

## **Cyprus, Fifty Years Later (1974-2024): The Turkish Invasion and Occupation. The Process of Islamization-Turkification.**

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Following 82 years of British colonial rule (1878-1960) that succeeded the Ottoman rule (1571-1878), Cyprus became independent and a UN member (August 1960). Fourteen years later, on July 20, 1974, Turkey invaded and occupied Cyprus' northern part.<sup>1</sup> Five days earlier, on July 15, 1974, the Greek military junta that ruled Greece since 1967, orchestrated a military coup in Cyprus that overthrew the democratically elected and popular President, Archbishop Makarios, who held the office since 1960. At the time of the July 1974 coup, the junta leader was the secretive colonel Demetrios Ioannides. On his orders, the coup was carried out by the Cypriot National Guard which was commandeered by Greek officers loyal to the junta, in close collaboration with EOKA B. This was a junta-backed rightwing paramilitary organization that has been subverting the rule of President Makarios. He survived the coup, and with the help of the United Nations Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), he was flown to Malta and from there to London. Upon his returning to Cyprus in December 1974, Makarios received a tumultuous welcome, and was restored to power as the legitimate President. He died in 1977.

Since the early 1960s, Turkey has been seeking a pretext to invade Cyprus and, on several occasions, Turkish warships engaged in a show of force off the shores of Kyrenia.<sup>2</sup> The junta's July 15<sup>th</sup> coup provided Turkey the pretext it has been seeking to invade Cyprus. Up until 1974, despite being wary on occasion, relations between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots had been characterized by peaceful coexistence, which was ruptured by

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<sup>1</sup> Photographs of the Turkish invasion, July 20, 1974: [Cyprus wakes up to the memory of 1974 invasion - Financial Mirror](#) . [The Turkish Invasion – Δήμος Καραβά \(karavas.eu\)](#) [Sirens mark 1974 Attila operation in Cyprus, KNEWS \(kathimerini.com.cy\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> Kyrenia is a small port city 40 miles from Turkey.

the Turkish invasion. The first phase of the invasion took place between July 20-23, 1974, when a UN-sponsored cease fire was proclaimed. On July 23, 1974, the Athens junta collapsed under the weight of its crime in Cyprus. The same day, Constantine Karamanlis, a veteran Greek politician living in self-exile in Paris, returned to Greece to restore democracy. By this time, July 23<sup>rd</sup>, Turkey had taken control of 3% of Cypriot territory, an area around the little port city of Kyrenia. However, the Turkish army kept violating the cease fire, and on August 14, 1974, launched a major offensive that resulted in the occupation of 1,357 square miles representing 38% of Cypriot territory. In this way, Turkey came to control the island's northern part that resulted in the de facto partition of Cyprus.

The Turkish leader who ordered the July 20, 1974, invasion as well as the second round on August 14, 1974, was The Turkish Premier, Bulent Ecevit (1925-2006). He was a socialist, who blended his socialism with Atatürk's nationalism. He was also known as a poet. Ecevit was the leader of the Republican Peoples Party (RPP) and became Prime Minister four times, 1974, 1977, 1978-79, and 1992.<sup>3</sup> As RPP leader, he won the October 1973 elections but fell short of a majority and had to form a coalition government with Necmettin Erbakan's National Salvation Party (NSP). It was an Islamist nationalist party that marched under the slogan of *Kıbrıs Türktür* (Cyprus is Turkish) that became ubiquitous in Turkey. Consequently, in January 1974, Ecevit became prime minister with Erbakan's NSP as junior partner. When Ecevit, the socialist poet, became Turkey's premier, there was a tendency among many Greeks to view him positively. Six months later, Ecevit ordered the invasion of Cyprus that became the hallmark of his political career. While the Cyprus crisis was unfolding, and the Turkish army was preparing to launch the second round of the invasion, *Time* magazine published two related articles, one was on the ongoing crisis. The other was dedicated to Ecevit (his first name was mispronounced). The article was under the title: "Turkey: Ecevit: The Poet Premier."<sup>4</sup> It started as follows: "He wouldn't even kill an ant," was the way Turks described *Bülent* [instead of Bulent] Ecevit, 49, their Premier. His biographer called him a "romantic, artistic, even mystical man. . . a translator of the poetry of T.S. Elliot and Ezra Pound into Turkish and a poet in his own right. . . But since he ordered the invasion of Cyprus by Turkish troops Ecevit's image has changed. He has become a national hero."<sup>5</sup> As such, he assumed the popular nickname *Karaoğlan* (a type of folk hero) and was referred to as *Kıbrıs Fatih*i (Conqueror of Cyprus). The image of

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<sup>3</sup> Ecevit was prime minister from January-November 1974 (when the first and second round of the invasion took place); June-July 1977; January 1978-November 1979; January 1999-November 2002.

<sup>4</sup> See "Turkey: Ecevit: The Poet Premier," *Time*, August 12, 1974. [TURKEY: Ecevit: The Poet Premier | TIME](#)

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

Ecevit as conqueror, was depicted on a poster that became ubiquitous in Turkey and in occupied Cyprus.<sup>6</sup> It was a reminder of other epochs.

The consequences of the Turkish invasion and occupation have been profound.<sup>7</sup> Since that time, Turkey, which has the second largest army in NATO, maintains over 40,000-strong occupation army backed by hundreds of tanks, while Turkish fighter jets can be over Cyprus in 3-4minutes. (Cyprus has no air force). In 1973, the total population of Cyprus was 631.778.<sup>8</sup> The overwhelming majority, close to half a million (498.511) or 78.9%, had been Greek Orthodox Christian. The Muslim Turkish minority population accounted for 116,00 or 18.4%.<sup>9</sup> In other words, for every 4.3 Greeks there was 1 Turk. From the outset of the invasion, Turkey conducted a systematic policy of “ethnic cleansing” of the conquered territory.<sup>10</sup> 180,000 Greek Cypriots were forced to leave their ancestral homes to become refugees. Over 4,000 Greek Cypriots were killed. During the invasion, the Turkish army committed war crimes that included the execution of prisoners. Among them, were the five Greek Cypriot soldiers appearing in the photograph that was published by the BBC.<sup>11</sup> They had been captured near the Turkish village of Tziaos in the

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<sup>6</sup> Poster of Ecevit.: [Bulent Ecevit \(1925-2006\), Turkish Prime Minister during the Turkish Invasion of Cyprus in 1974 Stock Photo - Alamy](#)

<sup>7</sup> Christos Ioannides, “Turkish-Controlled Cyprus: The Consolidation of Occupation,” in in Eugene Rossides and Van Coufoudakis., eds. *The United States and Cyprus: Double Standards and the rule of Law*. (American Hellenic Institute Foundation, Washington, D.C., 2002) pp. 115-140.

<sup>8</sup> Republic of Cyprus, *Demographic Reports* (under varying titles). Nicosia: Department of Statistics and Research (1960-1988).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> On the ethnic cleansing of the Turkish occupied territory, see: Michael Jansen, Briefing on *Cyprus Religious Cultural Heritage in Peril*: Testimony before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, July 21, 2009. Testimony based on, Michael Jansen, *War and Cultural Heritage: Cyprus after the 1974 Turkish Invasion* ((Minneapolis: Minnesota Mediterranean and Easter European Monographs, No. 14, University of Minnesota, Modern Greek Studies, 2005). See also, Loqman Radpey, “What Kurdistan Should Learn from Turkey’s Cyprus Occupation, *The Middle East Forum Observer*, July 19, 2024. Also, Marios Evryviades, “United States Strategic Interests and the Policy of Partition,” in Rossides and Coufoudakis., eds. *The United States and Cyprus*, pp. 229-248, esp. pp. 236, 238. The author provides a comprehensive account on U.S. policy vis a vis Cyprus, with specific examples on how it tended to favor Turkey.

<sup>11</sup>See “Greek Cypriot bodies identified.” BBC News, August 11, 2009. See photograph of prisoners who were executed: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8196106.stm>.

Also, <https://en.famagusta.news/local/ammochostos/ego-tou-anapsa-tsigaro-istoria-piso-apo-ti-fotografia-symvolo-ke-ektelesi-ton-pente-sto-tziaos>. (“I lit cigarette for him. The story behind the photo-symbol and the execution of the five in Tziaos). The five Greek Cypriot prisoners who were

Famagusta District. The five soldiers had been listed as missing until 2009, when their remains were found in a nearby well along with 14 other bodies.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, during the invasion, hundreds of Greek Cypriot women became victims of rape.<sup>13</sup> There were also women who had been raped, but did not report it. Under International Law, the execution of prisoners and rape constitute war crimes. By the time military operations ceased the last week of August 1974, there were 1,619 Greek Cypriots missing. A considerable number had been transferred to prisons in Turkey never to return.<sup>14</sup> There was also a devastating blow to the Cypriot economy. Over two thirds of the island's productive capacity came under Turkish control. However, since then the economy in the free part of the Republic, Cyprus rebounded and experienced sustained growth. The island's remarkable socioeconomic advancements enabled Cyprus to become a full member of the European Union in 2004.

### Converting Christian Orthodox Churches into Mosques

In the immediate aftermath of the invasion, Turkey adopted a policy of the cultural transformation of the occupied territory that the Turks named the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" (TRNC). (The formal establishment of TRNC is discussed below). This transformation was carried out through a methodical policy of Islamization-Turkification.<sup>15</sup> The landscape that has been historically Christian and Greek was

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[executed are identified in the photograph: Antonakis Korellis, Panikos Nikolaou, Christophoros Skordis, Ioannis Papayiannis, and Phlippos Papakyriakou.](#)

<sup>12</sup> BBC, August 11, 2009.

<sup>13</sup> See "Villagers driven from Cyprus homes charge murder and rape by Turks, *New York Times*, August 6, 1974. [Villagers Driven from Cyprus Homes Charge Murder and Rape by Turks - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](#).

Lawyers in Cyprus, "Rape of Greek Cypriot Women, Nicosia, November 26, 2019. [Cyprus > Rape of Greek Cypriot Women \(lawyersincyprus.com\)](#). Also, Uzay Bulut, "Turkey's Crimes against Humanity and Illegal Occupation of Cyprus," Gatestone Institute, January 4, 2023." [Turkey's 'Crimes against Humanity' and Illegal Occupation of Cyprus: Gatestone Institute.](#)

<sup>14</sup> For an account that includes photographs of Greek Cypriot prisoners transferred to Turkey in 1974, see Avraam Christophorou, "Αιχμαλωτοι του 1974 που μεταφερθηκαν στην Τουρκια εξομολογουνται" (Prisoners who were transferred to Turkey in 1974, speak candidly). In *OmegaLive*, Nicosia, July 20, 2023. Link: [Αιχμάλωτοι του 1974 που μεταφέρθηκαν στην Τουρκία εξομολογούνται: - OmegaLive](#) (. See also, *Greek Reporter*, July 20, 2024: [23-8.jpg \(900x600\) \(greekreporter.com\)](#).

<sup>15</sup> "Προς Ισλαμοποίηση τα κατεχομενα (Islamizing the occupied territory), Simerini, July 21, 2023: [Προς Ισλαμοποίηση τα κατεχόμενα \(sigmalive.com\)](#) . Also, Στρατηγική εποικισμού και ισλαμοποίησης στα

transformed into Muslim and Turkish.<sup>16</sup> This dictated that the historic past and all evidence of religious and ethnic symbols of Greek culture had to be eradicated. Coufoudakis described authoritatively the Turkish policy as follows:

. . . The systematic destruction of the Greek Cypriot cultural heritage in the occupied areas. Towns and villages have been given Turkish names in violation of international conventions. Archaeological sites have been looted and others have been destroyed in the name of development. Churches and cemeteries have been desecrated, plundered, damaged, or converted to other uses. Innumerable religious artifacts, icons and other treasures have been stolen and smuggled abroad and illegally sold to art dealers.<sup>17</sup>

This systematic destruction of Greek Cypriot cultural heritage has been well documented.<sup>18</sup> The deliberate policy of Islamization-Turkification dictated the converting of Christian churches into mosques, while other churches have been looted or destroyed.<sup>19</sup> A thorough and authoritative documentation can be found in the 2009 study

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Κατεχόμενα (The strategy of colonization and Islamization of occupied (Cyprus). Στρατηγική αποικισμού και ισλαμοποίησης στα Κατεχόμενα - [slpress.gr](http://slpress.gr) *Slpress*, August 18, 2018.

<sup>16</sup> On the Turkish policy of Islamization-Turkification of occupied Cyprus, See Christos P. Ioannides, "The Cultural Transformation," *In Turkey's Image. The Transformation of Cyprus into a Turkish Province* (A. D. Caratzas, Publisher, New Rochelle, NY, 1991), Ch. 10, pp. 177-89.

<sup>17</sup> See Van Coufoudakis, *Cyprus: A Contemporary Problem in Historical Perspective* (Minnesota Mediterranean and Easter European Monographs, Modern Greek Studies Series, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis Minnesota, No. 15, 2006) p. 89. The author provides a comprehensive account Cyprus problem, especially in the aftermath of the 1974 Turkish invasion, its consequences, and the diplomacy related to the problem.

<sup>18</sup> There are considerable number of publications on the destruction of Cyprus' cultural heritage providing extensive documentation, especially on the fate churches and the de-Christianization/ Islamization of Turkish occupied Cyprus. Among others, see Library of Congress, *Cyprus: Destruction of Cultural Property in the Northern Part of Cyprus and Violations of International Law* (Washington, D.C., The Law Library of Congress, Global Legal Research Directorate, April 2009); Michael Jansen, *War and Cultural Heritage: Cyprus after the 1974 Turkish Invasion* ((Minneapolis: Minnesota Mediterranean and Easter European Monographs, No. 14, University of Minnesota, Modern Greek Studies, 2005); Charalampos G. Chotzakoglou, *Religious Monuments in Turkish-Occupied Cyprus: Evidence and acts of continuous destruction* (Nicosia: Museum of the Holy Monastery of Kykkos, Studies on Byzantine and post-Byzantine Archaeology and History of Art. No. 3, 2008); Academy of Athens, *Cyprus – The Plundering of a 9000 year old Civilization*, Introduction by Melina Mercouri, Minister of Culture & Sciences (Athens: Committee for the Preservation of the Cultural Heritage of Cyprus, 1988).

<sup>19</sup> On the turning of Greek Orthodox churches into mosques in the Turkish occupied territory, see *The Catholic World Report*, "Numerous Cyprus churches being turned into mosques; others looted or

by the Library of Congress. It is entitled *Cyprus: Destruction of Cultural Property in the Northern Part of Cyprus and Violations of International Law*.<sup>20</sup> The study provides, among others, the following data: 500 Greek Orthodox churches and chapels have been pillaged, vandalized, or demolished. 133 churches, chapels, and monasteries have been desecrated: the whereabouts of 15,000 paintings are unknown. 77 churches have been turned into mosques, 28 are being used by the Turkish military forces as hospitals or camps, and 13 are used as agricultural barns.<sup>21</sup> The figure of 77 churches goes back to 2006. A more recent estimate is that 81 churches have been converted into mosques. The location and names of the churches listed by district, appear on the table below:<sup>22</sup>

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destroyed." May 28, 2021. Link: [Numerous Cyprus churches being turned into mosques; others looted or destroyed – Catholic World Report](#) . See also, Uzay Bulut, "Turkey Wipes out the Christian Culture of Occupied Cyprus," *Gatestone Institute*, International Policy Council, November 25, 2018: [Turkey Wipes Out the Christian Culture of Occupied Cyprus :: Gatestone Institute](#).

Also, Ioannides, "The Cultural Transformation," *In Turkey's Image*, pp. 177-89.

<sup>20</sup> Washington, D.C., The Law Library of Congress, Global Legal Research Directorate, April 2009. Link: [Cyprus: Destruction of Cultural Property in the Northern Part of Cyprus and Violations of International Law \(loc.gov\)](#)

<sup>21</sup> See Library of Congress, *Cyprus*, p. 8. The Library of Congress data are based on a report by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus, *Destruction of Cultural Heritage* (Nicosia, July 2006).

<sup>22</sup> Source: Archbishop Makarios III Foundation, 2006: Επιχείρηση Αφανισμού: Εξαφανίζουν κάθε ελληνορθόδοχο στοιχείο στα κατεχόμενα (Operation Erasure: They erase all Greek Orthodox evidence in the occupied (territory): [2006 \(makariosfoundation.org.cy\)](#) [Επιχείρηση αφανισμού](#) (Operation Erasure).

**CHRISTIAN ORTHODOX CHURCHES  
IN THE TURKISH OCCUPIED TERRITORY  
CONVERTED INTO MOSQUES**

**NICOSIA DISTRICT**

CITY OF NICOSIA: St. Andrew

VILLAGES (Name of village in parenthesis)

Annunciation, All Holy Mother (AHM) (Gerolakkos); St. Marina (Alone); St. George (Exo Metochi); Archangel Michael (Pano Zodia); Holy Cross (Kato Zodia); St. George (Kapouti); AHM Chryseleousa (Katokopia); St. Anna Syrkianas (Kythrea); AHM Chardakiotissa (Kythrea); St. John the Theologian (Mia Milia); St. Paraskevi (Morphou); St. Nikitas (Nikitas); St. Nicholas (Pentayia); St. Stylianos (Prasteio); AHM The Merciful (Skyloura); St. Nicholas (Syrianochori); St. George (Filia).

**FAMAGUSTA DISTRICT**

CITY OF FAMAGUSTA: AHM Chrysospilotissa; St. Luke; St. Nicholas; St. George; St. John.

VILLAGES (Name of village in parenthesis)

Prophet Elias (S. Elias); St. Paraskevi (Agastina); Transfiguration of The Savior (Akanthou); St. Andronikos (Arnadi); John the Baptist (Ashia); The Savior (Acheritou); St. George (Vathylakas); St. Basil (Vasili); St. George (Vatyli); St. Mamas (Vitsada); St. George (Voukolida); St. George (Gerani); St. Fotios (Yialousa); St. George A (Gypsou); All Holy Mother (Engomi); St. George (Eptakomi); John the Baptist (Kalopsida); Archangel Michael ((Koma Yialou); St. George (Komi Kepir); John the Baptist (Lapathos); St. Demetrios (Leonarissos); The Savior (Lefkonoiko); St. Nicholas (Limnia); St. George (Limnia); All Holy Mother (Lysi); St. Epiphanius (Milia); St. Luke (Mousoulita); All Holy Mother (Neta, new); All Holy Mother (Neta, old); Archangel Michael (Patriki); Holy Cross (Pigi); St. George (Prasteio); St. Luke (Spathariko); Saints Stergios and Bachus (Tavrou); St. George (Trikomo); St. George (Flamoudi).

**KYRENIA DISTRICT**

CITY OF KYRENIA: St. George; St. Barbara; AHM Glykiotissa; St. Irene

VILLAGES (Name of village in parenthesis)

St. Ambrosios (St. Ambrosios); St. George (St. George); St. Epictetus (St. Epiktetus); St. Ermolaos (St. Ermolaos); St. Constantine and Helen (Vasileia); Prophet Zacharias (Dikomo Pano); St. George (Dikomo Kato); St. Mamas (Kalogrea); AHM of the Annunciation (Karavas); AHM <sup>23</sup>Karmiotissa (Karmi); Apostle Luke (Klepini); St. Minas (Lapithos); St. Paraskevi (Lapithos); St. Demetrianos (Larnaka Lapithou); St. Constantine and Helen (Livera); St. George (Orka); Apostle Andrew (Panagra); St. George chapel (Bellapais); Apostles Peter and Paul (Fterycha).

The Islamization process commenced in the immediate aftermath of the invasion and ensuing occupation. The Turks landed west of Kyrenia at beach close to the church of *Panagia Glykiotissa* (Church of the All-Holy Mother, Healer of Pain). One of the Turkish army's first actions was to convert this church into a mosque where the soldiers could pray. The conversion of churches into mosques was granted religious justification by a prominent Islamic figure in Istanbul, Mufti A. Seref, who declared:

According to our religion, if needed, prayers can be held in a church but only under this condition: It is imperative that in the church there should be no religious object of the *gavurlar* (infidels), or these objects should be converted. There should be nothing over the head that has any relationship with these objects. Then a prayer can take place.<sup>24</sup>

The conversion of the Glykiotissa church into a mosque adhered to these rules. Regarding the church's interior, all Christian religious objects and symbols, sacramental vessels, icons, frescoes, mosaics, and crosses, were removed or covered by plaster. When the conversion process was completed, Muslim prayers took place. On October 12, 1974, the Turkish newspaper *Gunaydin*, published a feature article entitled: *Mehmetçikler kiliside namaz kildi* (Soldiers conduct prayers in a church). The article was accompanied by a photograph of the interior of the *Glykiotissa* church that has been converted into a mosque. It shows Turkish officers and soldiers praying.<sup>25</sup> Turkey's armed forces have been considered the guardians of secularism. On the left side, the photograph shows an imam who conducted the Muslim prayers. He is standing on the stairs to the *mihrab*, a niche in

<sup>24</sup> *Gunaydin*, Istanbul, October 12, 1974.

<sup>25</sup> See *Gunaydin*, Istanbul, October 12, 1974. For the newspaper photograph of the praying soldiers that was published above the article's title, see the link: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1L4G-S-oiUV6kUtxhXWYboH-DjLgzkCrs/view?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1L4G-S-oiUV6kUtxhXWYboH-DjLgzkCrs/view?usp=drive_link).



the wall of a mosque. Its purpose is to show to the Muslim faithful the direction of Mecca (the *gibla*) where they should be facing when praying. In this case, the *mihrab* was created when the church of Glykiotissa was converted into a mosque. The Turkish soldiers in the photograph are shown praying in the direction of the *mihrab*.<sup>26</sup> Included in the article was a small photograph of the church's exterior. The cross was removed from the roof as well as the bell.<sup>27</sup> Since 1974, at least 77 Christian churches were converted into mosques.<sup>28</sup>

### **Proliferation of Mosques: Grandiose Style**

The rise of Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) to power in 2003, ushered Turkey into a new era as Islam overshadowed Kemal Atatürk's secular-oriented ideology. Islamization accelerated under Erdogan's rule.<sup>29</sup> The most glaring example has been the reconversion of Aghia Sophia to a mosque (discussed below). Among others, Islamization has been reflected in the dress code of women and the head scarf (*hijab*). Moreover, there have been increasing restrictions on alcohol consumption.<sup>30</sup> Erdogan also considers smoking *haram*.<sup>31</sup> Apropos, on February 3, 2023, the so called

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> See Table in pp. 4-5.

<sup>29</sup> For a thorough account of Turkey's Islamization under Erdogan, see, *Turkey Transformed: The Origins and Evolution of Authoritarianism and Islamization under AKP*, Bipartisan Policy Center, Washington DC, October 2015. Scott Peterson, "In Turkey, Erdogan fans an Islamic nationalism to build Ottoman-style influence," *Christian Science Monitor*, February 23, 2017. [In Turkey, Erdoğan fans an Islamic nationalism to build Ottoman-style influence - CSMonitor.com](#) Levent Kenez (Stockholm), "Erdogan accelerates Islamization of the army before elections," *Nordic Monitor*, September 6, 2022. [Erdoğan accelerates the Islamization of the army before elections - Nordic Monitor](#)

<sup>30</sup> See *Balkan Insight*, September 1, 2023. [Istanbul Lawyers Go to Court Over Governor's Alcohol Clampdown | Balkan Insight](#).

*Deutsche Welle*, March 30, 2021. [Irked Turks see Erdogan's hand in booze ban – DW – 04/30/2021](#).

*Focus, France 24*, March 7, 2019. [Last call for alcohol? Tough times for Turkey's winemakers and bar owners - Focus \(france24.com\)](#). *NPR*, June 7, 2013. [Not Everyone Cheers Turkey's Move To Tighten Alcohol Rules : The Salt : NPR](#).

<sup>31</sup> *Haram* is Arabic and denotes what is forbidden under Islamic Law. "Smoking is haram, Erdogan says," *duvaR.English*, October 21, 2019: [Smoking is haram, Erdoğan says \(duvarenglish.com\)](#).

'mayor' of occupied Kyrenia, announced the banning of alcohol consumption and cigarette smoking in public parks.<sup>32</sup>

While Islamic ambiance is ubiquitous, public buildings are decorated with Atatürk's portraits while Erdogan poses under them. All over Turkey, one finds portraits of Erdogan and Atatürk side by side.<sup>33</sup> Atatürk means "Father of the Turks," and his legacy cannot be erased. Slogans and banners hailing Atatürk are evident at public events. At the soccer game between Antalya and Fenerbahçe, that took place on September 29, 2024, there was a huge banner with the inscription, *Atatürk'ün Ordusu* (Atatürk's Army).<sup>34</sup> This was the 101 anniversary of September 29, 1923, when Kemal Atatürk declared Turkey as an independent republic. Overall, Turkey has been characterized by an Islamic ethos which is more pervasive in the interior. In coastal cities such as Istanbul (Constantinople) and Izmir (Smyrna), western ambiance is evident while it is intermingled with Islamic customs. There are over 85,000 mosques in Turkey. The muezzin's call to prayer (*adhan*) takes place five times a day, before dawn, noon, late afternoon, and nighttime. It is transmitted by loudspeakers from the minarets of the thousands of mosques. The muezzin's call that echoes all over, has a mesmerizing effect on pious Muslims who rush to recite their prayer (*namaz*) at the local mosque.<sup>35</sup>

A most evident sign of Islam's influence has been the proliferation of new mosques. *The New York Times Magazine* dedicated an edition to this subject.<sup>36</sup> The feature article carried the subtitle: "A building spree of houses of worship is furthering the Islamization of the country and providing an ongoing economic engine."<sup>37</sup> A considerable number of these mosques have been characterized by their grandiose style reminiscent of Ottoman glory.<sup>38</sup> President Erdogan, who entertains the aspiration to becoming the leader of the

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<sup>32</sup> "No more alcohol and cigarettes in parks in occupied Kyrenia," *Cyprus-Digest*, February 5, 2023: [No more alcohol and cigarettes in parks in occupied Kyrenia - cyprus-digest.com](https://www.cyprus-digest.com). See also, *Cyprus Times*, February 4, 2023.

<sup>33</sup> *The Arab Weekly*, November 18, 2018. [Ataturk vs Erdogan: Battle of the myths | | AW \(the-arab-weekly.com\)](https://www.the-arab-weekly.com).

The Guardian, November 17, 2017. [Nato apologises to Turkey after Erdogan and Ataturk appear on 'enemy chart' | Nato | The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com).

<sup>34</sup> [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KmaAaSPg\\_MU7mGgGplAHfyCNdB7duly7/view?usp=drivesdk](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KmaAaSPg_MU7mGgGplAHfyCNdB7duly7/view?usp=drivesdk)

<sup>35</sup> See video of call to prayer in Istanbul, Bursa and Konya: [Muslim \(Islamic\) Call to Prayer in Turkey \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com).

<sup>36</sup> See "Reading Erdogan's Ambitions in Turkey's New Mosques." *New York Times Magazine*, June 14, 2017. [Reading Erdogan's Ambitions in Turkey's New Mosques - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](https://www.nytimes.com).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

Islamic world, inaugurated such a mosque himself.<sup>39</sup> This took place on May 29, 2021. The date carries exceptional symbolism. On May 29, 1453, the Ottoman Sultan, Mehmet *Fatih* (Conqueror), captured Constantinople, which was defended by the last Byzantine Emperor, Constantine Paleologos. The Sultan's first act was to turn the Church of Hagia Sophia to a mosque. Hagia Sophia was considered the greatest church of Christendom and has a sacred meaning for Greeks and Greek Orthodox worldwide. Converting it to a mosque, was a highly symbolic act demonstrating the victory of the Muslim faithful over the *gavurlar* (infidels). In 1934, under Kemal Ataturk, Hagia Sophia became a museum. After 86 years, however, on July 10, 2020, Erdogan ordered the reconversion of Hagia Sophia to a mosque.<sup>40</sup> Subsequently, on July 24, 2020, Erdogan led Friday prayers in Hagia Sophia.<sup>41</sup> In a vivid demonstration of religious nationalism, a Muslim worshiper, wrapped in the Turkish flag, was shown standing in the middle of Hagia Sophia.<sup>42</sup> Outside, the plaza and the surrounding area were filled with huge crowds of Muslim faithful. Erdogan stated that the crowd reached 350,000.<sup>43</sup> They could watch the ceremony on large video screens

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<sup>39</sup> See the May 29, 2021, CNN report entitled: Erdogan inaugurates new mosque in heart of Istanbul. See the link: <https://www.cnn.com/2021/05/29/middleeast/turkey-mosque-istanbul-intl/index.html>.

<sup>40</sup> [Opinion | The Hagia Sophia Was a Cathedral, a Mosque, and a Museum. It's Converting Again. - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](#); (July 22, 2020); [Hagia Sophia: Turkey turns iconic Istanbul museum into mosque \(bbc.com\)](#) ; [Hagia Sophia: Turkey's Erdogan orders the conversion of museum back into a mosque | CNN \(July 26, 2020\)](#).

<sup>41</sup> "Muslim prayers in Hagia Sophia for first time in 86 years," *Aljazeera*, 24 July 2020. [Muslim prayers in Hagia Sophia for first time in 86 years | Recep Tayyip Erdogan News | Al Jazeera](#).

["Istanbul's Hagia Sophia opens as mosque for Muslims amid international criticism, CBC News, July 24, 2024. Istanbul's Hagia Sophia opens as mosque for Muslim prayers amid international criticism | CBC News](#)

"First Muslim prayers held in Hagia Sophia after 85 years," *Hürriyet Daily News*, July 24, 2020. <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/first-friday-prayers-held-in-hagia-sophia-after-mosque-reconversion-156812>.

Bethan McKernan in Istanbul, "Erdogan leads first prayers at Hagia Sophia reverted to mosque," The Guardian, July 24, 2020. [Erdogan leads first prayers at Hagia Sophia museum reverted to mosque | Turkey | The Guardian](#); Also, Bill Chappel, Peter Kenyon, "Hagia Sophia Hosts 1<sup>st</sup> Friday Prayers Since it was Turned back into A Mosque," NPR, July 24, 2020 [Hagia Sophia Hosts 1st Friday Prayers Since It Was Turned Back Into A Mosque : NPR](#) . Also, "Erdogan Fulfills Cherished Goal, Opens Hagia Sophia to Prayers," *New York Times*, July 24, 2020.

[Istanbul's Hagia Sophia Reopens as a Mosque - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](#).

<sup>42</sup> ["Istanbul's Hagia Sophia opens as mosque for Muslims amid international criticism, CBC News, July 24, 2024. Istanbul's Hagia Sophia opens as mosque for Muslim prayers amid international criticism | CBC News](#)

<sup>43</sup> *CBC News*, July 24, 2020 (Above)

as they prayed along with their president. From Hagia Sophia, Erdogan went and prayed at the nearby mosque of Mehmet the Conqueror.<sup>44</sup> All this represented a grave provocation to Greece and the Greek Orthodox world in general. Greece strongly condemned the turning of Hagia Sophia into a mosque. The president of Greece, Katerina Sakellariopoulou, denounced the Turkish action that “brutally insults not only the Orthodox Christians, but also all civilized humanity.”<sup>45</sup> She appealed to Pope Francis to intercede for the preservation of Hagia Sophia’s status quo.<sup>46</sup> On his part, Prime Minister Mitsotakis called the converting of Hagia Sophia to a mosque, “an affront to civilization of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” He added that, “universal values have been tarnished, and that is why they require universal condemnation.”<sup>47</sup> Greek Orthodox Churches around the globe including those of Greece, Cyprus, the United States, Canada and Australia, denounced the Turkish action as flagrant violation of human rights and religious freedom, holding special services and vigils. For the millions of Greek Orthodox Christians around the world, converting Hagia Sophia to a mosque, was an affront causing a deep wound. On July 12, 2020, Pope Francis stated, “I think of Hagia Sophia, and I am very saddened.”<sup>48</sup> Overall, Turkey’s highly provocative action, the converting of the sacred Hagia Sophia to a mosque, did not seem to have a bearing on Greek-Turkish relations.

In the aftermath of the 1974 invasion, following the footsteps of Islamic Turkey, more mosques were constructed in Cyprus’ occupied north.<sup>49</sup> They were modelled after the grandiose style of mosques in Turkey. In 2012, a new mosque, known as *Yeni Cami* (New Mosque) was inaugurated in occupied Famagusta.<sup>50</sup> President Erdogan was also expected to inaugurate a majestic new mosque, one of the most grandiose in the Mediterranean.<sup>51</sup> The inauguration was to take place on July 10, 2018, in Mia Milia near occupied Nicosia, but was cancelled. No reason was offered for the cancellation, but it is reasonable to

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/45243/hagia-sophia-greek-president-appeals-to-pope-francis-to-put-pressure-on-turkey>

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> [Pope Francis: 'I think of Hagia Sophia, and I am very saddened' - Vatican News](#)

<sup>49</sup> [Some New Mosques in Northern Cyprus \(youtube.com\).](#)

<sup>50</sup> New Mosque in occupied Famagusta. [New Mosque Yeni Cami Famagusta Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus Trnc Photograph by Joe Fox - Pixels.](#)

<sup>51</sup> See, [Parliamentary question | Funding by President Erdogan of the largest mosque in the Mediterranean, in occupied Cyprus | E-003787/2018 | European Parliament \(europa.eu\)](#). See also, article with a photograph of the new mosque in *Phileleftheros*, Nicosia, July 9, 2018, in link: <https://in-cyprus.philenews.com/local/erdogan-to-inaugurate-giant-mosque-in-occupied-north-cyprus/>

assume that it was associated with opposition among Turkish Cypriots. Included was the Turkish Cypriot Teachers' Union (TCTU). Şener Elcil, TCTU's Secretary General—he was awarded the European Citizen's Prize in 2016—stated that the mosque was part of a systematic attempt by Ankara “to Islamize the occupied territory,” that the Turkish Cypriots opposed.<sup>52</sup>

On January 11, 2024, another majestic mosque, known as the *Dr. Suat Günsel Mosque*, was inaugurated by the Turkish Vice President Cevdet Yılmaz.<sup>53</sup> The new mosque could accommodate 10,000 worshipers, has 62 domes, and six minarets.<sup>54</sup> The majestic architectural style of these mosques is distinctively different from that of traditional Ottoman mosques in the island.<sup>55</sup> Other aspects of Islamization included the increase of religious schools. In the year 2017, there were 162 schools in occupied Cyprus while the number of mosques rose to 212. Between 2,000-2017 there were 46 new mosques built, while since 1974 there were only 15 new schools.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>52</sup> See the link above, “Parliamentary question.”

<sup>53</sup> *Cyprus Mail*, Nicosia, January 11, 2024. [Turkish Vice President Yılmaz opens Cyprus' largest mosque \(Updated\) | Cyprus Mail \(cyprus-mail.com\)](#).

<sup>54</sup> See “Biggest mosque in Cyprus to open in the north Cyprus”, *Cyprus Mail*, Nov. 13, 2023. [Biggest mosque in Cyprus to open in the north | Cyprus Mail \(cyprus-mail.com\)](#) Also see *Simerini, Sigmalive*, November 13, 2023, “Opening of new mosque with leaders from Muslim countries attending. <https://www.sigmalive.com/news/kypriako/1162616/me-kalesmenous-arxigous-mousoulmanikon-xoron-anoigei-to-neo-tzami>. [Με καλεσμένους αρχηγούς μουσουλμανικών χωρών ανοίγει το νέο τζαμί - Sigmalive](#) See also *Financial Mirror*, “Largest Mosque inaugurated in north,” January 13, 2024. Link: <https://www.financialmirror.com/2024/01/13/largest-mosque-inaugurated-in-north/> .

<sup>55</sup> The most famous Ottoman Mosque in Cyprus is that of Hala Sultan, the Turkish form of Umm Haram. She was a near relative of Prophet Mohammed who has her place in early Islamic history. During the first Arab conquest of Cyprus between 647 and 649, Umm Haram was riding mule when she fell off and died. This occurred close to a Salt Lake near Larnaca that was under siege. She was buried where she died, and her tomb became a Muslim shrine. The Ottomans who ruled Cyprus for three centuries (1571-1878) built a mosque complex around the tomb. It was built in stages and completed in the late 18<sup>th</sup>-early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The mosque complex is known as the Hala Sultan Tekke, and her shrine is venerated by Muslims. The architectural style of Hala Sultan Tekke differs from the grandiose style of the mosques recently built in the occupied northern part of the island.

See the link: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/16df-ze09DVYWP16\\_phJGKVtT7Cin31dO/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/16df-ze09DVYWP16_phJGKVtT7Cin31dO/view?usp=sharing)

<sup>56</sup> Kostas Venizelos, *Εποικοι, ο τρίτος Αττίλας* (Settlers, the third Attila), SLpress, Athens, April 4, 2018. Link:

[Εποικοι, ο τρίτος Αττίλας - slpress.gr](#). Also, [Προς Ισλαμοποίηση τα κατεχόμενα \(Islamizing the occupied territory\)](#), Simerini, July 21, 2023: [Προς ισλαμοποίηση τα κατεχόμενα \(sigmalive.com\)](#) .

## Occupied Territory: Anatolian Settlers, Islamization, and Marginalization of Turkish Cypriots

The Turkish invasion in the summer of 1974, also brought about, a dramatic change in the demographic makeup of Cyprus. Up to 1973, Greek Cypriots constituted the overwhelming majority of 78.9%. The Turkish Cypriots minority represented 18.4%. In the immediate aftermath of the invasion, Turkey embarked upon the colonization of the newly conquered territory by Anatolian settlers.<sup>57</sup> There is a long history of colonization of conquered territories by Turkey since such colonization was a customary practice during Ottoman times. This was the case following the Ottoman conquest of Cyprus in 1571 that lasted three centuries until 1878. The late Halil Inalcik, was a Turkish scholar and prominent authority on the Ottoman Empire. In his article "Ottoman Methods of Conquest," he refers to the colonization of Cyprus immediately following the Ottoman conquest of the island in 1571:

To make the conquest secure, the Ottomans used an elaborate system of colonization and mass deportation (*surgun*). Evidently, mass deportation was a practice by the Ottomans state from the earliest time.<sup>58</sup>

Certainly, there are significant differences between the Ottoman conquest and colonization of Cyprus in 1571 and the Turkish invasion and occupation of 1974. Still, there is a basic similarity between the two cases. In both, the transfer of settlers from Anatolia commenced immediately after the occupation. In addition, in both cases, colonization represented a systematic policy of the Turkish government. Özker Özgür, the Turkish Cypriot opposition leader, revealed in July 1989, that the sending of settlers to Cyprus was the result of a top-secret decision by the Turkish government taken on September 2, 1975.<sup>59</sup> Traditionally, Turkish leaders aimed at the rapid increase of the Turkey's population. A large population was deemed necessary for Turkey's military might and its expansionist aims.<sup>60</sup> In this context, the transfer of settlers to Cyprus in the immediate aftermath of the Turkish invasion in 1974, represented a strategic decision by

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<sup>57</sup> For a comprehensive account of the colonization of occupied Cyprus with Anatolian Settlers, see Stavros Lygeros, "Τουρκοί εποικιστές στην Κύπρο," (Αρδην-Ρηξη) (Turkish Settlers in Cyprus), July 1, 1997.

<sup>58</sup> Halik Inalcik, "Ottoman Methods of Conquest," *Studia Islamica* 2, (1954): p. 123.

<sup>59</sup> Özgür article in [Yenidüzen](#) (Turkish Cypriot newspaper), July 10, 1989; cited in Lygeros, "Turkish settlers."

<sup>60</sup> Lygeros, "Turkish Settlers."

Ankara.<sup>61</sup> Settlers take root which inherently creates permanency. Combined with the settlers' massive influx that led to their outnumbering the Turkish Cypriots, Turkey aims at their subordination to Ankara's will. The ultimate Turkish objective has been to overturn the population proportion by turning the Turkish minority into a majority. In meetings with Turkish Cypriot leaders, Erdogan stressed the importance of increasing the TRNC population so that it exceeds that of the Greek Cypriots and reinforces Turkish territorial claims in Cyprus.<sup>62</sup> The transfer of settlers to the occupied territory was massive in scale, methodical, and executed in phases.<sup>63</sup> According to Lygeros: "The transfer of Turkish settlers did not aim only at reinforcing the Turkish element that was a minority in Cyprus, nor at the political control of the pseudo state [TRNC]. The primary objective has been to create the conditions for a future overturning the population proportion in the totality of Cypriot territory."<sup>64</sup> At an unsuspecting time (September 21, 1978), the British *Guardian* published a revealing report: "According to Ankara's plan, the Turkish population of northern Cyprus will increase from 120,000 to 290,000. Settlers from mainland Turkey and Turkish Cypriot expatriates, who had left Cyprus long time ago, will contribute to changing the population proportion between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriot. The target is two Turks to one Greek."<sup>65</sup> In meetings with Turkish Cypriot leaders, Erdogan stressed the importance of increasing the TRNC population so that it exceeds that of the Greek Cypriots and reinforce Turkish territorial claims in Cyprus.<sup>66</sup>

The settlers originated from Turkey's rural areas of the south, central, and eastern part.<sup>67</sup> They lived in backward conditions, while their family and social life revolved around Islamic traditions and customs. The settlers have a high birth rate and on average, a settler's family has four children, while a Turkish Cypriot family has two.<sup>68</sup> The Anatolian settlers exhibit a much more traditional outlook than the Turkish Cypriots. One indication

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<sup>61</sup> On the Turkish government's strategic decision to colonize Cyprus and its instrumental role in the recruitment and transfer of Anatolian settlers to occupied Cyprus, see Ioannides, *In Turkey's Image*, pp. 2-39, esp. 34-36. See also, Lygeros, "Turkish Settlers."

<sup>62</sup> Venizelos, *Settlers, the third Attila*.

<sup>63</sup> On the methodical transfer of Turkish settlers to occupied Cyprus, see, Lygeros, "Turkish Settlers in Cyprus."

<sup>64</sup> Lygeros, "Turkish Settlers in Cyprus."

<sup>65</sup> *Guardian*, September 9, 1978, in Lygeros, "Turkish Settlers in Cyprus."

<sup>66</sup> Venizelos, *Settlers, the third Attila*.

<sup>67</sup> Reported in the Turkish Cypriot newspaper, *Soz*, 18 April 1980.

<sup>68</sup> *Yeni Duzen* (Turkish Cypriot newspaper), August 29, 1991, in Lygeros, "Turkish settlers in Cyprus."

is evident in their colorful dress with women wearing the hijab (scarf).<sup>69</sup> Another indication, is the alleged polygamy among the settlers, but its extent is unclear. The settlers' massive numbers contributed to the Islamization-Turkification of the TRNC. The construction of new mosques is but one of the manifestations of Islam's pervasive role. In this regard, the settlers' all-encompassing Islamic outlook and practices contributed to social and cultural tensions in the occupied territory.<sup>70</sup> There has been increasing discontent among Turkish Cypriots. They were more secular in outlook, and they were increasingly concerned by the prospect of imposing an overwhelmingly Islamic socio-political order. These concerns led to public criticism of the settlers for what has been considered "immoral" behavior, referring to polygamy, and for being "arrogant." In May 1978, the Turkish Cypriot leader, Dr. Fazil Kutchuk, wrote a series of articles that were critical of the settlers.<sup>71</sup> A few years later, in March 1984, the renowned Turkish journalist, Mehmet Ali Birand, also authored an article critical of the settlers.<sup>72</sup> Since 1974, there have been two generations of settlers. In 25 years a third generation will emerge.

Settlers take root which inherently creates permanency. Combined with the settlers' massive influx, Turkey aims for the Turks to outnumber the Greeks on the island.

The exact number of settlers remains nebulous as the TRNC lacks transparency. The demographic data it has been providing is not verifiable and is meant to serve political objectives. The last reliable demographic data are those of 1973, the year prior to the invasion, when the Turkish Cypriots were estimated at 116,000.<sup>73</sup> Following the Turkish invasion many Turkish Cypriots, estimated 20,000, emigrated, mostly to Britain. By 1991, the estimates of the Turkish Cypriot population by 1991 were 70-80,000.<sup>74</sup> This decline took place after 1974 when an estimate of 20,000 Turkish Cypriots emigrated to Britain primarily, but also to Australia and Canada. As the influx of Anatolian settlers continued, Turkish Cypriot officials close to Ankara, labeled them in the fall of 1975, as "seasonal

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<sup>69</sup> Photograph of settlers outside the offices of the National Unity Party (a settlers' party) in the occupied part of Nicosia: <https://i0.wp.com/www.onisilos.gr/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/epoikoi-collage.jpg?fit=800%2C500&ssl=1>

See also, Venizelos, photograph in the article, "The Strategy of colonization and Islamization of occupied (Cyprus)." *Slpress*, August 18, 2018. [Στρατηγική εποικισμού και ισλαμοποίησης στα Κατεχόμενα - slpress.gr](http://www.slpress.gr).

<sup>70</sup> Coufoudakis, *Cyprus*, p. 88.

<sup>71</sup> See the Turkish Cypriot newspaper, *Halkin Sesi*, Nicosia, 24 and 25 May 1978.

<sup>72</sup> See *Milliyet*, Istanbul, 13 March, 1984.

<sup>73</sup> Based on official demographic data for 1973. See Republic of Cyprus, *Demographic Reports* (under varying titles) (Nicosia: Department of Statistics and Research, 1960-1988).

<sup>74</sup> *Ortam* (Turkish Cypriot newspaper), February 26, 1991, in Lygeros, "Turkish settlers in Cyprus."



workers, who arrived for crop gathering and returned to Turkey at the end of their contract."<sup>75</sup> In reality, most of them stayed behind. By the end of 1975, there were estimates of 22,000 settlers in the occupied territory.<sup>76</sup> The influx of settlers into occupied Cyprus was reported, among others, in the British media.<sup>77</sup> It has been estimated that between 1975 and the latter part of 1980, 70,000 settlers had colonized the occupied territory.<sup>78</sup> Since that time, the colonization has continued unabated, and by 1987, the settlers controlled 52% of the land in the occupied territory.<sup>79</sup> In the year 2000, estimates of the settlers were between 100,000 and 111,000.<sup>80</sup> In the year 2011, there was a census under unofficial UN supervision, which places limits over its accuracy. According to the results, the TRNC population was at the time 286,000, excluding the 40,000 strong occupation army and their families.<sup>81</sup> Considering that the estimates of the Turkish Cypriot population has been 70-80,000, this means that for the year 2011, the settlers were over 200,000. Taking the 2011 census as a basis, the population projection for 2022 was around 400,00. The deduction of 80,000 Turkish Cypriots, renders the settler population at 320,000. Mete Hatay of the PRIO Cyprus Center, who has been researching the TRNC demography, considers the figure of 400,000 settlers as undercounting. He stated: "We know that the population is *at least half a million* . . . in any case, at any given moment, *Turkish Cypriots are a minority* in the northern part of Cyprus."<sup>82</sup> (Emphasis added). In this case, with the Turkish Cypriots estimated at 70-80,00, the settlers account for 420,000. While it remains problematic to estimate the precise number of settlers, there is little

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<sup>75</sup> Statement by Osman Orek, a top Turkish Cypriot leader. See *The Guardian*, 15 October 1975.

<sup>76</sup> See the statistical data in Table 4: Turks Settling in Occupied Cyprus-Arrivals and Departures of Turkish Nationals in and from the TRNC (1974-1989). In Ioannides, *In Turkey's Image*, p. 30. For the table, the author combined three TRNC sources of relevant data: A) *Yearly Action Report* (Police General Directorate of the TRNC). Provides data from for 1974-1986. B) *The TRNC Statistical Yearbook, 1987; TRNC Prime Ministry* (Nicosia, December 1988). Provides data for 1981-1987. C) *Records of the Office of the Prime Minister of the TRNC*. Provides data for 1988-1989. In *ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>77</sup> See *The Guardian*, London, October 13 & 15, 1975. "The World Today," *BBC World Service*, October 15, 1975; *The Sunday Times*, London, September 26, 1976.

<sup>78</sup> See Venizelos, *op. cit.*

<sup>79</sup> *Soz*, Turkish Cypriot newspaper, April 1987, in Lygeros, "Turkish settlers in Cyprus."

<sup>80</sup> See Gregory R. Copley, "Turkey Falts on the Edge of Ataturk's Dream," *Defense and Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy: The Journal of the International Strategic Studies Association*, Alexandria, VA, vol. xxviii, no. 3, (March 2000) pp. 7-9. "Hard Line Party wins Turkish Cypriot Elections," *Associated Press*, December 8, 1988.

<sup>81</sup> See "Stark increase in north's population," *Cyprus Mail*, Nicosia, November 5, 2023. [Stark increase in north's population | Cyprus Mail \(cyprus-mail.com\)](https://www.cyprus-mail.com/news/stark-increase-in-norths-population).

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

doubt that the Turkish Cypriots have been marginalized, being swamped in a sea of Anatolian settlers. To the number of settlers, one should add the overbearing presence of a 40,000 strong Turkish occupation army that makes sure, that Ankara's policies are being carried out faithfully in the TRNC. The Turkish Cypriots are obliged to operate in such an asphyxiating environment which limits drastically the space where they can express an independent viewpoint.

### **The Council of Europe and Colonization**

A series of reports on the ongoing colonization of occupied Cyprus in Greek and other western media,<sup>83</sup> prompted the Council of Europe to initiate a formal investigation. It appointed Alfonse Cuco, a Spaniard, to prepare a report on the subject. Following a visit to Cyprus in 1991, including occupied Cyprus, he submitted his report to the Council of Europe on April 13, 1992, that was subsequently approved by the Council. The report included the following:

The establishment of Turkish settlers in the northern part of Cyprus is an undisputable fact...This influx of settlers has had a real impact on the structure of the population in the northern part of the island...The arrival and establishment of the Turkish settlers is the most notable demographic occurrence since 1974.<sup>84</sup>

A decade later, in March 2002, Jaakko Laakso, a Finnish Parliamentarian visited Cyprus to compile a report on the demography on the island focusing on the Turkish settlers. Subsequently, Laakso submitted his report to the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe, May 2, 2003. The summary of the document on the colonization of occupied Cyprus was as follows:

Since the *de facto* partition of Cyprus in 1974, the demographic structure of the island has been continuously modified as a result of the deliberate policies of the Turkish Cypriot administration. Despite the lack of consensus on the exact figures, all parties concerned admit that *Turkish nationals have been systematically arriving in the northern part of the island*. At the same time, *continuous outflow of the indigenous Turkish Cypriot population from*

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<sup>83</sup>See *The Guardian*, London, October 13 & 15, 1975. "The World Today," *BBC World Service*, October 15, 1975; *The Sunday Times*, London, September 26, 1976.

<sup>84</sup> See the *Report on the Demographic Structure of Cypriot Communities* (Rapporteur, Mr. Alfonse Cuco, (Spain). Council of Europe, ADOC 6589-32/4/92-4-E, pp. 30-40.

*the northern part may be observed. In consequence, the settlers have outnumbered the indigenous Turkish Cypriot population.*

The policy of "naturalisation" implemented by the Turkish Cypriot administration encourages new arrivals and favours the process of *hidden colonisation which results in the modification of the demographic structure of the whole island* and constitutes a source of tension and dissatisfaction among the indigenous population.<sup>85</sup> (Emphasis added)

Through its meticulous reports, the Council of Europe established through well documented data, that the Turkish government was carrying out a massive colonization of occupied Cyprus that was in violation of the Geneva Convention. Turkey ignored the reports.

### **The TRNC, an appendix of Turkey**

The massive introduction of settlers had a lasting political impact since it affected the nature of the regime, which was established in the occupied territory under Turkey's auspices. Accordingly, on February 13, 1975, under Ankara's watchful eye a governing structure was created in the occupied territory. A Turkish Cypriot "constitution" established the "Turkish Federated State of Cyprus," (TFSC). It was granted jurisdiction to grant "citizenship" to the settlers. By the end of March 1980, it is estimated that 290 settlers became "citizens".<sup>86</sup> On November 15, 1983, under the umbrella of the Turkish occupation army, the Turkish Cypriot "Legislative Assembly" announced the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) and proclaimed that the Cypriot territory under occupation is becoming an "independent state." It was named the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" (TRNC). The TRNC's *raison d'être* is to serve Turkey's geopolitical interests. Rauf Denktash, who died in 2012, was the TRNC's founding "president" (1983-2005). He had considerable clout on his own right and Ankara took him seriously. Since 2020, the "president" of TRNC is Ersin Tatar. He functions as Turkey's Proconsul rather than the representative of the Turkish Cypriot community which has been marginalized by the overwhelming presence of Anatolian settlers.

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<sup>85</sup> For a complete report by the Council of Europe on the Turkish colonization of occupied Cyprus, see, *Colonization by Turkish settlers of the occupied part of Cyprus*, Doc. 9799, 2 May 2002. Committee on Migration, Refugees and Demography. [Colonisation by Turkish settlers of the occupied part of Cyprus \(coe.int\)](https://www.coe.int/en/web/migration/colonisation-by-turkish-settlers-of-the-occupied-part-of-cyprus).

<sup>86</sup> See the report in a Turkish newspaper by Erdogan Ozbalikki, "New Citizens from Turkey, *Aydin*, Istanbul, 18 April 1980. See also the Turkish Cypriot newspaper, *Soz*, Nicosia, 16 April 1980.

The TRNC kept up the granting of “citizenship” to the settlers. Consequently, the great majority of settlers were granted “citizenship.”<sup>87</sup> By virtue of being “citizens,” the settlers have been incorporated into the body politic of TRNC. They established political parties, such as the National Unity Party, they vote in elections, run for office, and become “ministers” in the TRNC “government.”<sup>88</sup> The combination of the dominant role of the settlers with the asphyxiating presence of the occupation army, have led to what Coufoudakis characterized, as the “the ghettoization and isolation of the Turkish Cypriots.”<sup>89</sup> What becomes clear is that successive colonization by settlers, combined with their high birth rate, resulted in the settlers’ becoming the great majority of TRNC’s population. In the process, the Turkish Cypriots have been reduced to a marginalized minority. This increased their discontent as many come to realize that Turkey’s primary objective in the TRNC has not been their welfare. Rather, it serves as Turkey’s appendix that advances its geopolitical interests. The settlers served as a critical tool to this effect by becoming instrumental in the Islamization of the occupied territory (TRNC).

Still, even though the Turkish Cypriots have been marginalized, there has been evidence of opposition especially among the left, intellectuals, and trade unions. They are against the asphyxiating embrace by Turkey, favoring a dialogue with the Greek Cypriots to reach a political settlement. Prominent figures among the Turkish Cypriot opposition include, Sener Levent, a courageous journalist who owns the newspaper *Avrupa*. His articles are widely read since they are published in *Politis*, a Greek Cypriot daily newspaper. In addition, the Union of Turkish Cypriot Teachers Association (UTCA) favors cooperation with the Greek Cypriots. Sener Elcil, the UTCA former Secretary General and currently president of the Arif Hassan Tahsin Foundation, has been critical of Turkey and its occupation army. He called the TRNC “government” subservient to Turkey, and among others, he received the support of the leftist Pancyprian Labor Federation (PEO).<sup>90</sup> Elcil has

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<sup>87</sup> Coufoudakis, *Cyprus*, p. 88.

<sup>88</sup> Christos Ioannides, “Turkish-Controlled Cyprus: The Consolidation of Occupation,” in Rossides and Coufoudakis, *The U.S. and Cyprus*, p. 127.

<sup>89</sup> Coufoudakis, *Cyprus*, p. 88.

<sup>90</sup> The UTCA called the occupied territory a subservient administration to Turkey: [Υποτελής διοίκηση της Τουρκίας τα κατεχόμενα λέει η συντεχνία των Τουρκοκυπρίων δασκάλων \(rik.cy\)](http://www.rik.cy).

The UTCA also declared that “we are not represented by Tatar.” «Δεν μας εκπροσωπεί ο Τατάρ» αναφέρει η «συντεχνία» των δασκάλων | [Cyprus Times](http://www.cypriostimes.com) (August 8, 2022). Also, PEO issued a message of

Solidarity to Sener Elcil: [ΜΗΝΥΜΑ ΑΛΛΗΛΕΓΓΥΗΣ ΤΗΣ ΠΕΟ ΜΕ ΤΟΝ ΣΕΝΕΡ ΕΛΤΖΙΛ ΚΑΙ ΤΗΝ ΚΤΟΣ - Παγκύπρια Εργατική Ομοσπονδία \(peo.org.cy\)](http://www.peo.org.cy).

also been a vocal critic of the occupied territory's colonization by Anatolian settlers.<sup>91</sup> However, Turkish Cypriot opposition while noticeable, has limited impact since Turkey's overbearing presence in the TRNC stifles dissent. Furthermore, the TRNC has created a "state" bureaucracy that can distribute resources and create dependence for the Turkish Cypriots.<sup>92</sup>

### **Maritime and Expansionism: The Doctrine of *Mavi Vatan* (Blue Homeland)**

Since TRNC's establishment in 1983, Ankara intensified its efforts to have the international community recognize it as a separate independent state in equality with the Republic of Cyprus. This effort, however, elicited little support. The government of the Republic of Cyprus enjoys universal recognition as the legitimate government of the island republic under its President, Nikos Christodoulides. Turkey is the only country that recognizes the TRNC. As such, however, the occupied territory has been increasingly becoming a geostrategic asset with land, air, naval, and other military facilities aimed to project Turkish power in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. For this purpose, Turkey planned a major naval base at Bogazi. in the Karpasia Peninsula. Likewise, Ankara is expanding the airport of Lefkonoiko.<sup>93</sup> In a highly symbolic move, Turkey demonstrated its might on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its invasion, by dispatching a naval armada of 50 ships near the occupied port of Kyrenia. Attending the celebrations was Turkish President Erdogan standing side by side with so the called TRNC "President," Ersin Tatar.<sup>94</sup> The armada's showcase was the "Anadolu," the Turkish-made amphibious helicopter carrier.<sup>95</sup> The armada also included nine helicopters, three maritime patrol planes, and a Bayraktar TB-3 unmanned aerial vehicle. Frigates, patrol boats and rescue ships were on display for the

<sup>91</sup> See *Philenews*, Nicosia, August 24, 2024: [Trade unionist condemns "disappearance of Turkish Cypriots" through population transfers | in-cyprus.com \(philenews.com\)](https://www.philenews.com/in-cyprus/trade-unionist-condemns-disappearance-of-turkish-cypriots-through-population-transfers).

Kostas Venizelos, "Τουρκοκυπριοι ακτιβιστες ξεσηκωνονται εναντιον του εποικισμου των κατεχομενων" (Turkish Cypriot activist rise against the colonization of the occupied territory), *slpress*, August 22, 2024: [Τουρκοκύπριοι ακτιβιστές ξεσηκώνονται εναντίον του εποικισμού των Κατεχομένων – For this slpress.gr](https://www.slpress.gr/Τουρκοκυπριοι-ακτιβιστες-ξεσηκωνονται-εναντιον-του-εποικισμου-των-κατεχομενων)

<sup>92</sup> On the role of bureaucracy in the TRNC, see Lygeros, "Turkish Settlers in Cyprus."

<sup>93</sup> [Ποιο είναι το σχέδιο Ερντογάν για την κατεχόμενη Κύπρο - Militaire.gr](https://www.militaire.gr/2024/07/20/ποιο-ειναι-το-σχεδιο-ερντογαν-για-την-κατεχομενη-κυπρο/). (What is Erdogan's plan for occupied Cyprus). Also, [Κατασκευάζουν ναυτική βάση στο κατεχόμενο Μπογάζι - slpress.gr](https://www.slpress.gr/2024/07/20/κατασκευαζουν-ναυτικη-βαση-στο-κατεχομενο-μπογαζι/) (Constructing a base at occupied Bogazi).

<sup>94</sup> Erdogan calls for a two-state solution during his illegal visit to the occupied territory, Cyprus Broadcasting Corp., July 20, 2024. [Σε λύση 2 κρατών αναφέρθηκε στην παράνομη επίσκεψή του στα κατεχόμενα ο Ερντογάν \(rik.cy\)](https://www.rik.cy/2024/07/20/σε-λυση-2-κρατων-αναφερθηκε-στην-παρانونη-επισκεψη-του-στα-κατεχομενα-ο-ερντογαν/)

<sup>95</sup> "Turkish navy launches UAV and helicopter carrier TGG Anadolu," *Euronews*, April 11, 2023. [Turkish Navy launches UAV and helicopter carrier TCG Anadolu \(youtube.com\)](https://www.euronews.com/en/2023/04/11/turkish-navy-launches-uav-and-helicopter-carrier-tcg-anadolu/).

public to visit. All this reflected Ankara's ambition to project power in the Eastern Mediterranean and beyond, a clear message to Cyprus and Greece as well. This is consistent with the recent Turkish ideological construct behind the doctrine of *Mavi Vatan* (Blue Homeland) that is inherently expansionist.<sup>96</sup> It was first promoted by the retired Turkish admiral, Cem Gurdeniz, during a symposium organized in 2006 by the Operational Center of the Turkish Naval Forces.<sup>97</sup> In this vein--the *Mavi Vatan* military march, Prime Minister Erdogan performs the role of narrator. In a highly animated fashion, he glorifies the Ottoman navy which provides the backdrop to today's Turkey naval power and exhorts the Turks to find inspiration in their ancestors.<sup>98</sup> The *Mavi Vatan* doctrine aims at elevating Turkey to a major maritime power in the Mediterranean Sea. In an article published by the *Center for International Maritime Security* (2021) it is pointed out that: "*Mavi Vatan* has increasingly gained prominence both domestically and as component of Turkey's foreign policy, which in the last half-decade has become increasingly aggressive and securitized, with anti-western, anti-US outlook as a central organizing principle."<sup>99</sup> Greece abides by the Law of the Sea that regulates navigation in the Aegean. On its part, however, Ankara has been disputing Greek sovereign rights in the Aegean and the Greek islands and challenges the Greek maritime boundaries determined by international treaties. Since 1974, Turkey has been routinely violating the Greek airspace and Greek territorial waters in the Aegean. This led to periodic crises and on two occasions, in March 1987 and January 1996, Greece and Turkey came close to war.

Turkey's *Mavi Vatan* doctrine extends far beyond the Aegean. Inherent in this doctrine is the securing of energy sources for Turkey that has an overwhelming dependence on foreign oil. This is behind Ankara's seeking maritime rights and reaching as far as North Africa and oil-rich Libya. In November 2019, Turkey and Libya signed a maritime deal that

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<sup>96</sup> Jeff Jager and Andrew Norris, "The Mavi Vatan Doctrine and the Blue Homeland Anthem: A Look at Turkey's Maritime Worldview," *Center for International Maritime Security* (CIMSEC), September 27, 2021. Also, [Turkey's "Mavi Vatan" Strategy and Rising Insecurity in the Eastern Mediterranean | Center for International Maritime Security \(cimsec.org\)](#). Also, Brian Gingeras, Blue Homeland: The Heated Political Politics Behind Turkey's Maritime Strategy, *War on the Rocks*, June 2, 2020. [Blue Homeland: The Heated Politics Behind Turkey's New Maritime Strategy - War on the Rocks](#). For the *Mavi Vatan* doctrine, see also the thorough study by Γραμματική Κορτεση, *Το Τουρκικό Ιδεολογικό της Γαλαζίας Πατρίδας από τη σκοπία της Ελλάδας και της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης* (The Turkish ideological construct of the Blue Motherland from the perspective of Greece and the European Union), Jean Monnet European Center of Excellence & The National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, October 2020. [\\*ΚΟΡΤΕΣΗ ΓΑΛΑΖΙΑ ΠΑΤΡΙΔΑ FINAL.pdf \(jmce.gr\)](#).

<sup>97</sup> Jager and Norris, "The Mavi Vatan Doctrine."

<sup>98</sup> See the video of the *Mavi Vatan March*: [Mavi Vatan Marşı \(youtube.com\)](#). Erdogan is the narrator.

<sup>99</sup> Jager and Norris, "The Mavi Vatan Doctrine," CIMSEC.

expanded Turkish maritime rights through a Turkish-Libya sea corridor. This was characterized as the “Mavi Vatan Doctrine in Action.”<sup>100</sup> The Turkish-Libyan sea corridor drew strong objections from Greece, Cyprus, and Egypt, with Athens expelling the Libyan Ambassador.<sup>101</sup> The Mavi Vatan doctrine was also extended to the Adriatic Sea. Since the end of the Cold War, relations between Turkey and Albania have thrived. However, these relations go back to the Ottoman times and provide the foundation for the close relations between Turkey and Albania. Its Muslim population is by far the largest sect representing 45.8% of the total population. To this one should the Muslim Bektashi Order that represents 4.8.% of the population. Roman Catholics represent 8.4% and Eastern Orthodox 7.2%.<sup>102</sup> Under Erdogan Turkey developed even closer ties with Albania. On January 17, 2022, Erdogan, leading a large delegation, visited Albania where he received a warm welcome by Prime Minister Edi Rama. Albania had been hit by a devastating earthquake in November 2019 when many residential buildings collapsed. Mindful of this, the Turkish President inaugurated a large residential and commercial complex in the city of Lac at the cost was 42 million Euros (44.29 US Dollars). All of it was covered by Turkey as a gesture to the people of Albania. In Tirana, the Albanian capital, Erdogan along with Rama, inaugurated the renovated Hajji Et’hem Bey mosque and signed a series of bilateral cooperation agreements.<sup>103</sup> In October 2024, Erdogan paid another visit to Albania which asserted the close strategic partnership between the two countries. It included the use of naval facilities at Durres, Albanian’s largest port. Earlier, on August 2, 2023, two Turkish warships docked in the Durres port as part of a joint naval exercise.<sup>104</sup> Turkey is a major

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<sup>100</sup> See Bulent Alhas, “Turkish Eurasianist Approach in Libya: The Mavi Vatan Doctrine in Action.” *Eurasia Peace*, November 6, 2023: [Turkish Eurasianist Approach in Libya: The Mavi Vatan Doctrine in Action \(eurasiapeace.org\)](https://eurasiapeace.org)

<sup>101</sup> Aykan Erdemir, “Turkey-Libya Maritime Border Deal Escalates Tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean.” *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, Washington DC, December 10, 2019.

<sup>102</sup> Albanian Institute of Statistics, “[Population and Housing Census 2023](#)” (PDF). *Instituti i Statistikës (INSTAT)*

<sup>103</sup> See. “Albania-Turkey.” <https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Albania/Albania-Turkey-Erdogan-s-visit-boosts-the-bilateral-relationship-215218>

<sup>104</sup> “Warships of Turkish navy docked at Durres port. ATAT, Tirana, August 2, 2023”: <https://en.ata.gov.al/2023/08/02/warships-of-turkish-navy-docked-at-durres-port-for-exercise-purposes/>

“Turkish warships visit Albania for a six-day stay in framework of a joint exercise in open sea.” *Balkan Overview, Current Events*, 2 August 2023. <https://www.argumentum.al/en/turkish-warships-visit-albania-for-a-six-day-stay-in-framework-of-a-joint-exercise-in-open-sea/>

trading partner of Albania while Ankara has invested heavily in a variety of sectors.<sup>105</sup> The highlight of Erdogan's visit in October 2024, was the inauguration in Tirana, of the Namazgha mosque, the largest in the Balkans.<sup>106</sup> The mosque's was Turkey's gift to Albania at a cost at 30 million US Dollars. It has a dome of 30 meters, four 50 meters high minarets, and it can accommodate 8,000 people.<sup>107</sup> In addition, Erdogan promised to provide Albania an unspecified number of the well-known Bayraktar drones. All these demonstrate that Ankara's *Mavi Vatan* doctrine was extended to the Adriatic Sea

By invoking the *Mavi Vatan* doctrine, Turkey acts on the base of what it considers its entitlement to extend its influence throughout the Middle East and the Mediterranean. In this vein, given Cyprus' strategic location, Turkey's military control of its occupied northern part, serves well Ankara's broader strategic objectives. The *Mavi Vatan* is consistent with Erdogan's grandiose ambition for Turkey to become not only a dominant regional power, but also the leader of the Islamic world that deserves a place in the league of the major world powers.<sup>108</sup> Consequently, Erdogan has been using Islam as a primary tool to advance Turkey's foreign policy objectives on a global scale.<sup>109</sup> Sponsoring the building of mosques has become a major instrument in the exercise of Turkish soft power abroad. "In countries from Latin America to sub-Saharan Africa, Turkey is building mosques, financing

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<sup>105</sup> "Turkish investments in Albania, sectors where they are located and trade balance." Euronews, September 10, 2024.: <https://euronews.al/en/turkish-investments-in-albania-sectors-where-they-are-located-and-trade-balance/>

<sup>106</sup> President Erdogan inaugurates largest mosque in the Balkans: <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/president-erdogan-inaugurates-largest-mosque-in-balkans>.  
<https://www.arabnews.com/node/2574799/world>. See also "Erdogan unveils present to Albania: The biggest mosque in the Balkans." <https://greekreporter.com/2024/10/10/erdogan-unveils-albania-biggest-mosque-balkans-southeastern-europe/>

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Kali Robinson, "Turkey's Growing Foreign Policy Ambitions," Council of Foreign Relations, July 11, 2023. Also [Turkey's Growing Foreign Policy Ambitions | Council on Foreign Relations \(cfr.org\)](#). Also, Henry Barkey, "How Erdogan Muscled Turkey the Center of the World Stage," Council of Foreign Relations, October 30, 2020. [How Erdogan Muscled Turkey to the Center of the World Stage | Council on Foreign Relations \(cfr.org\)](#). See also, Ryan Bohl, "A Final Term for Turkey's Erdogan in the Age of Annexation." Stratfor, KANE World View, June 8, 2023: [A Final Term for Turkey's Erdogan in the Age of Annexation \(stratfor.com\)](#).

<sup>109</sup> Scott Peterson, "In Turkey, Erdogan fans an Islamic nationalism to build Ottoman-like influence," *Christian Science Monitor*, February 12, 2017. [In Turkey, Erdoğan fans an Islamic nationalism to build Ottoman-style influence - CSMonitor.com](#).



religious education, restoring Ottoman heritage-and advertising its unique brand of Islamic leadership along the way.”<sup>110</sup>

Despite the catastrophic blow that the Turkish invasion inflicted upon Cyprus in 1974, the free part of the island republic was able to recover and advance economically and socially. This constitutes a remarkable achievement that enabled Cyprus to meet the required European Union criteria for membership. On May 1, 2004, Cyprus became a full EU member. Since then, it progressed even further and has become an overall prosperous and cosmopolitan country with an equal voice to that of its EU partners. All this, in sharp contrast to the Turkish occupied north where over two thirds of the island’s productive capacity was located at the time of the 1974 invasion. Yet, the TRNC, flooded by settlers and enjoying the largesse of the Turkish government, remains parochial in outlook and far behind the Republic of Cyprus in social and economic indicators. Looking back, fifty years since the Turkish invasion and occupation, Turkey cemented the island’s partition creating a mini-Turkey in the occupied territory, which has been swamped by Anatolian settlers and remains backward. On the other hand, the Republic of Cyprus that controls the free part of the island, has not only survived, but represents a vibrant democracy and a prosperous society. Still, the island republic endures the trauma of dismemberment by Turkey.

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<sup>110</sup> Gonul Tol, “Turkey’s Bid for Religious Leadership: How AKP Uses Islamic soft Power,” *Foreign Affairs*, January 10, 2019. [How Erdogan Exports Turkish Islam | Foreign Affairs](#)