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TWO STATES IN CYPRUS: A CONFEDERATION?

In the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), the presidential elections held on 19 October were won by the presidential candidate and Republican Turkish Party (CTP) Chairman Mr. Tufan Erhürman by a wide margin. Erhürman, who came to Türkiye on 13 November and met with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, will also meet with the Greek Cypriot Administration's leader Nikos Christodoulides on Thursday, 20 November.

One of the main factors that brought Erhürman to the forefront in the TRNC presidential election was the deep frustration felt by the Turkish Cypriot community due to the long-standing isolation and deadlock they have been experiencing.

Turkish Cypriots are now weary of the sense of exclusion stemming from the fact that, internationally, they are recognized only by Türkiye and by no other country. It is becoming increasingly clear that the two-state model (which began to be advocated after the most comprehensive peace plan—the Annan Plan—and the negotiation process in Crans-Montana were blocked by the Greek Cypriots despite the support of Türkiye and the Turkish Cypriots) has also failed to provide a solution to these problems. Therefore, Turkish Cypriots believe that a two-state solution will not eliminate the current deadlock and isolation.

Most recently, on 4 April 2025, at the EU–Central Asia Summit, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan announced in their joint

¹ <https://www.tepav.org.tr/en/ekibimiz/s/1139>

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declaration with the EU that they would adhere to UN Security Council Resolutions 541 and 550, which condemn the establishment of the TRNC and call for its non-recognition. This was, so to speak, the final straw. Considering that four of these countries (except Tajikistan) are members of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS), where the TRNC participates as an observer, and that the TRNC was not invited to the next OTS meeting held on 21 May, it has become clear that insistence on the two-state solution will no longer yield positive results for the TRNC and Turkish Cypriots.

On the other hand, Türkiye and the TRNC's insistence on the two-state model creates the perception in the eyes of the international community that they are advocating deadlock, while in fact elevating Christodoulides—who in rhetoric supports a solution despite being unwilling in practice—almost to the position of a “peace envoy.” As other regional actors, especially Israel, take advantage of the opportunity created by this shift in perception, not only the TRNC but also Türkiye has been left out of regional energy and defense cooperation initiatives.

Parameters of TRNC President Tufan Erhürman's Approach to a Solution

Mr. Erhürman has articulated his conditional solution model on various occasions as follows:

- One of the UN parameters, political equality—including rotational presidency and a Turkish Cypriot veto in state institutions—will be indispensable;
- The negotiations will not be open-ended; they will proceed on the basis of a predetermined timetable not exceeding one year;
- The talks will be results-oriented; issues on which agreement was reached in the past will not be reopened;
- Before the negotiations begin, the UN will give guarantees that, in the event of failure—especially due to the kind of obstruction previously undertaken by the Greek Cypriot side—the isolation imposed on Turkish Cypriots will be lifted and their status clarified, including direct travel, direct trade and direct contacts (“3D”) ²;
- Türkiye's guarantorship in Cyprus will not be open to discussion.

As the experienced Cypriot journalist Yusuf Kanlı has written³, “*Erhürman's approach aims to transform negotiations from a diplomatic ritual into a process oriented toward concrete results. For the Turkish Cypriot community, which has lived in uncertainty internationally for many years and feels its identity eroding, this approach represents a new source of hope.*”

Erhürman's basic assertion is this: “*Sovereignty is preserved not through isolation, but through negotiation.*”

² This proposal was also there in the Report written by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan after his comprehensive settlement plan was rejected by the Greek Cypriots in 2004. However, it was not approved by the UN Security Council.

³ <https://yetkinreport.com/2025/10/17/kktc-yol-ayriminda-kibris-turk-seciminin-arkaplani/>

The Meeting Between TRNC President Erhürman and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

During the meeting held between the two presidents on Thursday, 13 November, both sides expressed their views on the resolution of the Cyprus issue. At the press conference following the meeting, differences in their views regarding the solution model were expressed:

At the joint press conference with President Erdoğan, Erhürman did not give the impression that he had abandoned the approach outlined above and stated:

“The whole world must know that the Turkish Cypriot people are one of the two equal founding partners of this Island. Just as the Greek Cypriot people have sovereign rights on this Island, the Turkish Cypriot people have the same. The Turkish Cypriot people will not allow their sovereignty and equality rights to be violated, ignored or disregarded.”

President Erdoğan, by saying *“We believe that the most realistic solution to the Cyprus problem lies in the coexistence of two states on the Island,”* indirectly emphasized the two-state solution, adding: *“we maintain our stance that the two peoples on the Island can live in peace, prosperity and security; and we will continue our sincere efforts in this regard.”*

As seen, although differing views were expressed, President Erdoğan’s following statement; *“I hope that in the period ahead we will also see from the other side the courage and determination for a solution demonstrated by the Turkish Cypriots. To make this possible, we will continue our constructive, result-oriented, fair and humane approach together with the Turkish Cypriot people”* did not go unnoticed for containing an element of ‘constructive ambiguity’⁴. His remark in the same speech that *‘we are now faced with a very different international conjuncture’* further reinforced this perception.

Thus, once the Greek Cypriot side’s stance regarding the negotiation process becomes clearer, the approaches of the leaders will also become more concrete. However, the statements made during the Ankara meeting suggested that President Erdoğan and President Erhürman may be able to reach a certain point of convergence.

What Can Be Expected from the Erhürman–Christodoulides Meeting?

It would not be realistic to expect a concrete development towards a solution from the 20 November meeting, which is already announced to last one hour. While Greek Cypriot leader Christodoulides stated before the meeting that they were ready to resume negotiations, it is known that he has recently been focusing more on Cyprus’s upcoming EU Presidency in the first half of 2026.

Another noteworthy point before the meeting is that Erhürman’s rational solution framework has led even Greek Cypriots to question the approach of their own leader, who has long enjoyed the image of being “the side that wants a solution.” So far, no official statement has been made by the Greek Cypriot side regarding the parameters set out by Erhürman. If political equality—one of the UN parameters—is rejected, it is clear that negotiations will end before they even begin.

⁴ Kutlay Erk, Cumhurbaşkanlığı Erhürman’ın Ankara Ziyaretine Dair..., Yenidüzen, 15 Kasım 2025, <https://www.yeniduzen.com/cumhurbaskani-erhurmanin-ankara-ziyaretine-dair-24672yy.html>

Meanwhile, the Greek Cypriot negotiator Menelaos Menelaou has announced that they do not favour committing the negotiations to a timetable. Yet open-ended talks in the past have widely been seen as one of the major factors behind the failure to reach a conclusion.

Consequently, it appears realistic to expect the Greek Cypriot side not to reject Erhürman's conditions outright but to stretch the process out over time through consultations as a way to avoid starting negotiations. One of the factors behind this "time-buying" tendency is the presidential election to be held in the Greek Cypriot Administration in February 2028. On the other hand, some argue that Christodoulides' de facto unofficial position favors endless negotiations that would preserve the status quo⁵.

Therefore, under current conditions, the most optimistic expectation is the creation of an atmosphere that will foster trust between the sides and positively influence any future formal negotiation process. In this framework, cooperation could begin with concrete steps such as improving the conditions in the crossing points and opening new ones as well as cooperation on peace education, environment and energy.

Indeed, President Erhürman has said: *"If there is a negotiation table aimed at a comprehensive solution, we will be there. If such a table has not yet been set, we will be at the table to produce solutions that will ease the daily lives of the two peoples on the Island, build trust, and contribute to a future solution."*⁶

What Kind of Solution?

In the medium and long term, it is clear that achieving a lasting solution on the Island cannot rely solely on the efforts of the two sides in Cyprus given the current global and regional context. The reality that is now clearly visible is this: *"The Gaza war, the Israel–Iran tension, energy-sharing calculations in the Eastern Mediterranean, and Europe's security concerns have placed Cyprus once again at the center of the strategic equation."*⁷

To persuade the segments on both sides that are satisfied with the status quo and to ensure their efforts toward a solution, international actors who are aware of the strategic importance of sustainable stability on the Island must take part in the process. In this context, during the Crans-Montana process—which failed when the Greek Cypriots left the table at the last moment—it was significant that the Turkish side had shown a tendency to accept a security umbrella such as NATO in discussions on the highly contentious issue of "security and guarantees." Should international actors bring this issue forward in a potential negotiation process, it could make a very important contribution. If this is considered together with the Greek Cypriot Administration's request to become a NATO member, it may constitute an important step toward a solution.

In this regard, one of the key elements for Türkiye to contribute constructively to a rational solution envisioned for the Island is its reintegration into regional energy and defense cooperation frameworks. Being part of Europe's security architecture is also of great importance for Türkiye.

⁵ Fiona Mullen, Is the Cyprus problem paradigm changing? Sapienta Economics, 21 March 2025

⁶ <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/yazarlar/deniz-kilislioglu/kibris-icin-dikkatli-ton-7483575>

⁷ <https://haber.kibris.com/yusuf-kanli-yazdi-kibrista-cozum-ya-da-cozum-donemi-acilmali-1025-2025-11-01.html>

In searching for an answer to “What kind of solution?” it would not be wrong to say that under current conditions, a rational solution to the Cyprus problem will take shape somewhere between the two-state model and a federation. Indeed, it is known that during the Crans-Montana process (2013–2017), Christodoulides’ predecessor Nicos Anastasiades sent a message to Ankara in which he stated that he was willing to discuss a decentralised federation with broad powers to the federated states but with an indivisible state above them. The response from Ankara was that if he really meant it, the Cyprus problem could be solved in short time.⁸

Therefore, rather than being stuck on rigid concepts, it appears more reasonable, realistic and constructive to work toward a flexible solution model suited to the realities of the Island and the region.

⁸ Makarios Drousiotis, *Crime at Crans-Montana*, Alfadi Publications, 2023, p.25.