

# Republic of Cyprus



In 1974 Turkish troops invaded and occupied the northern 36% of the Republic of Cyprus. This area was later declared independent. The secession has not been recognised internationally, except by Turkey. The UN and Commonwealth have for many years protested about the occupation and tried to resolve the problem by negotiation.

Due to this division of the Republic of Cyprus, aggregated information is not always available. Economic and social data given here generally cover the government-controlled areas only, although legally and constitutionally the Republic of Cyprus includes the occupied north.

## KEY FACTS

Joined Commonwealth:	1961
Population:	871,000 (2009)
GDP p.c. growth:	2.2% p.a. 1990–2009
UN HDI 2010:	world ranking 35
Official languages:	Greek, Turkish
Time:	GMT plus 2–3hr
Currency:	euro (€)

## Geography

Area:	9,251 sq km
Coastline:	648km
Capital:	Nicosia

Cyprus is an oval-shaped island with 'pan-handle' north-east peninsula in the eastern Mediterranean. Its closest mainland neighbours are Turkey (to the north) and Syria and Lebanon (to the east).

**Time:** GMT plus 2hr winter, GMT plus 3hr summer

**Main towns:** Nicosia (Lefkosia, capital, pop. 215,600 in 2009, with a further 53,000 in the occupied north), Limassol (169,500), Larnaca (52,900), Paphos (42,300). In the occupied north, other main towns are Famagusta (36,500), Kyrenia, Morphou and Lefka.

**Topography:** The Troodos Mountains, in the central and western part of the island, rise to 1,951m at Mt Olympus. The Troodos, of infertile igneous rock, are characterised by steep slopes, narrow valleys and precipices. The Kyrenia Mountains (also known as the Pentadaktylos range), along the north coast, rise to 1,024m and are mainly limestone. Passes and valleys allow access to the north coast. The fertile Messaoria Plain lies between them. About half of its 186,000 hectares is irrigated. Most water sources are in the south – all major rivers originate in the Troodos and flow east, south or west. Many rivers dry up in the summer. There are sandy beaches on the south of the island and some rugged rocky coastline in the north.

**Climate:** Mediterranean type. Hot dry summers (June to September) and mild wet winters (November to March).

**Environment:** The most significant environmental issues are limited water resources – due to lack of rain in the summer and pollution of the island's largest aquifer by sea water; water pollution by sewage and industrial wastes; coastal degradation; and loss of wildlife habitats due to urbanisation.

**Vegetation:** Mediterranean scrub, succulents and pine woods, adapted to the dry summers, with 1,800 species and subspecies of flowering plants. The mountains are forested and less than 20% of the land is arable and permanently cropped, about 20% of which is irrigated. The occupied north is generally more thickly vegetated and fertile.

## did you know?

It is one of only three Commonwealth member countries located in Europe, all of which are island states and members of the European Union.

Cyprus has one of the lowest infant mortality rates in the Commonwealth: 997 infants survive every 1,000 births.

**Wildlife:** The only large wild animal is the agrino, a species of wild sheep, which is now protected. Snakes, once so abundant as to give the island its old name *Ophiussa* ('abode of snakes'), are now comparatively rare.

**Transport:** There is a good road network in the Republic, extending to 12,280km (65% paved), with motorways between Nicosia, Limassol, Paphos and the Famagusta area; comprising 2.2% of the total network. Cyprus has no railway.

Major ports are at Larnaca and Limassol.

Nicosia airport was closed in 1974. There are international airports 5km south of Larnaca, and 15km east of Paphos.

## Society

### KEY FACTS 2009

**Population per sq km:** 94  
**Life expectancy:** 80 years  
**Net primary enrolment:** 99%

**Population:** 871,000 (2009); 70% lives in urban areas; growth 1.3% p.a. 1990–2009; birth rate 12 per 1,000 people (19 in 1970); life expectancy 80 years (71 in 1970).

The population comprises Greek Cypriots (approximately 80%) and Turkish Cypriots, and small populations of Armenians, Maronites and 'Latins' (the term used in Cyprus for Roman Catholics of European origin). The population of the occupied north was estimated at 257,000 in 2005, and included around 160,000 Turkish illegal settlers.

**Language:** Official languages are Greek and Turkish. English is widely spoken; German and French spoken in tourist centres.

**Religion:** Most Greek Cypriots belong to the autocephalous Cypriot Orthodox Church; most Turkish Cypriots are Sunni Muslims. There are small religious groups of Maronites, Armenians, Roman Catholics and Anglicans.

**Media:** There are several daily papers, most in Greek but the *Cyprus Mail* is in English. Of the several bi-weekly, weekly and fortnightly papers, two (*Cyprus Weekly* and *Cyprus Financial Mirror*) are in English.

The public radio and TV provider is the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation, broadcasting in Greek, English and Turkish. Private radio and TV stations compete with the public networks. The switch from analogue to digital broadcasting was due to be complete in 2011.

There are 383 personal computers (2006) and 498 internet users (2009) per 1,000 people.

**Education:** Public spending on education was 4.1% of GDP in 2007. There are nine years of compulsory education starting at age five. Primary school comprises six years and secondary six, with two cycles of three years. There are many private schools. Some 98% of pupils complete primary school (2007). The school year starts in September.

Greek Cypriots have one of the world's highest proportions of graduates. The University of Cyprus is a bilingual (Greek and Turkish) university which opened in 1992. Other tertiary institutions include the Higher Technical Institute (founded 1968), Forestry

College, School of Nursing, Higher Hotel Institute and Mediterranean School of Management (postgraduate), as well as other, non-state universities. The female–male ratio for gross enrolment in tertiary education is 96:100 (2008). There is virtually no illiteracy among people aged 15–24. The occupied north also has free education to the age of 15.

**Health:** In the Republic, medical care is free for government employees, displaced persons and low-income families, including in all about 65% of the population. The government has proposed a national health insurance scheme. A new general hospital was built in Nicosia in the latter 1990s. Infant mortality was 3 per 1,000 live births in 2009 (30 in 1960).

The Government of Cyprus offers free treatment in government hospitals to all Turkish Cypriots residing in the occupied north.

**Communications:** Country code 357; internet domain '.cy'. Mobile phone coverage is good.

There are 476 main telephone lines and 1,122 mobile phone subscriptions per 1,000 people (2009).

**Public holidays:** New Year's Day, Epiphany (6 January), Greek Independence Day (25 March), EOKA Day (1 April), Labour Day (1 May), Assumption (15 August), Independence Day (1 October), Ochi Day (28 October), Christmas Day and St Stephen's Day (26 December). Fixed-date holidays falling on a Saturday or Sunday are not moved.

Religious and other festivals whose dates vary from year to year include Green Monday (start of Lent, 50 days before Greek Orthodox Easter), Good Friday (Greek Orthodox), Easter Monday (Greek Orthodox) and Kataklysmos (Pentecost, 50 days after Greek Orthodox Easter).

## Economy

(In this section, unless otherwise stated, figures do not include the occupied north.)

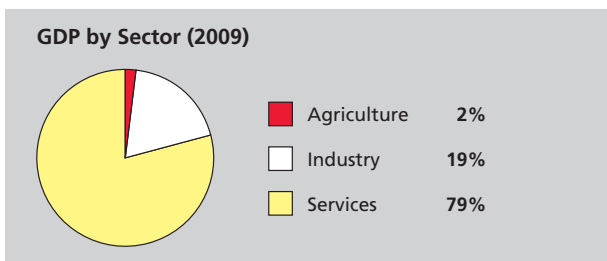
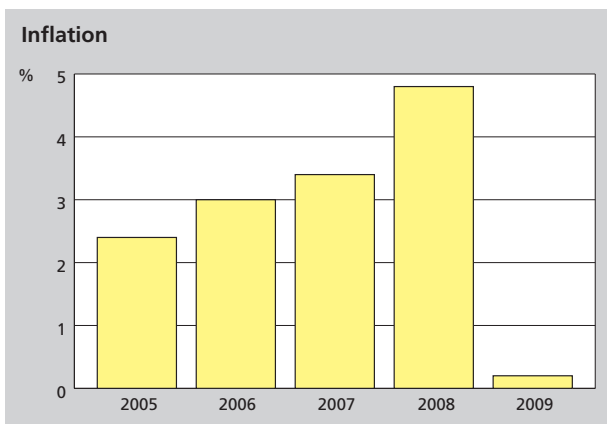
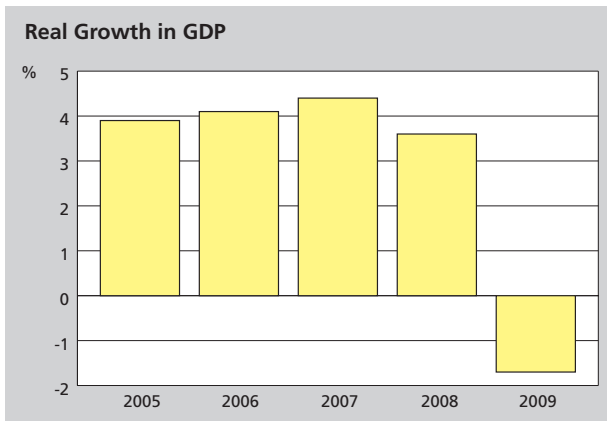
### KEY FACTS 2009

<b>GDP:</b>	US\$24.9bn
<b>GDP p.c.:</b>	US\$28,599
<b>GDP growth:</b>	4.1% p.a. 2004–07
<b>Inflation:</b>	2.3% p.a. 2004–08

**Overview:** Despite occupation of the north and the consequent forced movement of population and loss of resources, the economy of the Republic has grown steadily with relatively low inflation, particularly in the tourism and offshore financial services sectors.

From the latter 1990s, the government introduced economic reforms with a view to joining the EU. The economy continued to grow strongly, until it slowed in the tougher international climate after 2000, picking up again from 2004, the year in which the Republic of Cyprus joined the EU, and continuing at about 4% until 2008, when the impact of the world economic downturn on tourism and trade caused growth to stall in the latter part of that year and go into reverse in 2009 (–1.7%). Cyprus adopted the euro currency at the beginning of 2008 replacing the Cyprus pound.

In the occupied north, the economy has suffered from a number of factors including inflation and the weakness of the Turkish currency.



**Trade:** Major exports are manufactured goods, agricultural produce (especially citrus fruits and potatoes), pharmaceuticals, clothing and cigarettes.

The occupied north is unable to export directly to the EU, following a ruling by the European Court of Justice in 1994 that export documents for the island are valid only if issued by the Republic of Cyprus.

## Constitution

**Status:** Republic with executive president  
**Legislature:** House of Representatives  
**Independence:** 16 August 1960

The Republic of Cyprus is a democracy with a directly elected executive president, serving a five-year term. The 1960 constitution has provisions to ensure a balance of power between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities. The legislature, the House of Representatives, was to be elected by universal suffrage with 35 Greek and 15 Turkish seats and a term of no longer than five years.

Under the amendment of 1985, the legislature was to comprise 80 seats (56 Greek, 24 Turkish). In 1996 a system of proportional representation was introduced. The seats reserved for Turkish Cypriots have been unoccupied since 1963.

The executive was to comprise a Greek president, a Turkish vice-president and a council of ministers, with seven Greek and three Turkish members. Ministers may not be members of parliament. The president is to be elected by absolute majority. If this is not achieved, a second election between the two top candidates is to be held. All Cypriots must declare themselves either to be Cypriot Greeks or Cypriot Turks (the Armenian, Maronite and Latin communities declared themselves Greek for this purpose).

The ratio of Greek to Turk in the army must be 6:4, and 7:3 in the police, judiciary and civil service. Nicosia, Paphos, Larnaca, Limassol and Famagusta each have separate Greek and Turkish municipal authorities. Equal status was granted to the Greek and Turkish languages.

## Politics

**Last elections:** May 2011 (parliamentary),  
February 2008 (presidential)  
**Next elections:** 2016 (parliamentary),  
2013 (presidential)  
**Head of state:** President Demetris Christofias  
**Head of government:** the president  
**Ruling party:** AKEL

Parliamentary elections in the Republic held in May 1996 – the first to be held since the adoption of proportional representation – returned the Democratic Rally–Liberal Party coalition (supporting President Glafkos Clerides) with a majority of one seat.

There was optimism that real negotiations might be about to begin when in July 1997, Clerides and Rauf Denktaş (leader in the occupied north) met for the first time in three years at a UN-sponsored meeting in New York. Subsequent meetings were held in Nicosia and Glion (Switzerland) over the next six weeks.

However, tension was mounting with successive military exercises on the island by Greece and Turkey, and when it became clear that the EU negotiations would proceed without reference to the occupied north if a settlement had not been reached in the meantime, and also that Turkey was not at this period invited to join the EU, Denktaş left the talks and the process was stalled.

The first round of the presidential elections in February 1998 was inconclusive. President Clerides (aged 78) narrowly won the second-round contest with George Iacovou with 51% of the votes. Clerides then formed a broadly based coalition administration, to prepare for further negotiations with the Turkish Cypriots and the accession talks with the EU.

Talks with the Turkish Cypriots continued during 1999 and 2000, but progress remained stalled because the parties were unable to agree on future constitutional arrangements. While the Greek Cypriots, with the support of the international community, were seeking a return to a bi-communal independent federation with a central government, the Turkish Cypriots were insisting on a confederation of two equal states.

Accession negotiations with the EU began in November 1998 and the accession treaty on formal entry of Cyprus and nine other candidate countries in May 2004 was signed in April 2003.

In the parliamentary elections in May 2001, AKEL took an increased share of 34.7% of votes but the ruling coalition of Democratic Rally (34.0%) and United Democrats (2.6%) narrowly won the contest. Centre-right DIKO (14.8%) and social democratic KISOS (called EDEK until 1999 and again from 2006 – 6.5%) both received slightly fewer votes than in 1997. For the first time 18–21 year-olds were entitled to vote and, since voting is compulsory, there was a high turnout (some 92%) of the 468,000 registered voters.

Talks between Greek and Turkish Cypriots continued during 2001–02 and, from January 2002, these were UN-mediated talks between Clerides and Denktash, ending in March 2003 when the two leaders were unable to agree on putting the UN's settlement proposals to referendums in their communities, though both sides agreed to continue negotiations.

DIKO leader, Tassos Papadopoulos, won the presidential election in February 2003, with the support of AKEL and EDEK, receiving 52% of the votes, while Clerides took 39%.

Referendums on the UN reunification plan were held simultaneously in the two communities in April 2004. Greek Cypriots were overwhelmingly against the plan and Turkish Cypriots strongly for it. Among the reasons for the plan's rejection by Greek Cypriots were that it would give them only limited rights to return to and recover their original homes, and that it would allow tens of thousands of Turkish settlers to stay and Turkey to maintain a garrison. Turkey would also maintain its status of guarantor power, with the right of unilateral military intervention.

The parliamentary elections in May 2006 were won by the governing coalition of AKEL, with 18 seats and 31% of the votes, DIKO (11 seats and 18% of the votes) and EDEK (KISOS) with five seats and 9% of the votes. Democratic Rally gained 18 seats and 30% of the votes.



## History

The civilisation of Cyprus, recorded through archaeological finds, myths and later written history, can be traced through 9,000 years. The island, perfectly placed as a strategic base for the great civilisations of the Near-Eastern ancient world, has been much fought over. It was subject to the empires of Assyria, Egypt, Persia, Macedonia and Rome in the BC period. Its population has been predominantly ethnically Greek since then. After the collapse of the Roman Empire in the 4th century, it was ruled by Byzantium, the Franks, the Venetians and the Ottoman Turks. It was during the Ottoman period that the ancestors of the Turkish Cypriots settled on the island. Through these rich and varied influences, Cyprus acquired a great archaeological legacy.

In 1878, Britain concluded an alliance with the Sultan on Cyprus, and gained effective control. When Turkey sided with Germany in the First World War, Britain annexed the island. In 1925, Cyprus became a Crown colony.

From the 1930s, Greek Cypriots campaigned for *enosis* (union with Greece), a movement that came to be led in the 1950s by Archbishop Makarios. The UK proposed instead (in 1948, 1954 and 1955) various forms of internal self-government, all of which were deemed unacceptable by the Greek Cypriot Ethnarchy Council. In 1955, the National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters (EOKA) began armed resistance against the UK. Turkey helped the Turkish Cypriot leaders establish the Cyprus Is Turkish Party and the Turkish Resistance Organisation, and the fighting became intercommunal.

In 1960, the UK negotiated an independence agreement with Greece and Turkey, under which the three powers guaranteed to protect the integrity of Cyprus, which was to be allowed neither to unite with any other country nor to be partitioned. Cyprus, which had not taken part in these negotiations, became independent as the Republic of Cyprus.

Intercommunal fighting broke out again a few years after independence, leading to some 500 deaths and more than 1,000 casualties. British troops imposed order and a plan centred on a ceasefire line known as the Green Line. In 1964, the UN

Peacekeeping Force (UNFICYP) succeeded the British troops. A UN force remains in the same position today. However, hostilities continued, with the Greek and Turkish military becoming involved, and very nearly led to war between the two countries. Archbishop Makarios began negotiations towards a settlement.

But in 1974, a military coup in Cyprus overthrew Makarios and installed a fervently nationalist government, led by Nikos Sampson, favouring *enosis*. Turkey invaded twice, taking control of the northern 36% of the country. Greece, in confusion after its own military coup against President Makarios, was unable to intervene. About 180,000 Greek Cypriots fled from their homes in the north, and came south as refugees; 45,000 Turkish Cypriots were similarly uprooted.

Intercommunal talks under UN auspices began in 1975, and have continued. In November 1983, the Turkish Cypriot assembly in the north, under the leadership of Rauf Denktash, voted for independence and in 1985 approved a new constitution. Independence has subsequently been recognised solely by Turkey, but condemned by the UN Security Council and other international organisations.

The 1988 presidential election in the Republic brought to power George Vassiliou, on a platform of conciliation. He was not the first leader openly to seek compromise: Makarios had accepted the concept of federation in 1977, and concluded the first high-level agreement with Denktash; and President Spyros Kyprianou had signed the second high-level agreement with Denktash in 1979 and accepted the notion of bizonality proposing the demilitarisation of the island. But Vassiliou was prepared to go further. In 1993, he went to the elections stating his willingness to accept, as a basis for further negotiations, a UN proposal for a federal republic. However, he lost the election by a narrow margin to Glafkos Clerides, who took a more cautious view of the UN plan.

The Republic of Cyprus became a member of the European Union in May 2004. The application of the *acquis* is suspended in those areas of the Republic of Cyprus in which the Government of the Republic of Cyprus does not exercise effective control.

In the lead-up to the presidential election of 2008, the ruling coalition of DIKO, AKEL and EDEK was unable to reach a consensus on a common candidate and so Papadopoulos was to run for re-election with the support only of DIKO and EDEK. Communist party AKEL left the coalition and chose its general secretary and House of Representatives president, Demetris Christofias, as its candidate. Ioannis Kasoulidis of Democratic Rally was the other major candidate.

In the election in February 2008 – with turnout of around 90% – the three candidates each received about one-third of the votes (Kasoulidis 33.5%; Christofias 33.3%; Papadopoulos 31.8%). No candidate having more than 50% of the votes, Christofias and Kasoulidis went into a second round and the incumbent Papadopoulos was eliminated from the contest. Christofias defeated Kasoulidis by 53.4% to 46.6%. Christofias immediately invited DIKO and EDEK members to join his cabinet. DIKO leader Tassos Papadopoulos died in December 2008.

Formal UN-supported negotiations between the Government, led by President Christofias, and the Turkish Cypriots, led by Mehmet Ali Talat, began in September 2008. In June 2009, at the 32nd meeting, the economic agenda was concluded and discussions on territorial issues began. The first round of negotiations was concluded with the 40th meeting in August 2009. A second round of talks, covering economic matters, power-sharing, property rights and the EU was conducted from September 2009 to January 2010. A new round of talks got under way in May 2010, the Turkish Cypriots now led by Dervis Eroglu.

In the May 2011 parliamentary elections, Democratic Rally secured 20 of the 56 seats contested (34.3% of the vote); AKEL took 19 (32.7%), DIKO nine (15.8%), EDEK five (8.9%), the European Party two (3.9%) and the Green Party one (2.2%), with turnout of 79%. AKEL, and DIKO formed a coalition government. The coalition collapsed in August 2011 following policy disagreements, leaving AKEL in a minority government.

## International relations

Cyprus is a member of the Council of Europe, European Union, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, United Nations and World Trade Organization.

## Traveller information

**Local laws and conventions:** The Republic of Cyprus has a strict policy of zero tolerance towards drugs. Those caught in possession of any type of narcotic will face a fine or prison sentence. Photography is forbidden near military camps or installations.

Respect should be shown for religious beliefs and traditional values. It is customary to shake hands and other normal courtesies should be observed.

Cypriot dress is generally casual, although businessmen should wear a suit and tie and businesswomen should dress smartly but conservatively. A brief but firm handshake is the accepted custom at the start and end of a meeting.

Avoid arranging meetings for August or around the times of national holidays. Office hours are Mon–Fri 0900–1730.

**Immigration and customs:** Agricultural products and propagating stock such as natural fruit, flowers and seeds are not allowed to be imported into Cyprus without the approval of the relevant authorities. The importation of a number of other articles such as uncooked meat, fish and dairy products, animals, fire arms and explosives, pirated or counterfeit goods, and obscene publications is also prohibited or restricted.

**Travel within the country:** The Green Line separates the occupied north from the government-controlled areas. The Green Line Regulation provides for the crossing of the people and goods into the government-controlled areas.

Driving is on the left-hand side of the road. Travellers are permitted to take their hired car through the checkpoints, but are strongly advised to check the insurance implications with their car hire company.

Heavy fines are imposed on those driving without a seatbelt or riding a motorbike without a helmet. There are also fines for those caught driving while using a mobile phone or under the influence of alcohol.

Daily bus services connect all towns and villages. There is a limited service on Sundays and public holidays. Taxis run 24 hours a day between all the main towns. Fares are regulated by the government and all taxis have meters.

**Travel health:** Free or reduced-cost health care is available to European residents on production of a valid European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) – although an EHIC is not valid in the occupied north. Non-European residents must make special arrangements for health care before travel although accident and emergency care is available free of charge regardless of nationality.

Milk is pasteurised and tap water generally safe to drink.

**Money:** All major credit cards are accepted at most places. Visitors wishing to obtain non-Cypriot currency at Cypriot banks for business purposes are advised that this is only possible by prior arrangement.

New legislation on controls of cash entering or leaving the European Union has been imposed and any person carrying €10,000 euros or more must declare it.

There were 2,141,000 tourist arrivals in 2009.

## Further information

Republic of Cyprus Government Web Portal:  
[www.cyprus.gov.cy](http://www.cyprus.gov.cy)

Commonwealth Secretariat: [www.thecommonwealth.org](http://www.thecommonwealth.org)

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