

From Akıncı to Arıklı:

The TRNC Political Landscape in the 2020 General Elections

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This article profiles the main candidates in the upcoming presidential elections in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), scheduled for October 11th, 2020, with a likely second round on October 18th. The aim is to better understand the electoral atmosphere, the similarities, and the differences between candidates, and to help assess the impact of the election outcome on the future of the Cyprus Problem

Introduction

This article profiles the main candidates in the upcoming presidential elections in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), scheduled for October 11th, 2020, with a likely second round on October 18th. Almost [200,000 people](#) are registered to vote in the election. Of the total 11 candidates some are running as independents, while others are running for a particular party. The profiles start with the current President, Mustafa Akıncı, followed by the current Prime Minister, Ersin Tatar. Certain [polls](#) suggest that incumbent President Mustafa Akıncı will likely face challenger Ersin Tatar (the current Prime Minister, and leader of the UBP party), in a second-round run-off. Akıncı is vying for a second term, having been elected as the fourth President of the TRNC in 2015 with 60.56% of votes in another second-round run-off against a UBP opponent, former President Derviş Eroğlu. Other candidates have readily challenged the veracity of various polls to date in the run-up to the election given perceived limitations in polling methodologies. Thereafter profiles are ordered alphabetically by surname. There is strictly no endorsement of any particular platform or candidate. Any discrepancy in profile word length reflects issues candidates themselves have raised, the need to explain the context and meaning of ideas to those unfamiliar with Turkish-Cypriot politics, and the political situation on the island known as the “Cyprus Problem”.

This article, therefore, outlines each candidate's positions on the Cyprus Problem. The aim is to better understand the electoral atmosphere, the similarities, and the differences between candidates, and to help assess the impact of the election outcome on the future of the Cyprus Problem. The traditional model for a solution to the Cyprus problem, as defined in numerous documents including the Joint Declaration of February 2014, is “a bi-communal, bi-zonal federation with political equality, as set out in the relevant Security Council Resolutions and the [1977 and 1979] High-Level Agreements”. However, as will be discussed, this model is now being questioned. As the TRNC is a prime ministerial system, the President has no role in the executive. The Turkish-Cypriot parliament is comprised of 50 members. There are representatives from six different parties, with Prime Minister Ersin Tatar's UBP holding 21 seats, Tufan Erhürman's CTP with 12, Foreign Minister Kudret Özersay's HP at 9, Mustafa Akıncı's former party at 3, Serdar Denktaş' former party at 3, and Erhan Anklı's YDP with 2 seats. The primary de facto role of the TRNC President, as the elected representative of the Turkish Cypriot community, is to negotiate, under United Nations (U.N.) auspices, a settlement of the Cyprus Problem with their Greek-Cypriot counterpart. There is also some contention between candidates as to whether the office of the Presidency should have an expanded role in the international arena beyond the settlement talks.

Finally, the author hopes that the complexity and nuance of Turkish-Cypriot political discourse is explained at the direct expense of the cruder and unnecessarily polarising paradigms of left versus right, pro versus anti-Greek Cypriot, pro versus anti-Turkey. Whatever the outcome, it is envisaged that the elections will be yet another demonstration of the competitiveness of the TRNC's constitutional democracy. The report can be read in conjunction with [Dizdaroğlu's](#) (2020) policy paper on the impact of the elections for peace prospects in Cyprus.

Backdrop of Settlement Talks

With rising tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean, largely emanating from the association between the Cyprus peace process and the island's natural gas exploitation process, a number of regional geopolitical developments are taking place that are of direct concern to the Turkish-Cypriots and the future of the island. Turkey, for example, has now come out far [more critical of the federal model for a settlement as it stands](#) (asserting that everything has been discussed), whilst the UN has expressed its desire to convene [another 5-party conference](#) after the Turkish-Cypriot elections. There have been several polls that indicate a second-round run-off is all but certain. Although by no means deterministic, there is a popular notion the political leaning of the next TRNC President has great bearing on the prospects for a negotiated settlement on the island. The rationale is that the closer both Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot leaders are to a solution based on the bi-zonal, bi-communal, federal model, the greater the chances for a settlement to the island's political situation. This in turn becomes all the more significant when coupled with the state of play in the Eastern Mediterranean, where geopolitical tensions can be traced back to the political situation on the island. However, such lines of thought are always complicated by the fact that the two communities have thus far not been able to see eye to eye on exactly how the bi-zonal, bi-communal, federal model, with political equality between the two communities, will in practice exist. As to the process to get there, peace is envisioned as a comprehensive package deal on the endpoint in time, an endpoint that has been out of reach now for 52 years. Throughout this period, two established mantras of the negotiations have emerged. Firstly, that ‘nothing is agreed until everything is agreed’. Secondly, that it is necessary to ‘solve the Cyprus Problem’ first, only then cooperation can take place.

These sensibilities have led to a great deal of posturing between the two communities both during and beyond the forum of the official U.N. – led settlement talks. The most prominent source of controversy over the last decade or so has been the future of natural gas development in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea, one that has been appropri-

ated in a way that has been seen as a tool of geopolitics to enforce a particular vision of peace, but also one that raised international stakes, leading to a spectacular collapse of the peace process in 2014. Over the decades, there have been various admixtures of political leaders on either side of the island that have hailed from across the political spectrum. Examples include the more centre-left Mehmet Ali Talat with Tassos Papadopoulos (centre-right), and then Demetris Christofias (left/centre-left), Derviş Eroğlu (centre-right) and Christofias, later Nicos Anastasiades (centre-right) and so on.

Even with combinations of leaders of similar domestic political appeals in their respective communities, for various reasons, a solution acceptable to all has yet to be found. In the peace process, there are certain entrenched points, 'national issues' that may supersede ideology. An extensive discussion of that is not part of this paper. However, the reader will find between Turkish-Cypriot candidates how, where, and why, there is both change and continuity in political thought such as, for example, a stalwart emphasis on "political equality" or "Turkish-Cypriot identity" across the board. The political leanings of the TRNC President is one but one piece of a far more complex puzzle, both within Turkish-Cypriot politics and regional geopolitics. Owing to the extraordinary situation on the island, the TRNC is recognised only by Turkey, and is only able to sit down in negotiation with the Greek-Cypriots with political and material support from the latter. Some view this state of affairs as a gracious lifeline, whilst others see political concessions enticed from a state of dependence, though the notion of dependency can be problematic.



Mustafa Akıncı
(Independent Candidate, previously hailing from the TDP –

Communal Democrat Party, Centre-Left)

Arguing that a two-state solution is simply not feasible, President Mustafa Akıncı is stalwart on the bi-zonal, bi-communal federation with two constituent states, emphasising political equality and rotating presidency for the Turkish-Cypriots. When it comes to the federal model for a solution, a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation with political equality and effective decision-making for the Turkish Cypriots remains the baseline Turkish-Cypriot position

across the political spectrum. Coming from the more centre to left-wing spectrum of Turkish political thought, in abstract terms (which do in fact form a lot of the propaganda that all candidates disseminate on the campaign trail), Akıncı is firm on the notion of Turkish-Cypriot independent political agency. He often speaks of Turkish-Cypriot agency as something neither to be whittled down into an impotent minority on the island vis-à-vis the Greek-Cypriots nor to be automatically over-powered in all instances by Turkey. A binary is presented with apprehension about two potential extremes. Just how immediate or warranted these two potentialities are remains open to question, and a popular feature of political debate that all candidates draw upon, in one way or another, especially in terms of how much power the Turkish-Cypriots will have in a future federal Cyprus. Akıncı is unfavourable to a two-state solution, asserting that there are only two possible futures on offer: a federal solution, or the continuation of the status quo. He warns that the promotion of a two-state solution will hamper the peace process and that the Turkish-Cypriots in their unrecognised and embargoed status will remain in their current predicament. In his public addresses, Akıncı often likes to assert that a crossroad has been reached, that either the Turkish-Cypriots will move toward political equality, freedom, and security, or that division on the island will be permanent. International observers often refer to Akıncı as a moderate with his opponents contrasted as hardliners. Locally, the popular terminology used can be quite different, with Akıncı regarded as a simply 'leftist' at the expense of his more centrist leanings, or even by some as ['anti-Turkish'](#).

Akıncı has referred to the stance of the Greek-Cypriot leadership as the source of the Turkish-Cypriot's [isolation](#) in the international community, which thereon leads to its dependence on Turkey. Akıncı will also speak of the need for a more brotherly, rather than mother-to-child, relationship with Turkey, but [will highlight](#) that "because of isolation and the Greek-Cypriots, the sole bond the Turkish-Cypriots have left is Turkey". In earlier speeches, especially [one here delivered in Turkey](#), Akıncı can be more forthright about exactly how essential Turkey has been to the Turkish Cypriots. Akıncı seeks the sort of solution in Cyprus where the two constituent federal states would be unable to dictate terms to or override each other. The general idea is related to the continuous debate about just how much power a central federal government should hold in comparison to the two constituent states that a federated island would comprise of. "We neither want to be a minority of the Greek-Cypriots (the idea is sometimes expressed also as a 'patch' of the Greek-Cypriots) nor a sub-government dependent on Turkey", [Akıncı frequently asserts](#). With similar comments given recently to the Turkish Cypriot Sports Federation, Akıncı advocates that "our goal and endeavour is to see Turkish-Cypriot sportsmen and women compete with their own identity and underneath their own flag", referring here to potential [international competitions](#).

Akinci forwards the idea that a regional peace is needed; a solution that satisfies not only Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriot concerns but also that of Turkey, with the ultimate interest of a sustainable peace and a more prosperous and friendly future for all. He argues that a solution of the Cyprus Problem may help Turkey's relationship with the region and the E.U., adding also interestingly that a solution would help Turkey make [peace with the world](#). He has also cited in this regard the famous maxim of Atatürk: 'peace at home, peace in the world' at a recent party conference. Akinci is not an unfettered Cypriot nationalist that entirely overrides Turkish-Cypriot identity. He is also relatively more receptive to Greek-Cypriot concerns, though this position should not essentialise the other candidates as being wholly unreceptive. Akinci is also not in favour of an open-ended peace process, a view also shared also by the other Turkish-Cypriot candidates and relevant Turkish officials. As pushback against those who seek to portray him as an enemy of Turkey, Akinci has made the argument that it is not as if the two-state solution is a tangible option that he has then expressly rejected, but merely that the two-state solution will not be accepted by the international community. Recent events such as the decision of the E.U.'s Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell [not to meet with Akinci](#) in a visit to the island (though a phone call afterwards did take place), [was met with regret](#). Credence across the political spectrum has been given for a more 'active diplomacy', though what exactly this would entail is unclear. Similarly, Akinci has also been critical of France's recent military activity and the partial lifting of the weapons embargo on the Greek-Cypriots by the US.

Akinci displays dovish politics. The current election comes amidst the backdrop of ostensibly misunderstood comments by Akinci that have sowed discord with Turkey and within the TRNC. His remarks on Turkey's incursion into Syria against the YPG/PKK drew condemnation, both in Cyprus and in Turkey, as they seemed to condemn the offensive on general pacifist grounds without due emphasis on the dynamics of the Syrian Civil War and the nature of situation that led to the Turkish offensive. His remarks proved untimely as they came whilst anti-Turkish and anti-Erdogan sentiment reached somewhat of a crescendo in the international sphere. Akinci's remarks received a great deal of publicity in the South of the island, and by a number of Western media outlets. France's Emmanuel Macron even picked up on the discord, to which President Erdogan [replied](#), "since when do you recognise the TRNC?". The second controversial event came with Akinci's comments made to [The Guardian](#), segments of which (as explained below), were regarded as offensive. The issue revolved largely around what was seen as an undue fear expressed about the prospect of the TRNC being subsumed into Turkey (which is not the desire of the latter). Akinci countered later in the election process that he had [nothing to be sorry for](#), but around the same time the TRNC Presidency released [a recording and transcript](#) of the interview, arguing

that Akinci's remarks were misinterpreted by the paper. Akinci said that his vision is the opposite of Tayfur Sökmen (former President of Hatay State), who enabled the province of Hatay to join Turkey. In defence of his remarks, Akinci has also appealed to Rauf Denktaş' opposition to the 'Hatay' model and [stated](#) thereon that "I do not say it is possible for us to be an official province. But our dependence will be more apparent. [...] We have a special relationship; I assume that I do not have to say that the only country that recognises and supports the Turkish-Cypriots is Turkey". Nerves were nevertheless touched as neither annexation like Crimea (the idea of which [Akinci referred to](#)), nor joining Turkey like the province of Hatay, have not been floated. Turkey has vied for both the emergence of an independent, non-aligned Republic of Cyprus in 1960 and now for a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation with political equality between the two communities of the island. Many felt that the Hatay comments were belittling, especially when the prospect of becoming a part of Turkey was called 'scary' by Akinci. Turkish Foreign Minister [Cavuşoğlu](#) going so far as to say that he had "never seen such a dishonest politician in my life. He is using Turkey as a political tool ahead of elections". As of late, has criticism emerged from Turkey in the context of enhanced tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean, and with another round of 5-way talks announced by the U.N. after the elections, that everything to do with a federation had been discussed. This was [not meant to be a complete disavowal of a federative model](#), but the idea that alternative thinking was necessary as per Turkish Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Hami Aksoy. In the fallout from the last iteration of the settlement talks at Crans Montana in 2017, a certain gulf has emerged with Turkey asserting the need to be less mono-dimensional in its approach to negotiations about a federation. President Akinci is also said to have asserted that [it was the last attempt by his generation at a federation and it had been unsuccessful](#) but has since gone on to insist on the model again despite [his criticism of the Greek-Cypriot stance toward it](#).

Akinci's politics are also demonstrate more nuance and complexity under further examination. Akinci shared, both in a personal capacity and in the name of the Turkish-Cypriots, Turkey's pain following the deaths of 33 Turkish soldiers in February in Syria. Akinci was also critical of the Greek-Cypriots during [the failed Crans-Montana five-party peace talks](#). Akinci asserted that the Greek-Cypriots had taken a step backwards from a solution, that the Greek-Cypriot leader unofficially proposed alternative models for a solution, and that though Turkey had been ready to discuss the thorny issue of security guarantees for the island, the opportunity was scuppered by the Greek-Cypriots who were not ready for a solution. He has also stated that the Turkish-Cypriots [do not want to be enemies](#) with Turkey, and said he was the first to [criticise the coup attempt](#) of 2016. Akinci has [stated](#) for example that "we as the Turkish-Cypriot people can have nothing but love to give to Turkey. From our community only people

who want the best for Turkey emerge". He has also argued that one of the main reasons for natural gas-related tension in the region is the [refusal of the Greek-Cypriots](#) to talk with the Turkish-Cypriots on the matter, and has argued against the Greek-Cypriot inclination to refuse [time-bound negotiations](#). Despite the failure of the process, Akinci asserted that after the meeting of the two leaders in Berlin in November 2019, the peace process is back on track, pending the end of the Turkish-Cypriot elections. In quite an extraordinary fashion, [the Greek-Cypriot leader has openly endorsed Akinci](#), arguing that the settlement talks can "definitely resume" if he is elected. Akinci and Anastasiadis have negotiated with each other for five years now. Akinci has fought against what is seen as a politically motivated move to present him as anti-Turkish: "Enemies of Turkey will not /do not emerge from us, so [they] should not try in vain", Akinci [said](#) on the campaign trail in August.



Ersin Tatar (UBP – National Unity Party, Centre-Right)

Prime Minister Ersin Tatar leans toward the confederal and/or two-state resolution for the Cyprus Problem. He does so, not because he is in-

terested in war rather than peace, but instead he reasons from the 'realities on the ground', the presence of two states already in existence on the island, together with a long-standing scepticism and mistrust of Greek-Cypriot intentions. "The Greek-Cypriots do not even accept [our] political equality", [Tatar will often remind his audience](#). The messages can sometimes be mixed, with Tatar asserting that the most suitable solution entails a two-state model, though he probably means something more akin to a confederation. Tatar speaks of a desire for a settlement with the Greek-Cypriots based upon the notion of "[sovereign equality](#)" ([and preferably under the purview of the E.U.](#)). Whilst on this point, [Akinci counters with the argument](#) that the federation is made up of two equal states already. Tatar sees the recent engagement between Greece and the Greek-Cypriots during the flare-up of tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean as [opportunistic](#). On the one hand, Tatar sees the latter as trying to pressure Turkey and the Turkish-Cypriots through the EU on the one hand, whilst offering carrots to drive Turkey and the Turkish-Cypriots

towards their desired positions. Tatar largely envisages either a two-state or confederal resolution, but has spoken of a deal that draws the Turkish-Cypriots under what he referred to as the purview of the E.U. Tatar does not advocate for the TRNC to be officially subsumed into the Turkish Republic either, and emphasises the strengthening of a Turkish-Cypriot national consciousness alongside stronger ties with Turkey, the latter of which he sees great merit in. "Since 1977, federation has been deliberated for 43 years. It has not happened. The Greek-Cypriots have usurped our rights, and they continue to do so. It's time to say no to this", [Tatar said](#) in his election campaign. As part of this view, Tatar also speaks of an unconstructive attitude displayed by the Greek-Cypriot leadership at the Crans Montana talks, the details of which have been made public recently in the Cyprus Mail. Rather than engaging with a process that has failed for decades, instead of 'wasting time', Tatar speaks of the need to raise [alternative models](#) for a solution with the Greek-Cypriots¹.

Like Akinci, Tatar also speaks of a crossroad that has been reached, though his crossroad has two very different options: either the Turkish-Cypriots defend their rights and demands in tandem with Turkey – the tried and tested approach, or the Turkish-Cypriots concede to the 'games' of others, losing their freedom and security in the process. Tatar does not share the fatalistic concerns regarding the nature of the TRNC's relationship with Turkey and takes the opposing and optimistic view of the relationship. The rights of the Turkish-Cypriots are best upheld under the purview of a close relationship with Turkey, Tatar has argued, pointing to the stalwart support the Turkish-Cypriots have historically received, and what he recognises as the Greek-Cypriots' primary desire of reducing the Turkish-Cypriots into an impotent minority on the island. Tatar was critical of Akinci's outreach toward the Greek-Cypriots for what turned out to be a relatively small amount of what he argued was [unnecessary aid](#), highlighting that Turkey was providing everything the Turkish-Cypriots needed. Tatar has certain reservations then regarding the prospect of cooperation with the Greek-Cypriots. In effect, Tatar considers the now-engrained mantra of the talks – solve the Cyprus Problem first, then cooperation can take place – as a sign of Greek-Cypriot maximalism; to make the status-quo hurt for the Turkish-Cypriots to then extract gains at the negotiating table. Hence, the UBP are perhaps the least inclined to sacrifice large swathes of the status-quo in favour of what they see as unworkable Greek-Cypriot demands that are driven not by a commitment to political equality between the two communities on the island, but by an ingrained inclination in the south to diminish

¹ A European Social Survey (ESS) found that, given the choice, most Greek-Cypriots favour a unified state rather than a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation. From the survey sample, 27% of Greek-Cypriots favour outright a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation (BBF), while 57.2% prefer outright a 'unified state'. At the same time, 65% of Greek-Cypriots are in favour of, and or neither against nor in favour but could tolerate if necessary the BBF. However, given the choice, 73.6% of Greek-Cypriots responded either in favour of, and neither against nor in favour but would tolerate if necessary a unitary state. 35% were against the bi-zonal bi-communal federation, whilst 27.4% were against a unitary state.

Turkish-Cypriot political agency and render the community an impotent minority. Tatar, for example, says that he would not allow the city/region of [Güzelyurt/Morphou to be transferred to the Greek-Cypriot side](#).

The above rationale is placed amidst the recognition that just as the Republic of Cyprus was in 1960, the future bi-zonal, bi-communal federation is also a compromise deal (where both Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot communities generally vie for a stronger central government in the former, and more devolved powers for the two constituent federal states to be for the latter). Tatar recognises a play to [damage relations between Turkey and the Turkish-Cypriots](#) and is keen to combat it. His political opponents across the board acknowledge that good relations with Turkey are generally deserved and necessary, based both on historical antecedent and future peace. However, though anti-Turkish sentiment does exist (especially with the rise of [a new Cypriot nationalism](#)), Tatar's political opponents have [challenged him](#) to be more explicit about where and who exactly seeks to sully the bond between Turkey and the Turkish-Cypriots, with recent trips to Ankara now also added to the rhetoric. Though at first sight, it could be said that Tatar and the UBP are not the most desirable outcomes for the Greek-Cypriots, those in the South who are in favour of the status quo, or those who are least inclined to share power and prosperity with the Turkish-Cypriots, may tacitly prefer Tatar to win, for possible future blame for a non-solution could then be more easily shifted to the Turkish-Cypriots, shining the same spotlight that was once shone upon the late veteran Turkish-Cypriot leader Rauf Denktaş upon Tatar and Turkey, and thereby detracting attention away from Greek-Cypriot responsibility. Finally, like other candidates, Tatar has also spoken of the importance of the seat of the Presidency, but had advocated that the position should not be seen as mutually exclusive from the make-up of the Parliament or insensitive to the concerns of both Turkey and the Turkish-Cypriots. Tatar is quite vocally supportive of Turkey's drive to protect its and the Turkish-Cypriots' rights in the Eastern Mediterranean. Tatar has also [said](#) that the offer remains to talk about natural gas with the Greek-Cypriots, even if discussions are not made part of the formal U.N. sponsored settlement talks, the latter of which the Greek-Cypriots have vehemently resisted. Turkey has come out more critical of the federative model than ever before, the first signs of which can be traced back to the collapse of the Crans Montana talks where it appeared that [the Greek-Cypriot side was holding up a settlement](#). Tatar has come out critical of Akıncı, [asserting that the latter's politics have collapsed](#) and that he would raise alternative models to a solution in the settlement talks, and not be limited to the current federative model without giving up [Turkish security guarantees](#).

Erhan Arikli



(YDP – Renaissance Party, Centre-Right/Right)

Founded in 2016, the relatively newer Renaissance (sometimes translated as 'Re-birth') Party is looked down upon in Greek-Cypriot political

discourse as the 'party of settlers'. This is a derogatory term often used for citizens of Turkey that arrived in Cyprus immediately after the war of 1974. However, in a more alarmingly xenophobic manner, some members of the Turkish-Cypriot community can be just as intolerant, particularly those who identify themselves as "Cypriot nationalists". As such, "settlers" can be used as a lazy catch-all term for any and all who arrived to live, work or study, in the TRNC throughout the last 50 years or so, that are not entirely of Turkish-Cypriot heritage, though through the natural course of immigration have come to the island and may even be citizens of the TRNC. There can be almost a certain kind of chronological racism, given the fact that Turks had settled pre-1974, but also throughout history, on the island.

The YDP is said to have [7500 official members](#), which, based on that measure, Arikli says makes the YDP the second-largest party in the North. Arikli is staunchly against a federal solution for Cyprus Problem, and, as almost the polar opposite of Akıncı, asserts that he will only ever negotiate for a two-state solution for the TRNC and self-determination for the Turkish-Cypriots, rather than a federal solution. As such, the YDP is perhaps particularly appealing for those who stand to lose if what are seen as the more maximalist Greek-Cypriot demands are ever entirely acquiesced to. Arikli does not see a left versus right divide in the TRNC. Instead, he sees a divide between those who believe in and want to sustain the TRNC and those who believe in a federation and want to watch as another fifty years pass without a solution. Ultimately, Arikli is set on the goal of international recognition for the TRNC. Beyond Erhürman and Akıncı, in his campaign manifesto, Arikli had words of criticism for Tatar and Özersay as well, arguing that the latter was a 'hidden danger' that had apparently never pressed for the ability of Turkish citizens who had come to the TRNC to be able to travel to the South of the island, with such inaction fermenting division in the population. On Tatar, Arikli has suggested the former was, in fact, a 'federalist'. On the issue of the closed-off Famagusta suburb of Maraş, Arikli asserts that it is time to open the sector under the purview of the United Nations, with the ability of former property owners (presumably Greek-Cyp-

riot and Turkish-Cypriot) to develop and enjoy their properties. In the face of the 'party of settlers' pejorative rhetoric, [Arikli is adamant](#) that they do not want Turkey to intervene in the elections, that in contrast to the baseless propaganda from those of the 'Akıncı camp', Turkey has no such intention, that they seek to pull Turkey into the elections in a way that might be exploited for political gain by the Left, given the well-established dog-whistle effect with regards to the notion of Turkish-Cypriot agency and independence. Arikli has also encouraged the U.N. Secretary-General to [encourage new thinking on the peace process](#). As with other candidates, Arikli is confident that he will make it to the second round.



Serdar Denktaş *(Independent, former DP – Democrat Party, Centre-Right)*

A late addition to the electoral party has been Serdar Denktaş, the son of the legendary Rauf Raif Denktaş, who presents himself as an alternative for the electorate, one that can capitalise on the perceived failures of the current government, unite the centre-right, and draw votes away from Tatar and Özersay. On the Cyprus Problem, Denktaş has also expressed exasperation with thus-far intractable settlement talks, criticism of the Greek-Cypriot leadership, a feeling common across the Turkish-Cypriot political spectrum. He has lambasted the Greek-Cypriot leader for [by-passing the Turkish-Cypriots at nearly every platform](#). He has argued that he does not feel himself a prisoner to the bi-communal federation, especially in light of the prospect of another round of failed negotiations. "If the two sides cannot see eye to eye, then it is time to end this business, and to start looking at something new" [Denktaş has said](#), so as not to condemn the next generation to "another lost 50 years". He has a stated desire to get the Turkish-Cypriots acknowledged more on the international scene, as an ode to the frustrations felt at the deadlocked settlement talks. He has also said that [the opening of Maras/Varosha was a necessity](#). [Denktaş's vision](#) is similar to that of Özersay, where a more step-by-step method of normalisation is employed to unite the island (a compartmentalised approach based on realities on the ground, in essence), with unilateral steps taken by the Turkish-Cypriots if need be. For some, Denktaş's late candidacy is seen as a ploy to divide the centre-right and wrestle votes off both Tatar and Özersay. How this then goes on to affect a likely second-round run-off between the centre-left and centre-right candidate (which would take place on

October 18th, a week after the first-round), remains an open question. Denktaş may even be a candidate that those with consternations with both Tatar and Özersay can unite over if he makes the second round himself. There is even the possibility that with votes shared sparsely between the centre-right candidates, the second-round run-off would then comprise [of Akıncı versus Erhürman](#), with the latter the likely winner here. With a 31-year career in politics, Denktaş himself [has stated](#) that his candidature has displeased the heads of the other parties in the TRNC and that he would certainly win a second-round run-off, the latter of which he also says is certain to occur. Denktaş has not floated alternative models for a solution but has spoken of a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation with political equality for the Turkish-Cypriots and two constituent states, [a weaker central government](#), and in full consultation with Turkey. Denktaş has also picked up on the perception peddled that the Turkish-Cypriot administration is a sub-administration of Turkey, one that needs to be countered. He is sympathetic to the steps Turkey has necessarily had to take in the Eastern Mediterranean, as he put it, and asserts that the Turkish-Cypriots should support these steps. He has publicly [supported President Erdoğan's calls for a multilateral conference on the Eastern Mediterranean](#) that includes the Turkish-Cypriots, [as have all of the other candidates](#); another demonstration of the cross-cutting emphasis on getting the Turkish-Cypriot voice heard.



Tufan Erhürman *(CTP – Republican Turkish Party, Centre-Left)*

Hailing from the more centre-left CTP (and likely to appeal to moderates in the same vein as Özersay), Erhürman also argues for a comprehensive solution to the Cyprus Problem based on the bi-zonal, bi-communal federation model, asserts that the status quo is unsustainable, but posits [\(aiming the UBP\)](#), that a two-state solution is unrealistic. [He emphasises the need for a strong relationship with Turkey](#) (highlighting indirectly Akıncı's misgivings), asserting that "the relationship between the Republic of Turkey and the Turkish-Cypriots is extremely important, vital. The relations are incomparable between any two other states and are therefore special. They have deep historical, sociological, cultural, and legal foundations". As per usual, there is an emphasis on a healthier dialogue, but Erhürman takes care to note that the relationship runs both ways. The CTP and TDP (Akıncı's former party), attract like-minded voters,

yet the CTP is still fielding its own candidate whilst (initially) having espoused somewhat of a reluctance at confrontational and polarising politics (a reluctance that seems to wax and wane as the election draws nearer). There has been a suggestion that although CTP voters are [likely to cast their ballots](#) in favour of Akıncı (formerly of the TDP but now independent), TDP voters are less likely to vote for a CTP candidate. This would presumably change if Erhürman ran against another candidate in a second round, to which [Erhürman is certain](#) he will be a part of. Erhürman argues that the desires of the Turkish-Cypriots are for the most part the same, and so there is no need for a division between the CTP-TDP or other voters of the centre and more left-leaning portion of the political spectrum. At this juncture, Erhürman draws attention to the Cyprus Problem. In a vein similar to that of the other candidates, he also argues for the need of a more proactive Turkish-Cypriot foreign policy but also argues for greater powers for the seat of the Presidency as the primary thoroughfare for the Turkish-Cypriot voice to be heard in the international arena. Erhürman emphasises that the desire of the Turkish-Cypriots for peace must constantly be promoted with the ultimate aim of removing the various embargoes on the Turkish-Cypriots as just recompense for a consistently constructive stance towards a solution. Erhürman is not at all as despondent as others can be on the health of the dialogue between Turkey and the TRNC, asserting that the Turkish-Cypriots need [to engage constructively with all stakeholders](#) to the dispute, staying the course on the Cyprus Problem but remaining acutely aware of the need for good relations with Turkey. Erhürman is also a candidate that is far more careful with his rhetoric regarding Turkey and can position himself against voters of the left who are disenfranchised with Akıncı. Erhürman has been [critical of Akıncı](#) for his problematic statements that have caused unprecedented friction.

Erhürman has also been critical of the Greek-Cypriot stance, voicing concerns again at the Crans Montana fallout, but also other barriers faced by Turkish-Cypriots. This includes the case of those who have either a Turkish mother or father and so are subsequently denied citizenship in the internationally recognised South. He has also voiced concern over issues lumped together in the Eastern Mediterranean, arguing that the Greek-Cypriots continue to adopt a one-sided approach, ignoring the fact that the Turkish-Cypriots are the joint co-partners of the 1960 Republic (as well as any future settlement). Even without recognition of the TRNC, the Turkish-Cypriot community are still there and must not be ignored, he asserts. He acknowledges the fact that Turkey had been constructive at the Crans Montana talks, [and argues against an open-ended peace process](#) that the Greek-Cypriots exploit against both Turkey and the Turkish-Cypriots. Erhürman also supports the re-opening of Maraş/Varosha, [unlike Akıncı who dismissed the proposal](#) as mere election propaganda. More so, he [has also condemned](#) the actions taken with

France and the E.U. on the part of the Greek-Cypriots to “strengthen their position”; actions which he sees as detrimental to regional peace but also for the future of the negotiations. Erhürman says that Turkish-Cypriot rights should not be nullified by way of power games and that under the purview of international law a healthy dialogue is needed, with a spirit of equitable sharing, and a vision for a settlement. Erhürman was also critical of the comments made by Akıncı related to the TRNC ‘becoming a second Hatay’, arguing that such an issue is simply not on the agenda either in Turkey or the TRNC and was, therefore, an unnecessary controversy. Erhürman has also voiced the concern that the Greek-Cypriot leadership still finds it difficult to accept political equality for the Turkish-Cypriots. Erhürman also argues for an economy and democracy that ‘stands on its own feet’; the rhetoric clearly aimed at the Turkish-Cypriot voter who has become highly attuned to the notion of ‘dependency’, which at first sight insinuates dependency on Turkey but also means dependence on any other actor. Erhürman tends very much to assert the notion of Turkish-Cypriot agency as something not to be by-passed by any actor, being [critical of recent trips to Ankara](#) by Turkish-Cypriot MPs as indicative of a possible threat. In terms of the settlement talks, Erhürman vies for another five-party international conference to take place for a resolution of the Cyprus Problem, desires for that process to be ‘solution-oriented’, but also not an open-ended process – a point that Turkish Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu also shares. Erhürman argues for greater preparation and lesson-learning before another international conference should take place. In the meantime, the Turkish-Cypriots should prepare themselves for a solution whilst also strengthening independent capabilities at home in the TRNC. On the domestic front, Erhürman has hinted at reforms that would place greater power with the office of the Presidency for internal reforms, deemed a necessity by the short-lived nature of governments on the island that finds it difficult to commit to longer-term projects. Finally, Erhürman has noted that the Immovable Property Commission (IPC) set up in the North as a local mechanism to deal with property claims between the two communities, was set up under the auspices of a CTP government, but that the IPC needed further support. Finally, on the issue of the closed-off Famagusta suburb of Maraş, Erhürman argues for its future to be a part of a comprehensive deal rather than opened for development now.



**Kudret
Özersay**
*(Independent
Candidate,
formerly HP –
People's Party,
Centre-Right)*

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Özersay is not an opponent of the bi-zonal, bi-communal federation, but he does oppose how the talks have been constituted. Özersay advocates instead that [cooperation is a must](#) between the two polities on the island as they are now, in order to build the necessary trust and sense of federalism required to achieve a sustainable solution. For Özersay, the path must be different, not the end goal. Özersay is quick to highlight that Turkish-Cypriots and Greek-Cypriots shared power only for three years between 1960-1963 before the violent intercommunal conflict broke out and that cooperation should take place now instead of the seemingly endless wait for a comprehensive solution. [To work together](#) on issues such as natural gas exploitation may constitute a workable level of recognition of Turkish-Cypriot political agency in such crucial matters but would also potentially nullify the use of developments as geopolitical tools or weapons vis-à-vis the settlement talks to press one side's vision of peace over the other. The idea is logical but stands in the face of an ingrained and paradoxical characteristic of the Cyprus Problem favoured by the Greek-Cypriots, that the Cyprus Problem 'must be solved first, and only then cooperation can take place'. Briefly, the aim here is to avoid the recognition, normalisation, or legitimacy of Turkish-Cypriot institutions, to vehemently maintain the reputation of the status-quo, and thereon push for more wide-ranging changes on the island. Without a resolution of the Cyprus Problem, the idea is to capitalise upon the 'dependency' of the Turkish-Cypriots upon the only country that recognises them, Turkey, by using it to drive a wedge between the two through a narrative of perfect or shared victimhood. Özersay is sensitive to Turkish-Cypriot political agency, as all other candidates, but argues that the Turkish-Cypriot voice must not be entirely tied to the fate of the settlement talks, or held ransom to a particular settlement (or aspects of a settlement) and that the Turkish-Cypriots should become more active in the international arena. The Turkish-Cypriots are [not to be held prisoner to futile negotiations](#), a sentiment found across the political spectrum. On Turkey, Özersay often refers to 'brotherly relations' between Turkey and the Turkish-Cypriots, that a healthier and sincere dialogue is there to be had, without the unconstructive attitudes some may take from the offset.

Özersay often notes that the Greek-Cypriots are not ready to share power and prosperity with the Turkish-Cypriot

and as such, are comfortable with the status quo. Hence, it is not realistic to arrive at a federal solution in today's political climate. Instead, the experience of federalism must be gradually promoted, and that cooperation today is a litmus test for whether or not a partnership with the Greek-Cypriots will work. In his recent public addresses, the example of the island's E.U. accession process is often given here, where the outcome of the 2004 island-wide referendum was decoupled from membership of the E.U., which then after was utilised by the Greek-Cypriots to draw the E.U. into the Cyprus Problem against Turkey and the Turkish-Cypriots. Perhaps with a finger on the pulse of Turkish-Cypriot sensitivities on the notion of dependency, Özersay has [voiced the view](#) that emerges also on the left-of-centre that the Turkish-Cypriots should not be beholden or confined to the thus-far fruitless negotiation table. Uncertainty from 52 years of failed negotiations should not hinder domestic developments, Özersay argues to the electorate. Özersay has further argued that the isolation of the Turkish Cypriots is not beneficial to a solution and that if the Turkish-Cypriot's wished to maintain their [unique identity](#), then they must express responsibility towards the TRNC, particularly in an era where the Greek-Cypriots are not ready to share power and prosperity.

Özersay's views are liable to be interpreted by the Greek-Cypriots as con-federalist in essence, but instead, Özersay makes the case for peace as a gradual process rather than an all-in-one comprehensive deal. To this end, whilst in government, he made several overtures across the years, particularly with regards to the process to re-open the closed-off Famagusta suburb of [Maras/Varosha](#), and whilst negotiator, he promoted the idea of a joint committee to deal with any potential revenues from offshore natural gas development. Özersay presents himself as someone who will be able to shepherd the re-opening of [Maras](#) under Turkish-Cypriot jurisdiction. When it comes to peace as a gradual process rather than a comprehensive final deal, the trouble is that issues such as the future of natural gas development or the prospect of a rotating presidency and so forth, are liable to become weaponised as a tool of geopolitics or perpetual bargaining chips during the course of the peace process, rather than appropriated as an opportunity for bi-communal cooperation in the here and now. From the offset, Özersay seeks to approach the settlement talks from a more balanced and cooperative position as the best way to safeguard Turkish-Cypriot interests, which are ultimately not to be made conditional upon Greek-Cypriot demands, or a seemingly intractable, 52-year-old peace process. Özersay [says](#) that there is nothing to be had by waiting for a solution, maintaining negotiations for the sake of negotiations, that the parties to the natural gas dispute must negotiate now and reach a solution. He has also been particularly critical of what he says is a decision by the Greek-Cypriots not to allow E.U. passport holders to cross into the TRNC (ostensibly due to pandemic-related concerns, but for the Turkish-Cypriots an attack

on their economy); a decision that [drew condemnation](#) across the six TRNC parliamentary parties. On recent tensions related to the Eastern Mediterranean, Özersay has criticised [efforts to ostracise](#) the TRNC, Greece's efforts to create a fait accompli in tandem with the Greek-Cypriots, has condemned France's deal with the Greek-Cypriots, and defended the process to re-open the suburb of Maraş despite Anastasiades's remarks that Turkey would pay a high cost and that it would hamper Turkey's E.U. ascen-

sion bid. [Özersay says](#) that the way to keep the voice of the Turkish-Cypriots heard is (in a non-aggressive manner), to continue to pursue their rights in the Eastern Mediterranean, that the Greek-Cypriots would be mistaken if they sought to a deal with Turkey whilst cutting the TRNC out. As such, Özersay emphasises the need for negotiations on this matter (presumably separate to the settlement talks as well).

Observer Insight

Andrew Hopkins *TRT World Correspondent*



It is an oft-repeated opinion that the Turkish Cypriot presidential election has no meaning. It is Turkey that is really calling the shots, people say, even though the Turkish Cypriot president is the only internationally recognized representative for the Turkish-Cypriots during negotiations to resolve the Cyprus Problem. This coming election could show, more than ever, that this is not particularly the case. There are several front-runners, and some of them are not signed-up to the UN-sponsored talks, which have been taking place for several decades without finding a permanent solution. That process has been looking for a bi-zonal, bi-communal solution, in which the island is reunited, but with areas of control for Greek and Turkish-Cypriots. It has been operating under the framework that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. But the current Turkish-Cypriot Prime Minister, Ersin Tatar, who is standing in the election, has clearly stated that this process is now dead and that two states are the only answer. Then there is the current Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Kudret Özersay. He also is clearly frustrated with the current UN framework. He is suggesting that the 'nothing is agreed until everything is agreed' principle should be scrapped, that the two sides should try to make deals on individual issues and see where they end up. Özersay is a former Turkish-Cypriot negotiator who stood for the first time in 2015 and, to the surprise of many, got more than 20 per cent of the vote. The incumbent Mustafa Akıncı is also standing again. He is generally supportive of the UN framework, although he has said it should be more of a results-based process. If he wins, there will be an attempt to resurrect the talks which collapsed in Crans Montana in Switzerland in 2017. Akıncı was elected in 2015 on the basis that he would make a deal with the Greek-Cypriots. That has not happened. But if other candidates are successful, the international community will likely be facing a new set of challenges for the Cyprus Problem. A vote for them could be seen as a reflection of Turkish-Cypriot frustration at the lack of progress in the Cyprus talks, a feeling of hopelessness that their international isolation will never end and that's its time to try something new.

Özdil Nami *Former Turkish-Cypriot Chief Negotiator, CTP MP*



This year's presidential elections are taking place almost three years after the convening of the Cyprus Conference in Switzerland under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General, where the two sides on the island were joined by the guarantor powers Turkey, Greece and the UK as well as the EU as an observer. Although the sides failed to finalise an agreement, which would have then been voted on in a referendum by both Turkish and Greek Cypriots, they came very close. In fact, in his report published soon after the conclusion of the Cyprus Conference, the UN Secretary-General reported to the UN Security Council that "the deal was on the table but what was lacking was political will". So, with that background in mind, the elections in the TRNC will be a manifestation of where the political will of the Turkish Cypriot voters are at present. In its most general terms, it will show to the world whether the Turkish-Cypriot side is still interested in establishing a bi-zonal bi-communal federation as it has been negotiated for 50 years or have they given up and will from now on negotiate only to achieve a two-state solution.

The feeling on the ground is one of being fed up with never-ending talks and empty promises. This is true for both camps, i.e. pro federation and pro two-state solution, as neither of them have managed to deliver what they promised. People demand to see a way out of the status quo, a way that will end their isolation and integrate them properly with the rest of the world. They are comfortable with either of the two alternative solutions as long as it is achieved within a reasonable time frame.

The change needed has to do with the way the UN-led negotiations are structured, i.e. the process rather than the substance of the talks. What is clear to all observers of the Cyprus talks now is the fact that the Greek-Cypriot side has a strong preference to maintain things as they are if they cannot get all that they want. The new process must be constructed in a way that will not allow the status quo to continue. Another rejection of a federal solution by the Greek-Cypriot side should result in ending the isolation imposed by the international community on the Turkish side and removal of UN Security Council decisions that prevent member states from establishing diplomatic and economic ties with the TRNC. Faced with the choice of allowing recognition of the TRNC versus accepting a BBF (bi-zonal, bi-communal federation), Greek Cypriot voters will opt for BBF as status quo of being the only recognized authority in Cyprus will no longer be possible.

All candidates, whether pro-federation or two-state solution, know very well that they will need the full support of the government of Turkey to achieve their desired outcome. Therefore, this cannot be seen as a debate on being pro or anti-Turkey. Having said this, some feel their Cypriot identity is threatened by the over-reliance on Turkey and this will factor in in their decisions on how to vote just like there are those who feel supporting a candidate asking for a two-state solution will have a better reception in Ankara and this will help secure more assistance from Turkey towards the development of the TRNC.

Fiona Mullen *Economics Consultant, Cyprus*



Ultimately, you cannot fix any of the East Med issues without solving the Cyprus Problem. Or the other way around, you cannot fix the gas problem without solving the Cyprus Problem. So this idea that you can separate them both is not working for anybody, including the EU, Turkey, and Greece. There will still be trouble created for the EU in their dealings with Turkey. At present, we are more likely to see the 'Taiwanisation' of the North in exchange for some sort a peace deal, rather than the resumption of the negotiations to solve the Cyprus Problem.

What could we do to settle all of the energy issues in the East Med? Let's have a look at an energy-wide strategy for the Eastern Mediterranean: so it's not just gas, its renewables, and the EU can encourage the sort of partnerships that can include Turkey as well. The EU has an incentive to do so. They may want to look at the issues separately. Let's sort out Turkey and Greece separately at least get them talking, then the Libya issue, and then Cyprus. If there's enough strategic thinking, the question to be asked is how can we make this region interesting enough for everybody? Gas prices have collapsed, and nobody knows if developments in the region may be viable anymore, but it may be viable as part of a greater mix. Turkey certainly sees issues in the East Med as a threat and Greek-Cypriots find that very hard to understand because all they see is Turkey on its own path on their land and in their sea. But you can hear from the rhetoric in Turkey what they feel about the East Med and the media is full of that sort of narrative as well.