

July 2013 Parliamentary Elections in the TRNC: Still No Hope for a Thorough Change...

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Early legislative elections were held in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) on 28 July 2013. The results brought a period of coalitions. For the first time since the early 2000s Turkish Cypriot politics was solely dominated by domestic issues and the ideological differences between parties. Policy differences on the Cyprus issue were almost absent. Indeed, given the economic crisis in the south and the loss of pressure in Turkey-EU relations, the Cyprus negotiations did not present any prospects to champion or criticise.

Background to the elections

The decision on early elections was taken in collaboration with two rival dominant parties: the UBP (Ulusal Birlik Partisi - National Unity Party) and the CTP (Cumhuriyetçi Türk Partisi/Birleşik Güçler - Republican Turkish Party/United Forces). The election date was set at the earliest possible time, in the midst of summer holidays. It was a pragmatic decision aimed at preventing possible new rivals in the midst of the increasing dissatisfaction and mistrust in politics and politicians. The decision on early elections was taken in late May following the vote of no confidence on the ruling UBP government, which was initiated after eight parliamentarians resigned from the party. The UBP was going through a leadership struggle, a lengthy quagmire that resulted in political deadlock, thereby negatively influencing the functioning of not only the government but also the state. İrsen Küçük assumed the leadership in the UBP following the election of the former UBP leader Derviş Eroğlu to the Presidency in 2010. Küçük was considered unsuccessful by many, including Eroğlu, and attempts at challenging his leadership ended in an inter-party struggle and divisions within the party. The split was very much reflected in the domestic politics. Domestic politics increasingly appeared chaotic with UBP government unable to deal with economic difficulties and social problems, such as the Nicosia municipality crisis.¹

Following the decision on early elections, a technocratic government was formed by a CTP politi-

cian, Sibel Siber, who led the Turkish Cypriots to the 28th of July elections.

The 2013 Contest

The Rules of the Game

The TRNC has a parliamentary system within which the government acts as the executive power. The President has a symbolic role with regards to domestic politics, yet he represents the Turkish Cypriots as chief negotiator of the community. The 50 members of the legislative assembly are elected for five-year terms based on proportional representation with a five per cent threshold. The Turkish Cypriot political system allows voters to cast their votes in three different ways. Voters can cast their vote for one of the parties in their election constituency where the candidates of that party receive one vote each. Voters can also cast their vote for a party and choose between the candidates of that party. In this case, voters can pick and choose half of that party's candidates in their constituency. Lastly, voters can cast a mixed vote ('karma oy') and choose between candidates of different parties and independents. In this case voters have to pick and choose at least half the number of candidates in their constituency. The second and third ways gain importance in determining the winning candidates, regardless of their place in the party list.

The Parties and the Campaign

The election was contested by five political parties (See Table 1). The UBP, a right wing stronghold, asked for a consecutive term in power to establish continuity of its economic programme with the campaign slogan 'Tam Yol İleri... Oyunu Bozmak İçin Davana Sahip Çık' ('Full Speed Ahead... Maintain Your Cause to Disrupt Games'). The opposition parties concentrated on economic situation, the UBP's style of government and problems in the state structure with differing tones of criticism. CTP, a left wing stronghold, presented itself as the party, which symbolised change supported by the slogans '1 Parti Var' ('There is One Party'), 'Vesayet Değil Özgür İrade' (No guardianship, but the free will of the people), 'Ayaklarımızın üzerinde duracağımız bir sistem yaratacağız!' ('We will create a system that will help us stand on our own feet!').

Thus, CTP prioritised a renewed and strong understanding of state structure, as well as an economic understanding that would ensure Turkish Cypriot self-rule. DP-UG, a mid-size right wing party led by Serdar Denktaş – a son of former TRNC President Rauf Denktaş - appealed for voters who were dissatisfied with the UBP. The DP campaign used slogans, such as ‘Yeni seçenek, yeni gelecek’ (New alternative, new future), ‘Yeni bir dönem, yeni bir gelecek. Biz geleceğiz.’ (‘A new era, a new future. We are coming’). TDP, a minor left wing party, contested in the elections with slogans, such as ‘Zincirleri Kırmanın Zamanı Geldi’ (It’s time to break the chains), ‘Hedef Gerçek Egemenlik’ (‘Our aim is real sovereignty’), ‘Köklü Gelenek, Yeni Siyaset’ (‘Well established tradition, new politics’), ‘Hedef Avrupa’ (‘Aim Europe’). BKP-

The turnout, 69.61 per cent, was the lowest in the history of Turkish Cypriot elections. Indeed domestic political and economic issues and mistrust in politics and politicians were the main factors determining this outcome.

The CTP won the elections with 38.38 per cent of the votes cast, with a nine per cent increase in its vote share compared to the 2009 results (see Table 2). Yet, CTP was short of securing a ruling majority in parliament by gaining only 21 seats out of 50. Cautious support of the CTP is related to its record in government between 2003 and 2009, in particular, its failure to achieve a breakthrough on international isolation of the Turkish Cypriot community, deadlock on European integration, and inability to restructure the economy and the state. CTP politicking

Table 1: Political Parties in the 2013 electoral contest

Parties	BKP-TVG	TDP	CTP-BG	UBP	DP
Year founded	2002	2007	1970	1975	1992
Leader	İzzet İzcan (2002)	Mehmet Çakıcı (2007)	Özkan Yorgancıoğlu (2011)	İrsen Küçük (2009)	Serdar Denktaş (1996-2000, 2002)
Political and Economic Ideology	Leftist	Left of Centre	Centre Left	Centre Right	Centre Right
Policy on the Cyprus Problem	Strongly pro-federation	Strongly pro-federation	Pro-federation	Pro-two-state solution	Pro-two-state solution
Votes received in the 2013 elections	3.15 %	7.41 %	38.38 %	27.33 %	23.16 %

Notes: BKP-TVG (Birleşik Kıbrıs Partisi – United Cyprus Party); TDP (Toplumcu Demokrasi Partisi - Communal Democracy Party); DP-UG (Demokrat Parti-Ulusal Güçler - Democratic Party-National Forces)

TVG, the only non-centrist party – with a socialist inclination – in the 2013 elections claimed to continue its struggle for Cypriot existence, identity and emancipation calling for a Cypriot community standing on its own feet, free from intervention by Turkey. The parties used similar PR strategies of organizing public meetings and demonstration, holding banners at major roundabouts in the country, visiting villages, and, above all, appearing in media. Despite the extensive use of media, the parties were never involved in any debate over their party programs.

Explaining the Results

120,287 Turkish Cypriots – out of a total of 172,803 voters – went to the polls on 28 July 2013 to elect new members of the assembly.

on the way to the elections – especially with respect to decisions on the date of the elections and on the limited use of state television taken in collaboration with the ruling UBP – also created concerns for the undecided voters. All of these created pessimism on CTP’s ability to change.

Perhaps the major winner appears to be DP-UG, which came third with 23.16 per cent of the votes - substantially increasing its vote share by 12.52 per cent - and gained 12 seats. DP faired its second best result after the foundation of the party in 1993 by pro-Rauf Denktaş politicians who were critical of Eroğlu’s style. The DP election success can partly be attributed to the contribution of the members who defected from the UBP and partly to Denktaş’s appealing rhetoric on the economy.

However, the presence of defecting parliamentarians, and the share of mixed vote reflecting dissatisfaction with the UBP rule leaves certain question marks rather than exhibiting the real strength of DP support. What is more interesting is that DP was still left behind the UBP despite the widespread dissatisfaction with the UBP rule.

UBP and its leader, İrsen Küçük, are the major losers: UBP vote share was 27.33 per cent - a historic low - with a 16.64 decrease from 2009 that resulted in the loss of 12 parliamentary seats, including that of its leader. TDP was the other loser receiving 7.41 per cent of the votes cast, a minor increase from 2009, with only 3 seats in the parliament. The BKP was unable to gain representation in the parliament despite increasing its vote share.

In particular, high percentage of mixed votes cast on 28 July 2013 – around 20.5 per cent as compared to a high 8.9 in previous elections –

some of the candidates and elevate others from unfavourable positions in party lists and thus was a decisive factor in determining the winning candidates. 47 of the 50 MPs appealed to be re-elected, yet 18 of them, mainly old guards, were left out. For the first time, indeed, a party leader, UBP leader Küçük, as well as the general secretaries of both the UBP and the DP, failed to be elected. Combined with the fact that UBP vote share was at a historic low, this election result indicates discontent among the UBP voters with Küçük's style of handling the inter-party struggle and government.

There were three potential alternatives for a coalition government: A CTP-DP coalition – the two parties collaborated between 2003 and 2006 as well; a grand coalition between CTP-UBP, which seemed more likely to continue the existing economic programme; and a nationalistic UBP-DP coalition. Mehmet Ali Talat, former CTP leader and former TRNC President, argued

Table 2: Results of the 2013, 2009, 2005 and 2003 Legislative Elections

Year	2013		2009		2005		2003	
	Turnout rate: 69.6%		Turnout rate: 81.7%		Turnout rate: 80.8%		Turnout rate: 86.0%	
Party	Vote share, %		Vote share, %		Vote share, %		Vote share, %	
	Seats	Seats	Seats	Seats	Seats	Seats	Seats	Seats
CTP	38.38	21	29.34	15	31.7	24	35.2	19
UBP	27.33	14	43.97	26	44.5	19	32.9	18
DP-UG	23.16	12	10.64	5	13.5	6	12.9	7
TDP	7.41	3	6.87	2	-	-	-	-
BDH	-	-	-	-	5.8	1	-	-
TKP	-	-	-	-	2.4	-	13.2	6
BKP	3.15	-	2.42	-	-	-	-	-
Independent	0.57	-	0.05	-	-	-	-	-
ÖRP	-	-	6.2	2	-	-	-	-
HİS	-	-	0.5	-	-	-	-	-

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

Notes: ÖRP (Özgürlük ve Reform Partisi – Freedom and Reform Party); HİS (Halk için Siyaset Partisi – Politics for People Party); TKP (Toplumcu Kurtuluş Partisi - Communal Liberation Party); BDH (Barış ve Demokrasi Hareketi - Peace and Democracy Movement)

had an important impact on the results of the elections.² Encouragement of the voters to cast mixed votes was an important propaganda tool by civil society organisations and movements, such as 'Toparlanıyoruz',³ calling on the public to elect new and young politicians who represent social and political change in Northern Cyprus. This strategy allowed voters to punish

that a CTP-UBP coalition would have been more rational given that the UBP was going through a process of restructuring and this option would prevent President Eroğlu's intervention in domestic politics.⁴ Yet, the strong socialist wing of the CTP was against formation of such a coalition.

Following talks among the parties, the CTP-DP coalition government was formed. Indeed, the CTP-DP government programme addresses issues that were part of the parties' electoral campaign. These include changing the electoral law, creating a single electoral region rather than a divided district-based system; drafting a new constitution; removal of the transitional ar-

supported Küçük and UBP. It is important to note that no Turkish Cypriot ruling party can afford to disregard the Turkish government, on which it is dependent economically and diplomatically. Whether the TRNC coalition parties are ready to encounter the consequences of their promises yet remains to be answered. This preparedness shall determine the coalition gov-



title 10 of the TRNC constitution, which cedes responsibility for public security and defence "temporarily" to Turkey; restructuring the state by addressing issues of transparency, accountability and corruption; and a reevaluating of the economic austerity programme, especially its privatization dimension.

Regardless of an encouraging programme, the CTP-DP coalition government's ability and success in restructuring and transforming the Turkish Cypriot economy and state institutions in a more efficient way presents a limited glimmer of hope. This is related not only to the past record of the two parties but also to the possible high cost of social reforms. In addition, all issues involve a level of CTP-DP government's ability to foster good relations with the Justice and Development Party (AKP - Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) government in Turkey. The parties' rhetoric on economic austerity measures and privatisation indirectly indicate a criticism of AKP approach on Cyprus as the measures are perceived as 'imposed' by the Turkish government and investments through privatization schemes involve businessmen close to the AKP. The socialist wing of the CTP and particularly DP are presented to be at odds with the AKP government which seemed to have indirectly

eminent's attempts at establishing a healthy economy and a better functioning state as well as a sound relationship between TRNC and Turkey.

¹ Nicosia municipality faced a budgetary crisis for the last two years triggering a series of strikes and protests by the workers. The government transferred duties of the municipality to local governor's office, yet was unable to handle problems such as rubbish collection. This led to the resignation of Major Cemal Bulutoğluları and an early local election in Nicosia.

² 'Karma'lar UBP'ye yaramadı!', Yenidüzen, 01 August 2013, available at <http://www.yeniduzen.com/Haberler/haberler/karma-lar-ubp-ye-yaramadi/6151>.

³ Toparlanıyoruz means "We are pulling ourselves together".

⁴ "2. Cumhurbaşkanı Talat: "En mantıklı hükümet modeli CTP-UBP koalisyonu"", Kıbrıs Postası, 06 August 2013, available at http://www.kibrispostasi.com/index.php/cat/35/news/111791/PageName/KIBRIS_HABERLERI