

Varosha: Resurrection of a Ghost Town

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Varosha, an abandoned district located in the southern quarter of Famagusta, has been officially reopened to the public fairly recently. Its opening received many criticisms from all over the globe, both positive and negative. What is more interesting is the fact that the zone in question had been closed for 46 years, ever since Famagusta came under Turkish control. Then, why is Varosha being reopened to the public just now? What was the matter with this district that led to its closure in the first place? Let's find out!



Before the 1974 Turkish invasion of Cyprus, Varosha was the number-one tourist destination in Cyprus. To cater to the increasing number of tourists, many new buildings and hotels were constructed. Between 1970 and 1974, it was not only the most popular tourist destination in Cyprus but also one of the most favorite destinations in the world. In August 1974, the Turkish army advanced as far as the buffer zone named Green Line, which still holds up until today. Before Greek Cypriot and Turkish armies clashed in combat on the Varosha streets, the entire of its population fled south to Paralimni, Dherynia, and Larnaca. The Turkish army took control and fenced the area, after which no entry has been allowed other than Turkish military and UN personnel. Annan Plan that aimed for the unification of the island, provided for the return of Varosha to its original residents. Yet this proposal was rejected by Greek Cypriots in a referendum.

In June 2019, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus Prime Minister Ersin Tatar announced Varosha's reopening to the public settlement. This announcement was eventually followed by the beach area of Varosha to be reopened on 8 October 2020. Zone entries are carried out by security guards, and visitors are expected to abide by certain rules.

On the internal politics side, Varosha's reopening led National Unity Party's coalition partner People's Party to withdraw from the cabinet, causing the collapse of the Turkish Cypriot

government. The reason why was pronounced by Deputy Prime Minister Kudret Özersay, who had also worked on the reopening process previously, claiming that this was not a complete reopening of the area but just an election stunt carried out by Tatar.



Meanwhile, on the external politics part of the issue, the United Nations expressed their concerns over this decision. "The Security Council expresses its deep concern regarding the announcement in Ankara on Oct. 6 to open the coastline of Varosha and calls for the reversal of this course of action, and for the avoidance of any unilateral actions that could raise tensions on the island".

Furthermore, Varosha's reopening was met with harsh criticisms internationally. President of the Republic of Cyprus Nikos Anastasiadis stated that the reopening of Varosha is a violation of the United Nations resolutions. A statement made by Greece stressed that Varosha's reopening would risk diplomatic solutions within the island. Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed the decision made by the Northern Cyprus government being "unacceptable" and stated that Kremlin has serious concerns over the issue.

Being an exceptionally popular Mediterranean tourist destination in the past, lying dormant for 46 years as a ghost town, Varosha is finally being reopened to the public. Even though Northern Cyprus is internationally embargoed due to the 1974 Turkish invasion, perhaps this historical step paves a road towards the reunification of Cyprus, benefiting both sides. Who knows? We will see how things will turn out to be. Until then, stay tuned, stay present!

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