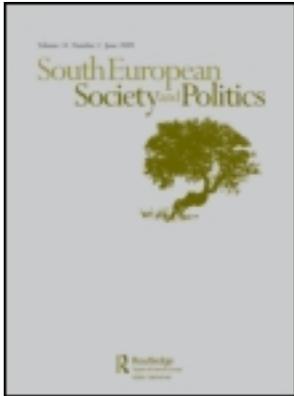


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Sait Akşit

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The Turkish Cypriot Presidential Election of April 2010: Normalisation of Politics

Sait Akşit

The Turkish Cypriot presidential election of 18 April 2010 attracted extensive international interest because of its expected impact on the prospect for a Cyprus solution. The election of National Unity Party leader and serving Prime Minister, Derviş Eroğlu, in the first round was not a surprise. The main factors accounting for Eroğlu's victory were the state of play regarding Turkish Cypriot relations with the EU, deadlock in the negotiations on the Cyprus question and debate over domestic concerns. This article argues that the 2010 election meant the normalisation of Turkish Cypriot politics, indicating the need to focus on domestic concerns and ending the CTP/Talat interlude of 2003–10. The results do not support a move in public opinion away from a search for a solution.

Keywords: Cyprus solution; UBP; Eroğlu; CTP/BG; Talat

The citizens of the 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus' ('TRNC'), approximately 164,000 voters, went to the polls to elect their president on 18 April 2010. The election, which received extensive international press coverage, was significant as it had important implications for the continuing process of negotiations between the Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities on the island in the search for a federal solution to the longstanding conflict. The talks on the Cyprus question were going through a period of renewed hope following the failure of the comprehensive settlement plan drawn up by United Nations (UN) Secretary General Kofi Annan and the impasse that followed the 2004 referenda.

The result of the election was not a surprise for many: Dr Derviş Eroğlu, the leader of the right-wing National Unity Party (*Ulusal Birlik Partisi* – UBP) and Prime Minister since 2009, was elected as the third president of the 'TRNC' in the first round, running against the incumbent President, Mehmet Ali Talat. When compared with the pro-solution Talat, Eroğlu was known for his hard-line nationalist position,

traditionally arguing for a two-state solution which envisages the independence of the 'TRNC' as an end point in itself.

The Eroğlu victory, following UBP's victory in the April 2009 legislative elections over Talat's former party, the Republican Turkish Party/United Forces (*Cumhuriyetçi Türk Partisi-Birleşik Güçler – CTP/BG*), was a reconfirmation that the extraordinary period in Turkish Cypriot politics was over. This period had been shaped by Cyprus's EU membership, Turkey's candidacy and developing relations with the EU, the euphoria around the prospect for a resolution of the Cyprus problem through the Annan Plan and the consequences of these developments for Turkish Cypriot politics. The 2010 presidential election took place at a time when the post-Annan Plan euphoria had faded away and attempts at overcoming the Turkish Cypriots' international isolation faced a stalemate, leading to frustration in Turkish Cypriot society. Political attention was increasingly focused on domestic issues and on how to restructure Turkish Cypriot society and politics. The economic crises since 2007 made restructuring urgent so that Turkish Cypriot society could achieve a viable political and economic system in the new situation in which it found itself. As such, it could be argued that the 2010 election meant the normalisation of Turkish Cypriot politics, indicating the need to focus on issues of domestic concern and ending the CTP/Talat interlude, which had begun with Talat's election as Prime Minister in 2003.

What factors account for Eroğlu's success? Should we consider the outcome as an individual or a party success? What implications does the presidential election have for Turkish Cypriot politics? Does the result indicate more of a general change in the political climate, a change in public opinion following the shift away from the status quo/right in the early 2000s? The answers should be sought in the interplay of international aspects and domestic political/economic dimensions of Turkish Cypriot politics.

This article continues with a brief background to the election, providing a short account of recent developments on the Cyprus question, the state of play regarding relations with the European Union, and the record of Talat and CTP/BG in power. Then, the article describes the role of the President in the 'TRNC' and presents details of the 2010 candidates and campaign, before proceeding to analyse the results. The article concludes with an assessment of likely future prospects based on the election results.

Background to the Election

The decades-long Cyprus problem is a result of inter-ethnic conflict between the two communities on the island—the Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities—who are co-founders of the 1960 Republic of Cyprus. The Republic was formed under the guarantorship of Great Britain, Turkey and Greece as a bi-communal republic based on a power-sharing mechanism (see Çarkoğlu and Sözen 2004, pp. 123–125). The system collapsed in 1963 with the outbreak of inter-communal violence, leading to

the formation of a separate Turkish Cypriot administration. A coup engineered by the Greek junta in July 1974 led to Turkish military intervention, resulting in the current territorial division of the island. The 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus', declared in 1983, is the last of a sequence of governing structures established by the Turkish Cypriot community. In contrast to the internationally recognised *de jure* state of the whole island—the Republic of Cyprus, which is administered by the Greek Cypriots—the 'TRNC' is not internationally recognised, except by Turkey. However, it exercises *de facto* sovereignty over the northern part of the island.

One of the important points to make here is the difference in interpretation of the two communities on the island regarding the starting point for defending their position on the Cyprus question. While the Turkish Cypriots take the 1960 accords as their basis, the Greek Cypriots focus on the 1974 intervention by Turkey. Various attempts at resolving the Cyprus question through the inter-communal talks which have been conducted since 1968 have failed to produce a compromise solution. The most comprehensive settlement plan to date remains that devised by the then UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, which aimed to find a solution to the conflict before Cyprus's accession to the European Union on 1 May 2004. In the simultaneous referenda held on the two parts of the divided island on 24 April 2004, the plan was approved by the Turkish Cypriots but rejected after the Greek Cypriot 'no'. Yet, the conjuncture that led to the development of the plan had important implications for Turkish Cypriot politics.

The process of Cyprus's EU membership was one of the important factors influencing Turkish Cypriot politics through detailed negotiations between the two communities, with the involvement and increasing pressure of the guarantors, including Turkey, along a tight schedule and a clear set of points. The other significant factor was change in Turkey following the rise to power of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* – AKP) in November 2002. On the one hand, AKP was keen to reconsider Turkey's foreign policy priorities and to attempt to solve longstanding disputes, including the Cyprus question. On the other, the Cyprus question was one of the thresholds set by the EU for the start of Turkey's accession negotiations by 2004. The AKP government, which aimed to start Turkey's accession negotiations, assumed a position in favour of resolving the conflict by taking the Annan Plan as the basis of negotiations. It was aggressive, positioning itself against those who supported the 'status quo' on the island, took initiatives and based its policy on a win–win approach and on 'being one step ahead' of the Greek/Greek Cypriot approach.

These developments and the economic crisis of the early 2000s were instrumental in the emergence of an alternative to the existing power in the 'TRNC'. The status quo in Turkish Cypriot politics was associated with the right wing and personified by the 'TRNC' President since 1976, Rauf Denktaş, who was largely perceived by AKP as well as the Turkish Cypriot left as an intransigent and uncompromising nationalist leader whose position on the Cyprus question endangered Turkey's relations with the EU and its prospects of opening accession negotiations. The left-wing opposition skilfully

capitalised on the perception of Turkish Cypriot society that a solution and EU membership would be the best answers in order to overcome the dissatisfaction and frustration with the socioeconomic difficulties in the 'TRNC'. The Turkish Cypriot left moderated its policies and moved towards the centre to appeal to business circles, right-wing voters and 'TRNC' citizens who had been born in Turkey. Overlapping with the AKP stance and rhetoric on the Cyprus question, which pledged to change the status quo, the left wing advocated change and progress. The AKP government in Turkey, aiming to sideline Denktaş as well as the ruling UBP which opposed the Annan Plan, favoured and supported the cause of left-wing parties in the 'TRNC', thus tilting the balance in Turkish Cypriot politics.

In this context, the left-wing CTP and Talat emerged as a serious alternative and later came to dominate the political scene with the shift in public opinion away from the status quo/right. The change in the Turkish Cypriot political climate could be observed in the increased vote share received by CTP and Talat. The CTP vote increased from a mere 13.4 per cent in the 1998 legislative elections to 35.2 per cent in 2003 and 44.5 per cent in 2005. In 2005, Talat was elected as the second president of the 'TRNC', receiving an overwhelming 55.6 per cent of the vote as compared with 10 per cent in the preceding presidential election in 2000 (see Table 1).

The focal point of CTP's political and economic aims was its European project: the integration of Turkish Cypriot society with the EU. Following the failure of a compromise solution, establishing direct trade links with the EU and unhindered financial aid became central to overcoming the international isolation faced by Turkish Cypriot society and achieving economic development and prosperity (see also Sözen 2009, p. 347). The EU Commission's immediate attempt to fulfil its pre-referenda promises to end the international isolation of the Turkish Cypriots by drafting two important regulations on trade and aid strengthened CTP's position. However, the problems in getting these regulations approved and the intra-EU struggle over them led to Turkish Cypriot disappointment with the EU.

The Green Line Regulation, approved on 29 April 2004 and dealing with the movement of persons and goods across the line that separates the communities on the island, remained very limited. The aid regulation was only approved after two years, on 27 March 2006, and promises on direct trade could not be fulfilled, due largely to the Greek Cypriot blockade in the EU Council. Despite renewed hopes for a solution with the February 2008 election of Demetris Christofias, the leader of the Cypriot communist party and a long-time friend and comrade of Talat, as the President of the Republic of Cyprus (see Christophorou 2008), the Greek Cypriots maintained their tough stance on the EU's Turkish Cypriot policy. The most recent EU attempt to establish direct trade links had occurred in early March 2010, just before the presidential election, with the European Parliament's initiative to assign a rapporteur to assess the new circumstances and possibilities of establishing direct trade links with the Turkish Cypriots following the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. The first parliamentary discussion on the issue was due to take place the day after the election, on 19 April 2010.

Table 1 Results of the 2010, 2005 and 2000 Turkish Cypriot Presidential Elections

Candidate	2010		2005		2000*	
	Turnout rate: 76.4 per cent	Vote share (%)	Turnout rate: 69.6 per cent	Vote share (%)	Turnout rate: 81.0 per cent	Vote share (%)
Derviş Eroğlu (UBP)	50.4		Mehmet Ali Talat (CTP)	55.6	Rauf R. Denktaş (Independent)	43.7
Mehmet Ali Talat (Independent)	42.9		Derviş Eroğlu (UBP)	22.7	Derviş Eroğlu (UBP)	30.1
Tahsin Ertuğruloğlu (Independent)	3.8		Mustafa Şenol Arabacıoğlu (DP)	13.2	Mustafa Akıncı (TKP)	11.7
Zeki Beşiktepeli (Independent)	1.6		Nuri Çevikel (YP)	4.8	Mehmet Ali Talat (CTP)	10.0
Mustafa Kemal Tümkən (Independent)	0.8		Zeki Beşiktepeli (Independent)	1.7	Arif Hasan Tahsin Desem (YBH)	2.6
Arif Salih Kırdag (Independent)	0.4		Hüseyin Angolemlı (TKP)	1.1	Şener Levent (Independent)	0.9
Ayhan Kaymak (Independent)	0.1		Zehra Cengiz (KSP)	0.5	Turgut Afşaroğlu (Independent)	0.6
			Arif Salih Kırdag (Independent)	0.3	Ayhan Kaymak (Independent)	0.4
			Ayhan Kaymak (Independent)	0.1		

Source: High Electoral Council of the 'TRNC', <http://lysk.mahkemeler.net>.

Notes: *Rauf R. Denktaş was declared president as Derviş Eroğlu withdrew before the second round of elections was held. UBP: National Unity Party (*Ulusal Birlik Partisi*); CTP: Republican Turkish Party (*Cumhuriyetçi Türk Partisi*); DP: Democratic Party (*Demokrat Partisi*); YP: New Party (*Yeni Parti*); TKP: Communal Liberation Party (*Toplumcu Kurtuluş Partisi*); KSP: Cyprus Socialist Party (*Kıbrıs Sosyalist Partisi*); YBH: Patriotic Union Movement (*Yurtsever Birlik Hareketi*).

Indeed, the positive conjuncture and the change in the political climate had led to a boom in the Turkish Cypriot economy between 2004 and 2007, despite the failure of the Annan Plan. Housing and investments in the tourism sector, taking the rules and regulations of the Annan Plan as the basis, formed the backbone of the economic development process. However, stagnation set in from 2007 onwards and was exacerbated by the global economic crisis. CTP was perceived by many voters as mismanaging the economic development process. Economic gains were distributed through wage increases and benefits for civil servants and workers, reflecting the governing party's ideological stance, while the government resorted to classical methods of increasing prices of goods and services in trying to overcome the difficulties (Sözen 2009, p. 339). Although there were attempts to reform the system, these remained limited, failing to match CTP's rhetoric on change and progress. As a result, CTP had shrunk to its traditional vote base in the 2009 legislative elections (see Table 2).

The 2010 Contest

The Rules of the Game

The 'TRNC' is a parliamentary system within which the government acts as the real executive power. The President of the 'TRNC' has a symbolic role with limited executive powers. The limited executive powers of the President are defined in accordance with the constitution and laws. The President, as the head of state, first and foremost, represents the unity and integrity of the State and the community. He should act independently, above and beyond political parties, to ensure respect for the Constitution of the Republic, the carrying out of public affairs in an uninterrupted and orderly manner and the continuity of the State. His executive powers confer on him the rights to appoint the prime minister, to entrust the prime minister with the duty to form the Council of Ministers, and to appoint the ministers on the proposal of the prime minister. In circumstances under which he considers it necessary, or at the request of the Prime Minister, he may preside over the Council of Ministers, albeit

Table 2 Results of the 2009 Turkish Cypriot Legislative Election across Districts

District	UBP	CTP/BG	DP	TDP	ÖRP	BKP	HİS
Lefkoşa	43.5	29.0	11.0	8.6	3.4	3.8	0.7
Gazimağusa	41.5	30.7	9.9	6.6	9.7	1.2	0.4
Girne	48.8	29.8	9.8	3.8	5.4	2.1	0.3
Güzelyurt	49.5	28.8	9.5	5.7	4.4	1.7	0.4
İskele	41.2	24.2	15.1	4.1	14.1	0.9	0.4
Total	44.0	29.4	10.6	6.9	6.2	2.4	0.5

Source: High Electoral Council of the 'TRNC', <http://ysk.mahkemeler.net>.

Notes: TDP (*Toplumcu Demokrasi Partisi* – Communal Democracy Party); ÖRP (*Özgürlük ve Reform Partisi* – Freedom and Reform Party); BKP (*Birleşik Kıbrıs Partisi* – United Cyprus Party); HİS (*Halk için Siyaset Partisi* – Politics for People Party).

without any voting rights. He also exercises powers in the promulgation of laws which are enacted by the Assembly and in the appointment of high-ranking public personnel, such as the president and judges of the Supreme Court. The President may only be replaced by the President of the Assembly upon his absence from work or incapacity to perform his duties.

The President is elected by universal suffrage for a period of five years. Almost any citizen of the 'TRNC' who is aged 35 or older and holds a higher education degree can run for the presidency. According to the electoral code, a candidate must obtain over 50 per cent of the total number of valid votes cast in order to be elected in the first round. If none of the candidates manages to obtain this absolute majority, a second round takes place after seven days between the two candidates who obtain the greatest number of votes. In the second round, the candidate who receives the highest number of votes cast becomes the President of the 'TRNC'. The constitution places no limits on the number of times a person can be re-elected as president.

Although the President of the 'TRNC' has only a symbolic role with regard to domestic politics, he is regarded by the UN and the international community as the 'community leader' of the Turkish Cypriots. As such, he is the main negotiator for the Turkish Cypriot community under the UN-sponsored peace talks. The post is also rather significant as the President acts as the main figure in directing the 'TRNC's' foreign policy, in coordination with Turkish officials.

The Candidates

A total of eight candidates officially applied to the High Electoral Council to run for the April 2010 election. The only female candidate, Serap Tezcan, was rejected on the grounds that she did not possess the qualifications to become president, due to the fact that she had psychological problems. One of the important events of the early stage of the campaign was the appeal against the candidacy of the incumbent President, Mehmet Ali Talat. The appeal was lodged by three citizens from the conservative wing, Vedat Çelik, Kamil Özkaloğlu and Vural Türkmen, on the grounds that Talat's rhetoric and initiatives contravened the second and third articles of the 'TRNC' constitution, creating concerns over the integrity and sovereignty of the 'TRNC' and the right to self-determination of the Turkish Cypriot people. The appeal was certainly related to the debate around the issues of single sovereignty and single citizenship as components of a possible federal solution, which the right-wing opinion makers argued was a concession given by Talat (see Zaman 2010). Ultimately, however, the appeal against Talat was rejected by the High Electoral Council of the 'TRNC', as Talat's candidacy was considered in line with the requirements of the constitution and the electoral law.

In the end, seven candidates ran for election on 18 April 2010. Table 3 summarises some basic information on the candidates. The number of candidates notwithstanding, the election was dominated by Eroğlu and Talat as the two most likely contenders. Tahsin Ertuğruloğlu and Zeki Beşiktepeli were seen as candidates who could possibly tilt the balance between Eroğlu and Talat by attracting rightist and leftist voters,

Table 3 Candidates Competing in the 2010 Turkish Cypriot Presidential Election (From Left to Right on the Ideological Spectrum)

Candidates	Zeki Beşiktepe	Ayhan Kaymak	Mehmet Ali Talat	Arif Salih Kırdag	Derviş Eroğlu	Mustafa Kemal Tümkən	Tahsin Ertuğruloğlu
Party affiliation	Independent	Independent	Independent	Independent	UBP	Independent	Independent
Political ideology	Leftist	Centre-left	Centre-right	Centre-right	Centre-right	Centre-right	Centre-right
Policy on the Cyprus issue	United Cyprus	Pro-federation	Pro-federation	Confederation	Pro-two-state solution*	Pro-two-state solution	Pro-two-state solution
Number of votes received**	1,967	168	52,294	520	61,422	964	4,647
Percentage of votes received**	1.6	0.1	42.9	0.4	50.4	0.8	3.8

Source: ** High Electoral Council of the 'TRNC'; <http://ysk.mahkemeler.net>.

Notes: *Although Derviş Eroğlu, Mustafa Kemal Tümkən and Tahsin Ertuğruloğlu traditionally support a two-state position, during the election campaign they declared their intention to continue the ongoing process of peace negotiations aiming at federation.

respectively, who were dissatisfied with the performance of these two candidates. Both Eroğlu and Talat had the concrete support of a major political party, UBP for Eroğlu and CTP/BG for Talat, and a group of small parties. In Turkish Cypriot politics, the support of a major political party is important for electoral success. Generally, political parties consider nominating a party candidate prior to entering into an alliance, and usually party leaders or senior political figures are nominated as candidates of major political parties in Turkish Cypriot politics. In 2010, in contrast to many of the previous elections, Dr Derviş Eroğlu, the prime minister, ran as the only candidate who was affiliated with a party. Talat preferred to run as an independent rather than a CTP candidate, trying to appeal to a wider audience.

Dr Derviş Eroğlu, a 72-year-old medical doctor and a conservative veteran, had been involved in Turkish Cypriot politics since UBP was first founded in 1975. He was elected to parliament in 1976 and assumed various posts within the party. He was Minister for Education, Culture, Youth and Sports in the first UBP government in 1976–77 and UBP provincial chairman in Gazimağusa between 1977 and 1983. He became the leader of the party in 1983. He served as the prime minister from 1983 to 1993 and again from 1996 to 2003. Despite the fact that he was not considered a charismatic leader, Eroğlu dominated the party until he retired in 2006. However, the party subsequently failed to produce a strong leader and Eroğlu returned in November 2008 to lead UBP in the April 2009 legislative elections, in which he was elected Prime Minister.

Traditionally, Eroğlu has been known for his preference for a two-state solution, believing in the sovereignty of the ‘TRNC’ and the Turkish Cypriot people. He is perceived to possess an uncompromising stance on the Cyprus issue, accepting Turkey’s 1974 intervention as a solution to the problem. Eroğlu, alongside former president, Rauf Denктаş, advocated a ‘no’ to the Annan Plan and opposed various steps taken during the Talat period, such as the establishment of the Immoveable Property Commission set up in 2005 to address Greek Cypriot claims relating to abandoned properties in northern Cyprus.

Mehmet Ali Talat, the incumbent President, had been involved in Turkish Cypriot politics since 1977. He assumed various roles within the leftist CTP and, following the general elections of December 1993, served as the National Education and Culture Minister and Minister of State and Deputy Prime Minister in the DP–CTP coalition governments. In 1996, he was elected as the leader of CTP, which he transformed into a social democratic party. Talat emerged as an important political figure in the wake of a series of protests against President Denктаş in 2002 and 2003, by advocating change, promising a solution (as opposed to the nationalist, status quo stance) and membership in the European Union under a unified Cyprus. Under Talat’s leadership, CTP joined forces with liberal business and civil society circles to become CTP/BG, leaning towards the centre/centre-left. Subsequently, Talat came to dominate Turkish Cypriot politics with his party’s victory in the 2003 legislative elections (see Çarkoğlu and Sözen 2004).

Tahsin Ertuğruloğlu was a former Minister of Foreign Affairs, UBP leader from 2006 to 2008, and an active UBP parliamentarian, who initially supported Eroğlu’s candidacy. In early March 2010, he declared that he would run in the presidential

election following a series of meetings with Turkish President, Abdullah Gül and Prime Minister, Recep Tayip Erdoğan, and a meeting with Eroğlu in which he demanded a guarantee that he would become prime minister if Eroğlu was elected president. Given these circumstances, his declaration created controversy in Turkish Cypriot politics and was perceived by right-wing voters as an instance of indirect intervention by AKP to weaken Eroğlu.

Zeki Beşiktepelı, on the other hand, could potentially negatively influence support for Talat by attracting leftist votes dissatisfied with the latter's performance. A Moscow-educated academic, Beşiktepelı was an important figure in the leftist Jasmine Movement for a united Cyprus and a former board member of BKP (*Birleşik Kıbrıs Partisi* – United Cyprus Party) which officially supported Talat for the presidency in the 2010 contest.

The other three candidates remained marginal, without a party base or any significant support, and lacked clearly identified and detailed election programmes. Ayhan Kaymak was a former head manager of a state cooperative, PEYAK, who emphasised the importance of equal rights for the Turkish Cypriot people. Arif Salih Kırdag worked independently in agriculture and trade and argued for a Cyprus solution based on a loose confederal structure. Finally, Mustafa Kemal Tümkan was a former military officer whose ideal was a sovereign independent 'TRNC'.

The Campaign

According to the electoral code, the formal campaigning period for the 18 April 2010 presidential election began on 23 March 2010. However, informal visits to regions were initiated well before this date. Given that the race essentially turned into a competition between two candidates, parties and interest groups largely grouped around Eroğlu on the right and Talat on the left. Eroğlu enjoyed the support of UBP (which had polled 44.0 per cent in the 2009 legislative elections), the centre-right DP (*Demokrat Parti* – Democratic Party, 10.6 per cent in 2009), the rightist HİS (*Halk için Siyaset Partisi* – Politics for People Party, 0.5 per cent), the rightist MAP (*Milliyetçi Adalet Partisi* – Nationalist Justice Party), business circles, and civil society organisations such as associations of retired military personnel. Talat, on the other hand, received support from his former party, the centre-left CTP/BG (with 29.4 per cent in the 2009 legislative elections), the left of centre TDP (*Toplumcu Demokrasi Partisi* – Communal Democracy Party with 6.9 per cent in 2009), CTP's former coalition partner, the right of centre ÖRP (*Özgürlük ve Reform Partisi* – Freedom and Reform Party, 6.2 per cent), the leftist BKP (2.4 per cent), some business circles, and civil society organisations, especially trade unions.

The most important aspect of these groupings was the active support of DP and the Denктаş family for Eroğlu. This was not an easy coalition to put together. DP was formed in 1992 by nine UBP parliamentarians—close to former president of the 'TRNC', Rauf Denктаş—who resigned following an inter-party struggle over discontent with the way Eroğlu ruled. The move in 1992 was read by Eroğlu as an

attempt by Denктаş to end his leadership of UBP and soon developed into a personal rivalry. Ever since, UBP/Erođlu and DP/Denктаş have not supported each other, even on policy issues where they shared similar viewpoints.

Erođlu entered the campaign using the slogan, ‘There is a difference! People are behind it!’ (*Fark Var! Arkasında Halk Var!*). His aim was to underline popular frustration and disappointment with Talat’s inability to achieve a breakthrough in the post-Annan Plan period and his detachment from society, especially in respect of domestic developments. Talat was criticised for not being transparent about and not communicating the developments in the talks.¹ Erođlu pledged to create a difference, a courageous stance towards a just and sustainable solution together with the people. This intent was reinforced by appeals to establish a national council involving people from different backgrounds as advisers in the negotiations and to inform the public on a regular basis. Erođlu repeatedly emphasised that he would continue the negotiations without any preconditions. This was the most important sign of moderation in his stance. However, his messages were mixed. While declaring that he would not be the person to leave the negotiations table, he vowed to defend the ‘interests of sovereign Turkish Cypriots’ (Özerkan 2010), implying the continuing existence of the ‘TRNC’ as a state and the guarantorship of Turkey. His approach was indeed reminiscent of the hard-line, status quo approach, reflecting the UBP approach towards a two-state solution (see Sözen 2009, p. 342).

This nationalist tone was also reflected in the feeling of pride in the ‘TRNC’, a point of criticism directed to Talat concerning his reactions to the declaration of ‘TRNC’s’ independence. In a recently published book, Talat openly stated that he had opposed the support given to the 1983 proclamation of the ‘TRNC’ by his party, declaring that he felt sad and had cried right after the declaration, believing this was a wrong political manoeuvre for the Turkish Cypriot cause (see Güven 2009, pp. 41–50). Another dimension of criticism concerned Talat’s perceived failure to supervise his former party with regard to socioeconomic developments. Erođlu underlined that he would do his part in supporting and supervising the government in overcoming socioeconomic problems as well as supporting initiatives for the universities, tourism, foreign investments and cooperation with Turkey in transporting water, electrical power and natural gas to Cyprus.

Talat, on the other hand, focused his campaign on anti-nationalist rhetoric as well as on domestic issues. His main slogan, ‘Either Yesterday or the World’ (*Ya Dün Ya Dünya*), appealed to the electorate to choose between the past and the future, between isolation from and integration with the world. As such, he associated yesterday with nationalist policies and backwardness, accusing Erođlu and Rauf Denктаş of being responsible for the difficulties Turkish Cypriots currently faced as they were responsible for the fact that the Republic of Cyprus had become a member of the EU without a resolution to the problem. The left perceived the uncompromising attitude of the right-wing leaders as the most important stumbling block in reaching a deal, which led to mounting pressure on the Turkish side, thus increasing the isolation of the Turkish Cypriot society. In trying to counter criticisms of his position on the

'TRNC', Talat maintained there was no dilemma between the 'TRNC' and a reunified Cyprus, declaring that the choice was rather between a compromise solution and isolation (Özerkan 2010).

Talat presented himself as the leader who symbolised the integration of Turkish Cypriots with the world, supported by slogans such as 'If Talat is in, I am in! Because he is connecting me with the world/Europe/Turkey' ('*Talat varsa ben de varım! Çünkü beni dünyaya/Avrupa'ya/Türkiye'ye bağlıyor*'). Talat argued that the constructive approach adopted by CTP, that is, as a party in favour of a settlement of the conflict, had changed the international community's perception of Turkish Cypriot policy in a positive way, leading to an acceptance of Turkish Cypriot leadership by world leaders. In support of this, he listed the international figures whom he had met during his presidency, including UK Prime Minister, Gordon Brown; United States Secretaries of State, Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice and Hillary Clinton; and a number of Foreign Ministers of EU member states. He argued that his stance had strengthened the 'TRNC' internationally, especially given the fact that some of the meetings had taken place in the Presidential Palace of the 'TRNC', such as the visits by British Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, on 26 January 2006, President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, on 25 June 2009, and UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, on 1 February 2010. He also emphasised the establishment of a working relationship with the EU, which had paved the way for EU financial assistance under various programmes. He argued that these steps were made possible through a convergence of interests with Turkey on the need to solve the Cyprus question, integration into the EU and opening to a globalised world. Thus, he emphasised, he acted with the people for the people by presenting himself as a link between the internationally isolated Turkish Cypriot society and the world.

In this respect, one of the important aspects with regard to Talat's campaign was his attempt to show the Turkish Cypriot society the progress achieved in the negotiation. Talat held a press conference to publicise the achievements (see Kibrispostası 2010a), which he also used extensively in his election brochure. He claimed there was a possibility of solving the problem in 18 months. This move aimed to persuade the Turkish Cypriots to keep their hopes for a solution alive and to stick with him. Talat also outlined an economic vision, a lesser dimension of his campaign, advocating the development of initiatives to encourage specialisation in agriculture, alternative tourism, women entrepreneurs, entertainment and administrative restructuring.

As the elections approached, Talat pursued a more aggressive rhetoric, arguing that Eroğlu lacked the necessary leadership characteristics and vision. He presented himself as the sole redress for negotiations in the name of Turkish Cypriots. This line reflected his uncertainty concerning his possibilities of re-election, given the results of public opinion polls. As early as November 2009, pre-election polls suggested that Eroğlu was leading against Talat (Kibris 2009). From January 2010, there was a proliferation of polls showing the same trend. In the later stages of the election campaign, the Eroğlu side used the polls to put pressure on Talat by predicting that there would be a 10 to 15 per cent difference between the two candidates and that Eroğlu would win the elections in the first round.

Talat, indeed, seemed to be reluctant to run for the presidency given the results of the public opinion polls and delayed the official announcement of his candidacy until 6 March 2010. During the later stages of his campaign, Talat preferred not to publish any polls, arguing that he felt change as he visited villages and contacted people. Talat perceived the support of the international community as another opportunity to strengthen his chances of winning the election. There were indeed indications of support. Some influential actors, such as the International Crisis Group, argued that Talat's re-election was the only way to an easy and quick deal on a federal state, implicitly signifying that the election of Eroğlu could lead to the failure of the negotiation process.² In addition, many reports indicated indirect support. The EU initiative on direct trade and the ECHR decision on the Immovable Property Commission in early March 2010 were read by the right wing as attempts to strengthen Talat's argument that his approach was yielding positive results. The ECHR decision recognised the Immovable Property Commission set up by the 'TRNC' in 2005 as an effective domestic remedy for claims relating to abandoned Greek Cypriot properties in northern Cyprus. This move was considered by Talat's supporters as significant in terms of creating an opening on the property issue.

The perceived Turkish support, on the other hand, was a little mixed. Statements by Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Davutoğlu on the need to continue a constructive approach were interpreted by media close to the AKP government as indications of implicit support for Talat (see Yanatma 2010). Indeed, *Zaman*, a leading Turkish daily with good connections with the ruling AKP, published an opinion poll on 11 April claiming Talat was closing the gap with Eroğlu and that he could manage to win the elections (Özkaya 2010).

Talat employed a different PR strategy from Eroğlu. He used the media extensively as well as holding public meetings, public demonstrations holding banners on major roundabouts, and village visits. He appeared on various TV programmes, both national and international, and called on Eroğlu for a live televised debate, thinking he would be able to gain the upper hand regarding the debate on the state of play in the negotiations and thus influence public opinion to his advantage through his charisma and ability to address people. However, Eroğlu refused to take part in such a debate. Instead he participated in a limited number of TV appearances, while largely organising his campaign around public meetings and village visits, as he had done in the April 2009 legislative elections (see Sözen 2009, p. 342). The two leaders appeared together only on the election programme of the official Turkish Cypriot television channel, BRT, where each candidate presented his programmes and positions through a monologue.

The campaign programmes of the minor candidates remained limited in nature, due to lack of finance. These candidates only took part in radio and television programmes and paid visits to villages, but did not stage any public meetings. According to reports, the electoral spending by Ertuğruloğlu was the highest among the five candidates, amounting to around €100,000–120,000 (Kıbrıs 2010). The financing of campaign activities by the other four candidates amounted to an average of €3500 each, compared with Talat's expenses of around €800,000 (Kıbrıspostası 2010d).

The slogans of these minor candidates included a dose of criticism for both Eroğlu and Talat. Tahsin Ertuğruloğlu advocated ‘Starting from Scratch’ (*‘Sil baştan.’*), blaming Eroğlu for assuming a dynastic approach in UBP and Talat for not paying due attention to the interests of the Turkish Cypriots. Beşiktepelı used the slogan ‘We will hear our voice not from Çankaya, but from Dikilitaş’³ (*‘Çankaya’dan değil dikili taştan sesimizi dünyaya duyuracağız.’*), arguing for full independence of Turkish Cypriot politics from Ankara. Kaymak’s slogan was ‘I am looking for a sane person’ (*‘Aklı başında insan arıyorum’*), following Diogenes of Sinope’s search for an honest man and largely emphasising dishonesty in Turkish Cypriot politics. Kırdag declared ‘Justice to replace lies, for freedom, to find a Cyprus solution by electing a courageous Turkish Cypriot’ (*‘Yalan dolanın bittiği yerde adalet için.’*), arguing that Talat has not been honest and courageous enough. Tümkın’s slogan was ‘Perfect Merging’ (*‘Kusursuz birleşme.’*), emphasising sovereignty, statehood and equality with the Greek Cypriots as the basis for a perfect solution.

Despite the tension that built up between the two major candidates, no major incidents occurred during the campaign period or on Election Day. There were only rare attacks on the banners—attacks which Talat supporters argued were used as part of the pressure mechanism of the Eroğlu side.

Explaining the Results

Among the 164,072 registered voters, 125,294 (76.37 per cent) turned out to vote in the 2010 presidential election. This remains the second lowest turnout in a presidential election in the history of the ‘TRNC’.⁴ Although a second round between Eroğlu and Talat seemed a quite likely outcome during most of the counting process, Eroğlu incrementally increased his share to 50.4 per cent of the total votes cast, compared with 22.7 per cent in 2005. Talat received 42.9 per cent, faring poorly compared with his 55.6 per cent in 2005. Eroğlu became the third president of the ‘TRNC’, following Rauf Denktaş and Mehmet Ali Talat.

A clear victory for Eroğlu, the election success can certainly be attributed to his party, UBP, and the collaboration of the right wing behind Eroğlu. In the three previous presidential elections in which he had participated, his vote share was between 22 and 30 per cent of votes cast, even following strong performances by UBP. In 2010, it was important that, first, UBP remained intact in support of Eroğlu following the controversial candidacy of Ertuğruloğlu. Second, the party presented Eroğlu as the most important candidate on the right and facilitated the active support of DP and the Denktaş family, which proved to be crucial in achieving Eroğlu’s electoral success. This ensured a support base resulting in an outcome that presented parallels in terms of party support received based on the results of 2009 legislative elections and the vote share obtained by Eroğlu (see Table 2 and Table 4).

A quick look at the figures in Table 2 and Table 4 suggests that political trends paralleled the electoral tendencies of the April 2009 legislative elections with variations at the regional level. Eroğlu built upon the success of his party in the legislative

Table 4 Results of the 2010 Turkish Cypriot Presidential Election across Districts

District	Number of Votes Cast	Derviş Eroğlu	Mehmet Ali Talat	Tahsin Ertuğruloğlu	Zeki Beşiktepe	Mustafa Kemal Tümkün	Arif Salih Kırdag	Ayhan Kaymak
Lefkoşa	39,055	44.0	47.2	5.5	2.2	0.5	0.5	0.1
Gazimağusa	33,293	53.0	41.4	3.1	1.0	0.9	0.4	0.2
Girne	23,298	50.8	43.2	3.0	1.9	0.7	0.3	0.1
Güzelyurt	16,371	52.5	42.0	2.3	1.6	1.1	0.4	0.1
İskele	13,277	59.3	34.1	4.1	0.8	1.1	0.5	0.1
Total	125,294	50.4	42.9	3.8	1.6	0.8	0.4	0.1

Source: High Electoral Council of the 'TRNC', <http://ysk.mahkemeler.net>

elections and enjoyed the support of smaller parties. Collaboration with the DP and the Denktaş family resulted in remarkable differences in favour of Eroğlu in regions of Gazimağusa and especially İskele, where UBP recorded its lowest vote shares in 2009 (respectively, 41.5 and 41.2 per cent). These regions are known for the high proportion of 'TRNC' citizens who are settlers from Turkey, with a tendency to vote for right-wing parties (see Hatay 2007, p. 68 and Çarkoğlu and Sözen 2004, p. 133). The left-wing CTP and Talat have generally fared poorly, especially in İskele—with only 24.2 per cent for CTP in the 2009 legislative elections and 34.1 per cent for Talat in the 2010 presidential elections. One of the reasons for this tendency is the failure of the left before the early 2000s to reach out politically to the 'TRNC' citizens in these regions who were born in Turkey.⁵ Despite an increase in the vote shares of the left-wing parties in these regions in the last decade, the 2010 presidential elections confirmed the tendency of high support levels for the right. On the other hand, Eroğlu was not able to fully capitalise on the right-wing support in the capital, Lefkoşa, where Talat secured the lead and Ertuğruloğlu was successful in obtaining 5.5 per cent of the votes cast. The tendency in Girne and Güzelyurt regions paralleled the overall outcome, repeating the strong standing by UBP in the 2009 legislative elections.

The main factors leading to such an outcome can be interlinked and explained under three main headings: the state of play regarding the relations of Turkish Cypriot society with the EU; the Cyprus question and Talat's record; and domestic political and economic issues.

As mentioned above, the rise of CTP and Talat to power and their dominance in 2003–10 was very much related to and built around their European project. The EU's failure to meet its pre-Annan Plan referenda promises, resulting in policy outcomes which fell short of Turkish Cypriot expectations, put the European project of CTP and Talat into difficulty. The promises given by the EU to Turkish Cypriots were either delayed in being fulfilled or failed to meet demands to overcome the international isolation of Turkish Cypriot society. At the same time, following its 2004 Enlargement, the EU continuously demanded that Turkey open its sea and air ports to Greek Cypriot vessels through the extension of the Turkish Customs Union to the new member states including the Republic of Cyprus. This EU attitude led to a perception of EU

ineffectiveness and submission to Greek Cypriot policy. In turn, this led to resentment and disappointment among different segments of Turkish Cypriot society (see EurActiv 2009, Star 2009, and Özgür 2010). The latest EU initiative regarding direct trade came at a very late stage and lacked a concrete foundation, thus failing to provide a positive signal concerning EU policy towards the Turkish Cypriots. In fact, in the eyes of the Turkish Cypriots, the EU had lost its privileged position as an actor who could contribute to the resolution of the problem and/or help end or ease the isolation faced. As a result, the EU factor indeed had a negative connotation for Talat.

The state of play with regard to the Cyprus question was a focal point for Talat in his election campaign. During his 1 April 2010 press conference on the course of talks, Talat highlighted progress achieved on three of the six main issues: governance and power-sharing, the EU and economic matters.⁶ He also emphasised that the two leaders had generated a total of 31 ‘convergence papers’ as a result of the 71 meetings that they had held since September 2008, a first in the negotiations on the conflict. However, there was no progress on sensitive issues of territory, property, security and guarantees or on establishing the agreement on the settlement as part of EU primary law (Kıbrıspostası 2010b, 2010c). These, coupled with the Greek Cypriot attitude in the last few months prior to the elections, strengthened the hand of the right wing. Manifestations of the Greek Cypriot attitude included President Christofias’s unwillingness to hold a joint press conference despite repeated calls by Talat to do so, the Greek Cypriot parliamentary decision of 19 February 2010 stating that there should be no provisions for guarantors or guarantees in a unified Cyprus, which is a member state of the EU, and the statement by Greek Cypriot government spokesman, Stephanos Stephanou, that the government would take ‘all necessary steps to deal with any moves to bring back the issue regarding the direct trade with the Turkish occupied areas of the Republic of Cyprus’ (Cyprus News Agency 2010). These all created question marks concerning the flexibility and cooperation of the Greek Cypriot leadership and meant any progress in the talks had limited impact on the course of the elections. The Greek Cypriot approach certainly weakened Talat’s standing, strengthening the right-wing rhetoric.

One of the most important variables in explaining the outcome of the 2010 presidential election—and one which depicts normalisation in Turkish Cypriot politics—is the re-emergence of domestic issues as a determining factor. As mentioned earlier, both Eroğlu and Talat referred to domestic issues in their campaigns, despite the limited executive powers of the president. Indeed, with the exceptions of the legislative and presidential elections of 2003 and 2005, domestic issues and ideological differences have always been important in Turkish Cypriot presidential election campaigns. The 2003 and 2005 elections were fought along political differences on the Cyprus problem and EU integration. However, with the economic crisis of 2007 these issues began to lose salience and the economic situation rose to prominence (see European Commission 2010, p. 6). Lack of a breakthrough on international isolation and deadlock on integration with the EU played a role, to an extent, in CTP’s failure to meet its promise of change. However, mismanagement of the economic growth of 2004–07, limited attempts to reform the economic and political structures and the

inability to establish a working relationship between the state and civil society—i.e. the trade unions—and, indeed, a disconnection between Talat and CTP proved to be crucial in affecting Talat's possibilities of re-election. In fact, Talat, in a way, acknowledged this and his failure to deal with domestic policy matters by promising that, if re-elected, in the future he would be more involved in a supervisory position and, if needed, would take corrective measures on a legitimate basis.

All in all, these factors, indeed, led to estrangement between CTP–Talat and the business circles/civil society and, coupled with the global economic crisis, meant the loss of liberal and right-wing voters who had departed from their tradition and unorthodoxly voted for CTP and Talat in the 2003 and 2005 elections (see Sözen 2009, p. 347). The result was Eroğlu's victory.

Conclusions and Prospects

The April 2010 presidential elections in the 'TRNC' marked the end of the Talat (and CTP) interlude in Turkish Cypriot politics during the extraordinary period from 2003 to 2010. It was not a surprise for many to see Eroğlu win in the first round of elections. The main factors accounting for Eroğlu's victory were the EU's ineffectiveness in fulfilling its promises to the Turkish Cypriots, the inability of Talat and CTP to overcome international isolation, the deadlock in the negotiations for a compromise solution to the Cyprus problem, the inflexible Greek Cypriot attitude with respect to both the negotiations process and the EU policy towards the Turkish Cypriot society and, indeed, CTP mismanagement of domestic issues and Talat's failure to supervise CTP. In fact, one of the significant aspects of the outcome, and normalisation in Turkish Cypriot politics, was the dominance of domestic issues and ideological differences as an important determinant, unlike the 2003 and 2005 elections, which were largely determined by a divide on European integration and the Cyprus problem.

The outcome can certainly be considered as the success of UBP rather than a personal success for Eroğlu. UBP was successful in remaining unified in support of Eroğlu following the controversial candidacy of former UBP leader and parliamentarian, Ertuğruloğlu. Its presentation of Eroğlu as the most important candidate on the right facilitated the active support of right-wing parties and figures, which proved to be crucial in achieving Eroğlu's electoral success. The process and outcome of the 2010 presidential election turned into a competition between two camps, reflecting continuity with the previous elections in the 2000s towards the development of a political system within which two major parties dominate, one on each side of the political spectrum, with minor parties scattered along the left and right political continuum.

However, such a development does not support the argument that there has been a move in public opinion away from the desire for a compromise solution. There was a growing perception among the electorate that Eroğlu would not be able to follow a drastically different stance leading the Turkish Cypriot community away from a search for a solution. Indeed, Eroğlu moderated his policy approach on the Cyprus question in order to regain the right-wing voters who had voted for Talat in the 2005 presidential

election. Both during the campaign and right after winning the election, Eroğlu declared his intention of working with goodwill for a solution that takes the Turkish Cypriot community's rights into account. Eroğlu supported his campaign rhetoric by immediately sending a letter to UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, calling for the negotiations to continue from where they had left off. He also established a core negotiating team and a 'negotiations advisory council' in May 2010 including various names from across the political spectrum of northern Cyprus, confirming his attempts to establish a constructive attitude in this early phase of his presidency.

Eroğlu's moderate approach also aimed not to estrange the ruling AKP government in Turkey. He was presented as being at odds with AKP, which was considered to be more supportive of Talat despite rhetorically being indifferent. It is important to note that no Turkish Cypriot president or ruling party can afford to come into conflict with the Turkish government, on which it is dependent diplomatically and economically. The sidelining of Rauf Denктаş is still fresh in the minds of the Turkish Cypriot elite. Yet, Turkey's approach on the Cyprus question and the state of Turkey–EU relations will show whether Eroğlu's initial approach was 'tactical' in nature or a sincere attempt to solve the conflict by involving various domestic actors.

Notes

- [1] Indeed, in an interview with the author, former President Mehmet Ali Talat argued that he preferred not to communicate details of the talks in order not to single out and politicise issues and polarise public opinion (Mehmet Ali Talat, Lefkoşa, 17 March 2011, interview by the author).
- [2] See for example Akyel and Pope 2010. The international community had in fact begun to talk about the possibility of partition of the island if the process of negotiations between Talat and Christofias failed. See for example Pope 2009.
- [3] Çankaya is a district of Ankara, Turkey which hosts the main state institutions. Dikilitaş is the Turkish for the Venetian Column that marks the centre of Nicosia.
- [4] The turnout rates for the previous presidential elections were: 85.7 per cent in 1985; 93.5 per cent in 1990; 85.1 per cent in the first round and 80.1 per cent in the second round in 1995; 81.0 per cent in 2000; and 69.6 per cent in 2005.
- [5] See Hatay 2007 for a demographic analysis of the 'TRNC' population and for a detailed analysis of the voting behaviour of 'Turkish settlers' in the 'TRNC'.
- [6] Talat and Christofias established six working groups on the main issues to be negotiated in April 2008 following the election of the Greek Cypriot leader. These are (1) governance and power-sharing, (2) territory, (3) EU matters, (4) economic matters, (5) property, and (6) security and guarantees.

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Sait Akşit (PhD Middle East Technical University) is an Assistant Professor at Gediz University, İzmir, Turkey. His recent publications include 'The Turkish Parliamentary Elite and the EU: Mapping out Attitudes on the European Union', *South European Society and Politics*, 2011, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 395–407 (with Ö. Şenyuva and I. Gürleyen) and *Turkey Watch: EU Member States' Perceptions On Turkey's Accession to the EU* (co-edited with Ö. Şenyuva and Ç. Üstün) (Ankara: Zeplin İletişim, 2009).