



Trade Unions in Cyprus

History of Division, Common Challenges Ahead

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December 2014

- Trade unions in Cyprus since the late 1950s have operated in different contexts as a result of the country's on-going ethnic and territorial division. Greek Cypriot trade unions in the south are much larger and organise workers from both public and private sectors whereas Turkish Cypriot trade unions are small and effectively restricted to the north's relatively large public sector. On both sides of the dividing line, trade union density has been steadily falling for more than two decades.
- Trade unions on both sides of the dividing line are politicised, in the south directly linked to political parties and their ideologies while in the north political party affiliation is less direct and political identity more related with their stance on the Cyprus problem.
- The Cypriot industrial relations system was built in the last decade of British rule based on the British model, i. e. restricting the state to a mediating role and avoiding direct legal or political interventions in the labour field.
- Collective bargaining in the Greek Cypriot community takes places at both the sectoral and the workplace levels but there is a tendency for the latter to grow at the expense of the former. In the Turkish Cypriot community collective bargaining is overwhelmingly a public and semi-public sector affair and takes place only at workplace level.
- In recent years austerity policies are being implemented in both the northern and the southern part of Cyprus as a result of pressure from Turkey and the Troika respectively. In the context of the economic crisis and its neoliberal management, social dialogue mechanisms have been weakened in both sides and trade unions are facing increasing difficulties to protect their members let alone the workforce of their communities in general.



Contents

1. Introduction and Historical Background	2
1.1. History of Trade Unionism in Cyprus	2
1.2 Representativeness and Dynamics	5
1.2.1 The South	5
1.2.2 The North	7
2. The Industrial Relations System and the Context and Scope of Trade Union Work	10
2.1 The South	10
2.2 The North	11
3. General Economic Conditions and Collective Bargaining	13
3.1. The South	13
3.2 The North	16
4. Trade Unions and Politics	18
4.1 The South	18
4.2 The North	18
5. The Prospects for the Coming Years and Conclusions	19
5.1 The South	19
5.2 The North	20
Acronyms	23
References	24

1. Introduction and Historical Background

Cyprus is a small island in the south-eastern Mediterranean, has a population of about one million, and Greek and Turkish are the main languages spoken. Cyprus came under British rule in 1878, was converted into a British colony in 1925 and became an independent Republic in 1960. The political antagonism between the two main communities of the island, the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots comprising in 1960 77 percent and 18 percent of the population respectively, resulted in inter-communal violence and the withdrawal of the Turkish Cypriot community from the state mechanism in 1964. The interventions of Greece and Turkey in 1974 led to the de facto territorial partition of the island and the total separation of the two communities completing thus a process which had begun since the late 1950s. Consequently, roughly 37 percent of the northern part of the island came under Turkish control.

The island remains until today divided as all attempts to negotiate a settlement have thus far failed. Whereas the Greek Cypriot community in the south, maintaining the control of the Republic of Cyprus has achieved significant economic growth in the 1980s and 1990s, and has entered the European Union (EU) in 2004 and the Eurozone in 2008, the Turkish Cypriot community was unable to follow a parallel route, largely because of the refusal of the international community to legitimise its secessionist initiative in the form of the establishment of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (*Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti*, TRNC) in 1983 which, is recognised (and bankrolled) only by Turkey. In fact, the two communities have never been equal in economic terms. Since the Ottoman time, the Turkish Cypriots were generally employed in the public administration and agriculture while Greek Cypriots specialised in trade. By 1961, average per capita income of the Turkish Cypriot community was approximately 20 percent lower than the Greek Cypriot one (Nötel cited in Kedourie 2005: 653), and this gap grew drastically after the first geographical segregation following the inter-communal clashes in 1963. By 1971, the Turkish Cypriot per capita income was 50 percent lower (ibid.). The gap continued growing after 1974, and by 2000, the Greek Cypriot per capita income reached to 13,155 US dollars and the Turkish Cypriot one only to 5,966 US dollars (Economist Intelligence Unit cited in Ayres 2003). The latest figures show that the gap slightly nar-

rowed and the Turkish Cypriot per capita income stood at 58 percent of the Greek Cypriot one in 2012 (Mullen, Apostolides and Besim 2014: 7). Lastly, to give an idea about the overall size of the two economies, it can be added that the Greek Cypriot GDP in the same year was 17.7bn Euro and the Turkish Cypriot one around 2.6bn Euro (ibid.).

The following report begins with a joint section (1.1) on the history of trade unionism in Cyprus which describes the diverging trajectories of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot trade unions. In the rest of the report the analysis is kept separate in different sections for the south and the north. This begins with Section 1.2, which refers to trade union representativeness and dynamics, and is followed by Chapter 2 dealing with the industrial relations system and the context and scope of trade union work. Chapter 3 discusses the labour market in both sides of Cyprus and the core tasks of the trade unions describing the general economic conditions prevailing and the forms of collective bargaining while Chapter 4 focuses on the political dimension of trade unions in Cyprus. The concluding Chapter 5 deals with the prospects for the coming years, in a context where both Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot trade unions find themselves facing a common challenge defined by the dominant austerity policies.

1.1 History of Trade Unionism in Cyprus

Trade unionism in Cyprus emerged in the 1920s and 1930s out of committees that sprang out of the spontaneous strikes in the mines and construction sites and the labour centres that were founded in the major towns. Communist militants played a key role in these developments and by the early 1940s when trade union membership expanded exponentially were consolidated as its leaders. These initial struggles were common involving both Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot workers organised in ethnically mixed trade unions. However the ethnic conflict at the local level and the political polarisation and antagonism between the Left and the Right, peaking at the time of the onset of the Cold War led into the splitting of the labour movement along ideological and ethnic lines. In addition to the »old unions« under the leadership of the Pancyprian Trade Union Committee (PSE) (named Pancyprian Federation of Labour (PEO) after 1945) – the trade union committee affiliated to

Progressive Party of the Working People (AKEL), the heir of the Communist party of Cyprus –, new trade unions emerged in 1944 along nationalist (both Greek and Turkish) and anti-communist lines.

Although, Turkish Cypriots started to establish their separate trade unions in as early as 1943 and subsequently formed an umbrella organisation called the Association of Turkish Cypriot Workers Unions [*Kıbrıs Türk İsci Birlikleri Kurumu*, KTIBK], which was under the control of the Turkish nationalists in 1945, this did not lead to the immediate termination of cooperation between trade unions of the two communities, particularly given the fact that »the fulfilment of Turkish workers' demands could not be realised if they were not included in a wider trade union forum« (Ktoris, 2013: 24). Indeed, PEO continued to attract the majority of the Turkish Cypriot workers thanks to its success in »securing labour rights for all Cypriot workers, in a time when (...) [particularly Turkish Cypriots] faced gruelling economic conditions« (ibid.: 24-5). The real rupture in the Cypriot labor movement took place after the beginning of the National Organization of Cypriot Fighters' (EOKA) revolt to achieve enosis (union with Greece) and the establishment of Turkish Cypriot counter-enosis Turkish Resistance Organization (*Türk Mukavemet Teskilati*, TMT). The EOKA revolt pushed the number of KTIBK members from 470 in 1953 to 2,214 in 1955 (ibid.: 35). Though this figure declined to 1,137 in 1958 again, after the TMT's terror campaign against the Turkish Cypriot workers who were still enrolled in the Greek Cypriot trade unions, the figure shot up to 4,829 in 1959 (For the figures see Dedecay 1981: 29; for more on the transition from class-based to ethnic trade unionism in the Turkish Cypriot community see An 2005) marking the divide within the Cypriot labour movement, which still continues today.

By the 1950s the trade unions became well-established social and political forces in the Cypriot society as a whole with total membership rising to 42,928 in 1956 (Slocum 1972). Moreover they were able to secure for their members and the workers in general some basic rights and benefits, which were institutionalised in the form of collective agreements allowing a general improvement in the standard of living. At the time of the transition to the independent Republic the colonial authorities acknowledged the trade unions as important factors in the labour and social policy field and trade

union leaders were invited to consult the new ministry of Labour and Social Insurance on the updating and upgrading of labour legislation, the social security and the industrial relations systems. International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions were ratified, the Basic Agreement set up the framework for dispute resolution and the trade union law was liberalised in the first years after independence. The constitution of the Republic guaranteed the previous gains of the trade union movement, recognising officially in articles 21, 26 and 27 the right to peaceful assembly, combination with others and the right to strike. The Labour Ministry assumed the role of overseeing industrial relations and the social insurance system.

The atmosphere of stability and peace following the conclusion of the agreements establishing the Republic in 1960 did not last long and in 1963 inter-communal clashes broke out. As a result, the Turkish Cypriot community started to live in ghettos effectively under military rule. »These areas were basically disconnected enclaves, dispersed all around the island. Overall, there were, some large and some very small, no less than 73 different administrative units« (Sonan 2014: 60). Under these circumstances, activities of the trade unions were seriously restricted. As the 2005 CIVICUS report put it »civil society nearly disappeared and the community authorities penetrated almost all social activities. The demands and actions of social organizations at this time were redesigned by nationalist doctrines« (2005: 113). Following the easing of the tension between the two communities in 1968, some ten thousand Turkish Cypriots started to work outside the Turkish Cypriot-controlled enclaves (Sonan 2014: 84), and therefore it can be said that some of those in this group, at least, could benefit from favourable working conditions outlined above. This relatively positive atmosphere also triggered the establishment of Cyprus Turkish Primary School Teachers' Union (*Kıbrıs Türk Öğretmenler Sendikası*, KTOS), a dissident organization, which is considered as one of the strongest trade unions today as well as the Cyprus Turkish Secondary School Teachers' Union (*Kıbrıs Türk Orta Eğitim Öğretmenler Sendikası*, KTOEOS). The first trade unions law was also passed in 1971. Still, poor economic conditions in general and the authoritarian tendencies of the administration did not allow the emergence of circumstances conducive to meaningful trade union activities in this period (see for instance Surec 2014: 26–30).

In the crisis conditions prevailing after the war of 1974 in the Greek Cypriot community, the tripartite system – the institutionalised consultation between workers' and employers' representatives under the auspices of the state – already in operation in rudimentary form since the late colonial era and in the process of consolidation in the first years of the Republic, was further boosted, strengthened and formalised. The trade unions accepted wage cuts and a series of temporary freezing of benefits in the context of the broader effort of national reconstruction. In 1977 the establishment of the Industrial Relations Code, negotiated and agreed by the main trade unions and employers' associations under the auspices of the state, governed in letter as well as in spirit the conduct of the labour relations for more than three decades.

While the tragic developments of 1974 and the geographical division of the island led to a huge crisis in the south, it marked the beginning of a new era in the north. In the relatively democratic conditions of the post-1974 period, the Turkish Cypriot trade union movement gained momentum, and new trade unions started to emerge one after another challenging the government policies, which was in the absence of a private sector, the biggest employer at the same time. This was a time when social democratic values were prevailing in Turkey, and the Republican People's Party leader Bulent Ecevit's left of center discourse was at the peak of its popularity. Among the Turkish Cypriots who have gone through a quite egalitarian period due to the ghetto life between 1963-1974, this discourse was particularly appealing. Indeed, all parties represented in the first multi-party parliament had remarkably social democratic/socialist programs including the ruling National Unity Party (*Ulusal Birlik Partisi*, UBP) (Sonan 2014: 124). Partly due to this positive atmosphere and partly thanks to the struggle of the trade unions, the parliament passed many working class-friendly legislations empowering the trade unions. A Minimum Wages Law, for instance, was passed in 1975. In a similar vein, referendum and collective bargaining rights were gained in practice in the early post-1974 period though they became part of the law only in 1996.

The participation of trade unions in a series of tripartite committees in the 1980s and 1990s (Sparsis 1998) in the Greek Cypriot community allowed them on the one hand to have a say on many policy issues but undoubt-

edly also pushed them to a largely conciliatory stance. Trade union participation in policy making however at no time extended to include state economic policy. As the political realm had stabilised by the 1980s, taking the shape of a four party system, the trade unions grew and expanded substantially in membership, financial resources and apparatuses while politically remaining under the shadow of their respective parties for which they constituted »transmission belts«. In addition to Pancyprian Federation of Labour (PEO) aligned to AKEL and Cyprus Workers' Confederation (SEK) aligned to DISY and DIKO, Democratic Labour Federation of Cyprus (DEOK) another small union emerged (breaking away from SEK) aligned with the social democratic party of EDEK.

The gradual but substantial expansion of the broader public sector allowed the right wing SEK to catch up with PEO in terms of membership as it organised the overwhelming majority of employees in the public services and municipalities while the Pancyprian Union of Civil Servants (PASIDI) representing the civil servants proper was also strengthened, expanding in membership and acquiring a series of wage increases and benefits for its members. PASIDI is formally neutral, that is not aligned to any particular party – yet as the majority of its members are DIKO and DISY supporters it is usually leaning politically towards the right. There are party members and party officials active within the civil service and within PASIDI although this does not take the form of formalised internal fractions such as those operating in the public sector teachers' unions POED, OELMEK and OLTEK representing the primary, secondary and the technical education respectively. ETYK, the banking sector union is alike PASIDI in the sense that it is not formally aligned to any political party, and in the fact that it was able to benefit from the substantial expansion of the banking system and its strong labour market position, gaining for its members substantial wage raises, benefits and privileges in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s.

Tripartism in the northern part of Cyprus is conspicuous by its absence. There is almost no unionization in the private sector and to a large extent those working in the private sector are left to the mercy of the employers given the fact that the Labor Law is also not enforced effectively. Overall, »public service unions do not possess too much strength,« as one commentator put it in

the 1990s and »the demonstrations they can easily organize have some political impact (...) but do not have a lasting effect« (Dodd 1993: 178). As long as trade unions' relations with political parties are concerned it can be said that trade unions in the northern part of Cyprus have over the years managed to develop more independent positions from political parties compared to their counterparts in the south. Although political orientations of trade unions are not secret, and from time to time, their leaders run for the parliament on various political party tickets, strictly speaking, it is difficult to talk about organic ties (Cf. CIVICUS 2005: 115). The only notable exception was the role played by KTOS in the setting up of the Communal Liberation Party (*Toplumcu Kurtulus Partisi*, TKP) in 1976, which became the main opposition party following the general election made in the same year. By the early 1980s, however, the organic ties between the party and the union were already severed. Having said that Revolutionary Trade Unions Federation (*Devrimci Isci Sendikalari Federasyonu*, Dev-Is), Cyprus Turkish Civil Servants Trade Union (*Kibris Turk Amme Memurlari Sendikasi*, KTAMS), KTOS, since the mid-1980s Cyprus Turkish Trade Unions Federation (*Kibris Turk Isci Sendikalari Federasyonu*, Turk-Sen) and since 1993 KTOEOS are considered left-leaning, while Federation of Free Labor Unions (*Hur Isci Sendikalari Federasyonu*, Hur-Is) and TRNC Public Officials Trade Union (*KKTC Kamu Gorevlileri Sendikasi*, Kamu-Sen) have right-leaning orientations. It should also be added that left-wing trade unions have been playing an active role in the pro-reunification movement. Indeed, the left-right distinction in the northern part of Cyprus is on this basis. »The Turkish nationalists who favor the partition or status quo are considered right-wing, and [those] favoring the reunification of the island on the basis of a federation are considered left-wing« (Sonan 2014: 1).

1.2 Representativeness and Dynamics

1.2.1 The South

Trade union representativeness varies enormously according to sector of economic activity and enterprise size. In the public, the semi-public and the banking sector trade union density approaches 100 percent as union membership is traditionally almost automatic upon employment. There are of course some exceptions

to this rule, involving higher administrative and managerial positions at the top, some project-based professionals who hold fixed term work posts and some part-timers and/or temporary workers who tend to be young and/or newly hired at the margins of these sectors. The same holds for municipal and cooperative movement workers.

In the private sector the main trend is for big firms to have trade union presence and for small firms to be without a trade union presence. Such is the case for hotels and restaurants and construction where trade unions are relatively strong and negotiate sectoral collective agreements. Trade unions however face in the last decade increasing difficulties in these two industries that used to be relatively large and very dynamic, driving along with the banking sector the whole economy. In transport and manufacturing sectors, there is a moderate trade union presence and a mixture of sectoral and enterprise level collective agreements which cover a small section of the workforce but also serve as a reference point for some other non-unionised enterprises. In retail trade and services trade union presence is limited, collective agreements very rare and when this is the case they do not extend beyond the enterprise level. In the absence of collective agreements the only tool left for trade unions is labour legislation and the minimum wage.

There is no national minimum wage, guaranteed by law and universally applicable, but a decree that is issued periodically by the Labour Ministry setting a minimum size for the hiring wage and the post six months of employment wage in nine specific occupations: sales staff, clerical workers, auxiliary health care staff, auxiliary staff in nursery schools, crèches and schools, security guards, caretakers and cleaners. Although the minimum wage is restricted in scope and direct impact, it does have a significant indirect impact in the labour market and in society as it serves as a broader reference point for wages in many sectors regulated by collective agreements as well as non-regulated by collective agreements. This explains the Employers' associations (OEB and CCCI) intense hostility to it and their frequent explicit request to abolish it or lower it as much as 20 percent. Currently, since 2012 it stands at 870 euros and 924 euros per month after six consecutive months of employment in the same employer and 4.90 euros and 5.20 euros per hour for security guards.

Table 1: Trade Union Density

Year	1981	1991	2001	2011
Trade Union Membership	124,299	154,049	174,577	204,475
Trade Union Density	80.8	77	63.4	50

Source: Trade Union Registrar and EIRO

Table 1 illustrates the trend of shrinking of trade union density levels and depicts the constant dilution of trade union power. The increase in trade union membership has been for more than two decades much below the increase of the labour force, while in the last years the labour force itself is shrinking and along with it the active trade union membership as many trade union members are currently unemployed. Cooperation between the main trade unions in the labour field remains constant but in the context of the crisis and the Memorandum of Understanding between the Republic of Cyprus and the Troika, the contours of the labour market and the industrial relations system shift and the old mechanisms of social dialogue and consensual decision-making no longer apply. As more and more decisions are taken unilaterally at the political and the technocratic levels, the inability of the trade unions to extend their cooperation into the political sphere and take concerted action, results in their position deteriorating and in their facing increasing difficulties to provide even the most basic protection to their members.

As shown in table 2 the main trade unions PEO and SEK are effectively general umbrella organisations composed of eight and seven sectoral and multi-sectoral unions. However both are quite centralised in their structure and the autonomy of their parts is limited. All political decisions are taken at the central level, the apparatus operates at the central level with professional trade unionists moving over time from one sector to another and even sectoral collective bargaining and strategy, tactics and sometime negotiations are effectively conducted by or under the guidance of the central leadership.

Trade unions with considerable delay, begun in the last decade to make a more concerted and sustained effort to organise particular groups of workers that were growing in number in the new conditions of the 21st Century. Workers in the hotels and retail trade sectors, immigrant and EU workers as well as Turkish Cypriots crossing the green line and working in the booming construction industry of the south eventually attracted the

Table 2: Main Trade Unions

Name	PEO	SEK	PASIDI
Founded	1941	1944	1947
President and Vice-President/s	Pampis Kiritsis, Soteris Fellas	Nikos Moyseos, Andreas Matsas	Glaftos Chatzipetrou, Kiria-kos Tsolakis
Number of member-unions	8	7	–
Total No. Of members and Trend	83 132*	70 322*	19 962*
Funding/ Financial sources	Members, own investments	Members, own investments	Members, own investments
Type of union and sectors with considerable strength	Federation – general Construction and hotel industries	Confederation – general Semi-public sector, hotel industry	Civil service – exclusive Public sector proper only
Political orientation/affiliation	AKEL	DISI and DIKO	Formally independent but leaning towards DISI and DIKO
International memberships	WUFTU	ETUC	ETUC

* Figures from EIRO (country profile) citing Trade Union Registrar based on last available data (Report last updated in 2013)

attention of the trade unions but the results were at best mixed. In the hotel industry for example the norm is that even when seasonal, often non-Cypriot workers become trade union members, they remain non-covered by the sectoral collective agreement.

1.2.2 The North

In the northern part of Cyprus as of 2008 overall 28 percent of the labour force currently in employment are trade union members.¹ Trade unions are strongly represented in the public sector. Particularly, the salaries of manual workers in the public administration are automatically deducted to contribute to a »solidarity fund« and to benefit from collective bargaining agreements workers are required to join the authorized trade union; therefore, it is possible to talk about a hundred per cent representation here. Unionization is very high in the semi-public sector too though giving an exact figure is difficult. In a similar vein, at 73 percent, unionisation among civil servants can also be considered as strong.² In a striking difference with the picture in the south, unionisation in the private sector is extremely low, however. According to a recent survey, there are no trade union members in the 95 percent of the privately owned workplaces (PGlobal Report 2014: 52). Apparently, only few private sector firms tolerated the unionization of their workforce. To give two concrete examples, one of them is affiliated with a multinational company, while the other one is a recently privatized public economic enterprise operating in a specialized field, which require special training. In other words, when the company was privatized, its labor force was already unionized and firing them was not an option for the new owner. This is to say unlike the southern part, there is virtually no unionization in sectors such as tourism, construction, retail trade as well as agriculture.

The negligible level of unionization in the private sector can be explained by two broad factors. First is the size of the private sector companies. Generally, firms are small size family businesses. According to the Social Se-

curity Department's statistics, there are only two private firms, which have more than 500 employees, and only ten, which have more than 250 (Cited in PGlobal 2014: 34). All of these companies are in either education or the tourism sector. Particularly, the tourism sector is an area where the majority of labour force is migrant workers whose precarious position makes it impossible for them to unionize. It is important to note that there are no workplaces in the manufacturing sector, which have more than 250 workers (ibid.). Furthermore, in these companies, employees are scattered and work in different workplaces. Needless to say these structural factors strongly undermine unionization efforts in the private sector.

Second explanation is historical. It is true that there were Turkish Cypriot trade unions in the pre-1963 period. However, these were established for political reasons in order to promote »national« interests rather than the interests of the workers. In other words, it is not possible to talk about class-based trade unionism. Furthermore, the conditions of effective military rule following the inter-communal clashes of 1963 were not conducive to the development of independent trade unions, and the little economic activity left outside the public administration of the parallel Turkish Cypriot state was not conducive to unionization anyway.

There are only three umbrella organizations, which are all organized in the public and semi-public sector mainly among manual workers. The reason behind this three-headed structure or division is to a large extent political orientation differences. To somewhat oversimplify, while Dev-Is stands furthest on the left of the political spectrum, Turk-Sen stands at the centre-left and Hur-Is at the center right. Indeed, Hur-Is was established when the leftist trade unionists took over the administration of Turk-Sen from nationalists. Currently, there is no umbrella organization at the civil servant trade unions level, though there was a short-lived attempt by KTAMS and KTOS to form one; the Federation of Progressive Trade Unions (*İlirici Sendikalar Federasyonu*, ISEF) was active for only a short period between 1979 and 1984. It seems the federation was stillborn as some influential members of KTOS were against its establishment from the outset (Surec 2014: 110-3).

Although, they could not agree to form a standing umbrella organization, it is worth to mention that civil

1. Figure calculated by author based on two separate sets of data published by the State Planning Organization (For the total employment figure: Ekim 2008 Hanehalkı İşgücü Anketi, DPÖ, 2009: 1; For the number of trade union members: 2008 Yılı Makroekonomik ve Sektörel Gelişmeler, 2010: 202).

2. Figure calculated by author based on figures provided by the ministry of finance and KTOS.

servant and teacher unions occasionally came together along with other trade unions and political parties to form *ad hoc* platforms to advance common causes. Of particular importance was the »This Country is Ours Platform« (*Bu Memleket Bizim Platformu*), which with the participation of political parties, and later employer organizations, spearheaded the Pro-Solution and European Union movement in the early 2000s.

Unlike the south, there is a universally applicable statutory national minimum wage in the northern part of Cyprus. The minimum wage commission, one of the rare functioning social dialogue mechanisms, which convenes at least once a year, is made up of fifteen members. Five of these members are appointed by the Council of Ministers, while the biggest employer and worker unions appoint five members each. As of November 1, monthly minimum salary is 1675 TL (approximately 605 euros). In the first 10 months of 2014, it stood at 1560 TL. Remarkably, those working in the private sector, who make the vast majority of minimum-wage earners are not represented in the commission.

The trade union landscape in the northern part of Cyprus is quite fragmented. Currently, there are 52 active trade unions according to the data provided by the Trade Unions Registry, whose membership size vary between 36 and 3,374. The biggest federation is right-leaning Hur-Is Federation, which has 5,064 members organised under 8 different unions. Other notable trade unions can be seen in Table 3. At the moment, there is no sign of a drive towards the creation of larger sectoral trade unions. If there will be any change, it seems, this will be in the direction of more fragmentation, which is obviously not a good sign for the future of the labor movement.

As in the south, a decline in trade union density and weakening of the trade union power can be observed in the northern part of Cyprus too. As seen in Table 4, trade union density has steadily declined from 1981 to 2012, though in a less dramatic manner than the south. In this respect the privatization of public economic enterprises such as Industrial Holding (*Sanayi Holding*) operating in the manufacturing sector, and the Tourism Enterprises (*Kıbrıs Türk Turizm İşletmeleri*), which used to control the biggest hotels in the north in the 1980s and 1990s can be seen as major turning points undermining trade unionism.

As far as the relations between trade unions are concerned, recently, an intensification of cooperation can be observed, which stems from the serious threat against their common interests, which came in the form of austerity measures imposed by Ankara. Particularly the »Law Regulating the Monthly Salary, Wage and Other Allowances of the Public Employees,« has attracted strong criticism from the unions and came to be known as the »emigration law« as it is believed that by substantially reducing the entry-level salaries in the public sector, it will impoverish the youth joining the labor force and in doing so lead to mass emigration. This common concern led to the formation of a new initiative called »Say No to the Emigration Law,« (*Goc Yasasina Dur De Inisiyatifi*) with the participation of a big majority of trade unions, including all three umbrella organizations as well as influential trade unions such as KTAMS, Kamu-Sen, KTOS and KTOEOS.

Unlike their Greek Cypriot counterparts, Turkish Cypriot umbrella organizations do not have strong control over their constituent unions. This probably has something to do with the fact that there is no collective bargaining at the sectoral level. Almost all collective bargaining agreements mentioned in the activity report of the ministry of labor and social security were negotiated by individual unions. Indeed, it can be said that some individual trade unions like the TRNC Public Manual Workers Trade Union (*Kamu İşçileri Sendikası*, Kamu-İs), are much stronger than the umbrella organization they belonged to. The umbrella organizations get involved in the collective bargaining process only when there is a stalemate or when there is a need to form public opinion.

Unlike in the case of the south, in the northern part of Cyprus, it is not possible to talk about a concerted and sustained effort to organise hitherto unionized groups of workers such as immigrants. The scope of trade unionism is to a large extent restricted to the public sector employees, and therefore private sector employees and particularly the migrant workers are completely deprived of any union protection. This is not to say that there has been no attempt to unionise in the private sector. Yet these attempts did not bear fruit because of the strong reaction of the employers, who, in one particular case in the manufacturing sector, went as far as firing en masse those who had joined the union. The trade union's failure to develop a strategy to ensure unionization in the private sector is indeed one of the points, which attracts criticism.

Table 3: Trade Union Density

Year	1981	1991	2001	2012
Trade Union Membership	20,409	20,154	21,485	23,884
Trade Union Density	37.8	28	23.78	25.54

Source: Trade Union Registrar; Statistical Yearbooks (various years); Social and Economic Indicators; Household Labor Force Survey.

Table 4: Main Trade Unions

Name	Founded	President & S. General	No. of Member Unions	No. of Members	Type of Union	Pol. Orientation	Int. Membership
Turk-Sen	1954	Arslan Bicakli & Erkan Birer	10	2,135	Federation	Left-Leaning	ETUC & ITUC
Dev-Is	1976	Mehmet Seyis & Hasan Felek	3	854	Federation	Left Leaning; Considers itself as Sister-Trade Union of PEO	WFTU
Hur-Is	1993	Yakup Latifoglu & Sener Ozburak	8	5,064	Federation	Right-Leaning	
KTOS	1968	Semen Saygun & Sener Elci	–	2,167	Primary Teachers	Left	Education International; WFTU
KTOEOS	1968	Tahir Gokcebel & Mehmet Tasker	–	2,486	High School Teachers	Left-Leaning	Education International; ETUCE; Euro-Clio; WFTU
KTAMS	1973	Ahmet Kaptan & Guven Bengihan	–	3,374	Civil Servants	Left-Leaning	
KAMU-SEN	1975	Mehmet Ozkardas & Metin Atan	–	2,461	Civil Servants	Right-Leaning	

2. The Industrial Relations System and the Context and Scope of Trade Union Work

2.1 The South

The Cypriot industrial relations system was built on the British model with voluntarism and free collective bargaining as central concepts. The state was restricted to a mediating role, avoiding direct legal or political interventions in the labour field. This tripartite system, already under way in the last decade of colonial rule was formally established in 1962 with the Basic Agreement setting forth the rules of the bargaining process and dispute resolution. This was a Gentleman's agreement, not enshrined in legislation, non-binding and restricting itself to being a formalised statement of political intention, moral commitment and mutual understanding of the two parties to respect and adhere to the agreed process. The Industrial Relations Code agreed in 1977 was in this sense a continuity of the Basic Agreement, based on the same logic of voluntarism and free collective bargaining while at the same time stipulating more explicitly and analytically the terms and conditions of the bargaining and dispute resolution.

The Code, formally still in operation today, distinguishes between »rights disputes« and »interest disputes« and stipulates for the latter stages and timeframes which guide the dispute resolution process through collective bargaining and mediation but also binding arbitration and public research. In both letter and spirit, the Code stands at the peak of the broader tripartite system with its multiple tripartite committees through which the social dialogue takes place (Sparsis, 1998). The Industrial Relations Code was quite successful in its regulatory intention as it offered a comprehensive framework securing social peace for more than three decades. Moreover it became more than an instrument, a symbol and a value in itself, adherence to which was taken for granted by the two parties for almost three decades.

Overall there are no significant legal obstacles to trade union organisation and trade union activity in general and strike activity in particular, except from the security forces – army and police. There is no formal prohibition of a »political strike« in the sense of a strike against a governmental decision and even when a strike takes place spontaneously or outside the framework of

the Industrial Relations Code, it is rarely settled in court and often resolved at the negotiating table. Even when a worker grievance is defined as a »rights dispute« and thus for which strike action is formally prohibited, the Industrial Relations Code has a window allowing it to be claimed as an »interests dispute« on the condition that there is a »flagrant violation of an existing agreement or practice«. The only significant restriction of strike action concerns the »substantial services« where the right to strike is curtailed by the reference to the »minimum limit of service provision« that needs to be respected in cases of industrial action. This was agreed in 2004 between the government and the main trade unions and added to the Industrial Relations Code replacing previous Defence Regulations which gave the government the right to declare national emergencies and services as essential and intervening unilaterally to prevent and or settle industrial disputes.

Collective bargaining is conducted also in the public and semi-public sector although in the public sector proper employment relations are regulated by »schemes of service« which are legal documents agreed between the government and PASIDI and approved by parliament and not collective agreements as is the case in the private and semi-public sectors. Collective bargaining is the main activity of the trade unions – although gradually it has been more or less established that trade union activity also involves substantial personalised »problem solving« mediation (Ioannou 2011). Furthermore the establishment and development of Provident Funds in many firms and sectors gave a new important function to trade unions which are key participants in their administration, especially the big sectoral ones. And last but not least, the medical schemes and more recently the welfare schemes run by the trade unions constitute other significant aspects of trade union service to their members and constituting attractive benefits justifying trade union membership. Subsidised medical and pharmaceutical care and holidays constitute additional factors, sometimes valued as the key ones for joining a trade union.

The fact that there are no substantial legal and institutional restrictions to trade union membership and trade union activity does not mean that the ability of trade unions to act and organise is an easy endeavour, or a matter determined solely by their own positive and negative attributes. The context of the labour market,

the structure of the economy and the prevailing conditions at workplace level pose serious and sometimes insurmountable obstacles to union organising and action. All these were exacerbated because of the economic crisis.

Employer hostility to trade unions explicitly stated or implied and employee fear of possible negative repercussions upon unionisation is a constant prohibiting factor in many big firms especially pronounced in commerce and service sectors, although present in firms in many more sectors. Then many firms in Cyprus are relatively small and this is an additional structurally inhibiting factor for unionisation as on the one hand labour relations tend to become subsumed within overtly personalised, informal and/or family connections while on the other hand trade unions are reluctant to spend time and resources for organising. Last but not least the increasing difficulty of trade unions to approach, communicate and persuade workers who are in precarious position with irregular employment terms and conditions to join the trade unions. With immigrant workers this becomes even harder as they are in an even more vulnerable position and language and culture may pose further obstacles to communication. Thus trade unions cannot protect precarious workers sufficiently and moreover they cannot convince that they will really make their best effort (Ioannou 2011). Certain groups of immigrant workers, such as house maids are totally unprotected with many of them facing overt exploitation not only in terms of their working conditions of long hours and low wages but also in terms of heightened gender and racial oppression.

Trade unions have come to recognise the limits of their organisational power and capacity to some extent by the end of the 2000s and have shifted their position. PEO and SEK agreed to formally pursue legislative reform allowing for an enhanced role of the Ministry of Labour in industrial relations and more specifically the right to decree the extension of an existing collective agreement to the whole sector including that is firms which do not abide by it. Moreover the legislative reform was meant to give the right to the trade unions to resort to the courts if they wished in a more generalised attempt to strengthen the status of the collective agreements. The employers rejected this in 2012 and the bill was eventually withdrawn by the new government taking office in 2013.

However the trade unions gained something in 2012 when another bill managed to be voted in by parliament concerning a reform of the process of trade union recognition. The new law gives the right to the trade unions if they represent at least 50 percent of employees in a firm employing more than 30 persons to apply to the Trade Union Registrar in order to compel the employer to recognise the union. If they represent at least 25 percent compulsory recognition takes place after a secret ballot (organised by the Trade Union Registrar with at least 40 percent participation) which turns out more than 50 percent supporting trade union representation. Continued employer refusal to recognise unions carries penalties while the right of the trade unionists to enter the workplace for organising new members is clarified more explicitly (PEO, 2012).

The other negative legal development for trade unionism taking place in 2012 was the restriction of the right to strike in the Civil Aviation Department. This took place after industrial unrest by a small union representing the Air Control Traffic operators, provoked disruption in the two airports allowing the government and the parliament to extend the 2004 agreement on the »essential services« and the »minimum limit of service provision« with an additional law that was instituted explicitly for the Civil Aviation Department and in substance (though not in letter) prohibiting strikes.

2.2 The North

The right to establish trade unions is protected by the Turkish Cypriot constitution (Article 23), with the caveat that »[t]he law may impose restrictions for the purpose of safeguarding national security, public order and public morals«. Furthermore, the constitution safeguards »the right to collective agreement and to strike involving their relations with employers for the purpose of protecting and improving their economic and social positions« (Article 24).

The exercise of the right to strike may be regulated by law only for the purpose of safeguarding national security, constitutional order, public order, or the rights and liberties guaranteed by this Constitution to any person«. Yet, »judges, law officers, members of the armed forces, members of the police and civil defense personnel holding key positions, have no right to strike«.

As far as ILO conventions are concerned, only a limited number (i.e. 15) of ILO conventions have been ratified by the TRNC parliament³ and indeed according to one account, if the number of ILO conventions in force are taken into account, the northern part of Cyprus has one of the most insufficient legislative frameworks in the world⁴ but in the light of interviews with the current and former trade unionists, it can be concluded that conditions in practice are not so bad, at least for the public and semi-public sector employees. It can also be said that the labor law dated 1992, which is supposed to protect the rights of those working in the private sector is quite progressive. However, there are serious problems in the implementation of this law. To give just one specific example, although the right to join a trade union is secured by this law, and it is explicitly stated in the law that joining a union cannot be a reason to terminate the employee's contract, there are many cases where the employers were fired after joining a union. The picture is even gloomier when it comes to the implementation of labor safety legislation. According to statistics provided by the ministry of labor and social security, in the period between 1 January 2006 and 30 September 2014, 2,255 workplace accidents occurred of which 55 were deadly. 23 of these deaths were in the construction sector. The ministry admits that due to lack of personnel, they cannot make the necessary inspections.⁵ Alas, as if being deprived of trade union protection is not enough, workers in the private sector lack the protection of the state as well.

Although there are few exceptions in the private sector, collective bargaining is to a large extent a public and semi-public sector affair in the northern part of Cyprus. Kamu-Is signs a yearly collective bargaining agreement with the ministry of finance, which covers all manual workers working in the public administration. Semi-public institutions, municipalities and cooperatives, on the other hand, negotiate their collective bargaining agreements independent from each other. Other than collective bargaining, subsidised credit opportunities as well as

discounts secured from private hospitals and hotels are other important aspects of trade union services to their members promoting trade union membership.

As long as recent legal and political changes affecting the working conditions in general, and labor organizations in particular are concerned, the most important development is the legislation entitled »Law Regulating the Monthly Salary, Wage and Other Allowances of the Public Employees,« which attracted strong criticism from all trade unions. The legislation substantially reduced the entry-level salaries as well as other benefits of those who were employed in the public sector after its entry into force and also undermined the collective bargaining power of the trade unions. In a similar vein, the privatization law passed in 2012 also attracted strong criticism. Though both of these laws were brought to the Constitutional Court, to the disappointment of the unions, the Court upheld both of them.

An earlier law dated 2008, which is also worth mentioning, has created a common social security system for public and private sector employees, which in effect reduced the benefits of those that have started working in the public sector after 2008. Finally, with an amendment in the relevant law in 2009, the Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA; for more see below), which used to be applied every two months, is now applied every six months, which is another negative development for the public sector employees. The private sector employees do not benefit from COLA at all.

In the recent past, the Turkish Cypriot government too resorted to the restriction of the right to strike several times. In 2011, for instance, it banned a strike in three schools after 18 days. In a similar vein, when the Air Control Traffic operators announced that they would go to strike at a time when the Turkish prime-minister Erdogan's plane was scheduled to land, the council of ministers rushed to ban the strike.⁶ According to a critic of the »Collective Bargaining, Strike and Referendum Law« dated 1996, by allowing the government to postpone strikes in »essential services,« which has a broad definition, the law undermines the right to strike. This has been used 95 times since 1976 by the government to restrict the right to strike.

3. Among them four are fundamental (Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention (C 087); Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention (C 098); Equal Remuneration Convention (C 100), Discrimination Convention (C111), one Governance (Employment Policy Convention (C122)) and remaining 8 are technical ones (C002; C014; C096; C102; C119; C141; C151; C158).

4. <http://www.kibrispostasi.com/print.php?news=104795>

5. <http://www.havadiskibris.com/Haberler/kibris/yasa-var-uygulayan-yok/40512>

6. http://brtk.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=31496:erolundan-soyere-gecm-olsun-zyaret&catid=1:kkct&Itemid=3

3. General Economic Conditions and Collective Bargaining

3.1. The South

The entry of Cyprus into the EU in 2004 not only accelerated processes already under way in the Greek Cypriot community but also provoked or opened the way for additional ones. Economic growth continued unabated while sectors that were already too big for the size of the economy such as construction and banking, expanded further. The import of cheap migrant labour also grew exponentially although the existing »guest worker« model was undermined as the majority of the newcomers were workers from eastern EU countries and Greece that had automatic rights of residency and work in Cyprus. In 2009 there were 83,387 registered EU workers, 57,460 third country nationals and 2,323 Turkish Cypriots (IOM, 2010) but given the substantial size of the informal segment, the real figures were probably significantly higher. Non-Cypriots constituted perhaps more than a third of the Republic's labour force at their peak but their numbers begun to drop by 2011 when the crisis arrived and unemployment started to climb. EU workers brought increasing mobility in the labour market and allowed employers to adjust their workforce size through hiring and firing according to the ups and downs of market demand. In addition their availability and their acceptance of low wages gradually led to the segmentation of the workforce and pressed downwards the average wage. Moreover they were instrumental in the spread of personal contracts which eroded the existing collective agreements.

Wage setting and collective bargaining takes place both at the sectoral level and the company level. In the former, collective agreements are negotiated and signed by the main trade unions PEO and SEK on the one hand and the corresponding sectoral employers' associations under the guidance of OEB and CCCI on the other. In the latter, a growing number of company level collective agreements are negotiated and signed by the unions and the corresponding individual employer again under the guidance of OEB and CCCI. Company level bargaining and agreements have been steadily growing at the expense of the sectoral level establishing a trend towards decentralisation, which has gained a further boost amidst the broader context of labour market deregulation, flexibility strategy and the dire straits of the economic crisis (Soumeli, 2014b).

Collective bargaining in Cyprus is uncoordinated with no formal connection between the two levels in the private sector and no formal connection between the public and semi-public sector with the private sector. There are no pace-setting agreements neither at the sectoral nor the company level directly extending negotiated and agreed pay increases as such, from one sector or one firm to others (Soumeli 2014a). However because of the small size of the country and the dense social networks on the one hand and the institutional traditions and the competitive economic context on the other, there is a degree of interaction and connection of employment regimes across sectors and firms. For example entry wages stipulated in sectoral collective agreements are enforced even in firms which do not otherwise abide by the collective agreements. Collective bargaining and wage raises in the semi-public sector informs wage raises in the public sector proper and the broader public sector in general constitutes a general axis, a quasi-core upon which most of the private sector revolves as a sort of periphery. Overall wages in the broader public sector are higher than those for corresponding positions in the private sector with the exception of top professional and managerial positions in big firms whose proximity to big capital and its profits result in ensuring higher than the public sector wages to their occupants.

Collective agreements as mentioned above are non-binding and compliance to them by the employers has been a problem diachronically, more so today amidst crisis conditions. In theory they cover the whole sector when they are sectoral and the whole personnel of a firm when they are agreed at company level. In practice the situation is much different and varying as a result of a number of factors such as trade union power, enterprise size, sectoral and firm employment traditions, labour mobility, presence of immigrant workers etc. Collective agreements are usually of two or three year duration and regulate all aspects of the employment relation, including wage rates for different occupational and skill categories, COLA⁷, amount and rate of over-time pay, 13th salary, holidays, leave and sick leave, provident and

7. COLA is an indexation system that automatically adjusts wages to the current inflation rate as estimated by a price index based on a bundle of basic consumption products. It was instituted after prolonged common worker mobilisations in 1944 and included in the collective agreements. However its application decreased along with the coverage of the collective agreements while it was watered down in 1999 with the removal of some key items from the price index, suffered a major blow in the context of the Memorandum and its future remains uncertain.

Table 5: Employment According to Sector of Economic Activity (2012)

Sector	Total: 388,605
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	11,319
Mining and quarrying	967
Manufacturing	29,075
Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	2,040
Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities	5,634
Construction	40,663
Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	72,685
Transportation and storage	14,948
Accommodation and food service activities	29,967
Information and communication	10,450
Financial and insurance activities	23,347
Real estate activities	2,202
Professional scientific and technical activities	25,043
Administrative and support service activities	8,050
Public administration and defence, compulsory social insurance	24,970
Education	28,829
Human health and social work activities	16,184
Arts entertainment and recreation	6,207
Other service activities	10,949
Activities of households	23,706
Activities of extra-territorial organisation and bodies	1,374

Source: Labour Force Survey 2012

Table 6: Employment Status (2012)

Employment status / gender	Employers	Self Employed	Employees	Family workers	Total
Men	13,326	28,226	159,150	2,584	203,285
Women	2,619	13,450	164,945	4,306	185,320
Total	15,945	41,675	324,095	6,890	388,625

Source: Labour Force Survey 2012



Table 7: Basic Economic Indicators (in %)

	2009	2011	2013
Real GDP Growth (% change on previous year)			
Cyprus	-0.9	0.4	-5.4
EU27	-4.3	1.6	0.1
GDP per capita			
Cyprus	100	93	86
EU 27	100	100	100
Unemployment Rate			
Cyprus	5.4	7.9	15.9
EU 27	9.0	9.7	10.6

Source: Eurostat

welfare funds and other staff rights, benefits and obligations. There are no reliable data for the actual coverage of collective agreements although undoubtedly this has been decreasing alongside trade union density levels. EIRO (2013) mentions a 2002 figure standing at 63 percent neatly adjusting to trade union density at that time, but since this includes the broader public sector where the union density and collective bargaining coverage approaches 100 percent, the figure for the private sector was significantly lower. And this has continued to fall as the deregulation of employment relations has been accelerated since (Stavrou, 2013).

The deregulation of employment relations in Cyprus accompanying the logic of flexibility has taken different forms in different sectors. In the hotel industry the main instrument for this have been the personal contracts and the fixed salaries, in construction this has been effected through the extension of subcontracting and in service and administration work through outsourcing. The erosion of collective agreements occurs via two ways – through employers’ blatant refusal to agree or abide to one, or through their avoidance of some of its articles and the exclusion of part of their staff from its coverage (Ioannou, 2011). The first way is more prevalent in sectors with low trade union density such as retail trade, the IT sector, cleaning and guarding services amongst others while the second more indirect way in sectors with relatively higher union density such as construction, hotels and manufacturing. The basic means through which col-

lective agreements are undermined is the last decade is through new hirings, although there have been many cases reported where employers asked workers to »voluntarily« accept to shift from collective agreement terms and conditions to individual personal contracts. The consequence of this trend is the relativisation of the collective agreements as regulation mechanisms, the decreasing influence of trade unions and the establishment of hybrid workplaces with dual or multiple terms and conditions of employment.

The onset of the economic crisis and the austerity policies that begun in 2011 and intensified in 2012–2013 effectively undermined immensely the previously celebrated institution of the »social dialogue«. Austerity policies were imposed by the government, the parliament in the prequel and sequel of the Memorandum with the Troika, sometimes without even keeping the pretences. These involved a series of wage and benefits cuts, hitting particularly hard the new and the late entrants into the public sector, freezing of the COLA, first in the broader public sector but by 2012 extended in most of the private sector as well, decreasing employer contribution to pension funds and many others (Ioannou, 2014). In the private sector these measures all begun unilaterally by the employers taking advantage of the crisis and the formalisation of austerity, but were incorporated in some cases in the collective agreements or included in separate agreements which the trade unions were forced to make while in some others the trade unions were

simply ignored. The picture is analogous in the area of the social state – although trade unions participate in tripartite committees (without however the meetings of these committees keeping the pace of the reforms occurring) and are formally consulted by the government, the trend is their decreasing influence in the shaping of social legislation. As the welfare state in general is being gradually dismantled, trade unions see their positions on unemployment relief, health care system reform, pension rights largely ignored or marginalised except when these positions are adopted conjuncturally by political parties.

3.2 The North

The Turkish Cypriot community did not become part of the EU following the rejection of the United Nations's (UN) reunification plan by the Greek Cypriot side in the 2004 referendum. However, dynamics triggered by the referendum process were enough to lead to major changes in the Turkish Cypriot economy too. Particularly, the UN plan's provisions about the property issue initially created a sense of certainty in the housing market, and triggered a construction boom. This stimulated »other sectors such as transportation, trade, commerce, and manufacturing and increased labor demand in these labor-intensive industries« too (Güven-Lisaniler and Ugural 2010: 3). This rising demand was to a large extent met by a large influx of migrant workers from Turkey (ibid.). Though the economic boom did not last for so long, as of 2012, migrants account probably as high as 42 percent of the total employment figure in the northern part of Cyprus.⁸ Not surprisingly, as in the southern part, this kept the wages at low levels despite growing demand for labor. Furthermore, absence of effective control in the labor market created conditions conducive to exploitation of these workers. As Güven-Lisaniler and Ugural put it »[m]igrant workers are employed in all of the industries and in all kinds of establishments and they are subject to lower wages, longer working hours and working weeks. They almost work 10–12 hours a day and 6 days a week, and in some industries where they are out of the sight of the labor office, they work 7 days a week« (2010: 3).

8. According to HLFs figures total number of people employed is 97,100 in October 2011 (SPO, 28/5/2012, p.1) and according to the Ministry of Labor figures, the total number of work permits issued in the first nine months of 2012 stood at 41,373 (p. 3).

Unlike in the south, the collective bargaining agreement signed between Kamu-İs and the ministry of finance covering the manual workers in the public administration aside, wage setting and collective bargaining in the northern part of Cyprus take place only at the workplace level and generally in the semipublic sector, municipalities and cooperatives. Of 67 collective bargaining agreements signed in 2012 and mentioned in the Ministry of Labor and Social Security Activity Report, for instance, only 6 were signed in the private sector. Furthermore, in the negotiation of the overwhelming majority of these agreements rather than two larger umbrella organizations, i.e. Hur-İs and Turk-Sen, individual sectoral trade unions and the smallest umbrella organization Dev-İs were involved. Even municipalities negotiate collective agreements independent from each other; in 25 municipalities where collective agreements were signed, there were five different trade unions involved. In other words, rather than decentralization, it is more appropriate to talk about fragmentation in the case of northern Cyprus.

The duration of collective agreements cannot be shorter than one year and longer than two years (Article 7(1) of the Law) and as in the south, they regulate all aspects of the employment relations, including wage rates for different occupational and skill categories, COLA, amount and rate of over-time payment, 13th salary, holidays, leave and sick leave, and other staff rights, benefits and obligations. One important point that should be mentioned is that employers even in the semi-public sector are dragging their feet before renewing the agreements. In the public broadcaster BRT for instance, the agreement for 2014–15 period was signed only in November. In general, there is a perception that collective bargaining rights are under attack.

The employment relations of the civil servants, on the other hand, are regulated by yearly protocols, which are signed between the government and two biggest civil servant unions provided that they come to an agreement. The fact that the last protocol was signed in 2007 can be taken as another sign that recently governments and trade unions have been having frosty relations and that collective bargaining is taken less seriously by the government.

Social dialogue mechanisms in the northern part of Cyprus have serious shortcomings. According to a recent report analyzing the labor market in the northern part of Cyprus, the legal framework provides various social

Table 8: Employment by Economic Activity (2010)

Sectors	Total: 93,498
Agriculture, hunting forestry and fishing	5,300
Mining and quarrying	73
Manufacturing	8,393
Electricity, gas and water supply	1,051
Construction	7,746
Wholesale and retail trade, repairs	16,547
Hotels and restaurants	7,470
Transport, storage and communication	5,026
Financial intermediation	3,498
Real estate, and business activities	4,686
Public administration	15,669
Education	9,149
Health and social work	2,481
Other (community, social and personal) services	6,408

Table 9: Employment Status (2011)

Employment status/ gender	Employers	Self Employed	Employees	Family workers	Total
Men	2,761	8,153	54,243	592	65,749
Women	941	2,728	27,153	533	31,354
Total	3,702	10,881	81,396	1,125	97,103

Source: State Planning Organization, October 2011, Household Labor Force Survey Results [Devlet Planlama Orgutu Ekim 2011 Hanehalki Isgucu Anketi Sonuclari] published on 28/5/2012. Numbers may not add up because figures given in percentages were converted by author.

Table 10: Basic Economic Indicators (in %)

	2008	2009	2010
Real GDP Growth (% change on previous year)			
N. Cyprus	-2.9	-5.5	3.7
GDP per capita			
N. Cyprus (US dollars)	16,006	13,830	14,611
Unemployment Rate			
N. Cyprus	9.8	12.4	11.9
EU 27	9.0	9.7	10.6

Source: Dünya ve KKTC Ekonomisine Bakış, State Planning Organization, September 2013, pp. 1; 6; 18.

dialogue mechanisms such as the Social and Economic Council, the Minimum Wage Commission, the Labor and Social Security Consultation Assembly, the Arbitration Commission and the Reconciliation Commission. However, the overall evaluation of the report is that these mechanisms in practice are insufficient. There are two clear problems. First is the lack of unionization in the private sector, which inhibits the effective participation of the private sector workers' representatives in these mechanisms. Secondly, laws are not complemented by by-laws that are required for the operation of these mechanisms. Furthermore, the report points out a lack of culture and consciousness of social dialogue (PGlobal 2014: 14). One of the most important of these mechanisms, the Social and Economic Council, for instance, has not been convened for over almost a decade (since 2005). Formation of effective social dialogue mechanisms featured as one of the targets of the ministry of labor identified in its activity report for the period between October 2012 and September 2013.

4. Trade Unions and Politics

4.1 The South

The collapse of the banking sector and the evident prevalence of white collar crime without anybody yet held account for it, in conjunction with the deepening of the recession and the severing of austerity by 2013 has brought about a serious discrediting of all institutions in Cyprus. Obviously the banks and the parties bore the brunt of this but trade unions were also damaged in multiple ways. Loss of income from subscription fees as many of their members entered unemployment lead them to reduce the size and costs of their apparatuses. Their inability to adequately protect their members and their continued ties with the political parties which legislated unanimously the Troika sponsored austerity plan meant that trust in them decreased (Ioannou, forthcoming). Effectively the crisis revealed the political limits and the structural weakness of the trade unions who now have to share the blame and the political cost of austerity as despite their polemics against austerity at the critical moment PEO and SEK declared that »there was no other way except from the Memorandum of Understanding with the Troika« (Stockwatch 2012) while PASIDI despite its opposite statements essentially remained inactive throughout the period from mid-2012 to mid-2014.

There are no consistent, diachronic and reliable data on public opinion concerning the trade unions but the levels of their societal acceptance and popularity, given their close connection with political parties are expected to also be falling alongside the figures for parliament, government and parties, which saw their trust levels dropping in 2013 compared to 2008 at a rate of 45 percent, 39 percent and 22 percent respectively according to the Eurobarometers 70 and 80 autumn waves (Charalambous, 2014). Nevertheless since no significant new actors emerged to constitute alternative promoters of workers' rights and no other representatives of workers' interest have arisen, trade unions do not face any serious competition.

At the European and international levels, the Cyprus trade unions are well networked, but given Cyprus' small size their involvement is neither central nor a priority. All three of the main trade unions have international liaison officers, follow up on common days of action and campaigns emanating from the European and or international level and report international developments through their press. PEO, is probably the most devoted and networked of the three and this derives from its historical legacy especially after the collapse of the Eastern bloc, being since the 1990s in the structural position to be one of the few main trade unions in the EU to be part of WFTU.

The biggest political challenge currently faced by the trade unions is the cumulative aggressiveness of the employers and the shrinking scope of their political influence with respect to the political parties in the context and under the constraints imposed by the Troika, sponsored social engineering and austerity framework. At the societal level the main challenge is the revealing of their weakness and their increasing difficulty to persuade that they are able and willing to protect the interests of the workers in general and their vulnerable members in particular. The priority set by the trade unions themselves has not changed – it is the protection of the existing industrial relations system in general and the institution of collective bargaining and collective agreements as the chief regulating mechanism in the labour market.

4.2 The North

The Turkish Cypriot economy and society have also been in a state of crisis since 2008 though because of different and more structural reasons, which are discussed in

detail in Chapter 5 below. In this time of hardship, public sentiments towards trade unions diverged. For one segment of the society trade unions are nothing but hurdles, blocking much-needed steps to reform the economy. For others, however, they are the only bulwark of social opposition against Ankara, particularly in the face of the apparent inability of the various governments in standing up to economic measures imposed by the Turkish government. Over the last five-six years, those parties supporting the trade unions in their efforts to reverse the austerity measures when they had been in opposition, turned tables when they came to power, and this is unsurprisingly undermining political parties' credibility. Unlike in the case of the south, however, in the northern part, the trade unions took a more confrontational stance vis-à-vis the political parties. In 2011, particularly, they organized two mass demonstrations against the austerity packages where the Turkish government was also targeted. However, these efforts failed to deliver any concrete results beyond infuriating the Turkish government, which flatly refused to back down.

As in the case of the southern part, there are no opinion polls available, which can show the trend in the confidence of public in certain institutions. There is a recent public opinion survey⁹, however, which can at least give us an idea. According to this survey conducted in 2011, only 16 percent of those who responded said that in their view the credibility of trade unions was very high or high. A closer scrutiny of the survey shows that all major institutions had rather dismal scores reflecting a deep level of distrust towards them. Political parties, politicians, ministries, media, justice system and courts, and the president's approval ratings were 10.9 percent, 13.9 percent, 14.8 percent, 19.3 percent, 23.9 percent, and 26.1 percent respectively. The only institution that passed the 50 threshold was the army with 52.5 percent (TEPAV 2013: 41-2). Furthermore, in the last general election held in 2013, the voter turnout dropped to 69.41 percent from 81.7 percent in 2009, another sign indicating a decline of trust towards political institutions.

As long as the Turkish Cypriot trade unions' stance regarding international contacts is concerned, it can be said that this depends on their political orientation.

9. The survey was conducted as part of a monitoring of the Turkish Cypriot state mechanism commissioned by the Board of Financial Assistance under the Turkish Embassy.

Those on the left have membership ties to the international bodies such as WTFU and ITFU. They also try to network and lobby at the EU level. In 2011, for instance, ten trade unions, which called themselves Syndical Platform and including heavy weights such as KTAMS, KTOS and KTOEOS visited Brussels to air their concerns regarding the Turkish influence on economic and political life in the northern part of Cyprus. Those on the right, on the other hand, prefer to establish and maintain ties with trade unions in Turkey. Kamu-Sen, for instance, is a member of a conservative confederation in Turkey, Hakk-Is, is a member of ITUC and ETUC.

5. The Prospects for the Coming Years and Conclusions

5.1. The South

At the level of employment relations the biggest challenge that lies ahead concerns the future of collective agreements. As mentioned above the trend is already negative in terms of declining coverage, increasing violations, delays in their renewal and agreed as well as unilaterally imposed negative changes by the employers within their duration. However, if this is examined in an international comparative framework and especially if one takes into account the aggressiveness of the employers, some of whom do not hesitate to demand their abolition in public, the ground lost on this dimension by the trade unions is not enormous and things are not so dramatic as they could have been. The same is true for the organisational level. Density is falling but this is a gradual process and comparatively it remains significantly above the EU average, something that shows that despite trade union decline, trade unionism in Cyprus sustains itself.

At the societal level, the challenges are probably much more severe, especially in the context of the financial and economic crisis. Wages have plummeted and worse lies ahead as unemployment remains uncontrolled at very high levels (INEK-PEO, 2013) the minimum wage is under direct threat, not only in terms of labour market actual practices but also as a legal decree, as the pressures to formally abolish it or substantially reduce it are piling, welfare spending by the state is reduced at a time when it is most needed and many thousands are soon expected to lose ownership of their houses as they face

increasing difficulties to service their loans. Trade unions have limited capacity to offer a social safety net to their unemployed members, have difficulties in restricting the losses suffered by their working members and prevent the overt exploitation of peripheral workers working under precarious conditions.

Trade unions although belatedly did understand the magnitude and implications of the restructuring of the labour market at the turn of the 21st Century and gradually made an effort to organise and integrate migrant workers and young entrants in the labour market. Success however has been limited when one sees the whole picture, but there was some progress by the early 2010s when compared to the early 2000s. Trade unions have realised that non-Cypriot workers are here to stay and that the way to defend the interests of their Cypriot members is not through the marginalisation of the non-Cypriots but through their integration. Thus the trend now is a sort of shifting emphasis towards the need to extend the coverage of the collective agreements to migrant workers rather than acquiescence to the overt exploitation of the migrants as long as this did not affect their primarily Cypriot members.

Public perception of the trade unions as mentioned above probably worsened along with all political and economic institutions in the country although there are no reliable hard data for this. This can be inferred from the references in the public sphere and the increasing difficulties mentioned by the unionists themselves in their contacts with rank and file members. There are little signs of changing trade unions' self-perception although an understanding that things are getting hard has been developing and that they are also a social movement in addition to social partners is heard more often lately. Although there has been an increase in strike actions reported in the last years, the overwhelming majority of these strikes were of short duration and localised, happening at company level and often involving violations of the law such as delays in wages, with the exception of a public sector strike in 2011 and construction where sectoral strikes took place 2012 and a long one in 2013. Even the strikes that took place in the public services protesting the privatization plans of the current government in early 2014 were largely symbolic. Compared to the watershed happening in the economy and the labour market, trade union reactions have been overall extremely mild.

Trade union strategy and focus in dealing with the cuts in rights and benefits of their members has been dual – emphasising the temporariness of the measures arising out of conjunctural necessity and demanding dialogue in order to offer its consent through formal agreements. The insistence on the temporariness dimension was crucial for unions both for dealing with their members' worries and for keeping the future open vis-a-vis the employers for a potential reclaiming of what was lost. The insistence on the consensual procedure was deemed crucial despite its tarnishing effect on trade union image, because in this way a precedent of unilateral employer action was averted or relativised. As far as the substantive part is concerned trade union strategy was to defend the wages and the entry wages and let go other benefits such as employer contribution to Provident Funds, over-time pay etc. which were more indirect and concerning the future rather than the present (Ioannou, 2014).

5.2 The North

As stated above, the economic crisis that Turkish Cypriots have been suffering from stems from different and more structural reasons. The root cause of the problem is, in the absence of a legal international status, the entity's overreliance on Turkey, and Turkey's resolve to overhaul the politico-economic landscape in the northern part of Cyprus based on a neoliberal approach. Indeed, this is not the first time that the Turkish government is putting pressure on the Turkish Cypriot government to implement austerity measures. What is new here is that for the first time in Turkish Cypriot history there is a government in Ankara, which can exert this pressure persistently for a long time. In the past, particularly in the political turmoil of the 1970s and 1990s, the Turkish governments were not likely to stay in power for a long time and therefore they were not able to devise and implement long-term policies to reform the Turkish Cypriot economy. Alternatively, the Turkish Cypriot side used to play the »national cause« card against Ankara to ward off implementing these policies for a long time. This is to say, come the time of general or presidential election, nationalist-dominated governments and former Turkish Cypriot leader Denktash would urge Ankara to suspend the implementation of measures lest Turkish Cypriot community falls to pro-communist or pro-Greek parties (or both) depending on the circumstances. This

was most of the time complemented with pay rises in the public sector as well as doling out of public sector jobs in the run up to the elections (Sonan 2014). This has changed since the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) coming to power in November 2002. The Turkish Cypriots have found themselves in a new terrain that they are not used to, particularly after the turning of the tide created by the Annan plan process, which had boosted the economic growth to two digit figures between 2003 and 2006.

Three economic protocols signed with Ankara envisaged serious cuts in public spending; not least in personnel expenditures, as well as privatization of public utilities, which all directly affect the trade unions. So far, only the operation of the Ercan (Tymbou) Airport and Turkish Cypriot Petroleum Enterprises (*Kıbrıs Türk Petrolleri*) have been privatized and both did not lead to mass layoffs. Yet, the closing down of two other public economic enterprises, the Cyprus Turkish Airlines and ETI enterprises (specializing in imports) left many employees jobless. Though most of those who had lost their jobs have been eventually employed in the public sector in line with the Privatization Law dated 2012, their salaries and benefits were substantially cut, which gives the trade unions an idea about the consequences of further privatization in the future.


Furthermore, trade unions have been directly targeted by Turkish officials in the island. The current Turkish ambassador, for instance, who is known to be the architect of the economic protocols, is openly critical of Turkish Cypriot trade unions. In an interview in 2011, when he was in a different post, he was reported to say: »The basic problem in the TRNC is that [public sector] employees earn too much and that their number is too high. There are very strong trade unions, which block all the measures that will save money (...) The way trade unions exercise their power is destructive (...) there is a need to narrow the union rights while regulating the exercise of these rights.«¹⁰ This created an uproar and not surprisingly, trade unions declared him *persona non grata*. Adding insult to injury, the Turkish government's response, however, was promoting him to ambassadorship. Given this stance of Ankara, continuing their struggle against these unpopular protocols as well as the legislations passed by the TRNC parliament in line

with these protocols seem to be one of the biggest challenges facing the Turkish Cypriot trade unions in the near future.

Basically, there are important divergences between the two communities both in terms of the depth and implications of the economic crisis and the way trade unions are reacting to it. In the northern part of Cyprus, unemployment rate seems to be stabilized around 10 percent and compared to the south wages are also more stable. Although, business circles have been complaining about the high level of minimum wage and floating the idea of introducing multiple minimum wages at sectoral levels to depress it, abolition of it has not been seriously discussed. Fortunately, there is no sign of a mortgage crisis either. On a more negative note, when it comes to the efforts of trade unions to organise and integrate migrant labourers into the trade union movement, we see that Turkish Cypriot trade unions have not raised their voices in the face of widespread exploitation of migrant workers, which can be seen as one of their biggest weaknesses. What makes one even more pessimistic about this situation is the fact that this is not even seriously discussed in the wider public opinion.

Given these circumstances, it is no wonder that the Turkish Cypriot trade unions are also faced with serious challenges and in fact, these are probably even more formidable than those in the south. To start with, as mentioned above, the level of unionisation is negligible in the private sector, and a breakthrough to reverse this does not look likely to come. Even worse, the trade union's position in the public and semi-public sector is also under serious threat. Though the trade union density is not as high as in the south, and the decline is more gradual, the likely privatization of public utility companies such as the Electricity Authority (Kib-Tek) may speed up this process and seriously undermine the trade union movement. At least for the moment, the losses suffered by their older members are relatively low – most probably thanks to the unions' strength, which is good for the unions. However, unless they manage to force the government to change its course, their membership figures are likely to continue to fall, as public opinion as well as their members will be convinced of the weakness of the unions. Outsourcing, which is already widespread in cleaning and security services is another factor threatening the trade unions' membership figures. A solution of the Cyprus problem, which can act like a *deus ex ma-*

10. <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/id/25181369/>



china, seems to be the only way out for the Turkish Cypriot community in this time of despair. Alas, this seems highly unlikely at the moment.

Overall, for trade unions in both sides of the island, the key challenges remain (and becoming starker) the need to rise their mobilisation capacities, revitalise their organisational structures so as to enhance rank and file participation and commitment and improve their image and reputation so as to recruit new members and coun-

ter the attacks they face at the level of public discourse. Trade unions need to reaffirm to their members that they are the main and only vehicle that can advance their interests and they also need to convince the precarious workers that this potentially applies to them as well and that they would be better off joining rather than keeping their distance from trade unions. That collectivism and solidarity are desirable as well as effective and that trade union revitalization is the only way to arrest the drift to the »dark ages« of employment relations.



Acronyms

AKEL	Progressive Party of the Working People (south; Left, heir of Communist Party)
CCCI	Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry (south)
COLA	Cost of Living Allowance (automatic indexation adjustment)
DEOK	Democratic Labour Federation of Cyprus (south)
DEV-IS	Revolutionary Trade Unions Federation (north)
DIKO	Democratic Party (south; Centre-right)
DISI	Democratic Rally (south; Right)
EDEK	Unified Democratic Union of Centre (south; Social democratic)
EFPSU	European Federation of Public Service Unions
EIRO	European Industrial Relations Observatory
ETUC	European Trade Union Confederation
ETYK	Union of Bank Employees of Cyprus (south)
EU	European Union
HUR-IS	Federation of Free Labor Unions (north)
ILO	International Labour Organisation
ISEF	Federation of Progressive Trade Unions (north; not active anymore)
KAMU-IS	TRNC Public Manual Workers Trade Union (north)
KAMU-SEN	TRNC Public Officials Trade Union (north)
KTAMS	Cyprus Turkish Civil Servants Trade Union (north)
KTOS	Cyprus Turkish Primary School Teachers' Union (north)
KTOES	Cyprus Turkish Secondary School Teachers' Union (north)
OELMEK	Organisation of Greek (-Cypriot) Secondary Education Teachers
OLTEK	Organisation of Greek (-Cypriot) Secondary Technical Education Teachers
OEB	Federation of Employers and Industrialists (south)
PASIDI	Pancyprian Union of Civil Servants (south)
PEO	Pancyprian Federation of Labour (south)
POED	Pancyprian Organisation of Greek (-Cypriot) Teachers (south)
PSE	Pancyprian Trade union Committee (evolved into PEO) (south)
PSI	Public Services International (south)
SEK	Cyprus Workers' Confederation (south)
TURK-SEN	Cyprus Turkish Trade Unions Federation (north)
WFTU	World Federation of Trade Unions



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Imprint

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Hiroshimastr. 28 | 10785 Berlin | Germany

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The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

This publication is printed on paper from sustainable forestry.



ISBN
978-3-95861-063-7