

CATS Network Roundup

A roundup of news and analysis on Turkey



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Dear Readers,

Welcome to the CATS Network Roundup of news, developments, and assessments concerning relevant issues about Turkish domestic politics and foreign policy.

In this issue, we look at the cautious reopening of **Cyprus reunification prospects following Tufan Erhürman's election**. Despite Ankara's continued commitment to a two-state line, its willingness to engage with Erhürman suggests that talks may not be off the table. We also assess **how Erhürman's electoral victory – and Tatar's defeat – can be interpreted in the context of Türkiye–Northern Cyprus relations**.

If you have any questions or suggestions, please e-mail us at cats@swp-berlin.org.

On the Spot



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The election of Tufan Erhürman – a committed federalist – as president of the so-called Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus **has raised cautious hopes about resuming talks on the unification of Cyprus**. Yet, his 13 November meeting with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Ankara – where Turkey reaffirmed its stance on a two-state solution – signals a bumpy road ahead. However, this does not mean that Ankara will necessarily block such negotiations.

The last round of unification talks was held at Crans-Montana in 2017. Back then, **Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot negotiators had come close to an agreement on key issues**, including territorial adjustments, political equality and a rotating presidency, property restitution, equivalent treatment of Greek and Turkish nationals, and a phased troop withdrawal. **However, the talks collapsed, with each side blaming the other for the outcome**. This prompted Ankara to abandon further federation talks, arguing that they were leading nowhere, and to begin strictly advocating for a two-state solution at the United Nations – a position it has held officially since 2021. That shift quickly translated into open support for aligned candidates such as Ersin Tatar, who were ready to do Ankara's bidding – a move many Turkish Cypriots viewed as blatant meddling, causing widespread dissatisfaction.

Erhürman's landslide victory in mid-October – securing 62.8 per cent of the vote compared to incumbent Tatar's 35.8 per cent – can be interpreted as **a broad rejection of Ankara's influence over politics in the island's north and its future with respect to unification talks**.

Throughout his campaign, **Erhürman made it clear that a federation-based settlement remains the only realistic and internationally legitimate path forward**. However, he did add a rather large caveat to this. In his manifesto and subsequent statements, he set strict conditions for resuming formal talks: explicit Greek Cypriot acceptance of the full political equality of the Turkish-controlled north of Cyprus, a binding timetable, a commitment to build on the convergences reached at Crans-Montana and, crucially, no return to the current status quo of isolation if negotiations collapse again.

His visit to Ankara was going to be a test of how Turkey would approach cooperation with the newly elected president. Instead, it became a 25-day waiting game – far longer than the traditional 7–10 days for prior presidents – and a sign that Ankara was perhaps reluctant to work with Erhürman on the Cyprus issue. When the day finally arrived, both leaders spoke to two different audiences. **Erdoğan reaffirmed that “the most realistic solution lies in the coexistence of two states”**, maintaining Turkey's established position, while **Erhürman focused on pledging the commitment of Turkish Cypriots to dialogue and insisted on the preconditions in his manifesto** to avoid unproductive negotiations. Although the leaders highlighted different priorities, they unmistakably agreed that the northern part of Cyprus cannot remain isolated internationally. More telling was the overall tone: **Ankara signalled its readiness to engage with Erhürman**.

Paradoxically, Turkey could leverage Erhürman's pro-federation stance to its own advantage without abandoning its two-state policy. At this stage, **it seems unlikely that Ankara would block negotiations outright**. In fact, Erhürman's emphasis on a binding timetable and an explicit “no return to the status quo” clause mirrors Turkey's long-standing distrust of open-ended talks.

Any return to negotiations will probably be riddled with demands for which **both sides have traditionally been unable to reach a compromise**. An example is the Greek Cypriots' requirement that all Turkish troops be removed. This is an ultimatum that Ankara and the Turkish-controlled north of Cyprus would be unwilling to accept. Such issues would stall the process or lead to its collapse, as occurred previously. In turn, this would reinforce **Ankara's narrative that a federation is unworkable and that only a two-state solution remains a viable option for the future**.

Ankara could also use the resumption of unification talks **to portray themselves as the constructive, cooperative side while casting Nicosia – and by extension, Greece – as obstructionist**. An example of this would be to portray the Greek Cypriots' insistence on adjusting veto rights to reflect population shares as resurrecting old arguments to block progress, thereby supplying Ankara with exactly the pretext it needs to press harder for a two-state solution.

For now, Erhürman's 20 November meeting with the Greek Cypriot president marks the first cautious step towards resuming unification talks. Ankara will watch every move from the sidelines and play it strictly by ear. If Nicosia somehow accepts Erhürman's conditions instead of reverting to its past rigidity on political equality and the presence of Turkish troops, this opening could restart meaningful unification talks rather than becoming just another forgotten chapter in Cyprus's half-century stalemate.

(Adam Michalski)

Three Questions for...



Fiona Mullen is Director of Nicosia-based Sapienta Economics and author of the flagship monthly Sapienta Country Analysis Cyprus, which provides independent, in-depth economic and political analysis on Cyprus. Prestigious clients include institutional investors, oil and gas majors, big four accountants, banks, embassies, the UN, and the EU, among others.

How realistic is Erhürman's support for a federation-based solution after the failed negotiations in 2017, and what new dynamics affect its feasibility?

I think Erhürman is genuinely in favour of a federation-based solution and, with 63 per cent of the vote in the first round, he certainly has a mandate for it. But he is realistic and understands that if everyone goes back to the table with no change to the process, it will fail again. This is why he has his four conditions. The other reason is that he cannot drag the Turkish Cypriots through another process that leaves them in unrecognised limbo at the end if it fails again. As regards new dynamics, it looks as though the US might have renewed interest in regional cooperation involving Turkey, Greece, Israel, and Cyprus, and this might also have a positive impact.

How should Erhürman's electoral victory and Tatar's defeat – particularly given their differing relationships with Ankara – be interpreted in the context of Türkiye–Northern Cyprus relations?

Tatar was compliant, which suited Ankara, but ultimately led to a backlash from UBP [National Unity Party] supporters that put Erhürman in power. Erhürman knows that President Erdoğan needs MHP's [Nationalist Movement Party] support for reasons unrelated to Cyprus, so he has behaved very carefully around Ankara. From their first meeting, it seemed both avoided any confrontation.

Ankara also appears less ideologically committed to a two-state solution than Tatar. Since it will be a long time before any formal negotiations start, they don't need to have a public row about two states versus federation. For now, Ankara can sit back and see how far Erhürman can take things.

On the other hand, two recognised states in Cyprus would mean only one neighbour on Turkey's southern coast, reducing security risks. Ankara might be worried that a united, federal Cyprus would not be fully cooperative, even with friendship or investment treaties. But this logic is flawed because the EU will never accept a two-state solution imposed on Greek Cypriots. In the meantime, Turkey faces more security risks, as the Greek Cypriots move closer to Israel, as evident in the reaction to the Barak MX purchase. So, the only way out is through some kind of negotiated “end” to the Cyprus problem. In my view, the most sustainable outcome will come from the citizens themselves—through a structured, deliberative democracy process. Citizens tend to be more imaginative and flexible than politicians.

How could the EU contribute to initiating – and sustaining – a new negotiation cycle on the island, under these conditions?

The EU is not fully trusted by Turkey or the Turkish Cypriots as an honest broker because the Republic of Cyprus is a member state. So, if the US is genuinely interested in regional cooperation, the smartest role for the EU would be to work closely with the US on offering some big “carrots” to everyone involved in the Eastern Mediterranean maritime space to encourage them to cooperate economically. This probably means big incentives for energy infrastructure that links Cyprus, Turkey, and Greece, and, ideally, also Israel and Egypt. It might involve electricity cables, gas pipelines, or LNG terminals. The EU should avoid funding anything that deliberately excludes Turkey.

Interview by [Sinem Bal](#)

Recommendations

In CATS Network Partner OSW's latest analysis, [Zuzanna Krzyżanowska](#) examines how the unexpected election of Tufan Erhürman in the so-called Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) opens a narrow window to revive federal reunification talks. At the same time, it highlights the entity's deep political, economic, and security dependence on Ankara, where debates over annexation and competing visions of federal versus two-state solutions risk turning the island into a testing ground for Turkey's regional ambitions and its relations with the EU.

A new SWP Comment by [Daria Isachenko](#) traces Turkey's shift from early pan-Turkic ambitions to today's pragmatic, interest-driven partnerships in Central Asia, centred increasingly on connectivity, energy, and defence exports. It also shows how Central Asian states carefully balance their foreign relations, engaging selectively with Ankara while maintaining diversified external ties shaped by regional dynamics and Turkey's evolving strategy.

In the updated visual platform titled [“Visualising Turkey's Foreign Policy Activism”](#) (2025), Salim Çevik and Marcela Müggler offer a concise overview of Turkey's increasingly multidimensional foreign policy using maps, charts, and short analyses. Reflecting major shifts since earlier editions, it highlights Turkey's expanding role across the Middle East, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Black Sea.

As part of the CATS Network Paper Series on [“The Role of Turkey in a Future European Security Order”](#), [Antonia Dimou](#) examines in her report Greece's view of the evolving European security architecture and the challenges posed by tensions with Turkey. She highlights how Greece balances national security concerns with the pursuit of regional stability, calling for a nuanced European approach that fosters de-escalation and strengthens institutional cohesion.

Former CATS Network Fellow [Erol Kaymak](#) analyses in his SWP Comment the 2024 European Parliament elections in the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) and their implications for the Cyprus question, offering concrete recommendations for fostering a more cooperative and resilient future for the island.

Kind regards,

The CATS Team