

Rape case teenager must be pardoned, Cyprus told

Pressure mounts on president amid calls for tourist boycott

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The woman was convicted on Monday of public mischief and faces up to a year in jail and a £1,500 fine when she is sentenced next Tuesday KATIA CHRISTODOULOU/EPA

The president of Cyprus is under increasing pressure to intervene in the case of a British teenager convicted of lying about being gang raped.

Lawyers in both countries have called on President Anastasiades to pardon the 19-year-old woman and have criticised the conduct of her trial, telling *The Times* that it should never have gone ahead. The woman, who has not been identified, claimed she had been raped by [12 Israeli men](#) while on holiday in the Cypriot resort of [Ayia Napa](#) on July 17 last year.

She then withdrew the allegation after what she now says was an eight-hour police interview conducted under duress and without legal advice.

The woman was convicted on Monday of public mischief and faces up to a year in jail and a £1,500 fine when she is sentenced on Tuesday.

The government has said that it is “seriously concerned” over the fairness of the trial, and Cyprus’s ambassador to the UK was summoned by officials. Although not wanting to be seen as trying to interfere in an overseas judicial system, sources at the [Foreign Office](#) said that they hoped to ensure the protection of a “vulnerable young woman”.

The teenager’s mother said yesterday that her daughter was suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, was sleeping 20 hours a day because of a condition called hypersomnia and had hallucinations when she heard foreign male voices. “She needs to get back to the UK to get that treated — that’s my absolute primary focus,” she told *Today* on Radio 4.

She also backed calls on social media for tourists to boycott the island.

The Times understands that there is widespread concern among lawyers in Cyprus over the handling of the case. Reports of the trial suggest that Michalis Papathanasiou, the judge who convicted the young woman, frequently berated her for allegedly not showing the court sufficient respect. The lawyers say that after she is sentenced political pressure will mount on Mr Anastasiades to exercise his power to pardon the teenager if a recommendation is made by his attorney-general.

“The authorities should absolutely consider a pardon,” Achilleas Demetriades, a leading human rights lawyer, said. Elena Ioannides, a commercial lawyer, said the Cypriot legal profession was “very surprised and disappointed that the case has got this far”.

A letter has been written to the attorney-general by prominent legal figures in the country asking him to intervene in the case.

Human rights lawyers in the UK also criticised the conviction. Kirsty Brimelow, QC, said the case “reeks of unfairness and injustice”, adding that the teenager could bring a case to the European Court of Human Rights.

Jonathan Cooper, a human rights barrister, said that the woman had “very good grounds for an appeal”, adding that “the problem with a pardon is you’ve got to accept that you did something to be pardoned for”.

A crowdfunding appeal to fund legal support for the woman passed its £105,000 target yesterday.

The Cypriot government said it would not comment on pending court cases, adding that the “executive authority . . . will make its decisions after the completion of the judicial process.” It said it had “full confidence in the justice system and the courts”.



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Q&A

Which judge oversaw the trial of the British teenager and was there a jury?

Michalis Papathanasiou, who sits in Famagusta district court in the town of Paralimni, convicted the woman of “public mischief”. In Cyprus, juries are not convened for criminal trials. A single judge hears most cases while more serious cases are heard by panels of three judges.

How was the judge alleged to have behaved?

It is reported that he lost his temper frequently during the trial and berated the defendant for not facing the court. A forensic pathologist, Marios Matsakis, who was an expert witness, told the Daily Mail that the judge’s behaviour had been “shameful”.

When delivering the guilty verdict, the judge said his decision was backed up by video evidence showing the woman having consensual sex. However, her mother said the video showed her daughter having consensual sex with one man and a group of people trying to get into the room. “[The video] shows her and the guy telling them to get out of the room,” she said.

He also said that the only time the teenager told the truth was when she was humiliated after learning that she had been filmed by the men. “She knows that she was never raped,” the judge added.

What do we know about his background?

He graduated with a law degree in 2000 and went straight into private practice as a lawyer. In 2010 he represented Christopher Metsos, a Canadian who was arrested in Cyprus on suspicion of being a Russian spy. Metsos fled after posting €27,000 bail. By 2015 Judge Papathanasiou was a member of the board of the Cyprus Judges Association

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