

An Assessment of Civil Society in Cyprus

A Map for the Future
2005

EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES



CIVICUS: CIVIL SOCIETY INDEX REPORT FOR CYPRUS

An international action-research project coordinated by
CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation



Conducted by The Management Centre of the Mediterranean
in collaboration with Intercollege

DISCLAIMERS

- This country report is divided into two sections because of the *de facto* division of the island of Cyprus since 1974. Each section was prepared by a different team but a decision was taken to include them in a single document as a symbolic gesture of their commitment to a common future and a common polity that would be acceptable to the majorities in both the Greek Cypriot and the Turkish Cypriot communities. The authors of each section are responsible for its contents only. This means that they do not necessarily agree with, and should not be therefore held responsible for, what the other section contains and the terminology that is used.
- This report does not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations Development Programme, its funders or member states. It is the fruit of a collaborative effort by a team of academics and consultants.



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SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Executive Summary: Civil Society in the southern part of Cyprus

(AREAS CURRENTLY UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS)

The CIVICUS Civil Society Index project was undertaken during the period March – September 2005 by Intercollege and the Management Centre of the Mediterranean, aiming to analyse and assess civil society in Cyprus. Civil society was assessed in terms of what CIVICUS refers to as the four ‘dimensions of civil society’ – its **structure**, the **environment** in which it operates, the **values** it promotes and shares and its **impact**.

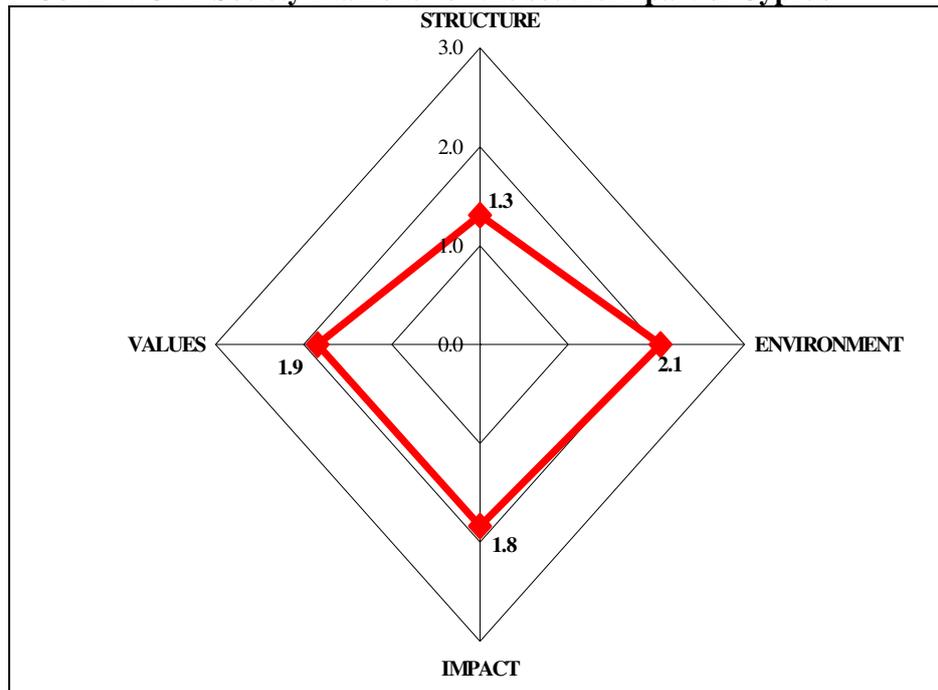
Due to the de facto division of the island and the segregation of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities, it was necessary to undertake two separate studies. The two project teams (Intercollege for the southern part and the Management Centre of the Mediterranean for the northern part of Cyprus), followed the same methodology and the implementation of each project stage was conducted in parallel.

The results presented below concern the main findings of the Intercollege research team and the evaluation of civil society in the areas currently controlled by the government of the Republic of Cyprus. The indicator scoring was carried out by a ‘Project Advisory Group’ (PAG) made up of thirteen persons of different backgrounds, based on the data collected by the research team and presented to the PAG in a scoring meeting that took place on 3 September, 2005.

The results of the scores given by the PAG are portrayed in a diagram, plotting the scores for the four dimensions: structure, environment, values and impact. The highest possible score was three and the lowest possible score was zero. The resulting Civil Society Diamond shows that:

- ❖ The **structure** of civil society is considered ‘slightly weak’, and is given a score of 1.3.
- ❖ The **environment** in which civil society is located was judged as ‘relatively enabling’ and was given a score of 2.1.
- ❖ The extent to which civil society practices and promotes positive social **values** was considered ‘relatively significant’ and given a score of 1.9.
- ❖ The **impact** of civil society on society at large was judged to be ‘moderate’ and was given a score of 1.8.

FIGURE 1: Civil Society Diamond for the southern part of Cyprus



Data concerning the **structure** of civil society show that levels of public participation in organised forms of volunteering (i.e. through organisations) are low. Even though a large percentage of the population survey sample stated that they had in the past donated to charity or engaged in some form of non-partisan political action, the percentage of those who had engaged in volunteering or were members of a civil society organisation was below 50%. Moreover, it seems that social groups such as ethnic or linguistic minorities, foreign workers and rural dwellers are largely excluded from the membership and leadership of civil society organisations. Only the affluent appear to be overrepresented in such organisations.

The research revealed a high concentration of civil society organizations (CSOs) in urban areas and more specifically, Nicosia, the capital. The lack of opportunity for citizen participation in rural areas seems to be accentuated by the fact that the majority of civil society organisations do not seem to be actively involved in local communities.

Turning to issues of civil society's infrastructure, the research found that CSOs belonging to a federation, umbrella organisation or network seem to enjoy somewhat higher levels of support. Nonetheless, many stakeholders believe that federations or similar networks are not highly effective. This could provide some justification for the rather small number of organisations that belong to a federation.

Generally speaking, cooperation and communication between different sectors of civil society is limited. Furthermore, the majority of organisations operate at a local or national level, while it is more common for trade unions and employers' organisations to be linked with international organisations than organisations from other sectors of civil society.

Finally, civil society organisations appear to be quite well resourced, although the PAG's view was that their financial resources were poor.

Civil society seems to operate in a relatively enabling **environment** in which political rights and civil liberties are safeguarded, where there is a clear separation of powers, a generally independent, well-respected judiciary and a comprehensive legal framework against fraud and

corruption. The majority of the population survey respondents show high levels of trust for the judiciary and the police.

Although there is a solid legal and institutional framework that safeguards human rights and civil liberties and gives the Republic of Cyprus the features of a modern democracy, there are areas of concern either because laws are ignored by the authorities or due to the way they are being implemented. The CSI team was able to find evidence of instances that continue to cause worry, such as, for example, the trafficking of women, police brutality, violation of the human rights of immigrants, the difficulty of journalists to obtain public documents, the pressures to which the holders of political office are subjected by powerful social and financial groups and the customer-provider type of relationship that exists between political parties and their voters.

Political parties have a huge impact on civil society with a great number of organisations having close relations to them, relations that often limit their autonomy. Relations between many CSOs and the state are largely determined by the connections that these organisations have with the political parties.

An important issue that emerged from the research concerned the lack of effective state monitoring of the finances of CSOs. Another issue was the lack of transparency in the mode of allocating state funds to CSOs.

The research also revealed a low level of corporate philanthropy. Compared to larger countries where the notion of corporate social responsibility (CSR) is well developed, Greek Cypriot private companies do not seem to have such policies in place. A case study carried out by the research team concerning the level and nature of CSR shows that the only companies that have such policies in place are the three largest banks – the Bank of Cyprus, the Popular Bank and the Hellenic Bank. Thus, the low level of CSR could be attributed to the small size of the overwhelming majority of enterprises, which allows them to contribute to charities only on an *ad hoc* basis.

Regarding the extent to which civil society practices and promotes positive social **values**, it seems that in their majority, CSOs practice internal democracy, and are committed to gender equity and transparency. Nonetheless, they seem to do little to promote these values in the wider society. In fact, during the research period there were no examples of civil society activity dedicated to the promotion of government and corporate transparency, tolerance, democracy or the eradication of poverty. There were however, some examples of activity dedicated to the promotion of peace and non-violence, the protection of the environment and gender equity.

Finally, with regards to the **impact** of civil society on public policy and the wider society, the research has shown that this varies according to the nature of CSOs. On the whole, civil society is not considered to be very active in holding the state or private corporations accountable. Furthermore, it does not seem to be a generator of positive social norms, such as tolerance, trust and public spiritedness, since there is no significant variation in the attitudes of members of CSOs compared to those of non-members on these three norms. CSOs do, however, according to popular belief, provide better services to marginalised social groups than the state and are quick to respond to pressing social needs.

Interestingly, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) seem to be less trusted by the population than the President, police and army. On the other hand, NGOs appear to enjoy higher levels of trust than the press, television, the Parliament, the Trade Unions and political parties. However, the public seems to trust the Church more than NGOs. Thus, it is not possible to provide a general answer on the levels of trust that civil society enjoys.

Civil society does not seem to have a big impact on the levels of tolerance, trust and public spiritedness, since there is no significant variation on the views of members of CSOs compared to those of non-members on these three issues. In fact, when prompted to state the degree of trust they had for their fellow citizens, members and non-members of CSOs shared the view that only some people can be trusted. In addition, the levels of intolerance of members and non-members of organisations seem to be the same: both categories in their majority stated that they would not like to have people with cultural characteristics different to those of Greek Cypriots as neighbours. Also, the levels of public spiritedness seem to be equally high in both groups.

Bi-communal cooperation between Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities, as well as citizen participation in bicomunal events, seems to be very limited, with 82% of survey respondents saying that they had not participated in any kind of bicomunal activity during the last year. Furthermore, 57% of civil society stakeholders who took part in a separate study said that less than 20% of CSOs have participated in an activity jointly organised with a Turkish Cypriot organisation. The few examples of bicomunal cooperation that do exist mostly involve cultural events, discussions, research, exhibitions and other similar events.

The findings of the CSI study were discussed during a workshop among civil society stakeholders, where a number of seminal issues and recommendations emerged. First, it was pointed out that many CSOs do not seem to be aware of the benefits of synergies and are not particularly keen to form umbrella-organisations, networks and federations. Second, participants pointed to the urgent need to diversify CSOs' sources of income so that they become more effective and less dependent on those who fund them. This was particularly important as it was felt that state and party political funding reduced the autonomy of civil society organisations. Forming independent and 'intermediate' bodies that would provide information for funding opportunities and help organisations secure funds (particularly from the European Union) was considered of paramount importance. In order to cultivate a democratic ethos, the participants to the workshop proposed that civil rights education within the educational system should be rethought and further developed. At the same time, it was reiterated that CSOs must practise participatory democracy and conduct their affairs in ways in which their commitment to tolerance, dialogue and non-violence become evident in their everyday practices.

At different points of the full report attempts are being made to explain the factors that lie behind the multiplicity of phenomena, institutions and processes constituting civil society in the southern part of Cyprus. Important explanatory variables that account for the current shape of civil society as it is portrayed in this report include:

- the fact that Cyprus gained its formal independence in 1960 and it took its polity some time to acquire the features of a modern democracy such as notions of citizenship and respect for the human rights and civil liberties of all social groups;
- the intercommunal conflict and the involvement of Greek junta, Turkey and other countries in the political affairs of the country that culminated in the de facto division of the island, displaced thousands of people but also elevated 'the Cyprus problem' to the status of the most important topic of public debate;
- the dominance of political parties over virtually every aspect of the public sphere;
- the impressive growth of the economy but also its small size;
- the high levels of intolerance that permeate the entire fabric of social life and
- the accession of the Republic of Cyprus to the European Union with all that it entailed for the relationship between citizens and their state.

Although this list is by no means exhaustive, it is to factors such as these that we should turn our attention if we are to begin to understand the characteristics and dynamics of civil society in the southern part of Cyprus.

Civil society is, of course, anything but a homogeneous arena. Within civil society one can come across a variety of organisations ranging, for example, from welfare associations to trade unions; and from advocacy groups to sports clubs, choirs, religious associations and youth organisations. Attempting to approach civil society as a homogenous entity is riddled with difficulties and downplays the complexity of social reality. What this piece of research has hopefully achieved is to map a largely un-researched field, point to possible avenues for further research and provide all those active or interested in civil society with plenty of stimuli for reflection.

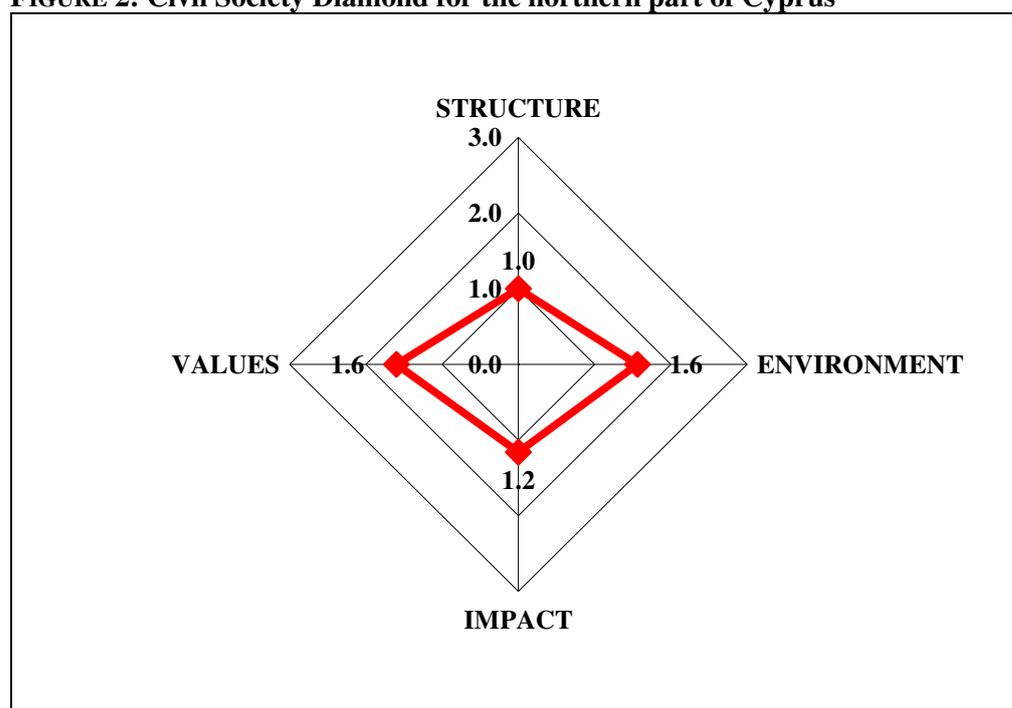
Executive Summary: Civil Society in the northern part of Cyprus

From March to September 2005, the CIVICUS Civil Society Index project (CSI) collected information and input from a broad range of civil society representatives, citizens, experts and researchers on the state of civil society in Cyprus. As Cyprus remains de facto divided, the project team conducted the study separately in the southern and northern parts of the island, but used the same methodology and implementation approach. Using a comprehensive framework of more than 70 indicators and drawing on extensive data collected by the project team, the respective Project Advisory Groups (PAG) assessed the overall state of civil society on either side of the Green Line separately. As a result, in the case of Cyprus, two Civil Society Diamonds and two reports were produced.

This executive summary discusses the findings that emerged from the study of the northern part of Cyprus. In recent years much has changed in the northern part of Cyprus. The impending European Union accession prompted the international community to forestall the admission of a de facto divided island as a member to the union. The UN blueprint – commonly known as the Annan Plan – stirred Turkish Cypriot civil society into motion. The plan that aimed to reunite the island was first revealed in November 2002 and separate, simultaneous referenda were held in both communities in April 2004. The plan was rejected by the Greek Cypriot community but endorsed by the Turkish Cypriots. The role of civil society in mobilizing support for the plan and EU membership is widely believed to have been crucial. The findings reported in this report reflect the period immediately after the Annan debate.

For the first time for the community in the northern part of Cyprus, a comprehensive and participatory assessment of civil society has been carried out through the CSI project. Its findings seek to chart the way for civil society's progress in the years to come. As the CSI study has found, the further development of civil society in the community in the northern part of Cyprus will require a focus on structural features and on strengthening its impact on government in particular, if not society at large. Overall, the CSI results suggest that civil society's values are its greatest strength, and the environment may not be as debilitating a factor as is often assumed regarding the Turkish Cypriot community. The Civil Society Diamond which emerged suggests areas for further development, especially on the structure and impact dimensions of civil society. Significantly, it suggests that despite the extraordinary role of civil society in addressing the Cyprus problem, its overall impact is limited.

FIGURE 2: Civil Society Diamond for the northern part of Cyprus



The CSI project brought to light various insights on civil society in the community in northern Cyprus. These highlights are briefly summarized below.

The examination of civil society's **structure** in the community in northern Cyprus revealed that apart from the huge mass demonstrations for and against the Annan Plan — civic participation in civil society remains limited. Whereas a significant proportion of Turkish Cypriots belong to a CSO or may have undertaken some form of non-partisan political action, volunteerism, especially within civil society organizations (CSOs), is fairly low. Participation in bi-communal events – that is, events together with Greek Cypriots – is also low, although in this case the relative paucity of co-sponsored or organized events may be a contributing factor. Another challenge for a healthy structure of civil society is the exclusion of significant social groups such as minorities, poor people, and workers, if not “settlers” from Turkey in CSOs. Women were equally represented in their level of involvement in CSOs; however, men predominantly hold leadership positions.

During the time leading up to the referendum on the Annan Plan, support for the Plan was galvanized by ad hoc umbrella organizations. To the extent that these umbrella organizations exist, they have proven effective. A major inhibitor for the establishment of more formal umbrella organizations is legal constraints, since specific legal provisions for their establishment do not exist. Thus, aside from sports federations, which are numerous, such organizations are limited. Finally, inadequate levels of resources, be they financial, human or infrastructural, continue to hinder the development of civil society.

Less problematic than usually assumed appears to be the **environment** in which civil society operates. Despite the presence of tens of thousands of troops from mainland Turkey, as well as dependence on Turkey on a number of levels, civil society in northern Cyprus exists in an environment that is considered to be politically free and also where civil liberties are, for the most part, respected. Moreover, the socio-economic context is largely favourable, somewhat surprising in light of the fact that residents in northern Cyprus have been ‘isolated’ from the international community for more than 40 years. Generous transfers from Turkey have helped sustain the Turkish Cypriot community over the decades. However these transfers have caused dependency and an irrational ‘public administration’. Other problems are that rule of

law is compromised by patronage, 'state' centralization - whereby the 'state' controls resources and is not accountable - and a lack of transparency within the public administration.

Dependency on Turkey also affects the 'state's' autonomy in policy making and implementation. This means that any 'government' in northern Cyprus must work in tandem with authorities in Ankara at various levels, to coordinate and implement policy. Since Turkey finances various projects, the 'state' has little leverage.

The above mentioned dependency on Turkey is not the sole deficiency for civil society's environment. Political parties lack internal democracy. Moreover, press freedoms are sometimes curtailed and journalists have been charged for various offences in military court. Acts of intimidation, arson and murder are rare but have been documented. Most debilitating for civil society are relations with the 'state' and particularly the private sector. In addition, corporate social responsibility is an area that needs improvement.

The CSI assessed the extent to which civil society practices and promotes positive **values** as moderate. A particular strength was detected in the commitment of civil society actors to non-violence. The project advisory group (PAG) also felt that society in northern Cyprus was a relatively tolerant society. Thus a variety of CSOs could be identified that often spoke out against the use of violence and in favour of inclusion. These are critical elements for fostering peace and understanding in ethnically divided Cyprus. Although not an aim of this study, as the various surveys did not address the question of tolerance vis-à-vis Greek Cypriots explicitly, the substantive issues related to a reunified Cyprus scenario can not be addressed here. Nor would it be fair to say that civil society actors and CSOs all share the same orientation. Indeed, a small group of CSOs and members of society remain committed to a more exclusive concept of society based on ethnicity, and for a few violence remains a legitimate means.

Finally, on the **impact** dimension the CSI assessed civil society's efforts to influence policy as relatively insignificant. Whereas CSOs played an extraordinary role in galvanizing support for the aforementioned Annan Plan, impact in other areas remains limited. For instance, it was revealed that teachers' syndicates may be effective in bargaining for wages, but are not as effective in curricular issues. Similarly, success in negotiating 'public' sector wages and minimal wages among trade unions does not translate into impact in the overall budgetary process.

One can draw a line between those CSOs that include trade and 'public' sector unions, as well as private sector chambers that strive for the interest and benefits of their members and are protected by special laws, on the one hand, and those NGOs which are working for the public in general such as environmental and health organizations that do not enjoy the protection and benefits of special laws, on the other.

In a number of areas, including environmental protection, traffic regulations, and other areas of concern to citizens, and where CSO lobbying efforts are apparent, policy changes are not always forthcoming. Not surprisingly, civil society is not successful in holding either the 'state' or private sector accountable. Where civil society seems more adept is in responding to social interests, and empowering citizens through information campaigns.

These and many other issues were raised in the final workshop that brought together a large number of stakeholders to discuss and interpret the CSI findings and come up with specific recommendations and priorities for the future development of civil society in Cyprus as a whole, and in the southern or northern parts of Cyprus, respectively. Nearly 50 people from CSOs, academic institutions and public administration participated in the workshop. Workshop participants identified the challenges and issues of civil society within their own communities and then throughout the entire island. They then produced recommendations

regarding how to strengthen civil society, especially identifying the means of strengthening its structure and impact. Specific recommendations include the introduction of civic education curricula, and training for CSOs to equip members and leaders with the tools that will help professionalize their organizations. The environment could be rendered more conducive with the introduction of advocacy centres, and legal counsel for CSOs, as well as with the introduction of 'legislation' that would make the establishment of umbrella bodies easier.

The full report contains these and other specific recommendations for the strengthening of civil society in the northern part of Cyprus, as well as those that address the needs of civil society in Cyprus more generally.

The CSI project provides the community of the northern part of Cyprus with a collectively generated and communally owned roadmap for the future. It is hoped that the participatory and knowledge-based nature of the CSI project has laid the groundwork for civil society and other stakeholders to act upon the goal of making civil society in northern Cyprus stronger and more sustainable in the future.