Research Article / Araştırma Makalesi

POLITICAL SYSTEM OF TURKISH REPUBLIC OF NORTHERN CYPRUS

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Abstract

Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus was established in the north of Cyprus after the intervention carried out by Türkiye in 1974, called the Cyprus Peace Operation, and declared its independence in 1983. The state, which is subjected to an international embargo in almost every area, especially in economics, politics, sports, and transportation, and therefore establishes its ties with the world through Türkiye, has had all the instruments that a democratic state should have in its domestic politics since its independence. This study deals with the political system of Northern Cyprus, which has not yet been studied comprehensively, and aims to fill an important gap in the literature. The study considers Northern Cyprus' constitution, principle of separation of powers, form of government, ongoing democratic elections, electoral system, and party system in the context of political science literature. Utilizing historical narrative and constitutional review methods, as well as the effective number of parties (ENP) formulated by Laakso and Taagapera, the study examines the political system of Northern Cyprus together with its political history and culture.

Keywords: Cyprus, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Northern Cyprus, Political system, Political culture.
JEL Codes: D72, N90

KUZEY KIBRIS TÜRK CUMHURİYETİ'NİN SİYASAL SİSTEMİ

Öz

Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti, 1974'te Türkiye'nin gerçekleştirdiği müdahale sonrasında Kıbrıs'ın kuzeyinde kurulmuş ve 1983'te bağımsızlığını ilan etmiştir. Ekonomi, siyaset, spor ve ulaştırma başta olmak üzere hemen her alanda uluslararası ambargoya maruz kalan ve bu nedenle dünya ile bağlarını Türkiye üzerinden kuran devlet, bağımsızlığından itibaren iç politikasında demokratik bir devletin sahip olması gereken tüm araçlara sahip olmuştur. Bu çalışma, henüz kapsamlı bir şekilde incelenmemiş olan Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti'nin siyasal sistemini ele almakta ve literatürde önemli bir boşluğu doldurmayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma Kuzey Kıbrıs'ın anayasa, güçler ayrılığı ilkesi, hükümet biçimi, süreklilik arz eden demokratik seçimleri, seçim sistemi ve parti sistemini siyaset bilimi literatürü bağlamında ele almaktadır. Tarihsel anlatı ve anayasal okuma yöntemlerinin yanı sıra Laakso ve Taagapera'nın formüle ettiği etkin parti sayısı (ENP) hesaplamasını kullanan çalışma Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti'nin siyasal sistemini siyasi tarihi ve kültürü ile birlikte incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kıbrıs, Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti, Kuzey Kıbrıs, Siyasal sistem, Siyasal kültür
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Introduction

Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (Northern Cyprus; TRNC), whose sovereignty is recognized only by Türkiye, is considered a part of the internationally recognized Republic of Cyprus (Southern Cyprus) since Türkiye's intervention in 1974, called the Cyprus Peace Operation. For this reason, the state, which is subjected to an embargo in every area, especially in political, economic, and transportation matters, is dependent on Türkiye, especially in military and economic terms, and establishes its ties with the world through Türkiye. The Green Line, established by the United Nations in 1964 as a buffer zone, divides both the island of Cyprus and the capital city of Nicosia into two sides.

Almost the entire population of Northern Cyprus consists of local Turkish Cypriots and Turks who moved to Northern Cyprus from Türkiye after 1974. The most prominent groups among the rest of the population are Greek Cypriots, British, and Maronites. Maronites are Arab Catholics of Lebanese origin who migrated to the island of Cyprus from the eighth to the thirteenth centuries. The official language of TRNC is Turkish; Turks speak the dialect of Cyprus Turkish, Greek Cypriots speak Greek, British speak English, and Maronites speak Sanna, which is a mixture of Arabic, Aramaic, Turkish, and Greek. Sanna is in danger of extinction and has been protected by UNESCO (Keser & Özdemir, 2017, p. 327). Although they have lived in Northern Cyprus for centuries, Maronites and Greeks are deprived of some of the rights held by citizens of Northern Cyprus. These residents, who are given a different identity card (light blue) from that of citizens, are exempt from military service and cannot participate in presidential, parliamentary, and municipal elections as candidates or voters (Dayıoğlu, 2014, pp. 33–35).

Northern Cyprus has a unitary state structure. Within the framework of the Civil Administration and Divisions Law No. 33/1998, some parts of which were amended in 2017, the state has is administratively six districts, 12 subdistricts, and 187 settlements. The districts are Famagusta, Kyrenia, Güzelyurt, İskele, Nicosia, and Lefke. District governors are the highest administrative and civil authorities. They are appointed by the president, prime minister, and interior minister and accountable to the minister of internal affairs. Subdistricts that are affiliated with the district governorship are administered by subdistrict officials. It is mandatory to establish municipalities in settlements where the population exceeds 5,000. In this context, there are 28 municipalities in the state.

Northern Cyprus has been subjected to an international embargo since its establishment and therefore establishes its ties with the world through Türkiye. Despite this disadvantage, it has all the instruments that a democratic state should have in terms of its political structure. Studies on the political system of Northern Cyprus are diverse. There are studies that examine the administrations established in Northern Cyprus as well as Northern Cyprus elections (Aydoğdu, 2005); political history; legislative, executive, and judiciary bodies; and other public institutions (Yolak, 1989). There are also studies that address the first political parties, political and constitutional developments after 1974, parliament, elections, electoral system, and types of governance of Northern Cyprus (e.g., Ekici, 2019, pp. 49-76). Some studies focus only on one or a few elements of the TRNC political system. TRNC has been examined in the context of forms of government (e.g., Keskin, 2020; Ustabulut, 2020), political parties, and electoral systems (Hatay, 2005, pp. 15-22), political developments (Bahcheli & Noel, 2010; Dodd, 1992), and democratic and political culture (Sonan et al., 2020, pp. 18-26). There is also a study that deals with the political structure of the Northern Cyprus as well as the deadlock within the system and suggested solutions (Bozkurt, 2014). Despite the existence of various studies, the political system of Northern Cyprus has not been discussed in a systematic and comprehensive study in the context of political science literature. For this reason, the study aims to address a significant gap in the literature through a comprehensive examination of the political system of Northern Cyprus,

focusing on its constitution; executive, legislative, and judicial powers; form of government; elections and electoral system; political parties; and party system. The study aims to analyze the political system, political history, and political culture of Northern Cyprus using historical narrative and constitutional review techniques, as well as the effective number of parties (ENP) developed by Laakso and Taagapera for the party system fragmentation.

1. Political History

Because Cyprus had a single history until 1974, when it was de facto split in two, it is impossible to analyze Northern Cyprus' political history up to this point separately from the island's history. Cyprus, which is centrally located and equidistant from the Asian, European, and African continents, is located at the intersection of several water passageways (Gözlü, 2011, p. 34) and is also an important naval base in the context of controlling the Eastern Mediterranean (Koday, 1998, p. 427). Due to its geostrategic importance, Cyprus has throughout history attracted the attention of states that sought to hold global and regional power. Cyprus was ruled by Egypt and the Hittite, Phoenician, Assyrian, and other ancient civilizations beginning in 1,500 BC. It was later annexed by the Persian Empire, Alexander the Great, and the Roman Empire beginning in 525 BC. Cyprus, which was one of the first Roman provinces to adopt Christianity in AD 46, remained under Byzantine rule following the Roman EmpireS split into two, and the first Orthodox Church in Cyprus was established during this period (Gözlü, 2011, pp. 315-65; Zeki, 1974, pp. 27-37).

The Islamic State campaigns against Cyprus, which began during the reign of the third caliph Uthman, continued during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods until the beginning of the ninth century, but full domination was not established on the island. Cyprus, under Byzantine rule, was captured in 1191 by the English king Richard the Lionheart, who was in the region for the Third Crusade, and was subsequently sold to the Knights Templar. The Knights, who could not hold on to the island due to the rebellion of the local people, soon gave the kingdom back to Richard. The dynasty was founded by Jerusalem King Lusignan, who bought Cyprus from Richard and ruled the island for about 300 years. Cyprus was next ruled by Genoese merchants, then Mamluks, and finally Venetians before the Ottomans (Zeki, 1974, pp. 37-52).

Cyprus came under Ottoman rule in 1571, and thus the Ottoman Empire dominated the Eastern Mediterranean. The Ottoman State, which began to settle Turks on the island after the conquest (Atasoy, 201, pp. 32-33), implemented the nation system in Cyprus and left non-Muslims free to practice their beliefs under the responsibility of their own religious leaders. Thus, the Orthodox population of the island, who had been oppressed by the Catholic Venetians, breathed a sigh of relief (Yolak, 1989, pp. 13-14). The Ottoman rule in Cyprus, which lasted for 307 years, ended in 1878, and the empire, which lost the war against the Russians in that year, faced a possible threat if the Russians did not return Kars, Ardahan, and Batumi and try to seize the Asian lands determined by the Congress of Berlin. In return for the possible assistance, Ottomans left the use and administration of the island to the British with an agreement signed on June 4, 1878. A second contract signed about a month later included that if the Russians left Kars, Ardahan, and Batumi to the Ottomans, the British would give Cyprus back to the Ottomans and the first agreement would be invalid (Gazioğlu, 1960, pp. 12-14). Hill (2010, p. 285) underlines that the island was left under the control of the British, *de facto if not de jure*.

Cyprus was introduced to elections during the Ottoman State. Following the inception of the Ottoman's first and sole constitution, Kanun-ı Esasi, in 1876, the first and second term elections of the Chamber of Deputies were held within this framework. Five deputies for each term, two Muslims and three non-Muslims, were determined for the Cezair-i Bahr-i Sefid province, which includes Cyprus and some islands in the Aegean Sea (Meclis-i Mebusan 1293/1877 Zabıt Ceridesi, 305; Tuncer, 2003, pp. 338-39).

The British, who has seized Cyprus's control from the Ottomans in 1878, accepted the constitutional principles that included provisions on how Cyprus would be governed in September of the same year. Cyprus, which became a Crown Colony de facto in 1880 and officially in 1925 was legally considered Ottoman territory until 1914. The first legislative experience in Cyprus began with the Legislative Council established at the beginning of the British rule, and four members—one Muslim and three non-Muslims—were elected in three constituencies. Voters were men who were Ottoman or British citizens over the age of 21, had paid taxes on any item, and had been residing in Cyprus for at least five years. The council consisted of 18 members, including three Muslims, nine Greeks, and six appointed members, but increased to 24 members after the constitutional amendment in 1925. While the number of Turkish members remained the same at three, the number of Greeks rose from nine to 12 (Hill, 2010, pp. 412-27). When the total number of appointed and Turkish members was equal to the Greeks, the final decision was left to the British governor, who was also the speaker of the council (Savrun, 2018, p. 26).

Following the Ottoman Empire's entry into the World War I on Germany's side, the British annexed the island. The Turkish state officially recognized its annexation with the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne in July 1923, following the war and the successful conclusion of the military phase of the Turkish War of Independence. It is important to note that one of the most significant documents of the Turkish War of Independence, the National Pact, did not include Cyprus. Cyprus would now be governed by the governor instead of the high commissioner after 1925 (Erdönmez, 2005, pp. 10-11). The Greek Cypriots, who were dissatisfied with the British administration and wanted the island's unification with Greece, revolted against the British in 1931, and the Turkish Cypriots found themselves under these attacks (Akın, 2005, pp. 37-38). Following the revolt, the British put an end to the Legislative Council, elections, and political activities in Cyprus (Bozkurt, 2014, p. 58). However, the first political organizations of Turkish Cypriots were established during the British period. For example, the Cyprus Island Turkish Minority Institution was established by Fazıl Küçük and his friends in 1942 (İsmail, 1998, p. 32) and the Cyprus National Turkish People's Party was founded in 1944 and changed its name to the Cyprus is Turkish Party in 1955 (Yolak, 1989, p. 31).

The emergence of the right to self-determination after World War II affected the fate of Cyprus. The situation in Cyprus was brought before the United Nations in 1954, with the efforts of Greece, and thus it gained an international character. Britain did not want to give up Cyprus and tried to justify its legitimacy in Cyprus by claiming that two different ethnic elements lived on the island and that if the British left the island, these elements would fall into conflict with each other. Türkiye's involvement and confrontation with Greece could have legitimized Britain's presence on the island. However, things did not go as the British had planned, and the United States, disturbed by a possible crisis of confidence between the two allies on the southeastern flank of NATO, intervened. By forcing two countries that were politically, economically, and militarily dependent on it to solve the problem with an agreement, the United States aimed to prevent the strategic interests of the West from being damaged during the Cold War, and this is how the process leading to the London Agreements began (Fırat, 1997, pp. 56-57).

In reality, the Orthodox Greeks and Muslim Turks, the two elements of the island, could not carry out an anticolonial struggle by joining forces during the British rule. The struggle of the Greeks against the British was not a struggle for independence but a struggle for the unification of the island to Greece, a movement known as Enosis (Gürel, 1993, p. 53). The Turkish Cypriots, who were unable to support this struggle, advocated the division of Cyprus into two, known as Taksim, and the connection of the part belonging to the Turks to Türkiye. Türkiye and Greece both attempted to include Cyprus under their respective sovereignty after the departure of the British. Greek Cypriots who wanted to realize Enosis held a referendum in 1950 in which 96% voted yes, and the advocates of Enosis used these results as an effective tool to explain themselves to the

world public (Irkıçatal, 2012, p. 47). In 1955, the Greek Cypriots formed the National Organization of Cypriot Fighters (EOKA) to carry out violent actions with the goal of driving England off the island and uniting it with Greece. Meanwhile, in 1957, the Turkish Resistance Movement was founded by the Turks, who had become the open target of the Greek Cypriots (İsmail, 1998, p. 41-44). During this period when the British lost control, the conflicts between Greek and Turkish Cypriots intensified, and Turkish-Greek relations also deteriorated. The London Agreement and the Zurich Agreement came into effect with the assistance of the United States on those days. In 1960, a five-party agreement that included the United Kingdom, Greece, and Türkiye as guarantors, in addition to and the Turkish and Greek Cypriots, established the Republic of Cyprus as an independent state. Consequently, the Taksim and Enosis movements were suspended.

The new state envisaged a complex political system aimed at keeping the parties together. The state, which is a presidential republic, granted the House of Representatives and Community Councils legislative authority and the president, vice president, and cabinet executive authority. The five-year terms of the Greek Cypriot president and the Turkish Cypriot vice president were granted by their respective electorates and had the right to veto the laws separately. Decisions in the legislative body, which had 70% Greek Cypriot and 30% Turkish Cypriot members, were made by simple majority for both parties. Greek and Turkish were the state's official languages, and both would be used in the publication of the official gazette. Each community also had its own Community Councils. Greek Cypriots received seven of the 10-member cabinet, while Turkish Cypriots received three. The ministry of foreign affairs, defense, or finance was among the ministries assigned to Turkish Cypriots. There were separate municipalities for both communities in five major cities. Both parties had also separate courts, but cases in which the defendant and plaintiff were from different communities were left to mixed courts (Fırat, 1997, pp. 59-62; for the Cyprus Republic's Constitution, see Gazioğlu, 1960, pp. 217-303).

The Republic, which ceased to be a British colony and became independent on August 16, 1960, became a United Nations member eight days later. Presidential and vice presidential elections of the new state were held at the end of 1959, and legislative elections were held in 1960. The constitution was not submitted to a referendum. The state, which covered the entire island except for two regions left as a sovereign base to the British, was built on delicate balances (Fırat, 1997, pp. 65-67). The slightest disagreement could stop the functioning of the state and cause the system to lock down. In a short time, disagreements grew on issues such as the collection of taxes and the borders of municipalities and President Makarios began to plan constitutional changes. The 13-article amendment plan ended the balance created during the state's establishment and reduced the Turks to a minority status. It included eliminating the veto power of the president and vice president, electing them by the parliament, and uniting the separate municipalities and courts (Fırat, 1997, pp. 116-24). The conflicts returned in December 1963, and on the first day of 1964, Makarios declared that he had unilaterally ended the agreements. The Greek Cypriots made the constitutional changes that Makarios wanted and declared to the Turks that they could also participate in the administration if they accepted these changes. The Turkish Cypriots, who were expelled from the state and had to live in ghettos, did not accept this offer. United Nations peacekeeping forces arrived on the island on March 14, 1964 (Gürel, 1993, pp. 57-58) following the United Nations Security Council resolution 186 that acknowledged the Greek Cypriots as the legal government of Cyprus (Ekici, 2019, p. 22). Following the attacks against the Turks, which prompted Türkiye to consider intervening on the island, the Turkish deputies withdrew from the House of Representatives did not participate in the 1965 elections (Dodd, 1992, p. 37). The Turks, who were excluded from state institutions and bureaucracy after the events of 1963-1964, tried to regroup themselves in towns where they constitutes majority (Soysal, 1992, p. 40).

At the inconclusive London Conference held on January 15, 1965, the Turks proposed a federal state in which the parties would live as separate societies, while the Greeks again brought up the

demand for a new constitution. Thus began a process in which the Greeks abandoned Enosis and the Turks reiterated Taksim (Fırat, 1997, pp. 126–27). Despite the fact that the two communities had been practically divided since 1964, the Turks declared that the Interim Turkish Cypriot Administration (ITCA) had been formed on December 28, 1967, headed by Fazıl Küçük as president and Rauf Denktaş as vice president. The 19-article set of administrative principles would remain in force until the 1960 Constitution was fully implemented. It seems clear that the Turkish Administration was designed to be temporary while a solution could be reached. The Turkish perspective was that an all-Greek government would be a violation of the constitution and that the Republic of Cyprus could not represent both the Greeks and the Turks. As a result, the Turks formed their own legislative body with 30 members in the Community Council and 15 reserved seats in the House of Representatives, as well as an executive branch led by Vice President Fazıl Küçük of the Republic of Cyprus. The parliament removed the word "interim" from its name in April 1971 (Yolak, 1989, pp. 79-80).

On July 15, 1974, Greek officers on the island and EOKA B, a paramilitary organisation founded by General Grivas in 1971 carried out a coup against Makarios with the support of the junta administration in Greece to unite Cyprus to Greece. Makarios applied to the United Nations Security Council to restore constitutional order during this process, which also targeted Greek supporters of Makarios. Following this event, Türkiye offered to intervene with the United Kingdom against this coup. After the United Kingdom rejected this proposal, Türkiye took the decision to intervene on the island on July 20, 1974, citing the 1959 Treaty of Guarantee as justification for safeguarding the Turkish community there (Gürel, 1993, pp. 63-64; Vatansever, 2010, p. 1515).

The Autonomous Turkish Cypriot Administration (ATCA), which was established by Turkish Cypriots who desired to establish their own self-government after the intervention, took the place of the Turkish Cypriot Administration (TCA) on October 1, 1974. The first instance of independent statehood for the Turkish Cypriot community was established on February 13, 1975, when the assembly of the autonomous administration unanimously decided to create the Turkish Federated State of Cyprus (TFSC). Its constitution was approved by the votes of almost all those who participated in the referendum (Yolak, 1989, pp. 81-86). The first multiparty period began in Northern Cyprus and five different governments were established during the TFSC period. Negotiations with Southern Cyprus continued during two summits in this period to resolve the Cyprus Issue, but no agrement could be reached. On May 13, 1983, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution that recognized the sovereignty of Southern Cyprus, which encompasses the northern part of the island, depicting Türkiye as an occupying foreign force (https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/112447?v=pdf#files). The TFSC assembly declared the establishment of the TRNC with a unanimous decision on November 15, 1983. This was the final stage of the Turks' nationalization experience on the island. Both Greece and Southern Cyprus opposed this process, and the United Nations Security Council, three days after this declaration of independence, adopted Resolution 541 stating that the attempt to establish a state in Northern Cyprus was invalid (https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/58970?ln=en&v=pdf#files), describing Northern Cyprus as secessionist when it adopted Resolution 550 on May 11, 1984 (https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/67600?v=pdf#files). In opposition, Türkiye recognized the independence of Northern Cyprus and began to refer to Southern Cyprus as the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus.

Türkiye's intervention in 1974 started a process in which the Greeks had to leave their lands in the north and migrate to the south, and the Turks had to leave their lands in the south and migrate to the north. Thus, Cyprus began to turn into two separate political geographies that were largely homogeneous in terms of population. With the population exchange agreement signed in Vienna under the United Nations supervision in 1975, 65,000 Turks relocated to the north and 142,000

Greeks relocated to the south (Kurtuluş & Purkis, 2014, pp. 3-4). Intercommunal and international negotiation efforts aimed at solving the Cyprus Issue have not yet reached a conclusion. The nearest solution came during the separate and simultaneous referendum of the Turkish and Greek Cypriots held on April 24, 2004. The Annan Plan, named after the United Nations Secretary General of the period and envisaging the unification of the island, was approved by roughly 65% of the Turkish Cypriots but only 24% of the Greek Cypriots. The plan, for which Papadopoulos, the president of Southern Cyprus, called on his people to vote no, envisaged the establishment of a federal state consisting of the Turkish and Greek Cypriot States, excluding the areas where British bases were located on the island (Sözen & Özersay, 2007, p. 125). Following the decline of the Annan Plan, Southern Cyprus joined the European Union on May 1, 2004, under the name of the Republic of Cyprus and representing the entire island. Since then, as a result of difficult negotiations between the parties, there has been no further significant negotiation process except for the April 3, 2008, opening of the Lokmacı Border Gate, which divides the city of Nicosia into two, and which has significantly increased trade between the two sides and allowed many people to cross to the other side (Yorucu et al., 2010, pp. 1749-50).

2. Political System

The first article of the constitution defines Northern Cyprus as a secular republic founded on the values of social justice, democracy, and the supremacy of the law. It is a republic in terms of form of state and governed by a semi-presidential system in the context of form of government. This section will discuss the political system of Northern Cyprus, which is the main focus of the study, in relation to th state's constitution; legislative, executive, and judicial branches; form of government; elections and electoral system; parties and party system; and its political culture within the framework of political science literature.

2.1. Constitution

The constitution prepared by the Northern Cyprus Constituent Assembly was accepted in a referendum held on May 5, 1985. For the referendum, the text of which was included in the constitution, the turnout was 78.35%, while the yes votes were 70.18% and the no votes were 29.82%. The constitution consists of eight parts including 164 main and 13 transitional articles. The constitution's provisions may only be changed, in whole or in part, by a proposal submitted by 10 or more depuites of the Assembly of the Republic (Parliament) and approved by two-thirds of the Parliament's total membership (Art. 162).

2.2. Executive Branch

There is a collegial executive branch in Northern Cyprus, consisting of the president and the prime minister. The prime ministerial candidate who is appointed by the president forms the cabinet. The legislature is unicameral. Voters choose the legislature, and the president assigns a party leader or member of parliament who can receive a vote of confidence to form the government. The prime ministerial candidate who forms the cabinet submits program and cabinet to the Parliament for approval. Finally, the cabinet that receives the investiture vote, that is, the vote of confidence, from the Parliament begins its duty. The authorities and their responsibilities are as follows:

2.2.1. President

The president is elected by popular vote for a five-year term and there is no obstacle to reelection of the president. The presidential candidates must be qualified to be elected as a Parliament member, have received higher education, be over 35 years old, be born to Turkish parents, be a TRNC citizen, and have resided in Cyprus for the last five years. The candidate who receives the absolute majority (more than 50%) of the valid votes in the elections is elected president. If no candidate is elected in the first election, the president is determined at the end of the second round, which pits the two candidates with the most votes from the first round against each other seven

days later. The president, who assumes office by taking an oath before the Parliament, is not permitted to hold the position of chairman of a political party while serving in office or engage in any employment other than official duties. Even if the president belongs to a political party, he or she must still act independently and impartially in carrying out their duties (Arts. 99–101).

The president is the head of state and commander in chief of the armed forces on behalf of the Parliament and resides in the presidential palace in Nicosia. Along with the cabinet, the president sets the overall policies of the state, represents the cohesion of the state and community, ensures the functioning and continuity of the state, and represents the state in foreign affairs (Art. 102). The president publishes laws passed by the Parliament, sends them back to the Parliament for reconsideration, or puts them to a referendum upon request from the cabinet (Art. 94). The president gives the task of forming the government to a party leader or a Parliament member who can receive a vote of confidence. The prime minister is appointed by the president, who also appoints and removes other ministers upon the prime minister's recommendation. The president is not responsible for his or her duties; the responsibility belongs to the prime minister or the concerned minister who jointly signs decrees with the president. The president shall only be tried before the Supreme Court on charges of treason and by the decision of at least two-thirds (30) of the total number of the Parliament. If the president is found guilty, the term of office shall end. The president who wants to resign submits a petition to the presidency of the Supreme Court. If the presidency is vacated for any reason, the speaker of the Parliament acts in place of the president. For any presidential vacancy, an election must be held within 45 days (Arts. 103–106). Presidents, who are an element of the executive branch, also undertake the task of representing the Turkish Cypriots and Northern Cyprus in the international arena in the context of negotiations with Southern Cyprus. This duty has brought the presidents of Northern Cyprus, who do not have more duties than presidents in parliamentary systems, to the political forefront. The most notable figure serving as president is Rauf Denktaş, the founding and charismatic leader of the state who held this position until 2005.

Table 1: *List of Presidents of Northern Cyprus**

Name	*Term of Office*	*Political Party*
Rauf Denktaş	1983–1985; 1985–1990; 1990–1995; 1995–2000; 2000–2005	National Unity Party
Mehmet Ali Talat	2005–2010	Republican Turkish Party
Derviş Eroğlu	2010–2015	National Unity Party
Mustafa Akıncı	2015–2020	Independent
Ersin Tatar	2020–	National Unity Party

* Prepared by the author

2.2.2. Prime minister

The prime minister, who is the head of government, cooperates with the president in determining the overall policy of the state and supervising its implementation, presides over the cabinet, directs the government, and ensures that the ministers work in cooperation within the legal and constitutional framework (Art. 107). The prime ministerial candidate, who selects ministers after being appointed by the president, takes office after receiving a vote of confidence from the Parliament.

Excluding Mustafa Çağatay, who served as the founding prime minister for 28 days during the establishment of the TRNC, 28 governments were established in the 40 years between December 1983 and December 2023, under the leadership of 15 different prime ministers. Derviş Eroğlu holds the record for serving longest as prime minister, approximately 17 years. On average, governments in the TRNC have a lifespan of 1.4 years.

Table 2: *List of Prime Ministers of Northern Cyprus**

Name	*Term of Office*	*Political Party*
Mustafa Çağatay	1983	National Unity Party (the founding prime minister)
Nejat Konuk	1983–1985	Independent
Derviş Eroğlu	1985–1994	National Unity Party
Hakkı Atun	1994–1996	Democratic Party
Derviş Eroğlu	1996–2004	National Unity Party
Mehmet Ali Talat	2004–2005	Republican Turkish Party
Ferdi Sabit Soyer	2005–2009	Republican Turkish Party
Derviş Eroğlu	2009–2010	National Unity Party
İrsen Küçük	2010–2013	National Unity Party
Sibel Siber	2013	Republican Turkish Party
Özkan Yorgancıoğlu	2013–2015	Republican Turkish Party
Ömer Kalyoncu	2015–2016	Republican Turkish Party
Hüseyin Özgürgün	2016–2018	National Unity Party
Tufan Erhürman	2018–2019	Republican Turkish Party
Ersin Tatar	2019–2020	National Unity Party
Ersan Saner	2020–2021	National Unity Party
Faiz Sucuoğlu	2021–2022	National Unity Party
Ünal Üstel	2022–	National Unity Party

* Prepared by the author

2.2.3. Cabinet

The cabinet consists of the prime minister and ministers. After the legislative elections, a party leader in the Parliament or a Parliament member who is likely to receive a vote of confidence in the Parliament is assigned by the president to form the cabinet. After its establishment, the program of the cabinet is read in the Parliament by the prime minister or a minister within one week. The cabinet must receive a vote of confidence from the Parliament (Art. 109/1–2), otherwise the task of forming the cabinet must be returned to the president.

Ministers are appointed and removed by the president on the proposal or request of the prime minister from among people who are qualified to be elected as members of the Parliament; they are not obliged to be a deputy (Art. 106/4). However, as in parliamentary systems, cabinet members can be members of both the legislature and the executive branch at the same time. The number of ministries cannot be more than 10 in Northern Cyprus (Art. 108/2). The current ministries are Economy and Energy, Finance, Interior Affairs, Foreign Affairs, National Education, Public Works and Transport, Agriculture and Natural Resources, Health, Labour and Social Security, and Tourism, Culture, Youth and Environment.

The prime minister, together with the ministers, is responsible to the Parliament, which has the power to call against the prime minister or the entire cabinet. For this to occur, at least nine members shall submit a motion of no confidence. Ministers, who are also accountable for their individual actions and decisions are responsible both to the prime minister and to the Parliament. If the prime minister fails to receive a vote of confidence at any time or a vote of no confidence against the prime minister is accepted by an absolute majority of the Parliament members, the prime minister shall submit his or her resignation to the president (Art. 109).

2.3. Legislature

2.3.1. Assembly of the Republic

Northern Cyprus has a unicameral parliament called the Assembly of the Republic, consisting of 50 members. The Parliament members are elected by public vote for a five-year term and has powers such as enacting, amending, and repealing laws, supervising the government, discussing and accepting budget and final accounts, approving international agreements, deciding on the issue

of currency, declaring general and special amnesty, and declaring war (Art. 78). The quorum for the meetings is the absolute majority of the total number of deputies (26), and the decisions shall be taken by the absolute majority of those attending the meeting unless there is an exceptional situation. If the votes are equal, the issue shall be considered as rejected. At least five members are required for political parties to form groups in the Parliament (Art. 81/4–5) whose means of exercising supervision on the cabinet and obtaining information are tabling questions, general debates, inquiries, investigations, and interpellations (Art. 96). The cabinet or the Parliament members are entitled to propose bills and resolutions (Art. 89/1).

2.4. Judiciary

There is no Ministry of Justice in Northern Cyprus. Various issues such as the general functioning of the judiciary; the training of the judges; and their appointment, relocation, and promotion are handled by the Supreme Council of Judicature (Art. 141/3). The chairman of the council, which consists of 12 members, is the president of the Supreme Court, and seven of the members are Supreme Court judges. The remaining four members are appointed by the president and the Parliament and elected by the attorney general of the Republic and the Bar Association (Art. 141/1). The other important judicial institution is the Supreme Court, which consists of a president and seven judges. The functions of the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Council, the High Administrative Court and the Court of Appeal are under the responsibility of the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court functions as the Constitutional Court and has a president and four members; the Court of Appeal and the High Administrative Court has either a president and two judges or only three judges. The judges in these courts, whose decisions are final, are determined by the Supreme Court every year prior to the commencement of the judicial year. The Constitutional Court, which has the authority to interpret constitutional articles, has the authority to make final decisions on issues such as the constitution, the laws, and the rules of court. This court checks the constitutionality of laws and regulations; decides disputes between state institutions; judges the president, prime minister, and ministers as the Supreme Council; carries out financial audits of political parties; and decides on closure cases of parties (Arts. 143–44; 149–50). All trials outside the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court are carried out by subordinate and specialized courts. Military courts are responsible for handling cases related to military personnel and crimes and the highest authority for making decisions in these courts is the Military Court of Appeal (Arts. 155–57).

2.5. Form of Government

Forms of government are determined according to relations between the legislative and executive branches since the judicial branch is accepted as impartial (Metin & Ünal, 2023, p. 487–88). In Northern Cyprus, the collegial executive branch is shared between the president and the cabinet led by the prime minister. The existence of a politically powerful president elected by popular vote and a cabinet responsible to the parliament indicates that the form of government in question is semi-presidential. Although the president of Northern Cyprus is elected by people, there is disagreement over whether the president is politically powerful, because the constitutional powers of the president are not much different from those of presidents who have only symbolic authority in parliamentary systems. The president of Northern Cyprus undertook the task of representing Turkish Cypriots during the negotiations with Southern Cyprus regarding the Cyprus Issue, so it is possible to consider the president of Northern Cyprus as politically powerful because of this authority to represent the Turkish Cypriot community internationally (Bozkurt, 2014, 67–68). For this reason, some authors claim that Northern Cyprus's form of government can be classified as parliamentary or a mixed presidential-parliamentary system (Bozkurt, 2014, p. 67; Hatay, 2005, p. 15).

This study considers the Northern Cyprus form of government in the semi-presidential category. Semi-presidential system has two sub-categories: premier-presidential and president-parliamentary (Metin & Ünal, 2023, p. 488-92). In both forms, the president is elected by popular vote. In the first sub-category, although the president has significant powers, the prime minister and cabinet, which are the other elements of the executive branch, are accountable only to the parliament (Shugart & Carey, 1992, p. 23-24). In this case, the president has to maintain the balance between himself and the prime minister, while in the second sub-category, the president unquestionably holds the political power. In this case, the prime minister—appointed by the president without considering the number of votes—is like the president's man in the parliament, and the cabinet is responsible not only to the parliament but also to the president. In other words, the government can be overthrown by a vote of no confidence in the parliament, or it can be dismissed unilaterally by the president. In Northern Cyprus, the cabinet is responsible only to the Parliament and not to the president. In other words, the president does not have strong political powers such as the authority to remove the prime minister and ministers and directly dissolve the parliament. According to these examples, the form of government in Northern Cyprus falls into the premier-presidential category.

2.6. Elections and Electoral System

In Northern Cyprus, elections are held for the presidency, parliament, mayor, municipal council membership, headman, and council of elders, in addition to referendums. Presidential and parliamentary elections are held for a five-year term and local elections for a four-year term. While the duration of parliamentary elections may be shortened due to snap elections, by-elections are also held for vacant parliamentary and local memberships. If the presidency is vacated for any reason, an election must be held within 45 days. During this process, the president of the Parliament acts as the president (Arts. 104-105). If there is a vacancy in the membership of the Parliament, by-elections are held once a year. If there is less than a year left for the elections, no by-elections shall be held for the parliamentary seats (Art. 79/4). In the context of local elections, municipality elections, municipal council member, village or quarters headman, and council of elders are held.

Elections are held according to the principles of free, secret, equal, universal suffrage, direct ballot, open counting and tabulation in accordance with the Election and Referendum Law of 1976, which was adopted during the TFSC period and some of whose articles were amended over time. While the voting age is 18, the eligibility age is 25 for parliamentary and local elections and 35 for the presidency. From June 23, 1985, when the first parliamentary elections were held, to 2024, eight presidential elections and 10 parliamentary elections have been held in Northern Cyprus.[7] Voting is not compulsory in Northern Cyprus. However, although voter turnout in the parliamentary elections was high until 2013 (average 87.6%), it began to decrease between 2013 and 2022 (average 64.4%). Voter turnout is similar in the presidential elections. While the average turnout in the six elections held between 1985–2010 was 81.88%, the average turnout in the next two elections between 2015–2020 was 60.3%. This change may attributed to a decrease in voters' sense of trust in their political institutions.

The High Electoral Council is responsible for the organization and safety of elections and referendums. Complaints and objections are also made to this council. The president and members of the High Electoral Council, which consists of a president, four full members, and two substitute members, are elected by the Supreme Court from among the judges by secret ballot and absolute majority. The president and one of the members are elected in the same way from among the

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[7] For detailed information, see ysk.gov.ct.tr, the official web site of the High Electoral Council.

president and members of the Supreme Court. The Council, whose members are redetermined every year through elections held in January, makes its decisions by absolute majority.

During the elections, an electoral council is established in each district, and a ballot box committee is established for each ballot box in the election circle, affliated with the High Electoral Council.

2.6.1. Presidential Elections

Following the establishment of the TRNC in 1983, presidential elections are held every five years, the first of which was held on June 9, 1985. While political parties can nominate candidates for the presidency, independent candidates can also participate in the elections. The candidate who receives the absolute majority (more than 50%) of the valid votes in the elections is elected president. If no candidate is elected in the first round, the president is determined at the end of the second round, in which the two candidates who received the most votes in the first round compete seven days later on Sunday (Art. 99). Elections in 1995, 2000, 2015, and 2020 proceeded to a second round in this regard. In the 2000 elections, although Rauf Denktaş, who received the most votes in the first round, could not reach the winning margin, he became president without a second round, as the second-ranked candidate, Derviş Eroğlu, withdrew from the elections.

2.6.2. Parliamentary Elections

In the elections held for the Parliament, which consists of 50 members elected for five years term, there are six multimember electoral districts: Famagusta, Kyrenia, Güzelyurt, İskele, Lefke, and Nicosia. At the time of state's establishment in 1983, there were three electoral districts in Northern Cyprus. İskele and Güzelyurt became electoral districts in 1998 and Lefke in 2013. The number of deputies to be elected by the districts is calculated by dividing the state's population by the number of members of the Parliament (50). When the population of each district is also divided by the number of members in the assembly, the number of deputies each district will elect is determined. According to this calculation, if the number of deputies elected by the districts is less than the number of members of the Parliament, the remaining number of deputies is determined by ranking them according to the residual population of the districts.

The electoral threshold is 5% in Northern Cyprus and political parties must receive minimum %5 of all the votes to obtain seats in the parliament. Changes to the electoral system in 2016 provided voters with the opportunity to vote across the state. Voters have three alternatives: first, they may vote for a party (party list proportional system); second, while voting for a party, voters may choose from candidates on that party list (party list preferential voting), thus changing the order of that party's candidates; and third, they may choose candidates from parties or independent candidates without voting for the party (mixed system). Voters who prefer the mixed system may vote for at least half of the number of seats in each constituency and at most as many candidates as the total number of deputies (50) across the state (Ekici, 2019, p. 64).

2.7. Political Parties

After the establishment of the TFSC on February 13, 1975, while preparations for a constitution were ongoing, many members of parliament attempted to establish a political party. The Law on Political Parties adopted by the Constituent Assembly on May 9, 1975, prepared the legal basis for these parties. Accordingly, the Populist Party was established on August 4, 1975; the National Unity Party (UBP) on October 11, 1975; and the Communal Liberation Party (TKP) on March 18, 1976 (Bozkurt, 2014, p. 67). The Republican Turkish Party (CTP), established as an association in 1970, also turned into a political party in this process. These four parties, which also formed a group in the Constituent Assembly, participated in the first general elections of Northern Cyprus held on June 20, 1976. In the 40-member TFSC parliament, the UBP was represented with 30 seats, TKP with six seats, CTP with two seats, and Populist Party with two seats. While the Parliament held its first meeting on July 3, the first cabinet of the TFSC was established by the

UBP. While six deputies who resigned from the UBP in 1979 founded the Democratic People's Party (DHP), a year later the Populist Party decided to join this party (Yolak, 1989, pp. 102-105). In the general elections of 1976, the main contenders were the UBP candidate Denktaş and CTP candidate Ahmet Mithat Berberoğlu; Denktaş won the presidential election. The political spectrum also expanded with parties such as the Turkish Unity Party (TBP), National Goal Party, and Social Justice Party, all established in 1979, and the number of parties participating in the 1981 elections increased.

Following the creation of the TRNC in 1983, the parties from the TFSC period continued their existence to a large extent, and presidential and parliamentary elections began to be held at different times. Parliamentary elections were held in 1985, 1990, 1993, 1998, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2018, and 2022. While the political spectrum has expanded with the new parties established over time, the two largest parties of the political system, the UBP and CTP, took the first two places in the 2022 elections with 24 and 12 seats, respectively.

In accordance with the Law on Political Parties, state support is provided to political parties that ran in the last parliamentary elections and are represented in the Parliament and to parties that received 3% or more of the votes in the last elections but did not win any seats.

The major parties, some of which have dominated Turkish Cypriot politics since 1974, are as follows:

The National Unity Party (UBP) was established in 1975 by Rauf Denktaş, then president of TFSC. Since the TFSC period, the party has participated in all parliamentary elections held in Northern Cyprus and has emerged as the first party except in the 2003, 2005, and 2013 elections. The UBP, which is the most successful political party in Northern Cyprus, achieved its highest success in the 1990 elections, gaining 34 deputies with 54.7% of the votes. The party, which has a nationalist and conservative ideology, won 24 seats with 39.54% of the votes in the 2022 elections. The UBP, which adopts close relations with Türkiye and international recognition of Northern Cyprus as its main strategy (Ekici, 2019, p. 56), advocates that the Cyprus Issue should be solved with a two-state federal structure. In this context, the party ran a campaign against the Annan Plan in 2004. As a result of the divisions within the party, the Democratic Party was established in 1992 and the Nationalist Peace Party in 2003 (Hatay, 2005, pp. 17–18).

The Republican Turkish Party (CTP), the oldest Turkish Cypriot Party, has a social democratic line. The CTP was established in 1970 by Ahmet Mithat Berberoğlu, who opposed the leadership of Fazıl Küçük and Rauf Denktaş. Like the UBP, the CTP has participated in all parliamentary elections held in Northern Cyprus since the TFSC period. Özker Özgür was the chairman of the party for 20 years between 1976 and 1996. CTP, which harshly criticizes the UBP regarding their economic performance, close relations with Türkiye, negotiations with Southern Cyprus, advocates the solution of the Cyprus Issue and the idea of unification with Southern Cyprus (Ekici, 2019, pp. 54-55).

The party, which became a full member of the Socialist International association in 2014, has evolved over time to support a market economy. Tensions between the parties arose in the 1990s, when CTP maintained its connection with AKEL, the Cypriot Communist Party in Southern Cyprus. According to the AKEL, the CTP desired to enter the government rather than remain in the opposition. The CTP then became the leading party during the Annan Plan referendum. The party gained 19 members with 35.2% of the votes in the 2003 elections and 24 members with 44.5% of the votes in the 2005 elections. Although it could not come to power alone in Northern Cyprus, the CTP came to power in the form of coalitions. The party attained its highest vote share in the 2005 elections, with Mehmet Ali Talat as the chairman who later became the first president after Denktaş in 2005. (Hatay, 2005, pp. 18–19). During Talat's presidency, the party formed

coalition governments with right-wing parties, and its anti-Türkiye criticism decreased during this period. The party won 18 seats with 32.04% of the votes in the 2022 elections.

The Democratic Party (DP), which was founded by nine members of parliament who left the UBP in 1992, managed to become the second party (29.2% of votes, 16 seats) after the UBP (29.8%) in the snap elections held a year later. Following the elections, Hakkı Atun, the founding leader of the party that formed a coalition government with the CTP, assumed the prime ministership, thus ending the uninterrupted rule of the UBP, which had governed Northern Cyprus since 1976. This rate was also the highest vote rate received by the party. Although the party, whose voter support gradually decreased in the following elections, recovered in the 2013 elections (23.2% of the vote), it decreased again in the following elections and won three seats in the 2022 elections. The DP has a nationalist-conservative line like the UBP. It's also claimed that the DP was established by Rauf Denktaş after the UBP leader clashed with him. This led to nine UBP deputies breaking off to form their party. Rauf Denktaş whose son, Serdar Denktaş, was the chairman of the party for 21 years openly supported the party after leaving the presidency (Ekici, 2019, p. 59). Since the 1993 elections, the DP in Northern Cyprus politics has always been noted as a coalition party, except during the 2009 elections.

The People's Party (HP) was founded by Kudret Özersay in 2016 with two basic principles: good governance and social justice (Halkın Partisi parti programı, 4). In the 2018 elections, which it first entered, the party won nine deputies with 17.1% of the vote, took part as a coalition partner in the post-election governments, and won three deputies in the 2022 elections.

The Rebirth or New Dawn Party (YDP), founded by Turkish immigrants in 2016, has received support from those who emigrated from Türkiye and settled in Northern Cyprus. Erhan Arıklı, the founding leader of the party, defended the idea of facilitating the integration of Turkish immigrants into the island of Cyprus and Turkish Cypriots (Arıklı, 2020, 8). The YDP, which has a nationalist-conservative line won two seats in each of the 2018 and 2022 elections.

The Communal Democracy Party (TDP) was founded in 2007 by the merger of the Peace and Democracy Movement and the Communal Liberation Party, which was established in 1976. The party has a social democratic line (Çıraklı, 2019, 488) and won two seats in each of the 2009, 2013, and 2018, but could not pass the threshold in the 2022 elections. In the 2015 presidential elections, the TDP supported Mustafa Akıncı, one of the former deputies of the party, and contributed to his election as president (Ekinci, 2019, p. 57).

2.8. Party System

According to Duverger's traditional classification of single-party, two-party, and multi-party systems based on the number of parties (1959, pp. 206-80), Northern Cyprus falls into the multi-party system group. In the 1990 elections, the CTP, TKP, DHP, and YDP came together against the UBP and entered the race under the umbrella of the Party for Democratic Struggle (DMP). In this election, almost all of the votes and all of the seats were shared between the two parties, giving the impression of a two-party system. However, this alliance did not continue in subsequent elections.

Sartori (1976, pp. 108–11), who also accepts Duverger's classification and classifies single-party and multi-party systems within themselves, does not include the parties that cannot enter the parliament in the count, while taking into account the size of the parties that can enter the parliament. Accordingly, the size of a party does not depend on the rate of votes it receives but on a coalition or blackmail potential of the opposition oriented parties. Sartori classifies multi-party systems as limited pluralism (three to five parties), extreme pluralism (six to eight parties), and atomized (10 or more parties). Depending on ideological distance, limited and extreme pluralism are also described as moderate or polarized pluralism. If parties are fragmented but not polarized,

they are included in the *moderate* pluralism and if they are both fragmented and polarized, they are included in the *polarized* pluralism categories.

Northern Cyprus parties seem more suitable for a limited pluralism system; the two basic characteristics of extreme pluralism—the representation of anti-system parties in the parliament and the gathering of parties in two different blocks (Sartori, 1976, pp. 117–18)—are rarely encountered in Northern Cyprus. Although there are parties that can be considered anti-system, such as the Cyprus Socialist Party and the Independence Path, these parties either do not enter the elections or are not represented in the parliament since they cannot pass the 5% threshold.

A total of 28 governments were established from the inception of the state in 1983 until August 2024. In this period, only the UBP could form a government on its own between June 1990 and January 1994; between May 2009 and May 2010 and between May 2010 and June 2013, other governments were formed as coalitions of two or three parties, and even four parties, as was the case between February 2018 and May 2019. The parties that stood out as the major partners of the coalitions were the UBP and CTP. Although these two parties seem to represent different blocks, they were in the coalition government that lasted for nine months between July 2015 and April 2016. In additon, it can also be said that there is a lot of interaction between parties in Northern Cyprus and there are parties such as the DP that can form coalitions with different blocks.

One of the ENP indexes that measures the fragmentation of parties according to their relative strength rather than their actual numbers was formulated by Laakso and Taagepera (1979). As the most widely used formula in literature, the index shows the ENP participating in elections in terms of the percentage of the vote they received (effective number of elective parties, ENEP) and the seats they won (effective number of parliamentary parties, ENPP) (Ünal et al., 2024, pp. 310–11). Considering the parlimantary elections held in the TRNC period, the present study calculated the ENP in ENEP and ENNP forms. According to the calculations listed in the Table 3, ENEP varies between 2.01 and 4.57 and ENPP varies between 1.77 and 3.63. This indicates that fragmentation of political parties in Northern Cyprus is at normal levels. Only in the 1990 elections, ENEP (2.01) and ENNP (1.77) results show that Northern Cyprus may have a two-party system. This is an exceptional situation, however, since many parties came together under an alliance against the governing party in this election but did not continue the alliance in the following elections. When we exclude the 1990 elections, it is clearly seen that the results of both ENEP and ENPP are more meaningful and there is no low or high fragmentation in the party system.

Table 3: *ENP Indexes for Northern Cyprus Parliamentary Elections**

Election Year	ENEP	ENPP	Election Year	ENEP	ENPP	
1985	4.46	2.99	2005	3.12	2.57	
1990	2.01	1.77	2009	3.33	2.68	
1993	3.98	3.54	2013	3.55	3.16	
1998	3.87	3.01	2018	4.57	3.63	
2003	3.74	3.25	2022	3.63	2.71	

* Prepared by the author

3. Political Culture

The political culture of Northern Cyprus emerged as a result of the historical past of the island, especially the Ottoman Empire and British rule, the Republic of Cyprus, and the period after Türkiye's intervention in 1974. Northern Cyprus has a historical background that shaped its political culture, especially the constitution, parliament, elections, and political parties before the establishment of the TRNC. Northern Cyprus has also been experiencing serious isolation in the international arena since it is only recognized by Türkiye. This isolation has a great impact on the foreign policy and domestic politics of Northern Cyprus.

It is significant to mention political participation, a strong leadership figure, awareness of being a Northern Cypriot in the context of political culture. As underlined in the elections and electoral system part above, the participation or turnout rate in Northern Cyprus elections remained quite high until 2013 when it began to decline. The primary reason for this situation is the decrease in voters' sense of trust in the political institution since 2013. High turnout rate indicates a high democratic consciousness, and voter turnout in elections is directly related to the legitimacy of the system. In Northern Cyprus, which has more than 50 years of political experience, in addition to the eight presidential elections, 10 parliamentary elections were held, the first in 1985 and the last in 2022, and a total of 28 governments were established in the same period. The average lifespan of cabinets is only 1.4 years, indicating negativity in the context of political stability. On the other hand, although voting is not compulsory, the turnout rate in parliamentary elections was 87.6% until 2013 and 64.4% from 2013 to 2022. In presidential elections, the average turnout rate in the six elections held between 1985 and 2010 was 81.88%, while the average turnout rate in the last two elections between 2015 and 2020 was 60.3%. As can be seen, the turnout rate in the presidential elections is lower than in the parliamentary elections. There was dynamic political participation in elections for Northern Cyprus until 2013.

Northern Cyprus has not seen a strong leader after its founder Rauf Denktaş. Denktaş served as president twice during the TFSC period and four times during the TRNC period. Denktaş, who assumed the leadership of the Turkish Cypriots from the period of the Republic of Cyprus until his term as president ended in 2005, took his place in the history of the state as a charismatic leader. Although there is no legal limitation, no president after Denktaş has been able to be elected for a second time.

Northern Cyprus, which is ethnically homogeneous, is roughly divided into a bipolar society in political terms. As also underlined in a survey (Sonan et al., 2020, p. 4), ethnic homogeneity in Northern Cyprus has not led to the emergence of a stable, harmonious society. On the one hand, there are those who are nationalists, pro-Türkiye, and in favor of the continuation of Northern Cyprus without making any concessions despite disadvantages in the international arena; on the other hand, there are those who are anti-Türkiye and pro-United Cyprus. The first group is mostly led by the UBP, and the second group is led by the CTP. While the UBP embraces those who came from Türkiye after 1974, the CTP and TDP, which emphasize the Turkish Cypriot identity more, display a distant approach toward those who came from Türkiye. Mustafa Akıncı's election as president with over 60% of the votes in 2015 meant that those who wanted unification with Southern Cyprus came to the fore. Akıncı promised in his election campaign that he would strive for unity and that an equal and brotherly relationship would be established with Türkiye, not one dominated by Türkiye. Similarly, with the election of pro-Türkiye Ersin Tatar as president in 2020, Northern Cyprus returned to the pre-Akıncı situation. According to Bozkurt (2014, p. 75), the opposition always criticizes the government for being under the influence of Türkiye and claims that nothing changes when they come to power. Also, the governments in Northern Cyprus resort to certain methods such as placing the responsibility on Türkiye for bad practices that attract the public's reactions.

Particularly the young population in Northern Cyprus is in favor of unification with Southern Cyprus and is willing to develop more relations with them. One of the reasons behind this idea is that Northern Cyprus is thought to be behind Southern Cyprus in economic and social terms due to the embargo and unsuccessful administrations it has been subjected to. According to them, after the de facto dissolution of the Republic of Cyprus, Northern Cyprus was mismanaged and therefore fell far behind Southern Cyprus, which developed over time. What needs to be done in this context is to resolve the Cyprus Issue peacefully by uniting with Southern Cyprus. Those who support this view keep their distance from Türkiye, which they see as an obstacle to the solution. On the other hand, the UBP and incumbent president Ersin Tatar argue that a solution should be

reached with Southern Cyprus on the basis of sovereign equality. They also emphasize that Northern Cyprus voted yes and Southern Cyprus voted no in the Annan Plan referendum held in 2004 and think that Southern Cyprus, who rejected the solution, was rewarded by becoming a European Union member.

While Southern Cyprus insists on a bicommunal, bisectional federal solution to the Cyprus Issue, Northern Cyprus defends a two-state solution based on sovereign equality. In May 2024, Tatar, the president of Northern Cyprus, put forward the condition that the sovereign equality of the Turkish side be accepted and the embargoes imposed on Northern Cyprus be lifted in order for new negotiations to begin. The personal representative of the United Nations Secretary General in Cyprus, Maria Angela Holguin Ceullar, conveyed to President Tatar that the United Nations would not make any initiative regarding the acceptance of these conditions. Tatar emphasized that although sovereign equality of the two cummunities was gained with the founding agreements, Southern Cyprus was accepted as the representative of the whole of Cyprus in the following process (Firik, May 13, 2024). The opposition parties in Northern Cyprus such as the CTP, TDP, and the United Cyprus Party (BKP) accused Tatar, who rejected the tripartite meeting for the above mentioned reasons, of dragging the Turkish Cypriot community into a deadlock (Stelya, May 9, 2024). In other words, as of August 2024, it is not even possible to talk about a negotiation process on the Cyprus Issue.

Northern Cyprus elections, which take place in a democratic atmosphere, are open to international observers and foreign press members. Freedom of the press and expression is largely guaranteed in Northern Cyprus, which continues to establish its ties with the world through Türkiye due to the embargo. While the government of Northern Cyprus has been seriously criticized by the opposition, Türkiye is also accused of trying to design the politics of Northern Cyprus. Freedom House describes Northern Cyprus as a largely democratic state with a multi-party political system that generally supports civil liberties, despite the intervention of Türkiye, and points to issues such as corruption and discrimination against minorities as ongoing concerns in their 2024 Northern Cyprus Country Report (freedomhouse.org/country/northern-cyprus). Northern Cyprus, rated free since 2002, has also a free status in 2024 with a score of 27 out of 40 in political rights, 49 out of 60 in civil liberties, and a total score of 76 out of 100. It should be underlined, however, that Northern Cyprus is far behind in terms of minority rights. The fact that Maronites were not given the right to vote and be elected in addition to their identity cards constitutes the most obvious example of this issue.

4. Conclusion

The present study aimed to examine the political system of Northern Cyprus, particularly its constitution, the principle of separation of powers, democratic elections, form of government and party system, and to fill a significant gap in the literature. To reach this aim, political system of Northern Cyprus was examined along with its political history and culture, which have been shaped by the island's historical past, including the influences of the Ottoman and British administrations, the creation of the Republic of Cyprus by the Turkish and Greek communities in 1960, and the political developments following Türkiye's intervention in 1974. It was also underlined in the study that the Turkish Cypriots experienced their first independent state with the TFSC in 1975 and adopted their initial constitution largely determined the political line of Northern Cyprus, which has continued until today. The study also emphasized that the Turkish Cypriots experienced their first independent state with the Turkish Cypriot Constitution in 1975, and that these largely determined the political line of Northern Cyprus that has continued until today. Due to intercommunal conflicts and disagreements, Northern Cyprus politics followed a national line, and political life was largely designed within this framework (Hatay, 2005, p. 16).

TRNC is defined as a secular republic founded on the values of social justice, democracy, and the supremacy of the law according to the first article of the constitution. Similarly, this study has argued that Northern Cyprus has all the tools that a democratic state should have in the context of political system. The study revealed that Northern Cyprus is a unitary republic with a multi-party regime and a state governed by a semi-presidential system. During over 50 years of its political experience, eight presidential and 10 parliamentary elections have been held since its inception in 1983. Moreover, 28 governments have been established during the same time. Even if there is less stability in terms of the lifespan of governments, it is also possible to affirm stability in the context of the regular functioning of the political system. Although minorities such as the Maronites have not been given the right to vote and be elected, Northern Cyprus is a largely democratic state with a multiparty political system as underlined by the Freedom House 2024 Northern Cyprus Country Report. This is unquestionably a noteworthy accomplishment for a state that has faced an international embargo since its establishment.

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