



**BROKEN
CHALK**

Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of the United
Nations Human Rights Council 4th Cycle – 46th Session

Right to Education

Country Review: Cyprus

Submitting Organization: BROKEN CHALK

October 2023

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Broken Chalk is an Amsterdam-based NGO established in 2020 that monitors and minimises worldwide human rights violations in education. We aim to promote universal and equal access to education for all.

We encourage and support achieving societal peace with our international sponsors and partners by advocating for intercultural tolerance, preventing radicalism and polarisation, and tackling educational inequalities.

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I. Introduction

1. Cyprus has turned the island into a place renowned for conflicts due to the differences between the two central communities, Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. In 1974, a Greek coup against the President of the country and Turkey's military invasion and partition of the island led to the forceful division and completed the physical separation of the two central communities. (i) This situation and especially the consequences of the Turkish invasion affected every sector, such as the economy, the society, and the education system.
2. Nowadays, two education systems exist in the country. The structural organisation of Turkish schools is similar to the Greek one. However, there are a lot of differences. The Republic of Cyprus, as a member of the European Union since 2004, complies with European standards about education. Compulsory education lasts for ten years and four months, starting from the age of 4 years (pre-preliminary education) and extending to the age of 15 years (end of lower secondary education). Public education, namely preliminary, primary, and secondary education, is free for all from the age of 4 years to 18 years. However, there are many private institutions. Furthermore, public tertiary (non-university level) education is free. As for public higher education (undergraduate level), it is free for Cypriots and citizens from the European Union, as the government fully pays the fees. ⁱⁱ
3. As for the northern part of Cyprus, Turkey controls it, and the educational system is similar to the Turkish one. Education is compulsory and free from age 5 to 17 years. Higher education includes all the institutions after secondary education. The system consists of 5 private universities and one semi-public state academy. ⁱⁱⁱ Under these circumstances, both educational systems of Cyprus have been criticised for supporting the idea of the other as an enemy.

II. Brief overview of the last UN-UPR Cycle

4. In its national report prepared for the state's 2019 UN periodic review, the Republic of Cyprus ensured progress in the education field. All children have free and equal access to education without prejudice based on gender, abilities, language, colour, religion, political beliefs, or ethnic background. Furthermore, the state plans to increase access to quality and provide opportunities for all students. As for children with disabilities, it provides the legislative framework which regulates the identification, development, and evaluation of these children and promotes their inclusion in mainstream classrooms. The state has taken measures to ensure curriculum access to these children with the use of assistive technology changes to teaching and learning arrangements. Few children with disabilities, less than 1% of the school population, are educated in special classes, which operate within the boundaries of mainstream schools. ^{iv}
5. However, the Republic of Cyprus received some recommendations. Firstly, the Human Rights Committee was concerned about reports that the laws were discriminatory to individuals from groups, such as children of Turkish Cypriots. The Human Rights Committee recommended that the state strengthen its attempt to eradicate discrimination against Turkish Cypriots and other minorities to promote tolerance and respect for diversity. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination recommended that Cyprus develop a strategy for the inclusion of the members of the Roma community to ensure that they have access to education, including in their language, when and where it is appropriate because they must face discrimination, stigmatisation, and challenges, such as low school attendance and high drop-out rates.
6. Furthermore, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women was concerned about the high number of girls who suffered from discrimination and sexual harassment in schools and the number of Turkish Cypriots, migrant, refugee, asylum-seeking, and Roma girls who still have difficulties in gaining access to high-quality education, despite the effort by the State.

7. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recommended that Cyprus continue to ensure that all children with disabilities fully participate in inclusive education at all levels.
8. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights mentioned no development regarding establishing a Turkish-language school in Limassol.
9. Finally, it recommended that Cyprus ensure that every unaccompanied minor has adequate access to education suited to their needs and abilities and appropriate for their inclusion in society.^v
10. There is no UN periodic review for the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. After the Turkish military operations in Northern Cyprus in 1974, a significant development in the continuing division of the island occurred in November 1983 with the proclamation of the 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus' and the enactment of the Constitution on 7 May 1985. The international community condemned this. According to the United Nations Security Council Resolution 541 (1983), the proclamation of establishing the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is 'legally invalid and calling upon all States not to recognise any Cypriot State other than the Republic of Cyprus'. The Security Council made a similar call based on Resolution 550 (1984). Under these circumstances, this state is not internationally recognised, especially by the UN; consequently, any UN periodic review does not exist.^{vi}
11. However, it is stated in the last UN-UPR that because of the persistent division of Cyprus, monitoring and reporting on the human rights situation in the northern part of the island is still limited.

III. Teaching History in a Divided Country

12. The goals of history education range from the inculcation of national identity to the propagation of political positions, the exploration of others, the creation of empathy or historical analysis, and critical thinking.^{vii} However, in many societies, especially those divided because of ethnonational conflicts, history is often a tool to propagate a narrative depending on the political goals. One of these cases is Cyprus.

Independence in 1960 marked the birth of Cyprus as a bi-communal Republic. Under these circumstances, the concepts and contents of national narratives are imported from Greece and Turkey. On the Greek Cypriot side, the history of Cyprus has been presented as the extension of Greece's history, and on the Turkish Cypriot side as the extension of Turkey's history, instead of supporting the newly founded bi-communal Cypriot nation-state.

- 14.** Although the educational system should have promoted cooperation and trust, the educational systems of the two communities looked towards their respective mother countries for educational policies and objectives. In particular, the history of the Greek Cypriot side begins with the arrival of Greeks in Cyprus, and 1974 emerges as the tragic end for the Greeks of Cyprus. The goal of history teaching is thought to be the mono-perspective view of history teaching as heritage and the promotion of the national identity. Notably, it is mentioned in the history curriculum for primary education: the subject history aims to help pupils become familiar with and appreciate the historical life and cultural heritage of Cyprus and Greece and construct a national consciousness as members of the Greek nation and as citizens of semi-occupied Cyprus.^{viii}
- 15.** Despite the Council of Europe's Recommendations on teaching history in the 21st century for reconciliation, mutual trust, and multiperspectivity, the current history books have not endorsed these principles.^{ix}
- 16.** Conversely, the Turkish Cypriot school textbooks followed the same logic of ethnic nationalism. The books were entitled 'Cyprus History', but the certificates given to the pupils at the end of each semester refer to the subject as the 'History of Turkish Cypriot National Struggle'. From the perspective of this protagonist, in 1974, it was a glorious victory.
- 17.** After its election victory in 2003, the left-wing UTP (Republican Turkish Party) called for a complete rewrite of school history books, as this party and its supporters favoured reunification and critical of Turkey. Since then, the history books have criticised the old ones for teaching that Cyprus was the Turkish homeland. The terms "our island" or "our country" are often used for

Cyprus. Furthermore, they emphasise that Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots have had many similarities, and what has divided them have been the forces of nationalism and the British "Divide and Rule" practice.^x

18. Under these circumstances, the history textbooks have played an essential role in the conflict between the two communities. As UNESCO believes, *"Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed."* the authorities of the two educational systems could make changes to the history textbooks, so they promote the critical thinking, the mutual trust between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots and in peace education.

IV. Bilingualism in the field of education

19. Cyprus has never been monolingual. For over four hundred years, the main languages are Greek and Turkish. The recognition of Greek and Turkish as official languages of the Republic of Cyprus in Article 3 of the 1960 Constitution was a political act aimed at recognising the two communities based on equality.^{xi}
20. After the island's division in 1974, significant population shifts led to a radical differentiation of the population distribution in the northern and southern parts of Cyprus. Greek Cypriots were forced to leave the places of the north, and Turkish Cypriots from all over Cyprus moved to the areas under Turkish Cypriot control.
21. In northern Cyprus, the only official language is Turkish. The constitutional document does not acknowledge minority languages. The children in the schools learn to speak and write in Turkish. Since 2004, the local Cypriot culture has been included in the curriculum, and the teacher is expected to emphasise the active use of the Turkish language and [must] continuously make efforts to develop the Cypriot Turkish culture. The curriculum also includes the Turkish-Cypriot Literature course, and one of the course's objectives was to 'contribute to the students' ability to perceive the difference between Cypriot Turkish and Turkish spoken in Turkey.
22. As for Greek, the language of the neighbouring society, courses are also offered optionally in some universities. Since 2003, the KTOS (Teachers' Trade Union) has been offering Greek language courses that are open to all. Moreover,

Greek Private institutes offer Greek courses, as some Turkish Cypriots go to the south to take Greek courses.^{xii}

- 23.** On the other hand, the language in the field of education in south Cyprus is Standard Modern Greek. Turkish has been introduced as an optional foreign language in secondary schools since 2004 due to the changes and obligations brought by the entry of Cyprus into the European Union. Nowadays, it is taught as a foreign language in the 2nd and the 3rd class of high school.^{xiii}

V. Higher Education in the Internationally Unrecognized State

- 24.** After the island's division in 1974, a Higher Technological Institute was established in Northern Cyprus. In 1986, the governments of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and Turkey agreed to open the Eastern Mediterranean University. Then, private universities began to spring up around the state, such as the Girne American University and the Middle East Technical University. Furthermore, the Istanbul Technical University signed a protocol with the government to open campuses in the state.
- 25.** The leading sector of Northern Cyprus is education. In this state, no less than 23 universities have been concentrated and attract students from developing countries, mainly Africa, the Middle East, and the Indian subcontinent, by offering affordable courses with a "European" stamp of approval.
- 26.** However, universities in Northern Cyprus are not listed in important reference publications, which come out annually as a result of the joint endeavour of UNESCO and the International Association of Universities, for example, the International Handbook of Universities, the World List of Universities, and the Higher Education Database.
- 27.** Although three universities in North Cyprus were accepted as full members of the International Association of Universities in December of 2005, two years later, the Executive Committee of the Administrative Board took a final decision and refused the inclusion of these universities in the reference publications, because they are not listed among institutions recognised by the competent national body in one of the countries recognised by the UN, the Republic of Cyprus.^{xiv}

- 28.** The Republic of Cyprus emphasises that internationally recognised educational organisations cannot accept them because establishing these universities violates UN Security Council resolutions. It added these institutions were built on property mainly belonging to Greek Cypriot displaced people who were forced to flee their homes due to the Turkish invasion. Notably, Turkey has been found responsible by the European Court of Human Rights for violations of the property rights of Greek Cypriot land and property owners in the occupied area of Cyprus. It concluded that the Greek Cypriot owners remained legal in the occupied areas.^{xv}
- 29.** Under these circumstances, international students feel disappointed as the agents of these universities make false promises. Magazi Ahmed, a student from Sudan and member of the Voice of International Students, claimed: "All the people who come here are shocked by the reality they discover.". According to the Cypriot authorities, over 19,000 people crossed over in 2022, most of whom were students in North Cyprus who planned to go to Europe.^{xvi}

VI. Recommendations

- 30.** Broken Chalk recommends the authorities, the organisations, and the stakeholders collaborate in the field of education, as it is essential for the future generations of Cyprus.
- 31.** Broken Chalk recommends the authorities of the educational systems should promote the kind of education that prepares children and youth to live in a multi-cultural and multi-lingual society.
- 32.** Broken Chalk recommends that the two communities should promote peace education.
- 33.** Broken Chalk recommends educational activities that the two communities could organise to help children and youth learn more about Cyprus's multicultural and multilingual society.
- 34.** Broken Chalk recommends history textbooks should promote critical thinking and multiperspectivity.
- 35.** Broken Chalk recommends controversial issues of history, such as the events in 1974, should not be avoided but approached critically.

36. Broken Chalk recommends all universities in Cyprus should comply with international legislation and standards.
37. Broken Chalk recommends that Greek and Turkish languages be taught in the schools, as they are the official languages in Cyprus.

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