

# The north of Cyprus, a strategic island in the Eastern Mediterranean, holds presidential elections

**Hakan Özal****21 October 2025**

In the presidential elections held in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) on Sunday, October 19, Tufan Erhürman, leader of the Republican Turkish Party (CTP), won by a landslide, defeating incumbent President Ersin Tatar.

According to data from the High Electoral Board of the TRNC, which has a population of approximately 380,000, Erhürman received 62.8 percent of the votes (87,000 votes), while Tatar received 35.8 percent (49,000 votes).

The TRNC, under Ankara's control since 1983, has not been recognized by any country other than Turkey to date. Internationally, the entire island of Cyprus is represented by the Republic of Cyprus (referred to by Turkey as the Greek Cypriot Administration of South Cyprus/GCASC), a member of the European Union (EU). The north of the island is effectively isolated diplomatically and economically. As a result, the TRNC is economically and militarily dependent on Turkey. Casino tourism and all forms of money laundering are the main economic activities in the country.

The office of the president in the TRNC has limited executive power. However, because it represents Turkish Cypriots in negotiations, it carries political significance. Therefore, presidential elections are not merely a matter of internal political competition; rather, they constitute an important arena of struggle in terms of the division of the island, Turkey's decisive influence, and the balance of power in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Erhürman stated during his campaign that if elected, he would restart official negotiations with the Republic of Cyprus, the last of which were suspended in 2017. Erhürman supported the two-community, two-zone federal solution framework outlined in United Nations resolutions and argued that the two-state model supported by Turkey did not serve to end the economic and political isolation of Turkish Cypriots. According to him, the reason the north of the island remained cut off from the world was that Ankara's imposed separation policy had no legitimacy in the international arena. For this reason, Erhürman presented the goal of a "federation" as a means of seeking both diplomatic recognition and integration with the European Union.

In contrast, Tatar, who has held the presidency since 2020, has categorically opposed federation-based negotiations with the Republic of Cyprus. With Ankara's full support, Tatar has defended the two-state model, in which Turkish Cypriots have a

separate state based on "sovereign equality," as the only viable solution. Tatar has insisted that he will not sit down at the negotiating table with the Greek Cypriot side unless his three demands, which he calls "3D"—direct flights, direct trade, and direct contact—are met. This approach essentially reflects Ankara's foreign policy and perpetuates the division on the island.

Erhürman's call for a federation and Tatar's insistence on two states may formally point in different directions, but both lines are driven by the impulse to best protect the interests of the ruling class in Northern Cyprus and Turkey. Neither line offers any solution to the fundamental problems of Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot workers, that is, the oppressed majority on the island: poverty, unemployment, war, and dependence on regional powers and imperialism.

It was no secret that Ankara supported Tatar. Viewing the elections as linked to Turkey's strategic interests, President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an's government sent many high-level politicians to the island to campaign directly on Tatar's behalf.

Since the candidates were announced, those who have visited Northern Cyprus include former Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu, former Defense Minister Hulusi Akar, Mustafa Destici, leader of the fascistic Great Unity Party (BBP) which is an ally of Erdo?an, and even former soccer player Mesut Özil, who has been used as a symbolic figure of "national unity." These visits clearly demonstrated that the elections were not merely a local political contest, but part of Ankara's regional power struggle.

Tatar's election campaign received extensive coverage in the Turkish media, while rival candidates were often marginalized. Turkish officials directly influenced the election atmosphere with statements supporting Tatar's "two-state solution" line. The propaganda campaign in Northern Cyprus was almost entirely consistent with the political rhetoric of the ruling bloc in Turkey led by Erdo?an: a nationalist, religious, and "national interest"-focused campaign.

Erhürman, meanwhile, claimed that a "massive smear campaign" had been waged against him. However, he emphasized that he would not pursue a confrontational approach in relations with Turkey, stating: "Determining a foreign policy in Cyprus without consulting Turkey has never been an option up to now; it will never be an option during my term either."

Following the announcement of the unofficial results, Erdo?an

congratulated Erhürman in a brief statement: “I congratulate Mr. Tufan Erhürman, who has been elected President according to the unofficial results. I hope this election, in which our Turkish Cypriot brothers and sisters have reflected their will at the ballot box, will be beneficial for our countries and our region.”

Erdo?an’s ally, Devlet Bahçeli, the leader of the fascist Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), argued that the 65 percent turnout was “too low,” advocating that the election results should not be recognized and that the TRNC should join Turkey. Bahçeli said, “The TRNC parliament must convene immediately, declare that the election results and the transition to a federation are unacceptable, and decide to join the Republic of Turkey.” This call, reflecting the line of a faction within the ruling class, amounts to the outright annexation of the north of Cyprus, which is officially entirely within EU borders.

Erdo?an accepts the election results and Bahçeli’s call is not on the agenda for now, but it is indisputable that Ankara’s guardianship over Northern Cyprus will continue. Indeed, Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan underscored his government’s true stance in his congratulatory message: “The motherland and guarantor Turkey will continue to be the defender of the just cause of the Turkish Cypriot people and to emphasize most strongly on every platform that the only realistic solution to the Cyprus issue lies in the acceptance of two separate states on the island.”

Republican People’s Party (CHP) Chairman Özgür Özel congratulated Erhürman and his CTP, which he described as a “sister party”, on his social media account. He argued that the Turkish Cypriot people had “responded to the mentality that interferes with democracy and national will from outside.” Referring to the Erdo?an government, Özel said, “The Turkish Cypriots have made their voice heard against the approach that intervenes in the island and takes sides.”

Cyprus, which gained official independence from Britain in 1960, quickly became the scene of a power struggle between Ankara and Athens, both NATO members, with bloody consequences for the island’s population. Following a coup attempt supported by the Greek military junta in 1974, the Turkish Armed Forces intervened militarily, effectively dividing the island in two. This military intervention and subsequent occupation marked a significant turning point in the ethnic-based division and regional power struggle that has continued for more than half a century. It is reported that the size of the “Turkish Peace Forces in Cyprus”, affiliated with the Turkish Armed Forces, ranges between 50,000 and 100,000.

The recent discovery of hydrocarbon reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean has further increased Cyprus’s importance in terms of regional and imperialist competition. The US, France, Israel, and Greece have formed an axis that excludes Turkey from the Mediterranean by developing energy partnerships with Southern Cyprus. Meanwhile, Ankara has embarked on an effort to expand its sphere of influence and persuade its imperialist allies to accept its demands within the framework of its “Blue Homeland” doctrine.

Cyprus is also gaining importance as a strategic military base. The island is known as an unsinkable aircraft carrier and hosts two major British military bases. These bases have played a critical

role in NATO operations in the Middle East and North Africa. Located south of Turkey and southeast of Greece, Cyprus is also in close proximity to Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, and Egypt.

The US is modernizing the Andreas Papandreou air base it uses in Cyprus, which is critical to American imperialism’s drive for full dominance in the Middle East. Meanwhile, the competition between Ankara and Tel Aviv, which has intensified particularly due to the regime change in Syria, is spreading to Cyprus. Israel, which is increasing its regional influence with its genocide in Gaza and its aggression towards Iran and its allies, is seen as a threat by Turkey, especially given the military ties it has developed with the Republic of Cyprus this year.

According to Anadolu Agency, sources from the Ministry of National Defense made the following statement last month: “We are closely monitoring reports in the press that the GCASC [The Republic of Cyprus] has procured an Air Defense System from Israel. We would like to reiterate that the GCASC’s ongoing efforts to arm itself and its activities that undermine peace and stability on the island could have dangerous consequences.”

The results of the elections held in Northern Cyprus amid regional power struggles and imperialist domination plans will certainly not bring any solution to the social and political issues facing the workers of Cyprus and the region. The way forward lies in rejecting both bankrupt forms of imperialist-backed Turkish and Greek nationalism and in fighting for the international unity of workers on the basis of a socialist program.

As stated in the Historical and International Foundations document of the Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi, the Turkish section of the International Committee of the Fourth International:

The only progressive solution to the problems of the Greek and Turkish Cypriot working people as a result of the partition of Cyprus, which reveals the reactionary and bankrupt character of nationalism, is a united and socialist republic of Cyprus. This means establishing the political independence of the Turkish and Greek working class from the Turkish and Greek bourgeoisies, which for decades have repeatedly come to the brink of conflict over their reactionary interests in the Aegean and Mediterranean, and uniting and mobilizing workers in the struggle for a socialist federation between Turkey, Greece and Cyprus.



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