

UK Trade Envoy Resigns Following Controversial Northern Cyprus Visit

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A UK trade envoy has resigned following criticism over a personal visit to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, a self-declared state recognised only by Turkey. Labour MP Afzal Khan, who represents Manchester Gorton and served as the UK trade envoy to Turkey, stepped down after facing mounting pressure from political groups and the British Cypriot

community. The resignation underscores the sensitivities surrounding the Cyprus issue and the delicate nature of diplomatic representation.

Khan defended the visit as personal and self-funded, taking place during the parliamentary recess. He stated that he travelled to the region to see his nephew and to receive an honorary degree, asserting that the trip was entirely unrelated to his official duties as trade envoy. Nevertheless, photographs from the visit, including meetings with Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar and displays of TRNC flags, drew criticism for appearing to lend legitimacy to an unrecognised entity.

The National Federation of Cypriots in the UK, representing more than 300,000 British citizens of Cypriot descent, denounced the visit as a violation of international law. The federation argued that Khan's actions contradicted the United Kingdom's longstanding policy on Cyprus, calling for his immediate removal from the trade envoy role. In statements to the press, leaders described the visit as "a serious breach of diplomatic propriety" and a move that risked undermining the UK's role as a neutral mediator in Cyprus peace negotiations.

Political reactions in Westminster were swift. Conservative MPs, including Dame Priti Patel, criticised Khan's actions for eroding the credibility of British diplomacy in the Eastern Mediterranean. Some lawmakers called on the government to reaffirm its official stance on Cyprus and clarify whether Khan had sought prior approval for the visit. The controversy also prompted discussion about the responsibilities of public officials and the need to maintain a clear separation between personal trips and formal diplomatic duties.

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office emphasised that the visit had been conducted in a personal capacity and had not been sanctioned by the government. Officials stressed that UK policy continues to recognise only the internationally recognised Republic of Cyprus and that all official engagements should adhere to established diplomatic protocols.

Khan's resignation highlights the intersection of personal conduct, political accountability, and international diplomacy. The episode serves as a reminder of the symbolic weight carried by meetings with unrecognised states, particularly in regions with complex political histories. Analysts noted that the incident could affect the perception of UK neutrality in ongoing Cyprus negotiations and potentially complicate relationships with both Turkish and Greek Cypriot leaders.

While Khan expressed regret over any unintended consequences, he maintained that his intentions were personal and not political. Nonetheless, the backlash illustrates the scrutiny faced by MPs holding formal roles in international representation, where even personal actions can quickly attract diplomatic and political consequences.

The resignation leaves the role of UK trade envoy to Turkey vacant at a sensitive time for bilateral relations and regional stability. The government has yet to announce a replacement or outline steps to restore confidence among stakeholders. Observers suggest that the episode may prompt renewed attention to the conduct of envoys and the protocols governing travel to disputed territories, ensuring that future engagements align closely with the UK's official foreign policy objectives.