



CIVIL SOCIETY AND DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS IN THE NORTHERN PART OF CYPRUS:

Monitoring Report on the Right to Freedom of Association and Peaceful Assembly in the northern part of Cyprus

January 2023 - December 2023



Funded by
the European Union

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Platformu
Human Rights Platform

Monitoring Report on the
Right to Freedom of Association and Peaceful Assembly
in the northern part of Cyprus
January 2023 - December 2023

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2023 Democratic Rights Monitoring Report, prepared by the Human Rights Platform (HRP), provides a comprehensive analysis of the situation of civil society in the northern part of Cyprus for the period January to December 2023. It focuses particularly on issues such as access to public funds and participation in the decision-making processes of the 'administration'. The report aims to evaluate the legal, financial, and operational framework that supports civil society, with an emphasis on the rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly. The main findings of the report are as follows:

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION: Despite 'constitutional' protections, a range of legal and bureaucratic barriers still severely restrict the freedom of association. Particularly affected are foreign nationals, students, and refugees who face substantial barriers when trying to form or join associations.

PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY: Although the right to peaceful assembly is safeguarded at the 'constitutional' level, the applicable 'legislation' is outdated and obstructs access to this right, leading to arbitrary practices. However, it has been observed that 'police' interventions that could be perceived as rights violations were limited in number during the protests of 2023. According to the 'attorney general's office' and the 'supreme court', three 'citizens' faced charges under 'articles 70 and 71 of the criminal code', which address 'unlawful' assembly and rioting. Another important issue is the repression of 'public officials' participating in strikes or demonstrations. These repressions have been marked by salary cuts, frequent strike prohibitions by the 'council of ministers', intimidating written warnings from the 'administration', and demands for protesters to provide statements to the 'police'. It is also noteworthy that despite the prolonged mass demonstrations and protests throughout 2023, the 'government' routinely passed the 'bills' that provoked these backlashes, without sufficient attempt towards a constructive dialogue.

'STATE'-CIVIL SOCIETY RELATIONS: The approach of the 'government' to civil society organisations (CSOs) varies significantly. Within this context, the 'government' supports organisations that align with its own ideologies and interests, while marginalising rights-based organisations that critique its policies, and choosing to obstruct their access to public funds.

FUNDING AND SUSTAINABILITY: Access to financial resources remains a significant challenge for CSOs. Public funding is limited, lacking transparency and defined criteria, making it nearly impossible for rights-based organisations to access these funds. A substantial portion of the 2023 budget allocated for civil society has been redirected elsewhere. Petitions submitted by the Human Rights Platform (HRP) to the relevant 'public institutions' have gone unanswered, with decision-makers showing a reluctance to disclose information on this issue. An analysis of the 'ministry of finance's' budget reveals no details on how the substantial allocations for grants are spent.

PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES: Interaction between the 'government' and civil society is minimal. Consultation meetings typically include organisations that are favourable to the 'government', while independent and rights-based organisations are excluded from the decision-making processes. Recommendations to remedy these issues include improving the legal framework for civil society, ensuring transparent and equitable access to 'public funds', enhancing dialogue between the 'government' and CSOs, and safeguarding the rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly.

INTRODUCTION

In its initial monitoring activity of 2022, the Human Rights Platform (HRP) focused on the legal framework and related practices within the framework of Freedom of Association and Peaceful Assembly, with the objective of assessing the enabling environment for civil society in the northern part of Cyprus.¹ This effort also laid the groundwork for future monitoring and reporting activities. Within the context of freedom of association, which forms one pillar of this matter, the focus was on the 'regulations' and restrictions concerning the association registration process and the oversight by the 'administration'; fundraising, use of funds, and financial incentives; and civil society's participation in decision-making processes. Under the heading of the Freedom of Peaceful Assembly, an integral component of the Freedom of Association and a form of collective expression, the monitoring report addressed the authorisation and notification processes, restrictions imposed on this right, and the general approach of 'law enforcement officials' towards the freedom of peaceful assembly. Freedom of expression, inherently both an individual and collective right, was analysed in a separate report. This new report, a continuation of the initial monitoring report, provides a comparative analysis of the rights violations identified and highlighted in 2022 and related developments. In the thematic analysis section, the report analyses the approach of the 'political authority' towards various CSOs such as rights- or service-oriented associations, trade unions, and professional associations, as well as their participation in decision-making processes and access to funds.

METHODOLOGY

In 2023, a monitoring plan was developed to track violations of democratic rights and related developments, with indicators established to take into account environmental impacts. These indicators also used in 2022, facilitated the comparison between 2022 and 2023. Consultations were held with the team of the EU-funded Civic Space Technical Assistance Project and the Civil Society Initiative Association (SiTi), both instrumental in fostering an enabling environment for civil society. CSOs operating across various regions and focusing on different issues form the target group of this monitoring. They were contacted, and relevant information was gathered. Additionally, an interview was conducted with the managers of an accounting firm that frequently collaborates with CSOs. Alongside a media scan, websites of relevant 'institutions' such as the 'presidency', 'parliament', 'ministry of interior', 'ministry of finance', and others were reviewed, and data obtained from these and other sources were analysed. In reporting the data, the principle of non-harm to victims was adhered to; case examples were anonymised, and subjects were informed and consent obtained for the use of their information. Within the framework of the monitoring, petitions were submitted under the 'law on right to information' to the secretariat general of the 'supreme court', the 'attorney general's office', the 'police general directorate', 'parliament', the 'prime ministry', the 'deputy prime minister's office', the 'ministry of tourism, culture, youth and environment', the 'ministry of economy and energy', the 'ministry of finance', the 'ministry of interior', and the 'district governor's offices' of Nicosia, Famagusta, Trikomo/Iskele, Morphou/Güzelyurt, Lefka/Lefke, and Kyrenia, requesting data on both freedom of assembly and freedom of association. However, as reported in 2022, challenges in accessing the right to information continued for all civil society, particularly for those CSOs engaged in monitoring activities. No response was received to any petition regarding funds allocated to civil society. The Trikomo/Iskele 'district governor's office' outright refused to accept the petition, while the Nicosia and Central 'district governors' offices' did not respond to the petitions despite the persistence.

¹ https://insanhaklariplatformu.eu/uploads/o%CC%88rgu%CC%88tlenme_raporu_SMALL.pdf

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2023 was a challenging year marked by global conflicts, mass migrations and the subsequent rise of nationalist right-wing politics, the climate and economic crises, the decline of democracy and the increase in human rights violations. In Africa, the Americas and Asia, and even in Europe—the cradle of democracy and freedom—a series of alarming news on democracy and human rights unfolded. There was a notable surge in the repression of dissenting groups and minorities. Authoritarian leadership and practices escalated, leading to increased restrictions on fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression, assembly, and the press.²

In the northern part of Cyprus, democracy and human rights faced several challenges. For instance, during Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's visit to the region following his re-election on 28 May 2023, a journalist known for his opposition views was barred from entering the 'presidential office' where meetings with Turkish Cypriot and Turkish officials were held. Following the devastating earthquake in Turkey on 6 February 2023, which claimed the lives of 49 Turkish Cypriots, a significant portion of the public budget, particularly funds allocated to civil society, was redirected to aid the earthquake victims.³ The disaster brought building safety into sharp focus, particularly schools, leading to students being relocated to prefabricated classrooms and tents, which sparked protests and demonstrations by trade unions, parents, and students. The economy, inflation and the rise of the foreign currency have diminished people's purchasing power. Trade unions and CSOs organised numerous protests addressing issues such as the economy, education, energy, healthcare, civil rights of public employees, freedom of expression, women's rights, increasing traffic accidents and the environment.⁴ Furthermore, the trial of Basın-Sen President Ali Kışmır, who faced up to 10 years in prison for an article he wrote in 2020, commenced in October. The trial, which elicited reactions from many CSOs, including press organisations, had not concluded by the end of 2023.⁵ Another major issue was the *fake prescription investigation*, initiated after the 'minister of labour and social security' filed a criminal charge with the 'police general directorate' (PGD) regarding prescription fraud. Legal actions were taken against 74 individuals, including many doctors and pharmacists. What sparked outrage was that they were taken to 'court' in handcuffs and held under very poor conditions throughout their detention. The fact that elderly people and those who had held important 'public' positions in the past, and respected by the community, were also subjected to the same treatment, further fuelled the outcry.

² https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/FIW_World_2023_DigitalPDF.pdf

³ Detailed information with references is provided on page 20-21

⁴ Detailed information with references is provided on page 10-15

⁵ Detailed information on this issue can be found in the 2023 Human Rights Platform Freedom of Expression Report.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF 2022 FINDINGS AND RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN 2023

As noted in the 2022 report, the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of association are protected by the 'constitution'. However, the presence of open-ended criteria such as *public morality*, used to restrict these rights, continued to pose potential issues, particularly for LGBTI+ and other vulnerable groups exercising their rights to peaceful assembly and association. The 2022 monitoring report highlighted that the 'constitution's' recognition of these rights and freedoms solely for 'citizens' is incompatible with international conventions that have been incorporated into 'domestic law'. This poses a significant barrier to accessing human rights for foreign students, workers, and refugees in the northern part of Cyprus.

International conventions, such as the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which are ratified by 'laws' and incorporated into 'domestic law', are crucial for protecting these rights. However, in 2023, in the case known as the *Caricature Case*,⁶ the 'supreme court' explicitly stated that if local 'legislation' conflicts with the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgments, the judiciary shall prioritise local 'legislation', causing serious concern among civil society.

A. LEGAL FRAMEWORK IN THE CONTEXT OF FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

Overview of Civil Society Organizations: Establishment, Membership, Objectives, and Restrictions

The right to form associations and/or to be a member of established associations is, in principle, granted only to 'citizens' ('nationals') who have reached the age of 18. However, the rights of foreigners to form an association or to be members of established associations are separately regulated in the 'law'. The relevant 'regulations' include restrictions that hinder access to this right. According to 2023 data from the 'district governors' offices' in the northern part of Cyprus, six foreign associations are registered in the Kyrenia region alone. Four of these are community organisations established by foreigners residing in the northern part of Cyprus, one is a sports association, and another is a consultancy and assistance association.

⁶ <https://www.yeniduzen.com/karikatur-davasinda-ikinci-beraat-167009h.htm>

'Regulations' Regarding the Association Registration Process and 'Administrative' Oversight

No changes were made to the relevant 'laws' in 2023. The provisions of the 'law' do not make the establishment of associations subject to permission. However, as clearly stated on the website of the 'ministry of interior', the 'ministry' completes its investigation of the founding members of the association that has applied for registration and examines the Association Statute in terms of compliance with the 'law', then forwards it to the 'district governors' offices'. If approved by the 'district governors' offices' with the endorsement of the 'ministry', the applicant association shall be registered in the Associations Registry.⁷ This procedure continues to contradict both the 'constitution' and the 'law on associations'. Therefore, in the context of freedom of association, practices that are still far from meeting international standards have persisted.

For a more in-depth analysis of the current situation regarding the issue, requests for the list of associations in all regions, including those registered in 2023, were submitted to the 'central district governor's office' and all other 'district governors' offices' under the 'law on access to information'. While the Kyrenia, Famagusta, Morphou/Güzelyurt, and Lefka/Lefke 'district governors' offices' responded to the petitions, the Nicosia 'district governor's office' and central 'district governor's office' did not respond to the petitions despite the persistence.⁸ The Trikomo/Iskele 'district governor's office' outright refused to accept the petition. For these reasons, detailed information could not be provided as the number of associations registered with the Nicosia 'district governor's office' is significantly higher than in other districts.

Another issue that arises is in the approval process of association statutes. Procedurally—although not mandated by the 'law'—the statutes of associations are sent by the 'district governors' offices' to the 'legal department (attorney general's office)' for review. However, delays persist due to a shortage and inadequacy of legal staff within the relevant 'state' units. Similar issues apply to associations that amend their statutes during general assemblies. Despite six months having elapsed since the HRP and SiTi amended their statutes in the beginning of 2023, their approvals had not occurred within the timeframe covered by this report. According to information from the 'district governors' offices', no associations were audited, dissolved, or closed in 2023 (except for Nicosia and Trikomo/Iskele). Furthermore, as noted in the 2022 report, visits by civilian 'police' to the activities of rights-based associations have become more frequent. According to HRP data, two rights-based associations have faced issues with the 'police' in this regard. Additionally, the play *HIS MOTHER* by Antilogos Theatre, which is based on true stories from 1974 and themed around peace, and was scheduled to be staged by the Kyrenia Thought Association, was blocked by the Kyrenia 'district governor's office' without any legal justification.⁹

⁷ <https://icisleri.gov.ct.tr/BAKANLIK/Dernekler-ve-Birlikler>

⁸ A detailed analysis on the right of access to information is detailed in 2023 Human Rights Platform Freedom of Expression Report

⁹ <https://ozgur gazeteki bris.com/kibris/136745-antilogos-tiyatrosunun-annesi-oyunu-engellendi-kaymakamlik-izin-vermedi.html>

Fundraising, Use of Funds and Financial Incentives

Associations in the northern part of Cyprus are notably more disadvantaged than public trade unions, professional associations, and foundations concerning access to finance and sustainability. Nearly half of the registered associations are inactive. As highlighted in the 2022 report, although CSOs working on socially sensitive issues such as healthcare, children and service provision are more privileged than rights-based organisations, access to public funds/support, international funds, the culture of philanthropy (donations), and their 'regulations' remain problematic and limited for all civil society. Furthermore, the issues experienced in 2022 under the 'law on collecting aid on the streets and from door to door' on fundraising continued in 2023 to subject CSOs to a slow permitting process by the relevant 'authorities' and cause operational difficulties. In this context, in 2023, one of the associations that had submitted its annual financial reports to the 'district governor's office', on the dates specified in the 'law', was asked for a detailed breakdown of the donations received in the previous period based on the issued donation receipts. New donation receipts were not approved or issued until the requested report was submitted to the 'district governor's office'. This poses a serious obstacle for CSOs that rely on financial resources, and particularly on future donations, to carry out their activities. Additionally, under the same 'law', when association administrations sought approval for donation receipts from the Nicosia 'district governor's office', they were subjected to separate interrogations by the 'police' and the 'municipality'.

Civil Society Participation in Decision Making Processes

In 2023, communication between civil society and 'public institutions', particularly those working on public interest and rights issues, remained limited. No significant changes were made to the relevant 'legislation', except for the inclusion of an 'article' concerning civil society participation in the Strategic Planning section of the 'law on municipalities'. At the 'presidential' level, no meetings were held with rights-based organisations. In fact, these organisations were not included in the 'people's council' established under the 'presidency'. According to information from the 'parliament'¹⁰, only three rights-based organisations were invited to 'committee' meetings. Additionally, media reports indicate that the Green Peace Movement did not receive an invitation to the 'committee' meeting on the 'zoning law' amendment on 6 July 2023, despite their request.¹¹ The situation at the 'ministerial' level was no different. Despite the crowds that took to the streets to make their voices heard, decision-makers often refused to engage in dialogue, preferring to adhere to their established paths. However, 'local governments' (despite their diversity) continued to be more open to communication and cooperation with civil society. On 2 December 2023, the Nicosia Turkish Municipality (NTM) organised a CSO Strategic Planning Workshop under the auspices of SiTi as part of its *strategic planning activities*. At the workshop, 38 representatives from 20 different organisations provided suggestions and contributions to the strategic planning that will shape the next three years of the NTM.¹²

B. SITUATION ANALYSIS IN THE CONTEXT OF FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

In 2023, two notable cases concerning the freedom of peaceful assembly emerged: An academic and another individual, both members of the 'Eastern Mediterranean university' Academic Staff Union (EMU-SEN), who were injured during a disproportionate 'police' intervention at a protest in front of Turkish Cypriot Airline (KTHY) on 19 July 2011, filed compensation lawsuits against the 'police general directorate (PGD)'. Twelve years later, on 7 March 2023, these lawsuits were concluded.¹³ The defendant 'police officers' were found guilty of aggravated and tortious assault, as well as violating the freedom of peaceful assembly. However, the compensation penalties imposed were not sufficiently deterrent. Additionally, many other 'police officers' who faced similar complaints related to the same incident were not prosecuted.

¹⁰ Detailed information with references is provided on page 16-17

¹¹ <https://ozgur gazetekibris.com/kibris/118997-tel-dogal-afetin-nasil-felaketle-sonuclandigini-unutmusa-benziyor sunuz-ama-biz-unutmadi k.html>

¹² <https://ozgur gazetekibris.com/kibris/128412-1tb-sivil-toplum-inisiyatif-i-dernegi-organizasyonunda-sto-calistayi-duzenliyor.html>

¹³ <https://www.yeniduzen.com/dau-sen-polis-mudurlugu-ikinci-kez-mahkum-oldu-161806h.htm>

In 2022, following a protest¹⁴ organised by the Turkish Cypriot Secondary Education Teachers' Association (KTOEÖS) and the Turkish Cypriot Teachers' Association (KTÖS) in front of the 'ministry of education'—alleging that there were attempts to undermine teachers' rights, and where the 'police' intervened—22 teachers were subsequently sued by the 'attorney general's office' on charges of *assaulting the 'police'*. The trial began on 24 November 2023, which coincided with *Teachers' Day*. To protest both the trial and the choice of the day for it, the teachers' associations, along with supporting CSOs, staged demonstrations in front of the Nicosia district 'court' and simultaneously during the Teachers' Day event organised by the 'government'.¹⁵ The case was adjourned by the 'judge' to 15 December 2023. In a statement issued by one of the teachers on social media regarding the second hearing, it was alleged that the 'judge' addressing the prosecution expressed difficulty understanding why the teachers were present in 'court', yet the prosecution persisted with their charges.¹⁶

According to information received from the 'police general directorate (PGD)', no demonstrations were prevented or dispersed in 2023. However, according to information received from the 'attorney general's office', a case was initiated against three 'citizens' for the crime of unlawful assembly under 'articles 70 and 71 of the criminal code'. On the same issue, according to information received from the 'supreme court', a case has been initiated at the Nicosia district 'court', which is ongoing as of July 2024. Additionally, within the scope of the monitoring, petitions were sent to the 'district governors' offices'. These petitions inquired how many applications were received in 2023 under the 'law on meetings and demonstrations', the nationalities of the applicants, and how many of the applications were rejected and for what reasons. The data received from the Famagusta, Kyrenia, Morphou/Güzelyurt, and Lefka/Lefke 'district governors' offices' are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Peaceful Assembly Requests Received from the 'district governors' offices' for 2023

'DISTRICT OFFICE'	REQUESTS	NATIONALITIES	REJECTED	REASON FOR REJECTION
Famagusta 'district governor's office'	57	'northern part of Cyprus', Turkish Republic, Iran, Palestine	2	It is in a residential area, it will take a long time and location is not suitable.
Kyrenia 'district governor's office'	4	'northern part of Cyprus', Turkish Republic, UK	0	
Morphou/Güzelyurt 'district governor's office'	13	'northern part of Cyprus', foreign nationals	1	As the applicant was a foreign student, he was told to hold the meeting at the school and was not allowed to do so.
Lefka/Lefke 'district governor's office'	3	'northern part of Cyprus', Turkish Republic, Palestine	1	For security reasons, it was suggested that the meeting be held on the EUL campus. NOTE: The EUL Rectorate also did not grant permission for the meeting.

*According to the information obtained from the 'district governors' offices', no decision to stop or dispersal was issued by the 'district governors' offices' for any protests that took place in these regions in 2023.

¹⁴ <https://haberkibris.com/ktos-ve-ktoeos-eylemde-1418-2022-08-02.html>

¹⁵ <https://www.yeniduzen.com/22-ogretmen-ogretmenler-gununde-mahkemede-utanin-168158h.htm>

¹⁶ <https://bugunkibris.com/2023/12/15/yargic-saskin-savcilik-israrli-ogretmenlerin-davasi-devam-ediyor/>

These figures do not provide a realistic view of the protests that occurred in 2023. One contributing factor is that the 'prime ministry', 'parliament', and the 'ministry of education' are all located in Nicosia, and the 'Nicosia 'district governor's office' was unable to supply information regarding the protests that took place there. Additionally, 'public' sector unions, which traditionally organise the majority of protests, do not seek permission from the 'district governors' offices' for their activities, as noted in the previous report. This practice is based on decisions from the 'supreme court' and the 'court of cassation'¹⁷ on the matter. According to the 2023 monitoring results, 'public' sector unions conducted over 35 actions, protests, and strikes focusing on healthcare, education, personal rights, and energy. Apart from these unions, various associations and initiatives exercised their right to peaceful assembly on issues including women's education, healthcare, peace, elderly rights, LGBTI+ rights, and traffic accident prevention.

Education

The devastating earthquake on 6 February, centred in Kahramanmaraş, struck a significant blow to the year 2023, raising concerns about the structural integrity and durability of public school buildings in the northern part of Cyprus. In response, various actions, protests, and strikes were organised by student and parent initiatives in February and March.¹⁸ The situation was further exacerbated by the decision by the 'ministry of education' to continue schooling in tents at some schools, which were subsequently flooded due to heavy rains.¹⁹

KTÖS launched a strike across all schools and held a march to the 'parliament' in 2023, protesting the '(amendment) law on teachers' that they claimed would render Atatürk 'teachers' academy' dysfunctional in the long term and lead to its closure. They also argued that the bill would reduce the personal rights of teachers.²⁰ KTÖS received support from KTOEÖS and other unions organised in the public sector. The teachers' unions issued a statement in front of the 'parliament' explaining that, beyond the aforementioned issues, the intention of the 'government' was to shut down the existing 'teachers' unions' and authorise a union allegedly established by the Turkish 'embassy'. They also opposed the transition to full-day education without adequate preliminary infrastructure and protested against the hiring of teachers from Turkey despite the high number of unemployed teachers in the northern part of Cyprus.²¹ In the days following, the unions continued their strikes and protests in front of the Turkish 'embassy' in Nicosia and the 'prime ministry'.²²

Despite widespread protests across the northern part of Cyprus, the '(amendment) law on teachers' was passed by the 'parliament' by a majority of votes.²³ The 'ministry of education' then made cuts to the salaries of teachers who participated in the strikes, in breach of the 'constitution' and 'laws'. The unions continued their protests in response. Moreover, teachers' unions expressed concerns over the 'government's' education policy, criticising it for compromising modern, scientific, and secular education, particularly with attempts to integrate Koranic courses into the formal education system. Additionally, parents, organised via social media, protested in front of the 'ministry of education' under the banner of the Movement for Secular Democratic Education, triggered by the prominent inclusion of religious symbols in 'primary school' textbooks.²⁴ These protests also received backing from the teachers' unions.

17 Unified Court of Cassation/Penal: 2-3-4-10-11-12-/2012, D.5/2014.

18 <https://www.yeniduzen.com/guvenli-okul-talebi-161572h.htm>

19 <https://www.yeniduzen.com/bu-utanc-sizin-161904h.htm>

20 <https://www.yeniduzen.com/ogretmenler-meclis-onunde-163609h.htm>

21 <https://www.yeniduzen.com/niyetleri-ktos-ve-ktoeosu-kapatip-elciligin-kurdugu-sendikayi-yetkili-kilmak-163612h.htm>

22 <https://www.yeniduzen.com/ogretmenlerden-siyah-celenk-boyun-egmeyecegiz-163632h.htm>

23 <https://www.yeniduzen.com/ogretmenler-degisiklik-yasa-tasarisi-meclisten-gecti-163925h.htm>

24 <https://www.yeniduzen.com/veliler-eylemde-kitaplarin-icerigini-derhal-degistirin-166018h.htm>

Energy

One of the most prominent developments of 2023 was the strike and other protests organised by the 'Turkish Cypriot electricity authority' Employees' Union (El-Sen) against the amendment to the 'public procurement law'. On 31 March, El-Sen responded to a committee discussion on a 'public procurement (amendment) draft law' that would facilitate a new agreement with AKSA, a private firm supplying electricity to the northern part of Cyprus, independent of the 'Turkish Cypriot electricity authority (KIB-TEK)'. The 'council of ministers' imposed a sixty-day ban on the strike, citing that its nature gravely disrupted essential services.²⁵ Additionally, the KIB-TEK Board of Directors issued a warning that personnel engaging in *civil disobedience* by not resuming work, would face disciplinary actions ranging from suspension to potentially permanent dismissal unless they ceased their actions.²⁶

In response to the legislative changes, El-Sen, along with several trade unions, staged multiple demonstrations outside 'parliament'. Following the incidents where protesters damaged the door of the 'parliament', seven union members were summoned by the 'police' to provide statements.²⁷ Furthermore, the 'riot police' and 'special operations team' were positioned behind the 'parliament' building. In a show of solidarity, the Turkish Cypriot Civil Servants Union (KTAMS) conducted a day-long strike in the 'parliament'. When the 'council of ministers' delayed this strike for sixty days, the stenographers, who are union members, refrained from working overtime. 'Parliamentary sessions' were consistently adjourned prematurely. The speaker of the 'parliament' Zorlu Töre then sent a reminder referencing the 'public servants law' about the "Duty to Obey Orders".²⁸ Moreover, he requested an investigation into the 'parliament' stenographers for allegedly abandoning their posts without permission or valid excuse, thereby obstructing the fulfilment of 'legislative proceedings'.²⁹ To counteract the stenographers' refusal to work overtime, non-union members who were on annual leave were summoned to 'parliament'.

In a related development, the Air Traffic Controllers Union, affiliated with the Federation of Turkish Cypriot Trade Unions (Türk-Sen), initiated a strike at 'Ercan' (Tymbou) airport in solidarity with El-Sen, but this too was halted by a decision from the 'council of ministers'.³⁰ Amid these events, the northern part of Cyprus experienced widespread power outages. El-Sen indicated that the power outages were orchestrated by KIB-TEK management, and reported that "police officers were stationed at all transformer stations".³¹ El-Sen chairperson disclosed that KIB-TEK employees attempting to address the malfunctions were searched by the 'police' and escorted to the affected sites.³² In Famagusta, a KIB-TEK employee was detained as part of an investigation into alleged 'sabotage'.³³ In an effort to break the strike, attempts were made to bring AKSA employees into the Teknecik Power Plant under police escort, but El-Sen did not permit it.³⁴ Prompted by the main opposition Republican Turkish Party (CTP), representatives from civil society organisations, trade unions, and economic groups convened for a meeting on energy. A consensus document was agreed upon at this meeting, which led to the conclusion of El-Sen's action. Subsequently, the relevant 'law' was enacted by the 'parliament'. Following these developments, the CTP faced accusations of undermining the protest efforts.³⁵

25 <https://www.yeniduzen.com/bakanlar-kurulu-elektrik-kurumundaki-grevi-yasakladi-162439h.htm>

26 <https://www.yeniduzen.com/isten-durdurma-ve-yeni-istihdama-gidilebilir-162767h.htm>

27 <https://www.yeniduzen.com/sokulen-meclis-kapisiyla-iligili-sorusturma-baslatildi-162756h.htm>

28 <https://www.yeniduzen.com/meclis-baskanligindan-calisanlara-mobbing-162525h.htm>

29 <https://www.yeniduzen.com/meclis-stenograflarina-sorusturma-162703h.htm>

30 <https://www.yeniduzen.com/ercandaki-greve-60-gun-erteleme-162712h.htm>

31 <https://ozgur gazetekibris.com/kibris/112406-el-sen-butun-trafo-merkezlerinde-polis-beklemektedir.html>

32 <https://www.yeniduzen.com/cesurer-arizalari-gidermeye-calisan-ekipleri-polis-iceri-aliyor-162560h.htm>

33 <https://www.yeniduzen.com/polisten-elektrik-kesintisi-sorusturmasi-162786h.htm>

34 <https://www.yeniduzen.com/el-sen-uyeleri-santral-onunde-ates-yakti-162813h.htm>

35 https://www.kibrispostasi.com/c35-KIBRIS_HABERLERI/n467971-ctp-elsene-grevi-sonlandir-onerisi-yapti-tdp-tepki-gosterdi-ne-kazandik

Health

In the health sector, notable concerns included violence against healthcare workers, challenges in accessing medicines and supplies, and significant issues surrounding *fake prescription* investigations targeting many doctors and pharmacists. Notably, the arrest and courtroom appearance of doctors and pharmacists in handcuffs, coupled with their detention under poor conditions, sparked widespread public indignation. The situation was exacerbated by the fact that some of those detained were elderly or previously held respected positions within the 'state', amplifying public dismay. In response, the pharmacists association organised an *Honour March* in Nicosia on 11 December 2023. The march highlighted the perceived discrediting of their profession, their victimisation, and the obstacles faced by insured 'citizens' in obtaining their medications.³⁶

Personal Rights of 'Public Servants'

In January, trade unions gathered in front of the 'prime ministry' and the 'ministry of finance',³⁷ demanding the implementation of previously agreed protocols regarding tax bases and adjustments to the salaries of public servants hired under the 'immigration law'.³⁸ In March, KTAMS protested salary cuts in front of the 'presidential palace'.³⁹ Throughout April and May, various trade unions staged actions on issues such as staff shortages, increasing violence incidents, unregulated entries and exits from the northern part of Cyprus, and the granting of exceptional 'citizenships'. In August, there were protests against rising costs of living and immigration policies. In November, there was an action against irregularities in the 'development bank's' examination 'regulations'. In December, a demonstration was organised in front of the 'parliament'⁴⁰ after 'parliament speaker', Zorlu Töre, allegedly applied pressure on 'parliamentary staff', urging them to resign from KTAMS. Issues related to arbitrary appointments at the 'ministry of health' were also highlighted.

Freedom of Expression

On 14 June, Basın-Sen staged a demonstration in front of the 'presidential palace' to condemn the expulsion of journalist Serhat İncirli on Monday, 12 June, while Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was on the premises during his visit to the northern part of Cyprus. Following the demonstration, the 'presidential' press office referred to the journalists as "so-called journalists" and claimed that İncirli had not been accredited to attend the press conference.⁴¹

36 <https://www.yeniduzen.com/bakanlar-eczacilar-tarafindan-yuhalandi-168548h.htm>

37 <https://www.yeniduzen.com/maliye-bakanini-protokol-masasina-oturma-eylemi-yapacagiz-160240h.htm>

38 <https://www.yeniduzen.com/imzalanen-protokolun-geregini-yapin-160138h.htm>

39 <https://ozgurgazetekibris.com/kibris/111813-ktams-yarin-cumhurbaskanligi-onunde-basin-aciklamasi-yapacak.html>

40 <https://www.yeniduzen.com/meclis-calisanlari-ktamstan-istifa-etmeleri-icin-zorlaniyor-168782h.htm>

41 <https://www.yeniduzen.com/cumhurbaskanligi-sozde-gazeteciler-164294h.htm>



Women's Rights

In January 2023, Ahmet Ünsal, who was appointed as the 'head of religious affairs' from Turkey, made a statement at Polatpaşa Mosque that violated the fundamental human rights and freedoms of women. This statement was met with backlash from some political parties and civil society organisations, leading to a series of protests with support and participation from more than 40 civil society organisations.⁴² Among the demands during these protests was the cancellation of the *exceptional* 'citizenship' granted to Ünsal. On 25 January, following the discovery of Zehie Helin Reessur's death, students from Famagusta Vocational High School, along with some civil society organisations and political parties, organised a protest.⁴³

In addition to these protests, bicycle riders held demonstrations in 2023 in response to fatal traffic accidents. That same year, amid the escalating Israeli-Palestinian conflict, various actions were organised in support of the Palestinian people. The Foreign Exchange Rate Victims Association protested in front of the 'prime ministry'. Residents of the Trikomo/Iskele region took to the streets to highlight issues of unplanned construction. The bicomunal Peace Initiative organised a demonstration in the Ledra Palace buffer zone to advocate for the opening of new crossing points. Furthermore, in 2023, the Pride March on 17 May and the United by Pride event on 18 June took place in the Ledra Palace buffer zone, attracting significant participation from both communities.

2023 THEMATIC ANALYSIS: "ASSESSING THE APPROACH OF THE 'AUTHORITIES' TO CIVIL SOCIETY—COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO VARIOUS TYPES OF CSOS"

This analysis aims to explore how various organisational types—such as rights-based or service-oriented associations, trade unions, and professional bodies—are exposed to differing levels of state support, intervention, or pressure. Data from international indices reveal correlations between state governance models and their approaches to Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).⁴⁴ While democratic regimes demonstrate significant support for the freedoms of CSOs, authoritarian governments exhibit restrictive practices. States give priority to CSOs that align with their strategic interests while marginalising those they perceive as threats. Such differential treatment impacts the effectiveness and sustainability of civil society initiatives. Due to the de-facto situation in the northern part of Cyprus, there is a sub-administrative approach by the Republic of Turkey that directly influences civil society. This influence is particularly pronounced given that the political parties governing Turkey and the northern part of Cyprus in 2023 adhere to this approach, affecting their communication and relationships with civil society.

⁴² <https://www.yeniduzen.com/derya-destek-veren-orgutlerin-sayisi-40i-asti-yarin-bulusup-basbakanliga-yuruyoruz-s-160180h.htm>

⁴³ <https://www.yeniduzen.com/helin-icin-eylem-isyandayiz-160756h.htm>

⁴⁴ https://monitor.civicus.org/globalfindings_2023/

A. PUBLIC-CIVIL SOCIETY DIALOGUE AND PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING

The 'people's council', established under the 'presidency' in 2023, vividly demonstrates this approach. According to the 'presidential' website, Ersin Tatar initiated twelve meetings starting in January 2023, leading to the formation of the 'people's council' in April 2023. The initial two meetings saw participation from 19 associations, including those representing 'combatants', retired 'police officers', and 'soldiers' with nationalist views. The third and fourth meetings included 25 associations, encompassing solidarity groups of Turkish origin and associations with nationalist ideologies. The fifth meeting was attended by 10 health related associations. In the sixth meeting, representation came from 14 agricultural and livestock associations. The seventh, eighth, and tenth meetings were exclusively reserved for sports federations. The ninth meeting involved the Board of Directors of the Nicosia District Union of Mukhtars, and the eleventh was with the administration of the Famagusta District Union of Mukhtars. In the twelfth and final meeting, Tatar met with automobile associations.

An analysis of the associations comprising the 'people's council' reveals the absence of any pro-peace civil society organisations that are committed to the general public good, protecting disadvantaged groups and human rights advocacy. This absence is significant given the discourse at the two meetings held after the 'council's' establishment. During these meetings, Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar made clear that a solution based on a federal model was unfeasible, and he would not participate in negotiations predicated on such a framework. Further, referencing the 'people's council', the TC leader declared that the objective is to "foster unity and solidarity, safeguard our state and sovereignty, educate our populace, and keep them vigilant against various threats, perception manipulations, and fifth column activities aimed at undermining our existence".⁴⁵

In this context, it is possible to interpret the TC leader's efforts to forge his version of civil society, technically his own GONGOs (government-sponsored non-governmental organisations), as a strategic move. These organisations are designed to support and refrain from questioning his statements and actions, effectively shaping a civil society that aligns with his governance.

According to information available on the 'presidential' website, Ersin Tatar had 115 engagements with civil society organisations throughout 2023. These interactions took various forms, including receptions, meetings, and visits. The most frequently contacted groups included 35 professional associations, 11 solidarity associations of Turkish origin, 11 sports associations, and 10 combatant associations. They were followed by various solidarity and think tank groups. The distribution of these CSOs according to the place of registration is as follows: the northern part of Cyprus (67), Turkey (20), and the United Kingdom (3). While Ersin Tatar conducted a single interaction with most associations, he had multiple engagements with certain CSOs such as the Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce (KTTO), Champion Angels and Cyprus TMT Turkish Resistance Organisation. He mostly attended the events organised by the Women's Stories Association and TC Sports Writers Association. He also attended the general assemblies of several associations, including the Resistance Commanders Association, Cyprus TMT Resistance Combatants Association, Malatya Culture Association, Turkish Cypriot Pensioners Association and Young Businessmen Association. A review of the associations contacted reveals that they closely mirror those involved in the 'people's council'.

⁴⁵ <https://bit.ly/48quGSW>

Upon reviewing the interactions reported on the ‘parliamentary’ website for 2023, a consistent pattern emerges, highlighting engagements with specific CSOs. ‘Parliament speaker’ Zorlu Töre met with 11 professional associations, 9 solidarity groups, 6 combatant associations, 2 women’s groups, 2 arts associations, 1 search and rescue organisation, and 1 think tank. Of these, 24 are registered in the northern part of Cyprus, 7 in Turkey, and 1 in the United Kingdom.

According to information obtained from the ‘parliament’ with the support of the opposition, following a ‘parliamentary’ question submitted by a CTP ‘mp’, the 2023 ‘committee meetings’ primarily featured professional associations and public sector trade unions due to the efforts of the opposition. An analysis of the profiles of CSOs participating in the ‘committees’ reveals that trade unions have an institutionalised dialogue with the ‘state’, though this can sometimes be limited by economic policies. Professional associations also maintain stable relations with the ‘state’, especially if they represent influential sectors. The participation of rights-based associations or initiatives, which act as the voice of disadvantaged groups, is insufficient, as indicated in the table below. While 11 associations participated in the ‘parliamentary committee meetings’ in 2023, 4 of these are associations with similar objectives to those that defend the interests of a professional group, such as the Financial Action Association and the Turkish Cypriot Association of Realtors.

Table 3: Number of CSOs Attending ‘parliamentary committee meetings’

‘economy, finance, budget and planning committee’	‘legal, political affairs, and foreign relations committee’	‘court of accounts committee’	‘ad hoc special committee to discuss EU harmonisation draft laws’	‘administrative, public and health affairs committee’
26 CSOs participated: 16 trade unions, 7 professional associations, 2 chambers and 1 association	11 CSOs participated: 7 professional associations, 1 trade union, 1 chamber and 2 associations	Only ‘public institutions/ organisations’	16 CSOs participated: 6 professional associations, 7 chambers, 1 association, 2 platforms	37 CSOs participated: 15 trade unions, 9 chambers, 7 associations, 6 unions

According to the information received, the Supermarket Operators Platform was invited to the meeting of the ‘ad hoc special committee to discuss the EU harmonisation draft laws’. However, both the Green Peace Movement and Cyprus Environment Platform (established in the northern part of Cyprus) had to formally request attendance. Associations and initiatives advocating for public interests are typically less equipped financially and resourcefully compared to trade unions, chambers, and professional associations, which are organised to benefit a specific class of individuals. Consequently, they are frequently overlooked by decision-makers. For instance, in January 2023, the Cyprus Green Action Group’s request to attend the ‘committee’ meeting on the ‘zoning law’ amendment, which was under consideration by ‘parliament’, was denied. Cyprus Green Action Group officials stated that they were informed by ‘parliament’ that “the association’s representatives would not be admitted to the zoning law amendment committee meeting as per the decision of the committee chairperson”.⁴⁶ Except for charitable organisations working on issues aligned with the ‘government’s’ priorities and touching on the general conscience of society, such as children and health, associations with negligible access to public funding are also excluded from dialogue with the ‘government’. This creates an unfavourable and concerning scenario for civil society and democracy, as it limits the participation of diverse voices. This exclusion paints an unfavourable picture for civil society and poses concerns for democracy regarding the participation of diverse voices. Throughout 2023, civilian ‘police’ visits to events held by rights-based associations, including their general assemblies, have created a climate of surveillance, compromising the safety and security of these organisations. Undercover ‘police’ visits to the Human Rights Conference organised by the HRP and the General Assembly of Universal Patient Rights Association in 2023 are examples of such practices.

⁴⁶ <https://ozgur gazetekibris.com/kibris/118997-tel-dogal-afetin-nasil-felaketle-sonuclandigini-unutmusa-benziyorsunuz-ama-biz-unutmadik.html>

In 2023, another significant development was the Republic of Turkey's policies in the northern part of Cyprus, particularly through its 'embassy' in Nicosia, focusing on civil society. These policies concentrated heavily on education and religious sectors, with increased interventions noted in these areas. Following these developments, on 16 May 2023, officials from KTÖS and KTOEÖS issued a statement outside the 'parliament' building, where the '(amendment) law on teachers' was under discussion. They claimed that the 'government' intended to dismantle both KTÖS and KTOEÖS and raised questions about why "a union formed by the embassy, which convenes at the embassy", was invited to the relevant 'parliamentary committee'.⁴⁷ In the same year, the newspaper *Yenidüzen* reported on the activities of Turkey-based political parties in the northern part of Cyprus.⁴⁸ According to unofficial figures, seven political parties had opened branches, registered members, and engaged in propaganda activities. The 'ministry of interior' informed the newspaper that these organisations are not registered under current 'legislation' and thus remain unmonitored. Furthermore, most of these entities have been registered by the 'ministry of interior' as foreign associations and umbrella organisations, in accordance with recommendations from the 'ministry of foreign affairs', and are active under the banner of associations with nationalist views of Turkish origin. These are the same associations that, as mentioned above, have frequent contacts with the Turkish Cypriot leader and the speaker of the 'parliament'. This clearly demonstrates how the politics of the Republic of Turkey is intertwined with high-level decision-makers and how rights-based associations engaged in 'grassroots' advocacy are marginalised.

Another noteworthy development of 2023 was the dismissal of İbrahim Benter as the Director General of the Cyprus Foundations Administration (EVKAF) on 21 December 2023 and the appointment of Mustafa Tümer as his successor.⁴⁹ The fact that Benter learned of his dismissal through the press raised serious questions about the way dismissal and appointments were made. Press reports suggested that Ahmet Ünsal, head of the 'religious affairs department', who reportedly had the full support of the Republic of Turkey and disagreed with Benter on various issues, was instrumental in Benter's removal.⁵⁰

47 <https://www.yeniduzen.com/niyetleri-ktos-ve-ktoeosu-kapatip-elciligin-kurdugu-sendikayi-yetkili-kilmak-163612h.htm>

48 <https://www.yeniduzen.com/denetimden-muaf-siyasi-partiler-168195h.htm>

49 https://www.kibrispostasi.com/c35-KIBRIS_HABERLERI/n500116-ibrahim-benter-gorevden-alindi-yerine-mustafa-tumer-atandi

50 <https://bugunkibris.com/2023/12/22/sabah-cami-actilar-aksam-operasyon-cektiler/>



Another significant issue that captured media attention and influenced the ‘national’ agenda in 2023 was the activities of religious associations. Organisations such as the Association of Love and Brotherhood (SEVKAD), Universal Love and Brotherhood Association (ESKAD), Association for Assistance to Students in the Age of Education, and the Science and Culture Association were highlighted for their extensive infrastructures, network of associations, connections with religious communities in Turkey, and notably, their provision of religious education and dormitory accommodations for young children. It was alleged that these associations, widespread across every region in the northern part of Cyprus, are also financially robust. According to a report by *Özgür Gazete*, for each affiliate of ESKAD, including SEVKAD, apartments were rented in every district to house impoverished students who were then subjected to religious education. Following this report, *Özgür Gazete* submitted petitions to the ‘district governorships’ to ascertain whether SEVKAD was ‘officially’ registered, only to learn that it was not registered under any ‘district governorship’.⁵² Another noteworthy point was that Recep Günaydın, who is the chairperson of the ‘presidential social support committee’, as of July 2024, is the former chairperson of ESKAD.⁵³ Religious associations also made headlines for other reasons. In December 2023, Ürün Solyalı, a CTP ‘mp’, publicly scrutinised the statute of the Association for Assistance to Students in the Age of Education in ‘parliament’, declaring the contents illegal and calling on the ‘department of social services’ and the ‘ministry of education’ to address the situation in the dormitories.⁵⁵ KTÖS also lodged formal complaints with the ‘ministry of education’ and the ‘ombudsperson’.⁵⁶ Despite these escalations, by the end of 2023, no responses had been received from any ‘institutions’, nor had any action been taken. Meanwhile, it was reported that at least five minors were residing in a dormitory in Kioneli/Gönyeli, owned by the Science and Culture Association, where they were housed alongside university students.⁵⁷

51 <https://ozgurgazetekibris.com/kibris/106739-adanin-kuzeyinde-merkezi-turkiyede-olan-dini-yapilanma-agi.html>

52 <https://ozgurgazetekibris.com/kibris/113239-sevkad-yasa-disi-dini-yapilanma-sadece-adi-var-kaydi-bile-yok.html>

53 <https://bit.ly/4hqUvXd>

54 https://www.kibrispostasi.com/c35-KIBRIS_HABERLERI/n180458-evrensel-sevgi-ve-kardeslik-dernegi-20-yasinda

55 <https://bugunkibris.com/2023/12/16/dernek-maskesi-altindaki-tarikatlar-konusu-mecliste-tahsil-cagindaki-talebelere-yardim-dernegine-ait-yurtlara-yasalara-aykiri-olarak-izin-verildi/>

56 <https://ozgurgazetekibris.com/kibris/106499-mavis-ozgur-gazeteyi-yaptigi-habercilikten-dolayi-tebrik-ederim.html>

57 <https://bugunkibris.com/2023/10/10/yasalar-ayaklar-altinda-koruma-altinda-olmasi-gereken-cocuklar-yurtlarda/>



B. PUBLIC FUNDS AND SUPPORTS

Public funds and support available to CSOs are very limited, and the process of CSOs accessing these funds is not transparent or accountable. Typically, applications from CSOs for public funding and support are assessed by the relevant ‘authorities’ without predetermined procedures or rules. In an attempt to delineate the financial support the public sector provides to CSOs, the Human Rights Platform submitted petitions to funding bodies in 2023. However, no ‘institution’ responded, with the exception of the ‘parliament’. The ‘parliament’ indicated that they were not obligated to reply as they fall outside the ‘right to information law’. Another petition sent from civil society also received a response indicating no obligation to reply. Some information was only obtained indirectly through the endeavours and intermediation of opposition ‘mps’.

Table 4: ‘Ministry of finance’ Budget Data and CSO Support Analysis (2023)

‘INSTITUTION’	BUDGET ALLOCATED (2023)	BUDGET UTILISED (2023)	GRANT AID	BUDGET ALLOCATED TO CSOS (2023)	BUDGET ALLOCATED TO CSOS (2023)	CSO BUDGET UTILISATION (%)
‘presidency’	143,205,100	752,024,899.20	600,000,000	935,000	285,000	30.48
‘parliament’	146,794,050	152,573,937.35	6,000,000	100,000	7,000	7.00
‘prime minister’s office’	467,464,010	1,277,009,611.89	762,020,000	40,780,000	40,709,170	99.83
‘deputy prime minister’, ‘ministry of tourism, culture, youth and environment’	523,581,000	739,873,004	178,000,000	1,263,600	1,129,100	89.37
‘ministry of finance’	17,712,144,700	14,903,266,285	420,000,000	300,000	55,514,100	18,504.7
‘ministry of interior’	1,047,526,860	1,339,012,418.74	217,706,346	0	5,863,000	0.00
‘ministry of education’	4,142,368,200	4,355,597,551.59	116,520,000	6,280,000	6,280,000	100.00
‘ministry of labour and social security’	1,388,110,000	1,444,417,139.94	51,010,000	19,500,000	19,500,000	100.00

* **The numbers given in Table 4 are in Turkish Lira currency.**

A concerning finding of this report is the apparent disinterest of ‘public institutions’, especially the ‘parliament’, in disclosing the financial support they provide to CSOs. To gather information on this matter, the ‘ministry of finance’ budget allocation tables for the Fiscal Year 2023–2024 were analysed.^{58 59} When examining the ‘presidency’s’ budget allocations, it was revealed that 30.48% of the budget designated for CSOs was channelled to the Committee on Missing Persons. However, the funds allocated to associations, unions, and other organisations were not utilised at all. While the budget allocated for civil society was not utilised, it was revealed that 600 million TL was spent under the category *Grant aids*, although it remains unclear where these funds were distributed and to which institutions or individuals. This pattern of non-disclosure is consistent across all other funding bodies, as illustrated in the table below.

⁵⁸ <https://bit.ly/40ilcqV>

⁵⁹ This data retrieved and analysed in May 2024 from the above website of the ‘ministry of finance’. The data was later completely removed from the website.

The 'parliament' used only seven percent of the budget it allocated. According to the information received from the 'parliament' through opposition 'mps', a total of 7,000 TL was donated to the Famagusta Women's Center Association, to the PTA of Democracy Secondary School and to Cyprus Polyphonic Choirs Association (established the northern part of Cyprus) upon their own request in 2023, by decision of the 'speaker of the parliament'.

In 2023, the 'ministry of finance' withdrew an allocation of 93,000 TL from the budget designated for CSOs to support earthquake victims. It should be noted that a significant portion of the 'public' expenditures for 2023, as reflected in the table data, was presumably redirected from the 'public' budget to aid victims of the 6 February earthquake. However, it must be emphasised that this is an assumption, as there is no specific explanation for the funds allocated in the data available.

The 'prime ministry' allocated 500,000 TL to the Cancer Patients Association, 40,000,000 TL to Sports Federations and Sports Unions, and 200,000 TL for School Sports and School Sports Facilities Expenses. Other associations, unions, and organisations received only 2.62 percent of the budget. Additionally, 4,000,000 TL was spent on the EVKAF Project Support Initiative. Within the budget line categorised as *Transfers to Non-Profit Organisations*, which is managed by the 'deputy prime ministry, ministry of tourism, culture, youth, and environment', a sum of 90,000 TL was allocated to the Hospitality, Tourism, Education Centre (OTEM), affiliated to the 'ministry of tourism and environment'. The High Council of Monuments received 3,600 TL, fine arts associations were granted 1 million TL, and the Folk Dance Federation was given 20,000 TL. However, of the 500,000 TL set aside for other associations, unions, and organisations, only 15,500 TL was actually spent. In 2023, an action was organised in response to anti-democratic changes in the 'regulation on aid to associations related to fine arts', leading to a joint statement by 66 organisations.⁶⁰ The 'ministry of finance' reported spending significantly more than the budget allocated to CSOs for that year. While only 15,000 TL of the planned 300,000 TL under the budget line for *Transfers to Non-Profit Organisations* was spent, an unforeseen expenditure of approximately 55 million TL was made. There is no detailed information available regarding the expenditure items.

The 'Ministry of Interior,' despite no budget being allocated for CSOs, transferred over 5 million TL to the Central Hunting Commission under this same budget line. On the other hand, the 'ministry of education' allocated 2 million TL to the Apprenticeship Training Center and 4 million TL to the Special Education Foundation, while the Turkish Cypriot Child Protection 'institution' received 280,000 TL. The 'ministry of labour and social security' provided 19,500,000 TL in support to the SOS Children's Village. These funds typically cover services that the 'administration' is obligated to provide but cannot, hence they are managed through protocols signed between the relevant 'institution/department' and the CSO. It should be highlighted that the 2023 budgets, like those in 2022, were prepared by the relevant 'public departments' without consultation with civil society, illustrating the absence of such a practice. In the 'committee meetings' held in 'parliament', 16 trade unions, seven professional associations, and two chambers participated; however, only one association (Financial Action Association) was represented.

In 2023, the Development and Economic Cooperation Office of the Turkish 'embassy' in Nicosia also allocated a budget for civil society under the *2023 Economic and Financial Cooperation Protocol Contribution to CSOs such as Associations, Unions, Clubs, Trade Unions, Foundations, Research Centers, etc...* Financial support was provided to organisations such as the Turkish Peace Forces Veterans Association, Turkish Cypriot Green Crescent Association, ESKAD, Martyrs' Families and Disabled Veterans Association, Varosha/Maraş Unity and Solidarity Association, Olive Tree Education and Assistance Association (ZAYDER), and Turkish Cypriot Resistance Organisation Association, which are religious, conservative-nationalist, and combatant in nature. As can be seen, Islamist, nationalist, and conservative associations are supported both by the 'government' and the Turkish 'embassy'.

⁶⁰ <https://www.havadiskibris.com/derneklerden-basbakanlik-onunde-tuzuk-eylemi/>

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2023 Democratic Rights Monitoring Report highlights ongoing challenges faced by civil society in the northern part of Cyprus. Despite 'constitutional' protections, the enforcement of these rights is inconsistent and often discriminatory. The 'government's' selective approach towards CSOs undermines the role of broader civil society in fostering a democratic and inclusive environment. The findings reveal the need for a more supportive and structured legal framework that guarantees the rights of association and peaceful assembly for everyone, irrespective of nationality or political affiliation. Increasing transparency in the distribution of public funds and ensuring meaningful participation of diverse CSOs in decision-making processes are vital steps towards a stronger and more vibrant civil society.

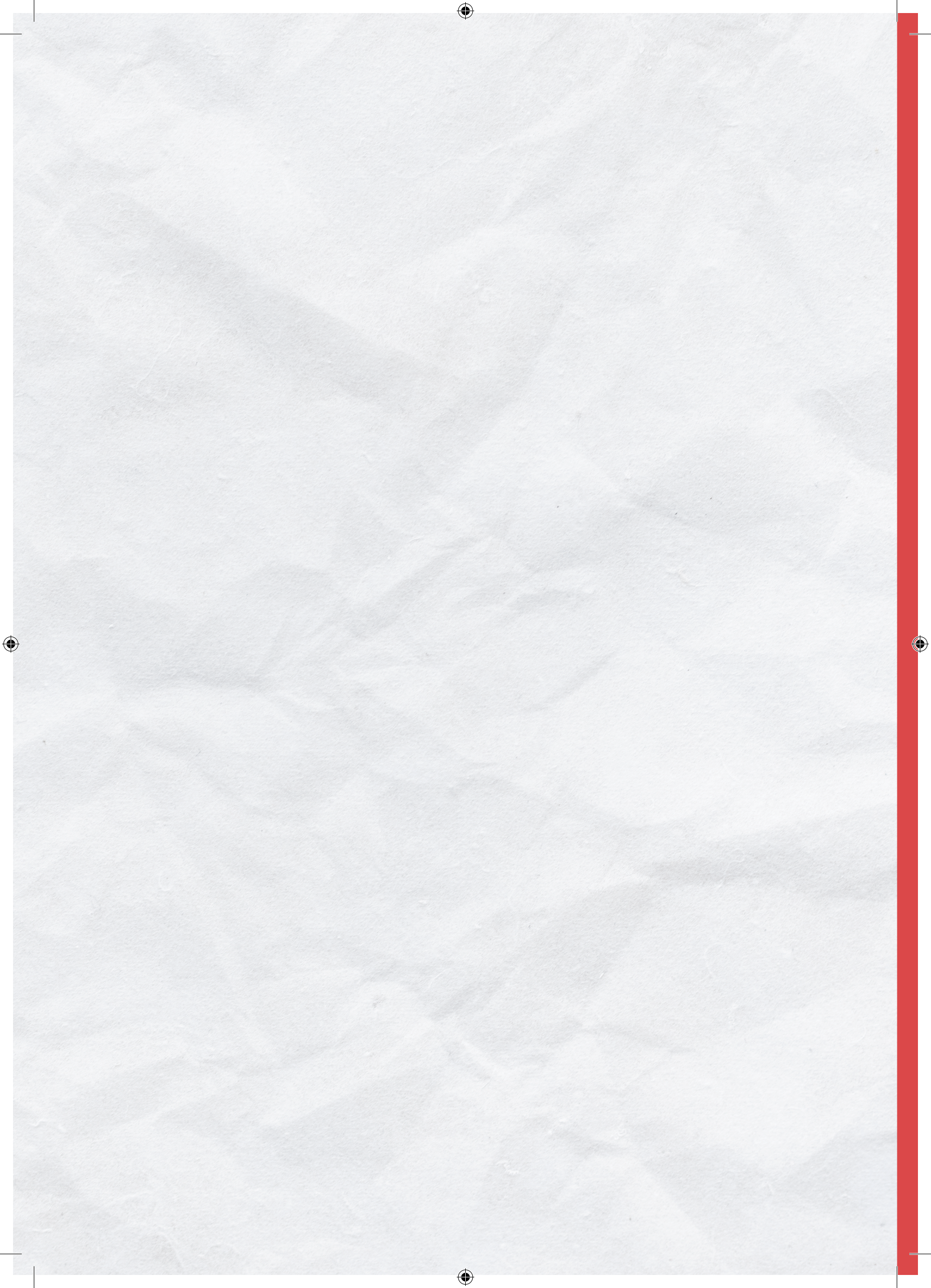
'Legislation' in line with international standards should be implemented to eliminate barriers for foreign nationals wishing to form or join associations. Criteria such as *public morality* should be clearly defined and should not be used to arbitrarily restrict the rights to association and peaceful assembly.

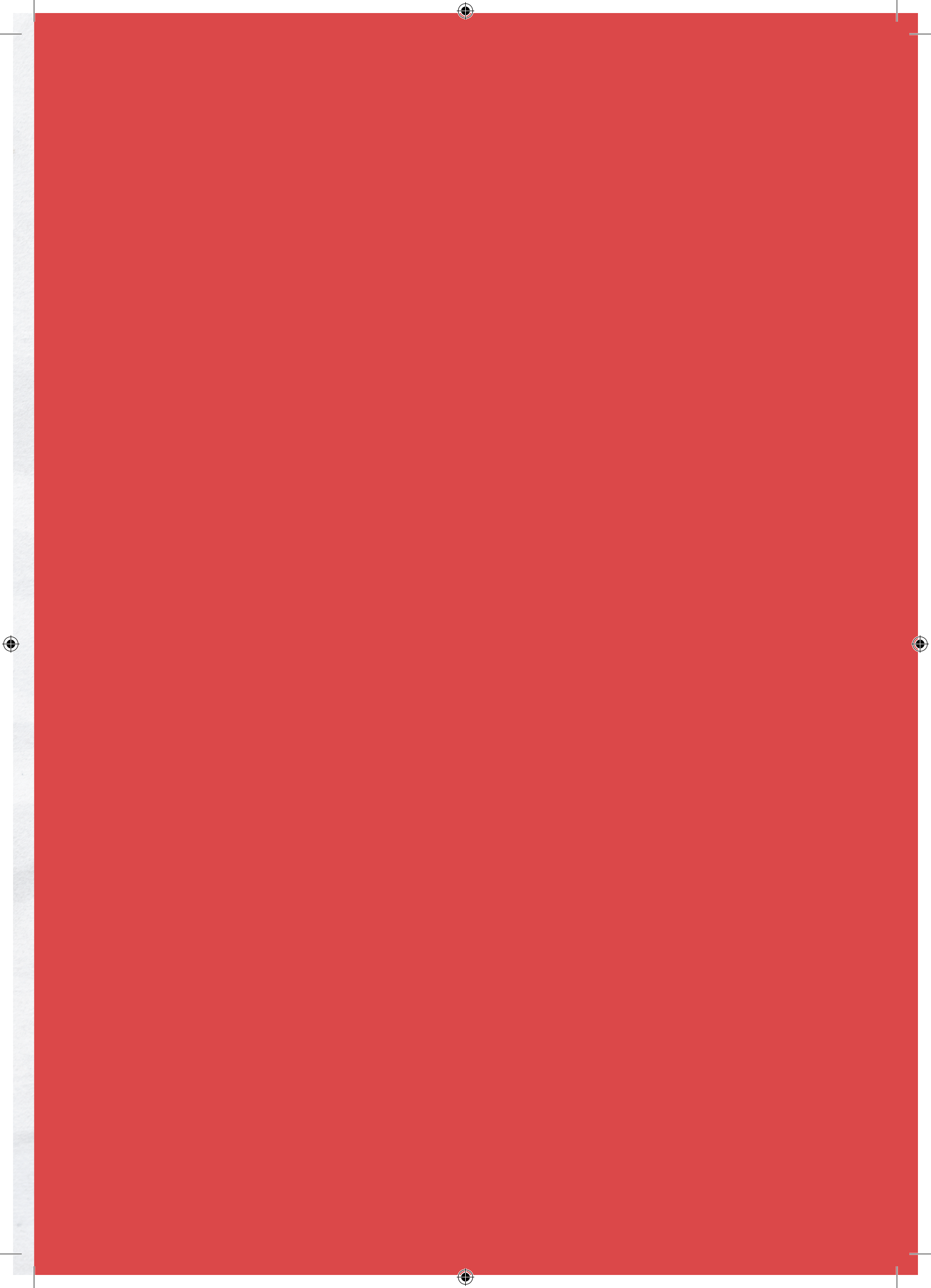
Transparent and accountable mechanisms must be established for the allocation of public funds to CSOs. The budget allocated for civil society support should be increased and distributed fairly among different types of organisations. Funders should also monitor whether the allocated funds are being used for the intended purposes, within the framework of democratic and transparent criteria. Formal platforms should be established to ensure regular dialogue between the 'government' and various CSOs.



Rights-based and independent organisations should be included in consultation and decision-making processes. As a first step, CSO focal points should be urgently established under each 'ministry', and communication should be equally maintained with all CSOs. The protection of the rights to organise and assemble peacefully should be strengthened by rigorously enforcing existing 'laws' and international standards. 'Law enforcement officers' should be trained to respect these rights and to handle protests in a non-discriminatory manner. Training and resources should be provided to enhance the advocacy, fundraising, and organisational management capacities of CSOs. Partnerships should be formed between local CSOs and international organisations to encourage the sharing of best practices and resources. These recommendations aim to contribute to the creation of a more participatory public sphere in the northern part of Cyprus, one that respects human rights and where diverse voices are heard.







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