

Armenians in Cyprus

Cyprus is the third largest island in the Mediterranean after Sicily and Sardinia. The island lies 65 km south of Turkey, 112 km west of Syria, 267 km north of Israel, and 418 km east of Egypt. The northwest distance to Greece is 965 km. Since 1964, Greece has been trying to annex the island.

In different historical periods until 1571, the island was ruled by the Byzantine Empire, the Arab Caliphate, Christian knights, the Mamluk Empire, and the Venetian Republic. In 1571, Cyprus became part of the vast Ottoman Empire. In 1878, under a protectorate treaty, the British received the right to rule the island from the Turks, subject to the provision of military assistance to the Ottoman Empire against the Russians. In 1914, Cyprus was annexed on the grounds that the Ottoman Empire was at war with Great Britain. Only in 1960, Cyprus gained independence and thereby, the Republic of Cyprus was formed. After the Cypriot coup and Turkish invasion, the Turkish Federated State of Cyprus was created. Currently, the island is de facto a homeland of two states: the Republic of Cyprus (Greeks) and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (Turks).

Concerning the topic under consideration, note that according to some sources, the first Armenians (about 3,000 people) were brought to the island in the second half of the 6th century, during the period of the Byzantine Empire.

Professor at the University of Illinois, American historian Ronald S. Jennings in his book *Christians and Muslims in Ottoman Cyprus and the Mediterranean World (1571-1640)*, published in New York in 1993, singled out Orthodox Greeks, Armenians, Maronites (Christian Arabs), and Jews as non-Muslim Cypriotes. This means that a small population of Armenians already lived in Cyprus during the Ottoman period. They were probably Cilician Armenians who fled to Cyprus in 1335, when the Egyptian Mamluk Empire captured Cilicia.

The next wave of Armenian migration fell on 1909, which was marked by the Adana events (Armenian uprising). At that time, Cyprus was a British colony.

In December 1921, after the French left the Turkish cities of Adana and Gaziantep (as a consequence of the national liberation movement of 1918-1923 in Turkey), Armenians supporting the interventionists fled to Cyprus.

It is known that at that time, the Armenian population of the island was about 8,000. They settled directly in the Turkish quarters and made attempts to oust the Turks.

When the First World War began, France and England formed armed groups of Cypriot Armenians. As of October 2, 1916, a total of 3 camps were established in Bogaztepe (Monarga), Dokuzevler, and Lefkosia (the capital of which was

Nicosia) to participate in the war against the Ottoman Empire. In parallel, the French took repressive actions against the Turkish population. Under ridiculous pretexts, representatives of the Turkish elite and intelligentsia were arrested and imprisoned in Kyrenia Castle. This continued until 1921.

A lot of us heard about the Armenian legion during the Second World War but few people know that the French army also had one in its composition during the First World War.

In 1915, the Armenian journalist, a disillusioned socialist, one of the founders of the Hunchak and Dashnaktsutyun extremist parties Mikayel Varandyan (born Mikayel Hovhannisyan) proposed to the French, British, and Russian authorities in Paris to arrange a 20,000-strong Armenian volunteer squad on behalf of the Western Bureau of Dashnaktsutyun. According to Varandyan's proposal, the Armenian armed unit was to be trained in Cyprus and then sent to war with the Ottoman Empire. Russia and England approved this proposal, and France abandoned this idea.

Having lost the Battle of Gallipoli (Dardanelles Campaign) to the Turks at Chanakkale in January 1916, the Entente (the military-political alliance between Russia, France, and Great Britain in 1907-1917) states, first the Anglo-French command, decided to open a second front in the southeast of the Ottoman Empire. The head of the US intelligence service in Egypt, Colonel Clayton proposed to deploy Armenian formations on the island of Cyprus under the flag of France. At that time, Cyprus was ruled by Great Britain, and the head of the Armenian national delegation, politician Boghos Nubar supported this idea. But the Armenians set a condition that they would fight only in Cilicia (southeast Turkey).

In 1819-1844, the brother of Boghos' paternal grandmother Boghos Bey Yusufyan was the Minister of Trade and Foreign Affairs and personal secretary of Muhammad Ali, the governor of the Ottoman Empire's Eyalet of Egypt. His father Nubar Pasha became the secretary of Yusufyan at the age of 17 and after his death in 1845, at the age of 20, the secretary of the governor of Egypt. In 1878-1895, he was the first Prime Minister of Egypt.

Boghos Nubar had been the Head of the Egyptian Railways for 8 years until 1898. He owned a land exploitation company in Menzel (Egypt), an omnibus (horse tram) company in Alexandria, and a water supply company in Cairo, and was engaged in the housing development of Heliopolis. He was a Board member of large Egyptian banks and a Chairman in some of them.

The Heliopolis Company for Housing and Development was founded in Cairo in 1906 as part of a partnership between a consortium of Belgian property developers led by Edouard Empain and Boghos Nubar. Boghos helped Empain (arranged through his ties with the Egyptian government) to buy 6,000 acres (24

km²) of land at 1 pound per acre, on which the latter built Heliopolis (a fashionable suburb of Cairo). 1 pound sterling was then equal to 5 US dollars, today it is about 130 US dollars. Empain paid £6,000. In 1901, 3-4 houses in Brooklyn (New York, USA) could be acquired for this money. Currently, the Heliopolis Company for Housing and Development and continues to work today, and perhaps is one of the financial sources of the Armenians.

Boghos Nubar is one of the founders and the first President of the Armenian General Benevolent Union, established in 1906 in Cairo, and the first Armenian philanthropist.

When the First World War started, the France Armenians formed volunteer battalions and fought as part of the French Foreign Legion. Armenians from the USA were also among them. In total, 1500 Armenian 'warriors' were in that legion. Only 250 of them survived.

On June 21, 1916, by the order of the French War Minister Colonel Pierre Horn, Colonel Ferdinand Romio was appointed commander of the Armenian legion. First, 600 Cilician Armenians and then, 550 Egyptian Armenians volunteered. The legion also included eight Armenian officers from the USA. In the first stage, 6 troops were formed, 200 soldiers each. Later, captured Syrians, Iraqi Arabs, and other motley crew from the Cypriot mines joined them. They also comprised workers who repaired the walls of Famagusta (the city of Gazimagusa in the Turkish part of Cyprus) and loaded the timber exported from Cyprus by warships.

According to the agreement between the Head of the Armenian national delegation Boghos Nubar, the French diplomat Francois Georges-Picot, and the British diplomat Mark Sykes, the Armenian Legion was created, which pursued the following goals:

- supporting the 'liberation' of Cilicia;
- 'restoring the Armenian state in Cilicia';
- becoming the core of the future Armenian army.

In May 1918, the number of Armenian legionnaires reached 4,000. On September 19, 1918, the Armenian legion fought its first battle against the Ottoman army as part of the French troops at the Arara hill in Palestine and then, it struggled in Lebanon and Syria along with the Anglo-French troops.

In mid-October 1918, another battalion was formed, and the number of legionnaires reached 5,000. In November 1918, the legion entered Cilicia.

The Armenian Legion was not the only Armenian military formation participating in the war against the Ottoman Empire. As known, about 250,000 Armenian soldiers and officers fought in the First World War on all fronts.

At that time, the campaign in support of the Cypriot Armenians was performed by the Armenian leaders Strak, Kirkor, Karabet, and Artvin, who fled to Cyprus from Anatolia, some individuals and organizations in Greece, Egypt, France, England, and the USA, as well as the Cypriots Unity Club, Fund to Assist the High Commissioner of Cyprus, Diocese of Kyrenia-Nicosia, and the X.Theccocharides company from Nicosia (Cyprus).

To disguise financial support from the island, Europe, and the USA, the British High Commission established a War Fund in Cyprus and handed it over to the command of the French Armenian camps.

According to the reports by residents, the attitude and behavior of the Armenian and Greek physicians in the Turkish POW camp were extremely cruel and far from mercy. The island Armenians attacked Turkish villages, blocked roads, showered stones on the Turkish POW camp, robbed passersby, and blasphemed Muslims, Islam, and the Prophet Muhammad. They terrorized not only the Turkish population of the island. Thus, they ransacked the Greek Trikomo village and killed a British soldier from the Royal Guard regiment. At British Governor John Clauson's request, the Armenians were forbidden to leave the camp and communicate with the residents.

Upon signing the Ankara Agreement on October 20, 1921 (between France and Turkey), the Armenian camp under the French flag in Cyprus was closed and everything concerning the camp was handed over to the British commander of the POW camp, Lieutenant Colonel Mazarwell, following which the Armenians from the camps left the island on ships.

In Cyprus, Armenians lived mainly in Nicosia, and a small part of them in Famagusta. Most of them were merchants and artisans. The Armenian chemical fertilizer importer Ornik Zekeryan from Nicosia was among the most prominent ones. Artin Bokhchadjyan owned 5 fabric shops in Nicosia. Tigran Uzunyan and Movsesi Sultanyan were engaged in the sale of bicycles and motorcycles. Armenians Ornik, Kirkor, and Nersesyan imported and sold sugar, lokum, and nuts.

Under the British, Vahram Levonyan was appointed Director of the island's Water Development Department, Aram Kevorkyan was the Postmaster General of Cyprus, and Apisog Utidjyan was the chief translator of the British Administration.

During the British period, the communist movement spread among the Cypriot Armenians. Since then, they have split into the Rights and the Lefts. The

Armenians, supported by the British administration, forced the communist Armenians to emigrate from the island.

In 1964, a confrontation emerged between the Greek and Turkish communities of the island. The Republic of Cyprus was established as a joint Greek-Turkish state. However, the Greeks soon started pursuing an anti-Turkish policy. Since then, the campaign of extermination of the Turkish Cypriots had been initiated. The Armenians living in the Turkish quarters moved voluntarily and massively to the Greek ones. In reply to the questions of foreign journalists, the Armenians stated, “Working in the Greek region while staying in the Turkish one is inexpedient.”

Also, in 1960-1963, Armenian families started emigrating from Cyprus en masse. During this period, approximately 1000-1200 Armenians emigrated to Armenia on two Soviet ships in coordination with the USSR. Most of the Armenian migrants belonged to the middle class and the poor. There were many artisans among them. From 1963 to 1965, another 200 Armenian families from Cyprus emigrated to Lebanon, England, Syria, America, and other countries.

The following reasons for the emigration of Armenians from the island were known:

- Armenians knew that the Greeks would sooner or later violate the constitutional order, thereby causing unrest on the island;
- Armenians were sick and tired of the abuses by the Greek authorities;
- Armenians who had not supported Berj Tilbiyan would not have a calm and normal life and access to government institutions on the island.

For these reasons, about 30% of the Cypriot Armenians left the island, and the Armenian population of about 4,000 decreased to 3,000 by mid-1965. Those were supporters of Berj Tilbiyan, who was a member of the Cypriot Parliament from the Armenian community.

When Armenians, who moved to the Greek part, refused to serve Greek propaganda and pay tribute, they were threatened, beaten, raped, or killed. Louise Bedrosyan and her mother Samandjyan were killed in their house in the center of the Greek region.

Under pressure and threats from the Greeks, the Armenians started turning gradually into a tool of political propaganda against the Turks. On the contrary, the Armenians of the northern part of the island lived comfortably and calmly among the Turks. This was evidenced by their statement to journalists on April 25, 1965.

In the first days of the events, some Armenians from the Turkish part of the island actively collaborated with the Greeks. They informed the Greeks through the Armenian Church located on the line dividing the Greek and Turkish parts.

Despite their anti-Turkish sentiments, the Cypriot Turks have never been hostile to them. Many Armenians who moved to the Greek part were coming to the Turkish one, visiting their houses or apartments, and taking off their belongings.

This is confirmed by materials stored in the Archives of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) in the city of Girne. Here are some of them.

On June 1, 1964, Mrs. Kohanig Shahinyan visited her home in the Turkish part and stated to the press interviewing her during the visit that the Turkish police treated her very well and she felt safer in the Turkish part than in the Greek one. Subsequently, Kohanig Shahinyan was savagely beaten in the Greek part of the island and threatened to murder.

Another Armenian Haig Assaduryan visited his old home in the Turkish part on June 4, 1964. He was "very happy when he saw his house and belongings intact and thanked the Turkish police for that."

In the 1960s, the Armenians making up a small minority in Cyprus were organized in almost all areas. Their main organizations were the Armenian Youth Union, Armenian Cultural Association, and Pan-Armenian Charitable Society. An Armenian gymnasium and radio in Armenian also operated there.

The contacts between the Cypriot and Lebanese Armenians were very close thanks to the close friendship of the Archbishop of Cyprus Makarios (President of Cyprus in 1960-1977) and Catholicos of Antelias (Cilicia) Khoren I. Makarios brought up an Armenian Mesrob from Nicosia in the Cypriot church, and in 1963, also with his support, Mesrob was elected Catholicos of Cilicia and took the name Khoren I.

Khoren was active against Turkey in Lebanon. When he tried to build a cathedral and a Saint Nishan Foundation by the sea near Beirut, it became known that this land belonged to Iran. Then Khoren contacted the Shah of Iran, and the Shah donated this land to the Foundation. While Khoren continued organizing the Lebanese Armenians and preparing them for actions against Turkey, on December 24, 1964, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Cyprus Spyros Kyprianou (President of Cyprus in 1977-1988), on the Makarios' directive, raised the 'Armenian issue' before the UN Security Council. Kyprianou mentioned the 1915 Deportation Law and stated that "the Turks killed the Armenians and therefore, the latter ones are preparing to commemorate the 50th anniversary of this inhuman action." Not being content with that, Makarios brought the Armenian issue to the Conference of the Heads of the Oriental Orthodox Churches in January 1965. Khoren also attended this Conference held in the capital of Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) Addis Ababa under

the auspices of Emperor Haile Selassie. There, in Ethiopia, he stated, “Turkey wants autonomy for the Cypriot Turks. Let's request the same autonomy for minorities from Turkey.”

The Armenian Youth Union in Cyprus was influenced by the Dashnaks; the Melkonyan Institute was a research center where the Hunchak group operated. The vast majority of Cypriot Armenians maintained good relations with the Turks. However, the organizations where the Dashnaks and Hunchaks operated constantly kept the ‘Armenian issue’ on the agenda and indisposed the island Armenians against Turkey.

On June 24, 1965, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the so-called ‘Armenian genocide’, a ceremony was held at the Melkonyan Institute under the chairmanship of the leader of the Cypriot Armenians Berj Tilbiyan by the order of the Catholicos of All Armenians Vazgen and under the auspices of the Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Greek Cypriots Glafkos Clerides. In a telegram sent to Makarios, Burj Tilbiyan wrote, “I read with great interest the proposal you made yesterday to solve the migration problem created by the Turkish rebels. I would like to express my admiration for the high Christian spirit and generosity you have demonstrated in this proposal. On second thought, I am sure you have not forgotten the real Armenian migrants. I would like to respectfully inform you that your official statement that Armenians will be treated with equal generosity will greatly help to keep up the morale of my community, which has been suffering quietly and patiently for already two years.”

As a result, on April 29, 1982, the Parliament of the Greek Cypriot Administration adopted the following decision, “The Armenian genocide in 1915 was organized by the Turkish regime.”

Based on an Israeli intelligence statement of July 6, 1987, the BBC spread the news that Armenian terrorists from ASALA (an Armenian military organization in 1975 - the early 1990s) were being trained in camps in the Troodos mountains of Cyprus. The news reported that about 700 Armenian, Kurdish, and Greek Cypriot terrorists were trained in camps in South Cyprus. ASALA moved part of its camps from Syria to Southern Cyprus, and the Armenian National Movement opened its liaison offices in Athens and Tripoli to provide financial support to these camps in the Greek part of Nicosia.

In May 1996, at the initiative of AKEL (Communist Party of Cyprus), an international forum of communist and left-wing parties was held in Larnaca in the south of Cyprus, attended by 38 organizations from around the world. Armenian communists also attended this forum. Close cooperation between Greece and Armenia in all areas, including the military sphere, was reflected at the level of parliaments, ministers, military forces, etc., of the Republic of South Cyprus and

the Republic of Armenia. The two sides maintain close ties and systematically make mutual visits.

In March 2001, the Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Cyprus Spyros Kyprianou visited Armenia, negotiated with the Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Armenia Armen Khachatryan, and was received by President Robert Kocharyan. At that meeting, Kocharyan stressed historical ties and the traditional friendship between the two countries, which also manifested as collaboration in international organizations. In September 2001, the Minister of Defense of South Cyprus Socratis Hasikos paid an official visit to Armenia, held bilateral negotiations with President Robert Kocharyan, Parliament Speaker Armen Khachatryan, Prime Minister Andranik Margaryan, and Defense Minister Serzh Sargsyan.

At the end of February 2002, Armenian Defense Minister Sargsyan visited South Cyprus and signed a new bilateral agreement for cooperation in the defense and military sphere.

A defense agreement has been in place between South Cyprus and Armenia for many years, providing for cooperation in military-technical issues, military training, etc. Armenian Defense Minister Serzh Sargsyan was received by the Head of the Greek Cypriot Administration Glafkos Clerides, Speaker of the Parliament Dimitris Christofias, and Archbishop of the Greek Orthodox Church Chrysostomos, and signed an agreement for defense cooperation with Greek Defense Minister Hasikos. The Minister of Defense of Cyprus Hasikos, the Ambassador of Southern Cyprus to Armenia Charalampos Ioannidis, and the representative of the Armenian Community in the Greek Parliament Bedros Kalaydjyan also attended the meeting of the Armenian Minister with Clerides. Sargsyan and Archbishop Chrysostomos had held a vis-a-vis meeting for about 40 minutes and stated that “Turkey is our common enemy.”

It is well known that many Armenian officers are trained in military schools in Greece. Before being sent to Greece, they take Greek language courses in southern Cyprus.

Bedros Kalaydjyan, who has been a representative of the Armenian Community in the Greek Parliament of South Cyprus, plays an important role in strengthening Greek-Armenian relations. Kalaydjyan had been an MP since 1996, and could win the election again in May 2001. The Paros monthly journal is published in two languages (Armenian and Greek), highly supported by the Armenian Community of the Greek part of Cyprus.

On April 25, 2002, at a meeting of the Parliament of Southern Cyprus, the ‘Armenian genocide’ commemoration ceremony was held, where Kalaydjyan expressed “gratitude on behalf of every Armenian.” All the political parties of

Southern Cyprus (the first European country to put the ‘Armenian genocide’ issue on the UN agenda) blamed Turkey and declared their solidarity with Armenia.

It is easy to guess what the Greek Cypriots and Armenians are talking about and planning. They are united by a policy against Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Northern Cyprus.

Ties between Greece, Armenia, and South Cyprus have now reached a high level. The trio is improving its relations with Russia and making efforts to establish close ties with Iran. Trilateral relations between Armenia, Greece, and Iran started in August 1995, and after the meeting of the foreign ministers of these countries in Athens on December 22, 1997, the institutionalization stage began. Meetings of the Executive Council, attended by the Deputy Foreign Ministers of these three countries, are held every two years. There are also trilateral relations Greece-Armenia-Egypt and Greece-Cyprus-Armenia.

Cypriot Armenians currently maintain a significant presence on the island, mainly in the capital Nicosia and also in Larnaca, Limassol, and Bafta. Their population is about 3,500.

The Armenian Diocese of Cyprus is located in Nicosia. They have chosen to belong to the Greek Cypriot community and under the 1960 Cypriot Constitution, they are recognized as a religious group along with the Maronites and the Latins.

The House of Representatives of Cyprus (Parliament) comprises 59 deputies elected for a five-year term. Of these, 56 deputies are elected by weighed voting according to party lists. 3 mandates are guaranteed for minorities: the Maronites (Christian Arabs), Catholics, and Armenians. The last elections were held on May 30, 2021.

In the Cypriot Parliament, Cypriot Armenians are represented by an elected representative. Vartkes Mahdesyan has been a representative since 2006. He is the managing director and shareholder of the International Cable Corporation in the UAE and owns the Cypriot company Troodos Electric Cables Ltd.

Marios Garoyan is very active in the political life of Cyprus. In 2006-2013, he was the Chairman of the Democratic Party and in 2008-2011, the Chairman of the Parliament of Cyprus. Since 2018, he has been the leader of the Democratic Equality Party and since 2021, a member of the House of Representatives.

The notorious Benon Vahe Sevan, who has worked for the UN for 45 years (1960-2005), is a native of Nicosia and a graduate of the Melkonian Institute. In 1996-2005, he was the Head of the United Nations Oil-for-Food Program.

Sevan accepted bribes in the form of oil vouchers from Saddam Hussein and allowed the latter to raise \$11 billion for military and other purposes. He continuously tried to convince the UN Security Council to make concessions to the

Iraqi regime. Sevan received large cash payments of \$160,000 for every year he managed the program. Sevan reported the receipt of this money from his aunt to the commission of inquiry but provided no evidence for this.

On January 16, 2007, Benon Sevan was charged with accepting bribes by a Manhattan Prosecutor. A warrant was later issued to Interpol for the arrest of Sevan at his home in Cyprus. The Extradition Treaty between the US and Cyprus does not require Cyprus to ship Sevan to the USA. In 2007, Sevan moved to Cyprus, where he was elected a permanent member of the Central Board of the Armenian General Benevolent Union.

Since March 2017, the Catholic Vicar Archbishop Khoren Dogramajyan, subordinate to the Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, has been the religious leader of the Cypriot Armenian Community. Armenian churches operate in the cities of Nicosia, Limassol, and Larnaca.

Traditionally, an Armenian is appointed headman in the Karaman-Zade (Armenian) district of Nicosia. There were 4 headmen: Melik Melikyan (1927-1949), Kasbar Delifer (1949-1956), Vahe Kuyumdjyan (1956-2009), and Mgo Kuyumdjyan (2011-present).

Armenian elementary schools operate in Larnaca, Limassol, and Nicosia, and a gymnasium in Nicosia. Melkonian Education Institute is the most famous educational establishment of Cypriot Armenians. Founded in 1926, the Melkonian Institute was open to Armenian students from all over the world and offered a comprehensive high school curriculum. All disciplines other than the Armenian language are taught in English and foreign languages, including Greek, French, Arabic, Persian, Russian, and Bulgarian. The Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation's daily hour-long Armenian radio program broadcasts wide-ranging interviews, news, cultural coverage, and music. The Armenian newspapers Artsankank (1995) and Azad Tsayn (2003) are published on the island.

On November 12, 2021, the Cyprus-Armenian Friendship Park was opened in Nicosia at the intersection of Armenian Street and Limassol Avenue, not far from the Melkonian Institute.

Memorials to the victims of the so-called 'Armenian genocide' were built in Nicosia, Larnaca, and Paphos (50 km from Limassol).

Today we can confidently argue for the existence of a Greece-Cyprus-Armenia union. Meetings of the foreign affairs and military ministries of the three countries became frequent. On August 31, 2021, Greece, Cyprus, and Armenia signed the Trilateral Defense Cooperation Program.

Concerning the EU's relations with Armenia, President Dimitris Christofias assured that Nicosia would continue to actively support the further strengthening of

these relations and pointed out that Armenia would receive full-fledged member candidate status in the nearest future. According to him, Cyprus is the strongest supporter and friend of Armenia in the EU.

Despite the relatively small population of Armenians in Cyprus, the Armenian Cypriot Community influenced significantly the Armenian diaspora and the Armenian people.

Many Armenian Cypriots emigrated to Great Britain, especially in 1964-1974, substantially forming today's British-Armenian Community.

In 1964, Greek Cypriots started demanding changes to the constitution and the abolition of the veto power of the Vice President, who should be a Turk under the 1960 Cypriot Constitution. The Greeks commenced infringing upon the rights of the Turkish Cypriots; clashes escalated into an armed conflict.

Cyprus gained independence and became a republic under the 1960 Treaty of Guarantee between Cyprus, Greece, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. Clause IV of the Treaty reserves for the guarantor countries the right to take action to restore the state of affairs in Cyprus. Under this Clause, in 1974, Turkey performed a military operation in Cyprus, the island was divided into the Greek and Turkish (38 % of the island's territory) parts, and the military conflict ended.

On April 24, 2004, according to Annan's plan, a referendum was held on the reunification of the island. In Northern Cyprus (Turkish Cypriots), a majority of 65% gave voices for reunification. Southern Cyprus (Greek Cypriots) rejected the reunification plan by 76% of votes. There are still two states on the island: the Republic of Cyprus in the south and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.