

Time Is Running out in
the Northern Part of
Cyprus:
The Turkish Cypriot
Community Between the
Prospects of Federal Solution
and the Reform of "TRNC"

by Dr. Nikolaos Stelgias

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The Turkish Cypriot Community between the Prospects of Federal Solution and the Reform of "TRNC"

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Summary:

The collapse of the talks in Crans-Montana caused significant concerns to the Turkish Cypriots that believe in the Federal solution of the Cyprus issue. These segments of the community, which hope that the establishment of a united federal Cyprus will lead to the resolution of all their socio-political and economic problems are searching for a political framework through which they will channel their dissatisfaction and their aspirations. At the same time, the Turkish Cypriot community, being cut off from the international scene, depends solely on Turkey and the Anatolian economy which is currently facing systemic problems. Within this context, the Turkish Cypriots understand that the need for the social, political and economic reconstruction of "TRNC" is urgent.

Key Words:

Turkish Cypriots, Greek Cypriots, Cyprus Issue, Turkey, Elections, Federal Solution

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Time Is Running out in the Northern Part of Cyprus: The Turkish Cypriot Community Between the Prospects of Federal Solution and the Reform of "TRNC"

Introduction: Analyzing and understanding the eventful January 2018 in the northern part of Cyprus

January 2018 has left its mark on the modern political and social history of Cyprus. Within a few weeks, the Turkish Cypriots took important decisions which will have an impact on both the future of the Cyprus Problem and Turkey's relations with the island.

In this working paper, I will attempt to shed light to a series of critical issues that affect the shaping of the current Turkish Cypriot reality and to examine the political aspects of the ongoing developments in the northern part of the island at the beginning of 2018. The paper will analyze the socio-political atmosphere under which the Turkish Cypriots went to the polls shortly after the collapse of the latest attempt to resolve the Cyprus problem. I will then focus on the political stance of the Turkish Cypriots, before and after the elections, mainly about the future of the Cyprus issue. Also, the paper will refer to the problems the Turkish Cypriot community is facing in its relations with Turkey. Finally, in the last part of this paper, I will attempt to draw a series of conclusions which in my opinion are of great importance for the future of Cyprus.

For the present survey, I used the archives of the Cypriot and Turkish press as well as a series of web archives.

The Turkish Cypriots' dilemma at the beginning of 2018: last chance for a federal solution of the Cyprus problem or simultaneous reconstruction of "TRNC" and the ties with Ankara:

The 7th of July, 2017 is a landmark date in modern Cypriot history and the history of the Cyprus problem. At the dawn of that day, the involved parties, after marathon consultations, concluded that a deal for the solution of the Cyprus problem on a Federal basis was unlikely to be achieved. The Greek Cypriot side insisted on the immediate withdrawal of the Turkish troops from the island, while the Turkish Cypriot side continued to express its fears that the principle of political equality of the two communities will not be respected after the solution of the Problem. Thus, the historic Conference of Crans-Montana failed, causing the renewed exchange of accusations between the two sides².

The failure of the Crans-Montana negotiations magnified the concerns of those segments of the Turkish Cypriot community which support the prospect of a federal solution. Shortly after the collapse of the talks Yeni Duzen, a newspaper affiliated with the Turkish Cypriot centre left expressed its bitterness for the negative result in Crans-Montana and criticized the involved parties for failing to embrace the idea of a federal solution:

"The parties that gathered around a table to create a federation are still very far from a "Federal Culture". They are following (the principles) of Greek and Turkish nationalism. They cannot resist the pressure of the balcony. The negotiation process "has been dressed" with ethnic identities. It follows an absurd route with slogans like "two separate but united (entities)". "Do you have doubts regarding my will for a solution?", asks Akinci. Of course, I do not have any doubts, but desire and courage are completely different things"³.

The pro-solution segments of the Turkish Cypriot community are frustrated by the recent failure in the negotiations that perpetuates the international isolation the northern part of the island, due to its de facto control by the Turkish Cypriots after 1974. These segments expect that the solution of the Cyprus problem will open the way for their community to be represented on an international level and for them to exercise their rights as citizens of Cyprus, a member state of the European Union since 2004. The failure in the most recent negotiation process triggers, apart from diplomatic and political implications, two additional effects on the future of the Turkish Cypriot community. Being cut off from the international markets, the Turkish Cypriot economy depends solely on Turkish and Anatolian capitals. Thus, this economic interdependency has two effects. Firstly, the

² "Crans-Montana Cyprus Talks Fail amid Provocations"; "Η Κύπρος ένα ολοένα και πιο βαθιά διχοτομημένο νησί, του Βασίλη Νέδου | Kathimerini."

³ Mutluyakalı, "İstemek de Yetmiyor - Cenk Mutluyakalı."

interdependency favours the transfer of the systematic problems the Turkish economy is experiencing to the economy of the Turkish Cypriot community. Secondly, the complete economic dependency of the Turkish Cypriot community from Turkey gives Turkish governments the right to interfere, whenever and however they wish, with the socio-economic affairs of the northern part of the island. In late 2017, these realities lead those segments of the Turkish Cypriot community that craved the establishment of a united and single European Cyprus to criticize the existing situation. As the most prominent and active Turkish Cypriot Teachers' Union wrote in 2017, shortly after the collapse of the latest attempt for the solution of the Cyprus Problem:

"We would like to remind the Colonial Minister, Akdag, that the Greek Cypriots and Greece are not (since 1974) the side that altered the demographic structure of the northern part of the island, plundered the property left by Greek Cypriots, imposed a bigot education system similar to that of Turkey, (meaning) reactionary and racist, and above all the side that usurped the political will of the Turkish Cypriots. We would like to remind them that they are the ones that made the economy of the northern part of the island appropriate for gambling, prostitution and money laundering. We want to remind them again that they treat the elected administrators of the Turkish Cypriot community as if they were their officers (...)"⁴.

The criticism as mentioned above sheds light on the dilemma that has been troubling the Turkish Cypriot community since mid-2017. On the one hand, the Turkish Cypriots can choose to continue pursuing the solution of the Cyprus problem as the answer to all the social and political issues of the community, even if that means "risking" the rupture of its ties with Turkey. On the other hand, the Turkish Cypriots can choose to put aside the solution of the Cyprus Problem, to maintain the community's interdependency with Turkey, and to focus on the economic and political reform of the existing structures of northern Cyprus in close collaboration with Ankara. In the early parliamentary elections held in northern Cyprus in January 2018, the Turkish Cypriot community chose the second option. Having lost their hopes for a "quick solution" to the Cyprus Problem, the Turkish Cypriot political forces drew up electoral programs in which they downgraded the importance of the solution. In the same programs, the goal for the reconstruction of the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC)", based on the renewed and enhanced strategic cooperation of the community with Turkey, was upgraded.

"In the shadow of the collapsed negotiation process (...) the electoral programs proclaimed by the local political actors in the northern part of Cyprus put the prospect of a federal solution in a "parenthesis" and emphasized the different political, social and economic utopias. In other

⁴ KTOS, "Türkiye, Garantörlük Görevi çerçevesinde Sorumluluklarını Yerine Getirirse, Kıbrıs'ta çözüm Olur. - Kıbrıs Türk Öğretmenler Sendikası."

words, as Cyprus distances itself from federal solution the famous "plan B" is starting to gain ground in the political arena"⁵.

On the night of the 8th January 2018, the Turkish Cypriots chose with their votes to put the "TRNC" first and the prospect of a united federal Cyprus second. Thus, the Turkish Cypriot Left, which supports the federal solution, experienced defeat in the early parliamentary elections. On the other hand, the Turkish Cypriot right managed to secure the lead in the elections and to increase the number of MPs elected in the parliament. At the same time, the Party of Renaissance, which is supported mainly by first and second generation citizens of "TRNC", was the third party of the Turkish Cypriot right that entered the parliament. The comparative study of the results of the last two parliamentary elections in northern Cyprus (the percentages of the parties that overcame the 5% electoral threshold), helps us understand the range of success of the Turkish Cypriot right⁶:

	2013	2018
Center Left	%	%
Republican Turkish Party (CTP)	38.38	20.97
Social Democratic Party (TDP)	7.41	8.61
Right		
National Unity Party	27.33	35.57
Democratic Party	23.16	7.83
Party of Renaissance		6.96
Centrist		
People's Party		17.10

The election results mentioned above lead us to two important conclusions. Firstly, the Turkish Cypriot right and the parties of the centre, that either oppose the idea of a Federal solution or retain severe reservations about it achieved a remarkable victory by securing 70.42% of the votes. Within this framework, the political powers that entertain doubts regarding the future of the talks

⁵ "Kıbrıs'taki Seçimlerin İki Olası Galibi."

⁶ "Seçim Detayları"; "YSK Başkanı Şefik Basın Toplantısında Açıkladı."

dominate the Turkish Cypriot political scene, while the Cyprus issue remains unsolved and the socioeconomic problems accumulate. Secondly, the Turkish Cypriots seemed to have cast their votes bearing in mind the alternative political and economic scenarios for their future which is, to a great extent, shaped by Turkey. Let's not forget here that since the beginning of 2010's Turkey imposes on the Turkish Cypriot community austerity packages that are inspired by neoliberal economic principles, while at the same time it actively pursues a social restructure based on its conservative and nationalist agenda.

Within this framework, a multi-party government was formed in northern Cyprus after the elections of January. With the central slogan of political and socio-economic reform and restructuring of the "TRNC", a coalition was formed by two parties of the Turkish Cypriot Left, the centrist People's Party and the Democratic Party⁷. The new government's program overlooks the importance of the solution of the Cyprus problem and focuses on other areas of governance, such as democratisation and reforms in the state sector and the economy⁸.

The program of the multi-party government sheds light on the concerns the majority of Turkish Cypriot public opinion has in the field of politics, at a time when the Cyprus issue remains unsolved, and the hopes for a quick settlement are rapidly eroding. In other words, the government's program shows that the centre of attention has shifted from the Federal solution to the future of the "TRNC". Hence, from the prospect of a full E.U. membership and a window of communication with the international community to the reformulation of the economic, political and social ties with Ankara.

At this point, an important question arises. How could the "TRNC" be reconstructed in a political, diplomatic, economic and military context whose boundaries and rules of operation are determined by Turkey and not the Turkish Cypriots? And most importantly how can the goal of financial and political reforms coexist with the goal of securing the autonomy of the Turkish Cypriot cultural identity with all its peculiarities? The answers to these questions were given in a clearest manner by a mob that attacked the offices of the Turkish Cypriot opposition newspaper Africa, shortly after the elections of January 2018. The opposition newspaper wrote in a front-page article that Ankara's military intervention in northern Syria is the second invasion of Turkey to the territory of a neighbouring country after the invasion of Cyprus in 1974⁹. The article triggered the public reaction of the President of Turkey, who called on the Turkish citizens in the "TRNC" to express their dissatisfaction with the new development¹⁰. A few hours later, angry crowds attacked the offices of

⁷ "KKTC'de Dört Partili Koalisyon Dönemi Başladı."

⁸ "İşte 4'lü Koalisyon'un Hükümet Programı."

⁹ "Türkiye'den Bir İşgal Harekatı Daha."

¹⁰ Kktc, "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan'dan KKTC'deki Gazeteye çok Sert Tepki - Son Dakika Güncel Haberler"; "KKTC'de Afrika Gazetesine Saldırı - Nikolaos Stelya"; YENİDÜZEN, "AKINCI'YA DA SALDIRI!"

Afrika in the centre of northern Nicosia. The angry crowd, after the attack on the newspaper's offices, moved on to assault the parliament and the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community¹¹. The tension lived on for several days when the democratic forces of the Turkish Cypriot community poured into the streets to express their disagreement with the political violence and the lack of tolerance for different views¹². At this point, Ankara warned the Turkish Cypriot community that there were active agents in the northern part of Cyprus that wish to draw a line between them and Turkey. Thus, the demonstrators chose to downplay the role of the Turkish President in the recent developments and to direct their demands to democratisation instead of the cease of Turkey's intervention to the internal affairs of their community¹³. Shortly after the demonstrations, the "authorities" prosecuted and imprisoned the persons responsible for the assaults¹⁴. The attack to the newspaper Afrika that took place after a call from the President of Turkey showed that there is little room for manoeuvre in the pursuit of the goal to preserve the autonomy of the Turkish Cypriot identity.

As in the case of the pre-election period and the multi-party government program, here to the majority of the Turkish Cypriot community chose to focus on the objective of the simultaneous reconstruction of both the "TRNC" and the ties of the community with Ankara. In other words, the popular demand concerned the creation of a new framework for the Turkish-Turkish Cypriot co-operation and not the immediate solution of the Cyprus problem and the federal future of the island.

¹¹ Sputnik, "Erdoğan'ın 'Cevap Verilmeli' Diyerek Tepki Gösterdiği Gazeteye Saldırı."

¹² "Barış ve Demokrasi Yürüyüşü' Yoğun Katılım Ile Gerçekleşti."

¹³ Atun, "Prof. Dr. Ata ATUN Kişisel Web Sitesi » Sağduyu Sahibi Akil Adamlar."

¹⁴ "Afrika Gazetesine Saldırıya Altı Tutuklama, Dokuz Kişi Aranıyor - Diken."

Conclusion: Time is running out for federal solution in the northern part of Cyprus

The collapse of the talks in Crans-Montana caused significant concerns to the Turkish Cypriots that believe in the federal solution of the Cyprus issue. These segments of the community, which hope that the establishment of a united federal Cyprus will also lead to the resolution of all their socio-political and economic problems, are searching for a political framework through which they will channel their dissatisfaction and their aspirations.

At the same time, the Turkish Cypriot community, being cut off from the international scene, depends solely on Turkey and the Anatolian economy which is currently facing systemic problems. This economic interdependence between the Turkish Cypriot community and Turkey allows the Turkish governments to interfere whenever and however they wish with the socio-economic affairs of the northern part of the island.

Within this context, the Turkish Cypriots understand that the need for the social, political and economic reconstruction of "TRNC" is urgent. What remains is to answer whether it will be achieved through the rebuilding of the community's ties with Turkey or the immediate achievement of the federal solution of the Cyprus problem.

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