not be implemented. For the Greek Cypriots the most contentious parts of the plan were those relating to Turkish troop levels on the island, the territorial

⁵ BBC News, [What is the UN's Cyprus plan?](#), 1 April 2004

adjustment between the two parts of Cyprus, and the return of refugees to their homes. An overarching concern was that, in the view of many Greek Cypriots, the plan favoured Turkey and legitimised the consequences of the Turkish intervention in 1974. And when it had become clear that Cyprus was going to join the EU, whether or not it remained divided, a strong incentive for the Greek Cypriots to accept a settlement had been removed.⁶

1.6 Cyprus and the EU

Cyprus joined the EU still divided, a week after the referendum on the Annan plan, on 1 May 2004. Some commentators argued that this both removed the Greek Cypriot community's major incentive for reunification and needlessly antagonised Turkey. One report suggested that the EU's promise to Greek Cypriots that they would join the EU whatever the result of the referendum was in fact partly based on a mistaken expectation of a Greek Cypriot 'yes' and a Turkish Cypriot 'no'.⁷

The whole of the island is in the EU, but European legislation and the rest of the *acquis communautaire* (entire body of EU obligations) is suspended in the north, in line with [Protocol 10](#) of the Accession Treaty 2003.⁸ In other words, EU law applies to the whole of Cyprus but will not be applied in the north until a solution to the Cyprus problem has been reached. The northern areas remain outside the EU's customs and fiscal territory, but the situation would change should a Cyprus settlement enter into force. EU rules would apply over the whole of the island.

The suspension of EU rules in the north does not however affect the personal rights of Turkish Cypriots as EU citizens: they are citizens of a Member State, the Republic of Cyprus, even though they live in a part of Cyprus that is not under the control of the Cyprus government.⁹ The "Green Line Regulation", adopted in 2004,¹⁰ deals with the movement of goods and persons across the line; trade across the green line is still severely restricted.

Cyprus is not a member of NATO. Since Cyprus joined the EU in 2004, Turkey (a NATO member) has blocked meetings between NATO and the EU Political and Security Committee because of Cyprus's participation in the latter.¹¹

⁶ New York Times, [Greek Cypriots Reject a U.N. Peace Plan](#), 25 April 2004

⁷ International Crisis Group, [Cyprus: Reunification or Partition?](#), Europe Report N°201, 30 September 2009, p1 fn3

⁸ [Treaty between Member States of the EU and the ten States acceding to the EU, concerning their accession](#), 2003, Official Journal of EU, L 236, 23/09/2003

⁹ European Commission Representation in Cyprus, [Turkish Cypriot community](#) (undated – viewed 14 February 2022)

¹⁰ [Council Regulation \(EC\) 866/2004 of 29 April 2004](#) (opens PDF).

¹¹ Brookings, [Cyprus and the NATO-EU Divide](#), 29 November 2010

2 UK Sovereign bases

2.1 Background

When Cyprus became independent in 1960 the UK retained the two main military bases of Akrotiri (the ‘Western Sovereign Base Area’) and Dhekelia (the ‘Eastern Sovereign Base Area’) and surrounding land as Sovereign Bases (SBAs) and Overseas Territories of the UK (see map below, marked in red). They were recognised as such by Cyprus, Greece and Turkey in the [Treaty of Guarantee \(Article III\)](#).

The UK agreed to use the bases only for military purposes and not to install customs posts around them. This meant that although day to day mechanisms for administration were agreed directly between the UK Ministry of Defence and the Government of Cyprus, the arrangements needed to be formalised and amended in international law when first the UK and then Cyprus joined the EU.

The two UK bases together cover 98 square miles (about 3% of the area of the island). The UK Government does not own most of the land. About 60% is privately owned, with some 20% owned or leased by the Ministry of Defence and the remaining 20% Crown land held by the Administration. The original 1960 boundaries largely excluded towns and villages, but as a result of events in 1974 and other developments over the years, around 10,000 Cypriots now live in the SBAs, most of whom work at the bases or provide goods and services to them.



Source: SBA Administration, map showing ‘Green Line’, Sovereign Base Areas and retained sites (in red)

In addition to the Sovereign Bases, the Treaty of Guarantee also provided for the UK's continued use of certain facilities in Cyprus known as "Retained Sites", and for the use of specified training areas in Cyprus.

2.2

Withdrawal Agreement Protocol on the SBAs

[Protocol 3](#) attached to Cyprus's 2003 Treaty of Accession to the EU provided a legal basis for SBAs once Cyprus joined the EU. This aimed to give those resident or working in the Sovereign Base Areas the same treatment as those resident or working in the Republic of Cyprus. It also noted the UK's "commitment" not to create customs posts or other frontier barriers between the SBAs and the Republic of Cyprus and the arrangements enabling the Republic of Cyprus to administer a wide range of public services in the SBAs, including in the fields of agriculture, customs and taxation.

A new legal basis for these arrangements was required once the UK left the EU. The Withdrawal Agreement (WA) negotiated by Theresa May's Government and the EU in November 2018 included a Protocol on the SBAs in Cyprus. Although this version of the WA was never approved by Parliament, the Protocol on the SBAs remained unchanged in the final version of the WA, which was agreed by Boris Johnson's Government and the EU in October 2019 and came into force when the UK left the EU on 31 January 2020.

The [Withdrawal Agreement Protocol on the SBAs](#) largely enables the continuity, from the end of the Brexit transition period (31 December 2020), of existing arrangements in and around the SBAs. The EU institutions retain powers in relation to the implementation and application of Protocol provisions. Where the Protocol refers to concepts or provisions of EU law, these should be interpreted and applied in conformity with the caselaw of the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU).

Cyprus and the UK will cooperate in ensuring the implementation of the Protocol and Cyprus will be responsible for implementing and enforcing EU law in the SBAs. The SBAs remain in the EU customs territory after Brexit and EU law on customs and the Common Commercial Policy will apply to and in the SBAs. Cyprus will be responsible for customs formalities, controls and the collection of import duties. There are various exceptions to this in relation to military goods and the personal goods of UK military personnel.

There are detailed arrangements for checks required by EU law of goods and persons crossing the external borders of the SBAs (the sea boundaries and the airports and seaports of the SBAs, but not their land and sea boundaries with Cyprus) and for goods coming from Northern Cyprus. EU law on agriculture and fisheries, veterinary and phytosanitary rules will apply to and in the SBAs, and Cyprus will be responsible for their implementation and enforcement. This largely continues previous practice.

A Specialised Committee on the Protocol will discuss any difficulties in implementation and make recommendations to the UK-EU Joint Committee which has overall responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the WA.¹²

For further details on the Protocol, see section 9 of Commons Library Briefing 8453, [The UK's EU Withdrawal Agreement](#)

¹² For further details of the governance committees established by the Withdrawal Agreement see Commons Library briefing CBP 8453 [The UK-EU Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee: functions and tasks](#) and Commons Library Insight, [Governing the new UK-EU relationship and resolving disputes](#), 24 February 2021

3 Recent political developments

3.1 Developments in Cyprus

Nicos Anastasiades of the conservative Democratic Rally (DISY) was first elected President in 2013, just before Cyprus agreed to an EU and IMF bailout. He was re-elected President in the second-round run-off vote on 4 February 2018 and heads a coalition government formed by the DISY and independents. The next Presidential election is due in 2023.

Mr Anastasiades has been a strong supporter of peace talks with the Republic, he supported the Annan peace plan in 2004, even though a majority of his party did not back it. After his re-election Mr Anastasiades set new talks to reunite the island as his priority, saying: "the biggest challenge we face is reunifying our country". He went on to say he will "continue to work with the same determination in a bid to achieve our common goal, ending occupation and reunifying our country".¹³

Legislative elections were held in May 2021. DISY lost seats but remained the largest party with 27.8% of the vote (compared to 30.7% in 2016). The Communist AKEL party remained in second place, but also lost votes. The far right ELAM party, linked to Golden Dawn in Greece, increased its share of the vote (from 3.7% to 6.8%).¹⁴

The Government's popularity has been impacted by several corruption scandals, including one related to an investment scheme, whereby Cypriot passports were granted without applicants having any prior connection to Cyprus if they made a minimum €2 million investment in Cyprus. 6,779 people were awarded citizenship between 2007 and 2020, a large number of them Russians (see below). An independent inquiry found that over half should not have qualified for passports, with some going to fugitives from justice.¹⁵

3.2 Cyprus and Russia

Since the early 1990s, Russia has sought to increase its influence in the Mediterranean and in Cyprus in particular. This builds on previous links prior to the collapse of the USSR, notably a taxation agreement between Cyprus

¹³ EU Observer, [Re-elected Cyprus president eyes fresh peace talks](#), 5 February 2018

¹⁴ Reuters, [Cyprus sees nationalists gain in parliament vote](#), 30 May 2021

¹⁵ Reuters, [Top Cyprus prosecutor asks police to probe cash-for-passport scandal](#), 14 May 2021

and the USSR in 1982. Investment in Cyprus from Russians since the 1990s has been substantial.

In October 2010 the two countries signed a new bilateral agreement (the Convention for the Avoidance of Double Taxation of Income and Property) that further increased the flow of investment.

Cyprus has engaged in military cooperation with Russia. This includes a Russian-Cypriot agreement on military technical co-operation signed in March 1996, and the purchase by Cyprus of Russian military equipment. The purchase of Russian-made anti-aircraft missiles in 1997 provoked strong opposition from the USA and Turkey. Following pressure from the USA, the Cypriot and Greek governments eventually agreed that the equipment would be transferred to the Greek island of Crete in 1999.¹⁶

Cyprus continued to maintain good relations with Russia prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. During the Russian–Georgian conflict of August 2008, Cyprus’s President Demetris Christofias was among the few international leaders and the only EU leader to give support to Russia. Christofias was head of the communist AKEL party, and was Cyprus’s first and so-far only communist head of state.

Cyprus was required to implement EU sanctions against Russia following the occupation of Crimea in 2014. However, the Cypriot Parliament voted for a resolution calling on these sanctions to be lifted in 2016.¹⁷ In 2015, Cyprus and Russia signed an agreement allowing the Russian navy to use Cyprus’s ports.¹⁸

Several Russian companies are based in Cyprus, and there is a sizeable Russian community in Cyprus, as well as Russian-speaking schools and media. Cyprus gave citizenship to 2,886 Russian nationals, among them investors and their families, between 2007 and 2020 under the discontinued so-called “golden passports” investment scheme.¹⁹ Russians make up around 6% of the Greek Cypriot controlled part of the island’s [population of around 850,000](#).

Response to Russian invasion of Ukraine

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy addressed the Cypriot parliament on 7 April 2022 and urged Cyprus to revoke passports given to wealthy Russians unless there was evidence they did not harm Ukraine. He also called for Cyprus to stop the private yachts of wealthy Russians from docking in its marinas.²⁰

¹⁶ Irish Times, [Ankara raged by second arms deal between Cyprus and Russia](#),

¹⁷ Andreas Stergiou, [Cyprus, recent history](#), *Europa World*, accessed 24 May 2022

¹⁸ BBC News, [Cyprus signs deal to allow Russian navy to use ports](#), 26 February 2015

¹⁹ Reuters, [Cyprus to strip citizenship from another four sanctioned Russians](#), 20 April 2022

²⁰ France 24, [Revoke Russian investor passports, Zelensky urges Cyprus](#), 7 April 2022

Prior to President's Zelensky's speech there were [reports in the Cypriot press](#) that four Russians who had been granted Cypriot citizenship under the scheme would have their passports revoked. These individuals were on the list of Russians subject to EU sanctions following the invasion of Ukraine, and were subject to an asset freeze and ban on travelling to the EU. The Government later confirmed that these individuals and their family members would have their passports revoked, bringing the number of passports revoked to 21.²¹ Later in April, another four Russians who had obtained passports through the investment scheme and had been added to the EU sanctions lists, together with 11 family members, had their Cypriot passports revoked.²²

The EU sanctions on Russia were projected to have a significant impact on Cyprus given the large number of Russian investors and dual passport holders, and income from Russian tourism. Russian nationals were estimated to make up around 20% of visitors to Cyprus prior to 2022.²³

The Cypriot Government has reportedly been reluctant to back some of the EU sanctions against Russia, although it has been obliged to implement them once adopted. Cyprus, Greece and Malta reportedly blocked a proposal for EU sanctions on all Russian-owned ships from docking in EU ports on 17 April 2022 (Russia flagged ships were banned).²⁴ In May, the same three countries also reportedly opposed a proposal to ban EU-flagged or EU-controlled oil tankers from transporting Russian oil. Around 120 oil tankers fly the Cypriot flag.

Cyprus has also objected to a proposed measure banning the provision of consulting and accounting services to Russians and there were also Cypriot concerns about a possible proposal to ban the sale of real estate to Russian citizens, including those residing permanently in the EU.²⁵ On 10 May, the Cypriot Foreign Minister Ioannis Kasoulides said that Cyprus would not resort to a veto but wanted its concerns resolved in discussions with EU partners. He said:

Sanctions cannot punish an EU member-state more than they do Russia. And our country has certain particularities not shared by any of the other member states. Our economy is based on tourism, services and maritime shipping. If these three sectors are dealt a blow, there is nothing else left. And we are obliged to shield these three sectors. Already tourism has been dealt a blow by the fact that Russian tourists will not be able to visit Cyprus this year. So we should understand that with each package that is proposed, the impact is a cumulative one.²⁶

²¹ Financial Mirror, [21 Russians to lose Cyprus passports](#), 13 April 2022

²² RFE/RL, [Four More Russian Billionaires Blacklisted By EU To Lose Cypriot Citizenship](#), 21 April 2022

²³ Financial Times, [Cyprus counts cost of weaker Russia ties after Kremlin's invasion of Ukraine](#), 17 April 2022.

²⁴ Euractiv, [Greece, Cyprus and Malta block sanctions against Russia-owned ships](#), 18 April 2022

²⁵ Cyprus Mail, [Cyprus objects to the new sanctions package against Russia](#), 6 May 2022

²⁶ Cyprus Mail, [FM says Cyprus not planning to veto Russia sanctions](#), 10 May 2022

There were reports in early April 2022 that Cyprus was considering giving some its Russian-made military equipment to Ukraine's forces, following a request from the US Government. However, on 8 April the Cypriot defence minister said that Cyprus would not be providing weapons to Ukraine as it would create gaps in the Republic's deterrence capabilities.²⁷

On 9 May, the European Commission Vice-President Margaritis Schinas suggested that Russia might interfere in the 2023 presidential elections in Cyprus.²⁸

3.3

Developments in Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus

Legislative elections, January 2018

The January 2018 elections saw the right-wing nationalist National Unity Party (UBP) of Prime Minister Hüseyin Özgürgün come out on top with 36% of the vote, winning 21 seats, ahead of the centre-left Republican Turkish Party (CTP) at 21%, with 12 seats. This left the UBP five short of the 26 seats it would need for a majority.

Özgürgün was unable to form a coalition government and handed over the mandate to CTP leader Tufan Erhürman. In early February 2018, Erhürman was able to form a coalition government, bringing together the CTP party, the Communal Democracy Party (TDP) and the Democratic Party (DP).²⁹ The Erhürman Government collapsed in May 2019 when the People's Party [announced](#) it was leaving the Government. Later that month Ersin Tatar, who [had become leader of the UBP in October 2018](#), formed a new two-party Government with the People's Party (HP).

Varosha announcement

Tatar went on to stand in the October 2020 Presidential elections, receiving financial backing from Turkey.³⁰ On 6 October, five days before the first round of election, Tatar announced on a visit to Turkey that his Government would open a beach in the town of Varosha, that had been abandoned since the Turkish invasion. Varosha is the subject of UN Security Council resolution 550 (1984) that considers any attempts to settle any part of Varosha by people other than its inhabitants as inadmissible and calls for the transfer of this area to the administration of the UN.

The move was seen as a piece of electioneering by Tatar. The move was condemned by the Cypriot Government, the EU's High Representative for

²⁷ Cyprus Mail, [Cyprus rules out sending weapons to Ukraine](#), 5 April 2022

²⁸ Cyprus Mail, [EU official warns of Russian interference in Cyprus elections](#), 9 May 2022

²⁹ Hurriyet Daily News, [Turkish Cypriot coalition gov't wins vote of confidence](#), 15 February 2022

³⁰ The Times, [Turkish Cypriots fear the heavy hand of Erdogan](#), 26 July 2021

Foreign Affairs, Josep Borrell, and UN Secretary General António Guterres. Mr Tatar's coalition partners the People's Party said they hadn't been notified, and left the Government causing it to collapse.³¹

Presidential elections, October 2020

The 2020 presidential election was postponed from April to October 2022 because of the covid-19 pandemic. The three main candidates in the election were, Ersin Tatar, Prime Minister and leader of the right-wing nationalist National Unity Party (UBP), Mustafa Akıncı the independent incumbent President who was first elected in 2015, and Tufan Erhürman, former Prime Minister of the centre-left Republican Turkish Party (CTP).

Tatar won the first-round, but did not achieve a majority, gaining around 32% of the vote. Tatar went on to win the second round, gaining 51.7% to Akıncı's 48.3%.

Legislative elections, January 2022

Initial attempts to form a new government following the 2020 Presidential election stalled, but a new UBP-led Government was eventually formed in December 2020. This was led by Ersan Saner of the UBP as Prime Minister. The other coalition partners were the conservative Democratic Party (DP) and the nationalist Rebirth (YDP) Party.

However, amid ongoing divisions within the coalition the government and opposition parties agreed to stage early legislative elections in February 2022. This was announced in October 2021. Saner then tendered the Government's resignation, referring to difficulties in convening the Assembly, disagreements between the coalition parties and a lack of co-operation from the opposition parties. He was supposed to remain as interim prime minister until the election, but was then forced to resign after compromising video footage involving Saner and a young woman was circulated on social media.

Faiz Sucuoğlu was elected as the new leader of the UBP, and became head of a new government in November 2021. The government comprised representatives of the UBP and the DP, and was backed by independent deputies.

Government and opposition parties then agreed on a new election date, which would be 23 January 2022. At the elections the UBP increased its representation in the Assembly to 24 seats. The CTP won 18 seats, the DP and the HP won three seats, and the YDP won two. Unlike the UBP which favours a two-state solution (see section 4 below), the CTP continues to support a bicomunal and bizonal federal solution to the Cyprus problem.

³¹ Cyprus Mail, [Turkish Cypriot 'prime minister' says Varosha beach will open Thursday](#), 6 October 2020

On 21 February 2022 Prime Minister Sucuoğlu formed a new coalition Government, comprising members of the UBP, the DP and the YDP. However, the Government resigned on 20 April after President Tatar refused to endorse Sucuoğlu's proposed dismissal of Minister of Finance Sunat Atun (with whom he disagreed over recent increases in electricity prices). Sucuoğlu then formed a new government with the same parties and a new finance minister, a week later, before resigning again on 1 May after coalition partners withdrew their support.³² Ünal Üstel, also of the UBP, was then tasked by President Tatar with forming a new government. His Government, comprised of the same three parties, received a parliamentary vote of confidence on 18 May.³³

³² Hurriyet Daily News, [Turkish Cyprus PM resigns for 2nd time in 10 days](#), 2 May 2022

³³ Daily Sabah, [New Turkish Cypriot govt aims to improve citizens' welfare](#), 19 May 2022

4 Recent peace talks

Since the Greek Cypriots rejected the Annan Plan for a permanent settlement in 2004, there have been attempts to restart negotiations but with limited progress. Significant momentum was regained in 2017, but these talks then collapsed.

4.1 UN negotiations

The United Nations negotiations to reunify Cyprus are facilitated by the [UN's special adviser on Cyprus](#). From August 2014 this position was held by Espen Barth Eide. However, he resigned in August 2017 in order to run in parliamentary elections in his native Norway.

Deputy Special Adviser to the Secretary General on Cyprus, [Elizabeth Spehar](#), who also serves as the Special Representative of the Secretary General in Cyprus and Head of the UN peacekeeping force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), then took the lead on peace talks.

On 4 November 2021, the UN Secretary General António Guterres announced the [appointment of Colin Stewart of Canada](#) as his new Special Representative and Head of UNFICYP. Mr. Stewart will also perform the role of Deputy to the Secretary General's Special Adviser on Cyprus, taking over from Elizabeth Spehar.

Talks were based on the previously agreed formula of a unified State of Cyprus with a single sovereignty, single international personality and a single citizenship, in a bi-communal, bi-zonal federation with political equality, as described in a series of UN Security Council resolutions.

4.2 Outstanding issues

The problematic issues include:

- **Power-sharing:** in general, Greek Cypriots want to keep as much power as possible at the federal government level and ensure that the new state is a continuation of the Republic of Cyprus. The Turkish Cypriots previously sought to keep as much power as possible within the two constituent entities and ensure that their own entity was

treated as an equal founder.³⁴ In recent years, Turkish Cypriot leaders have moved to advocating a two-state solution.

- **Security:** the status of Turkish troops and of the 1960 Treaty of Guarantee.
- **Residence and citizenship rights:** the rights of settlers from mainland Turkey.
- **Property issues:** there are thousands of claims to ownership of properties from people displaced during the events of 1974.

Guarantor powers and Treaty of Guarantee

Greece, Turkey and the UK, as Cyprus's three 'guaranteeing powers', take a close interest in the negotiations. Under Cyprus's 1960 [Treaty of Guarantee](#), the three states undertook to "recognise and guarantee the independence, territorial integrity and security of the Republic of Cyprus" and to "prohibit, so far as concerns them, any activity aimed at promoting, directly or indirectly, either union of Cyprus with any other State or partition of the Island". The Treaty gave each of the three states the right to take unilateral action as a last resort against a union or partition of Cyprus. They also had the right to keep troops on the island (with Britain keeping the two Sovereign Base Areas). But the extent of their practical involvement in the negotiations is sometimes hard to ascertain from the outside.

4.3

2017 talks: Renewed momentum, followed by a collapse

After the rejection of the [Annan peace deal](#) by the Greek Cypriots in 2004 there was a long period without serious attempts to revive talks. Momentum gathered again in 2014 with the appointment of Espen Barth Eide as the UN Secretary General's Special Adviser on Cyprus.

A new round of talks started in January 2017, coinciding with the appointment of Antonio Guterres as the new Secretary General, who had highlighted restarting major peace initiatives such as the Cyprus talks as among his [major priorities](#). He said at the start of the talks that a deal on reunifying Cyprus was "very close" but cautioned against hopes of a "quick fix".³⁵

In July 2017, despite the previous positive signals, talks held in the Swiss Alps collapsed after ten days after reportedly "[angry scenes](#)". The Turkish Cypriot

³⁴ International Crisis Group, [Cyprus: Reunification or Partition?](#), Europe Report N°201, 30 September 2009, p4

³⁵ BBC News, [Cyprus peace deal close, says UN chief after Geneva talks](#), 12 January 2017

leader Mustafa Akıncı predicted that future efforts to reunite Cyprus under a federal umbrella would be exceptionally difficult.

The Guardian reported that the issue of maintaining military intervention rights – insisted upon by Turkey – lay at the crux of the collapse. Greece and the Greek Cypriots had insisted that Turkey pull out its troops from Cyprus. The Turkish foreign minister said this was not acceptable for either Turkey or the Turkish Cypriots. The Greek foreign ministry said it was impossible for the Greek side to countenance an envisioned federal Cyprus with occupation troops on its soil and Turkey clinging to the right of unilateral intervention. Allowing another state to have the unilateral right of intervention in 2017 was unacceptable.³⁶

The BBC reported another major sticking point as being the question over how to return property to tens of thousands of Cypriots who fled their homes after the Turkish invasion in 1974.³⁷

4.4

Recent Positions of Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders

Tatar favours ‘two-state solution’

The election of a new Turkish Cypriot President, Ersin Tatar, in October 2020, appeared to further complicate the prospects for a peace deal. Tatar believes in a ‘two-state solution’, rejecting the UN model of Northern Cyprus becoming a sub-unit of a united federal Cyprus, albeit one with significant autonomy. The ‘two-state solution’ would formalise the de facto reality of two divided territories.

Tatar and other politicians on the right of the political spectrum in Northern Cyprus now reject a federal solution. Growing Turkish influence over politics in Northern Cyprus also shapes the positions taken by its leaders.³⁸ Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said that a two-state solution is the only option for Cyprus.³⁹

Could a a ‘hybrid’ solution be possible?

[Analysis](#) in the Financial Times after Mr Tatar’s election suggested there was still scope for better relations between the two sides. It cited Fiona Mullen, director of the Cyprus-based consultancy Sapienta Economics, who said Mr Tatar’s victory “doesn’t necessarily mean that it’s over” for attempts to solve the Cyprus dispute. She said it would be “in Turkey’s interests for this problem to go away because it’s upsetting the relationship with the EU”. She

³⁶ The Guardian [Cyprus reunification talks collapse amid angry scenes](#), 7 July 2017

³⁷ BBC News [Cyprus talks end without a peace and reunification deal](#), 7 July 2017

³⁸ Cyprus Mail [Turkey looms over elections in the north | Cyprus Mail](#), 4 October 2020

³⁹ Reuters, [Turkey's Erdogan says two-state solution only option for Cyprus](#), 10 February 2021

said that while a full solution to the problem was “less likely” under Mr Tatar’s leadership there could still be a “halfway deal” to resolve specific issues and reduce tensions in the eastern Mediterranean.⁴⁰

An article for the Cyprus Mail, in a piece written after an interview with Tatar, suggested that some sort of hybrid solution could be acceptable to both sides. This would be

... based on the idea of one country two states within the EU whereby the unifying effects of membership of the EU and the prospects of an ever closer union would be factored into a non-federal mix confining the country to a single member state within the EU but defining it as two states internally in accordance with EU and human rights law, with concessions on land, property and freedom of movement.⁴¹

The article suggested this idea had the approval of President Anastasiades of Cyprus “in preference to reunification under a power-sharing federal model”. Hence, the communities did not wish to share power under a domestic federal umbrella but would be willing to do so “at one remove under an EU umbrella”.⁴²

Anastasiades rejects claims he supports two-state solution

President Anastasiades however rejected reports that he might support such a two-state solution. In November 2020 Anastasiades said in a written statement that claims made by Ersin Tatar in an interview that Anastasiades did not rule out a two-state solution were “untrue” and did “not correspond to reality”. Referring to a meeting between the two leaders earlier that month, Anastasiades said that when Tatar had raised the issue of a two-state solution he had not only rejected it, but I argued that no one at international level, in the UN and the EU would accept such a solution. He said he had made his position clear to Tatar that the solution to be reached could be “solely on the basis of the high-level agreements, decisions and resolutions of the UN Security Council and in accordance with the EU principles and values.”⁴³

In the run up to fresh peace talks in March 2021, Tatar and the Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu confirmed that both Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots were firmly sticking to a two-state solution.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Financial Times, [Hardliner wins elections in northern Cyprus](#), 18 October 2020

⁴¹ Cyprus Mail, [A morning with new Turkish Cypriot ‘premier’ Ersin Tatar](#), 14 July 2019

⁴² Cyprus Mail, [A morning with new Turkish Cypriot ‘premier’ Ersin Tatar](#), 14 July 2019

⁴³ Cyprus Mail, [Anastasiades blasts as ‘untrue’ Tatar claim that he touted two-state solution](#), 17 November 2020

⁴⁴ Hurriyet Daily News, [Turkish side to negotiate only two-state solution on Cyprus](#), 2 February 2021

4.5

New talks in 2021

Following the breakdown of talks in 2017, there were no face-to-face talks between the two sides for the next four years. Leaders were regularly meeting with UN representatives. However, following a further push from the UN Secretary General, the Presidents of Cyprus and Northern Cyprus both confirmed their willingness to take part in a five-party summit (Greece, Turkey, the UK, and the Greek and Turkish Cypriots) in December 2020, after meetings with the UN Secretary General's special envoy Jane Holl Lute.⁴⁵

Informal talks take place

An informal meeting between the five parties took place in Geneva at the end of April 2021. Politico reported that [expectations were low](#) given the recent election of anti-reunification candidate Ersin Tatar as Turkish Cypriot President and his calls for a two-state solution, while the Republic of Cyprus and Greece continue to back reunification.

After three days of talks on 29 April, the UN Secretary General António Guterres said the discussions had not yielded enough common ground to resume formal talks on a settlement. But he added that he would “not give up” and that the parties had agreed to hold another meeting aimed at finding common ground “in the near future.” Guterres indicated that there would be another meeting in two to three months.

Not enough progress to restart formal talks

Politico reported that Tatar said there was no point in holding formal talks without recognition of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus as a state and that he would not drop the two-state proposal. Cypriot President Anastasiades said that this proposal would never be accepted. “There is not one single chance of Turkey or the Turkish Cypriot side succeeding in this. He said that the UN Secretary General also pointed this out.⁴⁶

In May 2021, President Anastasiades sent a letter to the UN Secretary General, indicating his willingness to meet with the Turkish Cypriots again.⁴⁷ However, it was [reported in June](#) that further talks were unlikely in the near future.⁴⁸ Later in June 2021, Turkish Cypriot foreign minister Tahsin Ertugruglu condemned a statement by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen that the EU would “never accept” a two-state solution to the Cyprus problem. He said the EU position was “[far from reality](#)”.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Cyprus Mail, [Both leaders confirm willing to attend five-party summit](#), 1 December 2020

⁴⁶ Politico, [Cyprus talks failed to find common ground, UN says](#), 29 April 2021

⁴⁷ Cyprus Mail, [President reviews Geneva talks in letters to UN and EU](#), 13 May 2021

⁴⁸ Cyprus Mail, [Informal summit on Cyprus issue unlikely for now](#), 14 June 2021

⁴⁹ Cyprus Mail, [Turkish Cypriot authorities condemn EU's rejection of two-state solution](#), 26 June 2021

On 2 June 2021, Anastasiades and Tatar confirmed agreement on synchronising the two sides' respective COVID-19 measures concerning crossings and on reopening all crossing points from 4 June 2021 onwards.⁵⁰

In July, Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias said that Turkey's and the Turkish Cypriot side's stance on the Cyprus Issue [left little room for optimism](#). He stressed that the Greek Prime Minister had made clear that Greece rejected any proposal that does not fall within the framework of the UN Security Council resolutions "namely a bicomunal, bizonal federation". He noted that this position was shared by all UN states, with the exception of Turkey."⁵¹

4.6 Erdogan visit to Varosha

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited northern Cyprus in July 2021. Alongside President Tatar, he announced [plans to further open up the resort of Varosha](#) (see section 3.3), while also insisting on a two-state solution for Cyprus. The plans to open up Varosha were condemned by the EU's High Representative for Foreign Policy, Josep Borrell. Borrell said that the EU underlined the need "to avoid unilateral actions [in breach of international law](#) and renewed provocations, which could raise tensions on the island and compromise a return to talks on a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus issue". The move was also condemned by the UK Government (see below).

4.7 Tatar-Anastasiades meeting

On 27 September 2021, UN Secretary General Guterres hosted an informal two hour meeting over lunch between the Cypriot President Anastasiades and Turkish Cypriot President Tatar. According to a [Cyprus Mail report](#), President Anastasiades refrained from giving a detailed account of what was discussed at the meeting but said it was "a creative meeting" where "differences were recorded". President Anastasiades said:

Mr Tatar developed the positions on sovereign equality and two independent states, and I developed our position which is fully in line with the UN resolutions, the mandate of the Secretary-General based on the resolutions, and we have developed various ways of moving forward to overcome the deadlock, but also to create prospects for resuming a creative dialogue.⁵²

⁵⁰ United Nations, Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Cyprus, [Statement by the United Nations Spokesperson in Cyprus, 2nd June 2021](#)

⁵¹ Cyprus Mail, [Turkey's stance on Cyprus issue leaves little room for optimism, Dendias says](#), 4 July 2021

⁵² Cyprus Mail, [Anastasiades: Creative meeting with Tatar, differences recorded, 27 September 2021](#)

Tatar said after the meeting that they talked about various issues, and expressed hope to see progress, “but of course this was just lunch”. He also said that the Turkish Cypriot north was entitled to recognition and sovereign equality. On his way to the meeting, he responded to Anastasiades’ statement that he was not open to a two-state solution, by saying that there were already two separate states in Cyprus.

Asked if he would have another meeting with the Secretary General and Tatar, Anastasiades said they had not agreed on anything like that for now.⁵³

Following the meeting, there were also reports that the UN Secretary General was poised to appoint a new special envoy to discuss confidence-building measures and also seek common ground and resume dialogue between the two sides. In October, Anastasiades sent another letter to Guterres [calling for the immediate appointment](#) of a special envoy to give a push to the settlement talks. However, the Turkish Cypriot side stated that they would not agree to a special envoy whose mandate would be limited to working within the UN resolutions, meaning a federal solution to the Cyprus problem.⁵⁴

The UN Secretary General [announced Colin Stewart](#) of Canada as the new UN Special Representative and Deputy to the Secretary-General’s Special Adviser on Cyprus, on 4 November.⁵⁵

Tatar calls for talks in the UK

In January 2022, President Tatar said that he had told UN Secretary General Guterres that new Cyprus peace talks could not be started, but that he was ready for an unofficial dialogue. He said he had asked the UK High Commissioner for Cyprus, Stephen Lillie, to invite President Anastasiades and himself to London for fresh talks to discuss various issues in a different environment.

He said: “There may not be common ground today, but it may arise in the coming years. We must continue the dialogue for a better Cyprus. I have no problem with dialogue”, and added:

If the Greek Cypriots do not object the recognition of the sovereign equality of the Turkish Cypriots in the U.N. Security Council, all aspects of the Cyprus problem can be negotiated.⁵⁶

⁵³ Cyprus Mail, [Anastasiades: Creative meeting with Tatar, differences recorded, 27 September 2021](#)

⁵⁴ Cyprus Mail, [President sends fresh plea to Guterres over special envoy](#), 23 October 2021

⁵⁵ UNFICYP, [Mr. Colin Stewart of Canada - Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus](#), 4 November 2021

⁵⁶ Daily Sabah, [No common ground for new Cyprus talks, TRNC president says](#), 31 January 2022

4.8

UK position

In a call with President Erdogan of Turkey in March 2021, Boris Johnson discussed the upcoming UN Cyprus talks. The UK press notice following the meeting stated that Mr Johnson had emphasised

that the UK continues to be a strong supporter of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Cyprus issue, based on the internationally accepted model of a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation.⁵⁷

The then UK Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab, attended the talks in Geneva in April 2021. This followed [meetings with both sides in Cyprus in February](#) in preparation for the talks.⁵⁸

The FCDO press release on the day talks started in Geneva stated that the Foreign Secretary would reaffirm the “UK’s support of a comprehensive, just and lasting resolution of the Cyprus problem”. He would also underline the potential of a reunited Cyprus, including greater opportunities on trade, investment and tourism, as well as bolstering security and stability in the region. Mr Raab said that the talks would be aimed “at delivering a fair and lasting solution to the Cyprus issue” and that he hoped “that all parties approach them with creativity and flexibility”.⁵⁹

Following the talks, a report by the Turkish Service of the BBC World Service on Friday claimed that Mr Raab had tabled an alternative proposal which deviated from the agreed UN parameters. This was based on the idea that Greek and Turkish Cypriots should mutually recognise each other’s existence, and northern Cyprus should be regarded as a part of the EU but not have an international recognition. However, this report was dismissed by an FCDO spokesperson and the article was later updated to reflect the FCDO position that Mr Raab had not deviated from the UN parameters and had supported a decentralised federation.

The revised article quotes a diplomatic source from Britain as saying that the Cyprus problem settlement basis is determined by the relevant UN Security Council resolutions as the internationally accepted bi-communal and bi-zonal federation with political equality. It added that the UK delegation in Geneva urged the parties in Cyprus to be “creative and flexible” and gave the message that many different solutions could be tried within the existing parameters.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ UK Government, [PM call with President Erdoğan of Turkey: 8 March 2021](#)

⁵⁸ UK Government, [Cyprus: Foreign Secretary urges progress at upcoming UN talks](#), 3 February 2021

⁵⁹ UK Government, [UK Foreign Secretary travels to Geneva for key Cyprus talks](#), 27 April 2021

⁶⁰ Cyprus Mail, [Foreign Office says BBE “broad enough framework” for Cyprus settlement, report about controversial UK proposal revised](#), 1 May 2021

FCDO Statement on the reopening and resettlement of Varosha

A [FCDO statement](#) in July 2021 expressed the UK Government's deep concern about an announcement made during the visit of Turkish President Erdogan to Cyprus on 19-20 July 2021 regarding the reopening and resettlement of an area constituting 3.4% of the fenced-off area of Varosha.

It said the announcement runs contrary to UN Security Council resolutions and to the Security Council Presidential Statement of 8 October 2020 which called for Turkey to halt and reverse its actions in Varosha.

It said that the UK strongly supports the relevant Security Council Resolutions covering the issue of Varosha and calls for all parties to comply with them. The UK would be discussing this issue as a matter of urgency with other Security Council members, and called on all parties not to take any actions which undermine the Cyprus Settlement process or increase tensions on the island.⁶¹

⁶¹ UK Government, [FCDO Statement on the reopening and resettlement of Varosha](#), 20 July 2021

5 Recent tensions in the Eastern-Mediterranean

5.1 The Cyprus-Turkey dispute over drilling rights

The geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean has taken on a new dimension in recent years with the discovery of natural gas fields. These included the Aphrodite gas field in Cyprus's southern economic exclusive zone (EEZ) which was discovered in 2011.

The rights of Cyprus to these gas fields and to an exclusive economic zone for drilling activities has been challenged by Turkey. It argues that the Greek Cypriot Government does not have legal authority over the whole island, and therefore does not have exclusive rights in these areas.

Tensions over drilling rights between Greece and Cyprus on the one side, and Turkey on the other, have intensified since 2018. Turkey has sought to block exploration activities by Cyprus and intensified its own exploration activities. Turkey's actions have been condemned by the EU, as well as by the US. Israel and Egypt have also given support to the exploration rights of Cyprus and Greece in the region.⁶²

Earlier in 2019, the Turkish Government had prevented Cypriot attempts to find offshore oil and gas by blocking a private drill ship owned by the Italian company Eni off Cyprus. EU leaders at the European Council criticised the Turkish action in a statement, saying it was illegal and calling on Turkey to respect the sovereign rights of Cyprus to explore and exploit its natural resources in accordance with the EU and international law.

The Cypriot Government has said Turkey's actions are in breach of international law. However, Turkey says it has legal rights stemming from international law, and that resources in the region should be shared. Later in 2019, the US Government also warned Turkey about "illegal" and "unacceptable" drilling activities, and EU foreign ministers agreed to draw up a list of economic sanctions against Turkish oil and gas drilling activities in waters off Cyprus.⁶³

⁶² Andreas Stergiou, [Cyprus, recent history, Europa World](#), accessed 24 May 2022

⁶³ Reuters, [Timeline: Turkey's gas exploration off Cyprus raises tensions](#), 14 October 2019

In 2020, [tensions increased](#) after Turkey said it was beginning drilling activities close to Greek islands, and in August 2020 naval frigates from the two countries were [involved in a collision](#).⁶⁴

5.2 EU sanctions

In December 2020, EU leaders at the European Council meeting agreed on steps towards more comprehensive sanctions on Turkey if it continued its drilling activities. This would involve penalising individuals and companies involved in planning and carrying out the gas exploration with travel bans into the EU and asset freezes.⁶⁵ Sanctions had already been placed on two executives at a Turkish state-owned oil company, on the basis of the sanctions framework adopted by the EU in 2019. EU leaders had previously offered trade and customs benefits as part of a “positive political EU-Turkey agenda” if Turkey halted these activities, and said the offer would remain on the table if Turkey showed willingness for dialogue and compromise.⁶⁶

The UK was [party to the earlier sanctions adopted in 2019](#), as it was still part of the EU sanctions regime during the transition period. It continued sanctions against individuals or entities involved in unauthorised drilling activities in Cyprus waters following the end of the transition period, implementing them through the [Unauthorised Drilling Activities in the Eastern Mediterranean \(Sanctions\) \(EU Exit\) Regulations 2020](#).⁶⁷

5.3 Greece-Turkey talks

In January 2021, Greece and Turkey resumed talks aimed at defusing these tensions. The Greek government said the talks would focus on the demarcation of exclusive economic zones and continental shelf in the Aegean Sea and eastern Mediterranean.⁶⁸

Following the beginning of these talks, and a reportedly more constructive approach from the Turkish Government, the EU halted plans to implement the wider sanctions in March 2021.⁶⁹ However, in April 2021, the Turkish

⁶⁴ See these useful explainers on this issue: BBC News [Turkey-Greece tensions escalate over Turkish Med drilling plans](#), 25 August 2020; Financial Times [What is at stake in the eastern Mediterranean crisis?](#) 8 September 2020; and International Crisis Group [How to Defuse Tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean](#), 22 September 2020.

⁶⁵ DW, [EU leaders back sanctions on Turkey over gas drilling](#), 11 December 2020

⁶⁶ Financial Times, [EU plans new sanctions on Turkey over Mediterranean dispute](#), 9 December 2020

⁶⁷ See UK Government [Explanatory Memorandum to The Unauthorised Drilling Activities in the Eastern Mediterranean \(Sanctions\) \(EU Exit\) Regulations 2020](#)

⁶⁸ France 24, [Greece, Turkey resume talks on maritime disputes after years of strife](#), 25 January 2021

⁶⁹ Reuters, [Exclusive: EU halts sanctions on Turkey oil executives as ties improve](#), 18 March 2021

Government said it [would be resuming](#) its drilling activities in the area. In October 2021, the Turkish Government warned Cyprus against research and drilling activities on the “Turkish continental shelf”.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, talks between representatives of the two governments continued.⁷¹ In November 2021, the earlier EU sanctions adopted in 2019 were prolonged for an additional year.⁷² A new round of talks between Greece and Turkey took place in February 2022.⁷³

On 13 March 2022, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and Turkish President Erdoğan held a rare meeting between leaders of the two countries over lunch in Istanbul. The two leaders discussed bilateral relations as well as cooperation in relation to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.⁷⁴

However, on 23 May President Erdoğan announced he was cutting all ties with the Greek Prime Minister. He accused Mitsotakis of deliberately antagonising Turkey when he addressed the US Congress a week earlier. Erdoğan referenced a request from Mitsotakis that the USA should not provide fighter jets to Turkey and said Mitsotakis had broken an agreement “not to include third countries in our disputes”.⁷⁵

Mitsotakis had not mentioned Turkey specifically in his address to Congress, but had warned the USA about instability in the Eastern Mediterranean and asked that it take this into account when making defence procurement decisions.⁷⁶

5.4

UK position

As noted above, the UK implemented EU sanctions against Turkey related to drilling activities around Cyprus in 2019. The UK Government has stressed the need for dialogue and diplomatic resolution of differences. For example, following a call between Boris Johnson and Prime Minister Mitsotakis of Greece in October 2020, the UK Government [press release stated](#):

The two leaders discussed the recent tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Prime Minister stressed the need for dialogue and welcomed the public commitment from Greece to resolve differences with Turkey diplomatically. He

⁷⁰ eKathimerini, [Turkey to resume drilling program in Eastern Mediterranean ‘soon,’ says energy minister](#), 2 April 2021

⁷¹ eKathimerini, [Turkey warns Cyprus against drilling in East Med](#), 21 October 2021

⁷² Council of EU, [Unauthorised drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean: Council prolongs the sanctions regime by one year](#), 11 November 2021

⁷³ Reuters, [Greece, Turkey to hold new round of exploratory talks next week](#), 19 February 2022

⁷⁴ The Independent, [Leaders of Turkey, Greece hold talks in rare meeting](#), 13 March 2022

⁷⁵ The Guardian, [Erdoğan says he is cutting all ties with Greek PM, dashing hopes of talks](#), 24 May 2022

⁷⁶ Government of Greece, [Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis' address to the Joint Session of the U.S. Congress](#), 17 May 2022

confirmed the UK would continue to work with both sides to de-escalate the situation.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ UK Government, [PM call with Prime Minister of Greece: 20 October 2020](#)

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