



In brief: a closed window in Cyprus?

Standard Note: SN/IA/5664

Last updated: 28 July 2010

Author: Arabella Thorp

Section: International Affairs and Defence Section

Nationalist Eroğlu wins presidential elections in the north

The nationalist Dervis Eroğlu won the April 2010 presidential elections in the ‘Turkish Republic of North Cyprus’ (TRNC – internationally recognised only by Turkey) with just over 50% of the vote. Most commentators had argued that a win by Eroğlu would close a window of opportunity for reunification, but peace talks have in fact resumed. Are these talks likely to bring progress, or is Eroğlu really still in favour of a two-state solution?

Eroğlu takes over from pro-reunification Talat

There was a strong chance of decisive moves towards reunification when Eroğlu’s predecessor, Mehmet Ali Talat, was in power at the same time as another pro-reunification leader, Demetris Christofias, the President of the Republic of Cyprus. The two leaders had a warm and trusting relationship and put considerable energy into negotiations, meeting more than 70 times in 18 months. They made considerable progress on governance, EU matters and the economy, and confirmed the areas of divergence and convergence. But even they

were unable to resolve fundamental disagreements over power structures, Turkish troops, property rights and the rights of settlers from mainland Turkey.

By contrast, Eroğlu, who was formerly the TRNC’s Prime Minister, is seen as taking a hard-line stance. He campaigned for the presidency on the basis of a two-state solution, a concept which has garnered increasing support amongst Turkish Cypriots but which is unacceptable to most Greek Cypriots as it would ‘legitimise’ the Turkish occupation. However, in his inaugural speech, Eroğlu said that he would continue to work for a reunified Cyprus, and in a letter to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon he called for the continuation of reunification talks and for a deadline to expedite the process.

A ‘bizonal, bicomunal federation’

The permanent partition of Cyprus was excluded by the three high-level agreements reached between the two communities on 12 February 1977, 19 May 1979 and 8 July 2006. Together, these committed both sides to a “bizonal, bicomunal federation, with political equality, in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions”. This statement is a compromise for both sides: for Greek Cypriots, it allows for flexibility in negotiating a federal solution but blocks their preferred unitary solution based on simple majority rule; and for Turkish Cypriots it confirms the federal solution with political equality but allows departures from the Annan Plan which they had accepted. The UN continues to stress that any talks must be within this framework.

Peace talks resume in May

Peace talks duly resumed on 26 May 2010, with the assistance of Ban Ki-moon’s Special

This information is provided to Members of Parliament in support of their parliamentary duties and is not intended to address the specific circumstances of any particular individual. It should not be relied upon as being up to date; the law or policies may have changed since it was last updated; and it should not be relied upon as legal or professional advice or as a substitute for it. A suitably qualified professional should be consulted if specific advice or information is required.

This information is provided subject to [our general terms and conditions](#) which are available online or may be provided on request in hard copy. Authors are available to discuss the content of this briefing with Members and their staff, but not with the general public.

Adviser, Alexander Downer, and his Special Representative in Cyprus, Lisa Buitenheim. The atmosphere was “very warm and positive”. Property was the main topic: Eroğlu and Christofias confirmed existing convergences and said that they would continue the discussions on property from where they were left off before the talks broke up earlier in the year.

But their next meeting, on 3 June 2010, was very brief. At the last minute Christofias tried – unsuccessfully – to postpone it, apparently after comments from Eroğlu questioning the basis of the negotiations.

Since then there have been several further leaders’ meetings, all on property, but there has been no progress to report. More meetings are scheduled up to the end of August.

Turkey’s influence

If Eroğlu does still want an independent, sovereign Turkish Cypriot state, why then is he taking part in talks on a federal solution?

The answer may lie in Turkey. Cyprus is a crucial piece in the jigsaw of Turkey-EU relations, and it would be surprising if Ankara – on which the TRNC is highly dependent – were not exerting some pressure on Eroğlu to continue negotiations. Indeed, shortly after Eroğlu’s win, Turkey’s president, prime minister and foreign minister all called for the continuation of the talks.

There is also the question of appearances: if Eroğlu pulled out of talks now, he would be blamed for their failure, whereas the Turkish Cypriots still have some ‘moral advantage’ as a result of voting in favour of the UN-brokered ‘Annan plan’ in the 2004 referendum.

What are the implications of Eroğlu’s election?

For those who seek reunification of Cyprus, the initial signs are more promising than expected, at least outwardly. But the short-term prospects for a settlement are not improved, and Eroğlu’s apparent co-operation may not be what it seems. Most of the old sticking-points remain, and if Eroğlu questions the fundamental basis of a federal solution the whole process could disintegrate.

Even in the unlikely event that a settlement is reached, the real test will be whether the leaders who have negotiated an agreement can persuade their populace to support it in a referendum. Turkish Cypriots appear increasingly disenchanted with reunification negotiations (a major reason for Talat’s defeat), and there is still a high level of scepticism in the Greek Cypriot population, which voted ‘no’ in the last referendum.

The best hope for reunification may be that even if Eroğlu’s election has shut one window of opportunity, another may open. Even so, a settlement by the end of 2010 looks highly unlikely, and each delay makes the chances of reunification increasingly slim. In this context, will the international community start thinking of accepting the division of Cyprus?

Further reading

Property disputes in Cyprus, Library Standard Note SN/IA/5663, 28 July 2010

[Report of the Secretary-General on his mission of good offices in Cyprus](#), 11 May 2010, S/2010/238

[Cyprus: a political and economic overview](#), Library Standard Note SN/IA/5208, 4 November 2009

Sven Gunnar Simonsen, *Best Chance, Last Chance*, The World Today, vol65 no11, November 2009, p26

International Crisis Group, [Cyprus: Reunification or Partition?](#), Europe Report N°201, 30 September 2009

David Hannay, “[Cyprus: the costs of failure](#)”, Centre for European Reform, 1 September 2009