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Appealing to Hearts and Minds: The Case of a Political Advertising Campaign in the 2019 European Parliament Elections in Cyprus

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### Abstract

This research explores the political advertising campaign of Niyazi Kızılyürek, who was a candidate for the 2019 European Parliament election with the left-wing Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL) in Cyprus. It aims to uncover the content of political ads by focusing on the emotive character of the campaign language. Adopting a multi-method approach involving visual and qualitative content analysis of fifty-five ads, I examined the characteristics of communication materials distributed prior to the election. I looked at the type of tone, theme, language, music, visuals, and emotions these ads displayed. The main findings of the study are the following: (1) Kızılyürek's political stance, which favors a solution to the problem of Cyprus based on creating a federation with Greek Cypriots, is literally reflected in each ad; (2) issue-based ads that underline political issues in the country were preferred to image-based ads that highlighted the personal qualities of the candidate; (3) both emotional appeals (associated with feelings such as hope and enthusiasm) and logical appeals (which tended to promote rational information processed by the conscious mind) were employed in the ads; and, (4) the overall tone of the ads was positive in nature, while negative emotions were completely avoided in this campaign.

**Keywords:** Election campaigns, emotional appeals, political advertisements, Turkish Cypriots, Cyprus.

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## 1. Introduction

Political communication campaigns are employed to shape peoples' political attitudes and behaviors. These campaigns do not merely inform individuals in society about the choices available to them, but they are also designed to persuade (McNair, 2003). They always have the objective of influencing a target group of people. Political communication is cultural (Schudson, 2001); 'it is composed of symbols and language, rituals and performances' familiar to a particular society (Ryfe, 2001: 416). Political actors need to express themselves to create a change in hearts, minds and behavior, or to ensure the continuity of existing thought and behavior. They use advertisements to communicate with a large proportion of voters (Moorman and Neijens, 2012). Ads are one of the few forms of communication over which political actors have complete control and are important as they give some clues about what politicians will do in elected positions.

Although an emotionally overwhelming 20 or 30 second spot or a simple evocative poster ad does not provide room for a candidate to give a thorough explanation of their plans, it is suggested that people do learn from political advertisements, at least to a certain degree (Vafeiadis et al., 2018; Valentino et al., 2004; Chang, 2001). Political ads, loaded with emotions, matter even if their effect sizes are small or short-lived (Franz and Ridout, 2007). They increase issue knowledge, influence perceptions of a candidates' character, and affect voter preferences (Benoit et al., 2007; Franz and Ridout, 2010; Atkin and Heald, 1976).

Bearing the above conceptualizations in mind, my intention with this study is to show how political ads, as a genre of political discourse, are created in a particular cultural context and environment by using different signifying practices, among which are slogans, visuals, music, and language. By doing this, I contribute to research in political advertising and throw some light on how political ads function as sign points of ideological and historical developments in a country. I focus on the nature and the characteristics of Niyazi Kızılyürek's political advertising campaign that targeted the Turkish-speaking Cypriot community in the northern part of the island during the 2019 European Parliament (EP) elections. I evaluate the verbal and visual characteristics and the emotions rooted in the language of fifty-five pieces of propaganda material. I have chosen these materials and not others because they best reflect the actual position of the candidate.

May 26, 2019 marked an exceptional election day in Cyprus. Using their Cypriot identity cards, Turkish Cypriots living in the de facto divided Mediterranean island and residing in the north passed through checkpoints to the south and voted in polling stations for the elections to the European Parliament that were being held in areas controlled by the Republic of Cyprus. There were nine Turkish Cypriots in the running to be MEPs: two candidates from the Cyprus Socialist Party, and six from the left-wing Jasmine Movement, none of whom won a seat in parliament. Niyazi Kızılyürek, a prominent Turkish Cypriot academic who is considered to be on the left side of the ideological spectrum, was another candidate running on the list of the main opposition leftist party, the communist-

rooted Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL), in the Greek-controlled south. He is also supported by the socialist Turkish Cypriot Republican Turks' Party (CTP), often branded a Turkish Cypriot extension of AKEL. Kızılyürek's candidacy sparked much controversy on both sides of the UN divide, with each side seeing him as an agent of the other.

Leaving all these speculations behind and running a bilingual election campaign (both the Turkish and Greek language) across the island, Kızılyürek received a majority (72 per cent) of votes from Turkish Cypriots who participated in the elections and was elected a Member of the European Parliament. *Al Jazeera* announced this victory by stating: 'Cyprus elects first Turkish Cypriot to European Parliament' (May 27, 2019). For the first time in the political history of Cyprus, and moreover since the deadly intercommunal clashes in 1963, a Cypriot with a Turkish ethnic background was elected to the European legislature, giving Turkish Cypriots a voice in public affairs. The leading motto of his campaign was 'Let's remember, we are Europeans!' – a simple and catchy slogan that was not difficult to grasp. The island has been divided by human-made barriers and troops from both sides, and riven physically and psychologically by ethnic division, for half a century. In such an environment, campaigners relied on references to a higher-level ethnic identity: a European one.

The research is driven by the following guiding questions: First, what type of slogans and messages were circulated? Political ideologies are presented to the world via persuasive language and the type of language campaigners use, and uncovering the emotions rooted in language is a relevant task. What type of information is selected to support language intended to do political work? And what type of themes, sounds, and visuals dominated the campaign? By focusing on the 2019 European Parliament election campaign of Kızılyürek, this research will suggest some answers to such questions.

A number of studies acknowledge that the content and emotions rooted in the language of political messages can influence attitudes regarding political candidates. Cho (2013), Matlock (2012), Fausey and Matlock (2011), Benoit et al. (2007), and Lau and Redlawsk (2006) all acknowledge that campaign tone and language may shape everyday thought in the political realm; the positive or negative wording of political messages can influence people's attitudes about political candidates, and, under certain conditions, information can affect a candidate's electability. This study is situated within the domain of qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2014; Ravitch and Carl, 2020), which recognizes the political dimension of language use, thus stimulating discussion about how the production of political ads is affected by political, economic, cultural, and historical dynamics in Cyprus. Additionally, visual analysis is employed, as visuals, similarly to text, contain ideological representations and make use of various rhetorical tools such as metaphors, depictions, and symbols that are intended to capture the essence of an issue (Helmets, 2006). Also, visual symbols are at the core of political communication: 'they can have rhetorical impact and make persuasive arguments to viewers,' and they can quickly communicate emotions (Schill, 2012: 122).

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Drawing on these ideas, in the following sections I review the scholarly literature on political advertisements, along with the conceptual background of emotions in politics and emotional appeals in political ads. The results not only add to our knowledge of political ads, but also show that ads can signal which issues are under discussion in society.

## ***2. Political advertisements and emotional appeals in ads***

Political advertising is the oldest form of propaganda and persuasion. It is designed to change our attitude and feelings toward an idea or person (Jowett and O'Donnell, 2012). Much of the relevant work on the emotions in political ads holds that propaganda and persuasion has psychological and ideological effects (O'Keefe, 2002). Persuasion, for example, is defined as a form of attitude change; as 'a successful intentional effort at influencing another's mental state through communication' (O'Keefe, 2002: 5). Propaganda, similarly, is a form of political language used to convince specific publics; to win them over and to convert them; it involves a deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions and is ideology laden (Jowett and O'Donnell, 2012). Political ads use a plethora of propaganda and persuasive techniques to get their message across.

The persuasive power of political ads has long been investigated as a form of communication, and there is a considerable literature about their application in this regard (Cho, 2013; Moorman and Neijens, 2012; Ridout and Searles, 2011; Franz and Ridout, 2007; Brader, 2006; Goldstein and Freedman, 2002; Prior, 2001; Bolivar, 2001; Rahn and Hirshorn, 1999; Jamieson, 1989). Within this stream of research, most studies show that well-designed political advertising campaigns can provide 'people with the information that they need to make enlightened decisions about which candidates best represent their interests' (Ridout and Franz, 2011: 6), can stimulate voters' interest in a campaign, and can produce more positive affect toward a candidate (Atkin and Heald, 1976). These studies not only demonstrate the difficulty of separating emotions from logical reasoning, but they also signify that emotions play a fundamental role in reasoning: that emotion and reason are cooperatively interrelated (Brader, 2005). 'Emotions influence attention, decision-making, attitudes, and action in the realm of politics' (Brader and Marcus, 2013: 165). Emotions play a significant role in shaping human behavior; they are one of the key components of politics (Gabriel and Masch, 2017), as are political ads (Moorman and Neijmans, 2012).

The vast majority of research on emotion within politics and political psychology has been conducted in the United States and Western Europe during the past several decades, and may be basically divided into two types: which involves the study of leaders, political candidates, and public or voter support (Redlawsk and Pierce, 2017; Valention et al., 2011; Brader, 2013; Neuman et al., 2007; Redlawsk, 2006; Chang, 2001), and which studies political advertisements (Vafeiadis et al., 2018; Cho, 2013; Benoit, 2000). The first group of researchers have approached the field by applying the lenses of political sciences and political psychology, while the second group of researchers have used social sciences,

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political communication, and cultural and media studies perspectives. Despite the difference in types of scrutiny, research on emotions in politics and emotional appeals in political ads has revealed similar findings. Such studies maintain that communication that fosters a positive mood induces a more positive assessment of politicians, whereas communication that promotes a negative mood increases the level of negative judgement of candidates who are simultaneously rated in electoral settings (Gabriel and Masch, 2017; Weber, 2012). For example, the overview of Brader and Marcus (2013) of current approaches to the study of emotion and politics makes an important contribution to this discussion. The authors confirm that communicating anger, fear, and sadness produce negative feedback, whereas positive or 'feel-good' emotions are associated with general satisfaction with life. For example, communicating enthusiasm suggests expectations in relation to what is happening and what lies ahead and thus motivates political action, while promoting hope strengthens the yearning for better things (Brader and Marcus, 2013).

Emotional appeals in ads also have a long history in political advertising campaigns, but few scholarly works have analyzed the characteristics of campaign ads and the emotions rooted in the language of ads (Kaid and Johnston, 2000; Lau and Pomper, 2004). A notable exception is the pioneering work of Vafeiadis et al. The content analysis of 243 ads during the 2014 gubernational and senatorial election by the latter authors (Vafeiadis et al., 2018) looked at the characteristics of these campaigns: the candidates' status, party affiliation, gender, campaign outcome (won or lost), type of narrative ads (autobiographical, voter stories, or testimonials), tone of ads (positive/advocacy or negative/attack), type of appeals (logical or emotional appeals, and source credibility), style of videos, and types of dominant speakers. For instance, positive ads were more likely to have voters or candidates themselves as the dominant speaker, while anonymous announcers served as the dominant speakers in negative ads (Vafeiadis et al., 2018). Borrowing the idea of Johnston and Kaid (2002), authors have also evaluated the type of emphasis in political ads: for instance, image-based ads that highlight the personal qualities of a candidate, and issue-based ads that underline political issues in a country.

Brader (2006; 2005), who studied the use of uplifting music and feel-good imagery in campaign advertising, also offers some insightful observations that help to explain the characteristics of political ads. Survey and experimental evidence from Brader (2006) highlights that integrating words, music, and images into a well-narrated story helps to stir emotions and create emotional impact among the public. Brader (2006) also highlights that positive campaign narrations that signal hope, pride, and trust suggest that conditions are good, while negative narrations that include hostility, uncertainty, and anger suggest they are bad (Brader, 2005). The same line of thought is found in the work of Ridout and Franz (2011), who experimentally analyzed televised ads and claimed that advertising has the potential to scare viewers into voting for certain candidates, or to increase the likelihood of voting for a candidate: 'Many evoke feelings of enthusiasm, hope, or joy, cued with a crescendo of uplifting music [...] Some ads, by contrast, are

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negative and nasty, attacking an opponent's policy ideas or personal character' (Ridout and Franz, 2011: 1). The work of Ridout and Searles (2011), involving an analysis of 631 unique ads aired in 26 different U.S. Senate races, makes another important contribution to this discussion. Ridout and Searles (2011) uncovered the fact that emotional appeals that apply one of two dimensions (happiness or aversion) can influence political attitudes and people's evaluations of political candidates.

Most of the research on the study of the emotional appeal of political ads is quantitative in nature, relying on laboratory experiments and surveys. These studies have neglected to delve deeply into single ad campaigns and ask questions about the nature of the political ads themselves, the type of emotions rooted in language, and the persuasive relationship between advertising text and meaning; namely, the information that a candidate intends to communicate to a voter. Based on theories of emotions in political ads, this research is a modest attempt to fill this gap.

### ***3. Data and methods***

Data is derived from the 2019 European Parliament election campaign of Niyazi Kızılyürek in the northern part of Cyprus. For this comprehensive empirical research, all of the political advertising materials that were systematically prepared to promote the candidate were collected. The analysis covers the period from April 2, 2019, the beginning of the distribution of campaign materials, to May 26, 2019 – the official European Parliament election day in Cyprus. In order to answer the research questions, fifty-five pieces of propaganda material were analyzed. The sample consisted of 24 videos, with an average length of 12 to 50 seconds, 27 posters, materials uploaded to the official Facebook and Instagram accounts of the candidate, three billboard advertisements located in popular squares of the cities of Nicosia, Famagusta, and Kyrenia, and one leaflet introducing the candidate himself and his ideological position. I additionally made use of data uploaded to the official web page of the candidate (<https://tr.niyazikizilyurek.com/>). Data were in Turkish and have been translated into English by the author.

Adopting a multi-method approach, qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2014) was initially applied to the fifty-five pieces of propaganda material. The goal of qualitative content analysis is the systematic examination of communicative material (Mayring, 2004). This technique is especially appropriate for focusing on the characteristics of language as communication, with an emphasis on the content or contextual meaning of text. It is a method that helps with the subjective interpretation of the content of text data. Visual analysis was then employed to examine the visual descriptions that accompanied the text (Helmets, 2006). Scholarly work acknowledges that visual images play a central role in constructing political images (Schill, 2012). They 'matter more than words in creating a feeling about a candidate' (Brader, 2006: 30), and transmit emotional impact more powerfully than spoken words (Jowett and O'Donnell, 2012). Departing from this line of thinking, analysis was undertaken on the visuals (what is the main figure,

and/or what is left out?), the color (which colors are used?), image bites (what types of visual shots are used to support the candidate's objectives?), and symbolic elements and signs (are any of the aspects of this piece symbolic?). Sound preferences (what type of music accompany the text and visuals?), and sound bites, if any, were additionally analyzed.

A codebook was created highlighting the theme, the sound, and the visual symbols in each ad and whether the overall tone was positive or negative: 'Positive promotional ads were defined as those favorably promoting the candidate, whereas negative attack ads represented those ads that attacked the opposing candidate' (Vafeiadis et al., 2018: 359). The findings were presented at three basic levels: (1) language, theme, and verbal symbolization; (2) visual symbolization; and (3) the sound and music preferences of the campaign. According to this approach, the first element for analysis was the content of each piece of propaganda material with respect to frequent themes and issues used to ascribe meaning to the campaign; for example, whether it used issue-related ads or character-based ads. In that same section, language and tone were evaluated in an attempt to understand the construction of themes; for example, do they apply a positive (promotional/advocacy) or negative (attack) strategy in relation to the overall tone; do the campaign slogans elicit enthusiasm and hope, or fear and anger; how is the candidate presented; what kind of narrations are embedded within the political slogans; and who is the dominant speaker? Second to be analyzed were the non-verbal elements, including political image-making and the use of visual symbols (e.g. flags or doves). I analyzed what kind of images are portrayed and the logic behind the dominant colors that were used (e.g. were bright colors used, or simply black and white?). Finally, the choice of music used in audio-visual elements was appraised in terms of the ideas and information this transmitted; what type of music or melody was used; what was the style of the music; what kind of message did it convey?

To fully understand the rationale of the campaign, a key member of the campaign team was interviewed and original visual materials from the graphic designer were retrieved. Findings are presented and discussed in the section that follows.

## **4. Findings**

### *4.1 Language, theme, and verbal symbolization*

The findings demonstrate that in the 2019 EP election campaign in Northern Cyprus, all of the political ads contained information on Kızılyürek's position in relation to specific political issues (issue-ads), and there were no ads containing information about the personal characteristics of the candidate (image-ads). The type of issues covered in the ads reflected the environment at the time in the country, namely political deadlock in Cyprus, isolation, or a lack of recognition. The top three themes emphasized in the ads included: (1) the identity struggle of



Turkish Cypriots; (2) the candidate's goals of reunification and federalism; and, (3) the longstanding peace-building efforts on the island.

First and foremost, many of the ads reflected the theme of an identity struggle, highlighting the fact that Turkish Cypriots have or share a European heritage: 'Let's remember, we are Europeans!' proclaims Kızılyürek. In one leaflet, he also claims that 'We are both European and Cypriot. This means that we are both citizens of the European Union and have rights across the whole of Cyprus. It's time to free our identity and citizenship properties!' and in another poster, 'Remember, we are EU members, let's vote and have our voice reflected in parliament!' In both cases, the candidate was the dominant character. Kızılyürek attempts to spread a positive feeling of Europeanness that was reinforced in many of the ads. In several posters in which the dominant speaker was a voter, the same theme is promoted: 'I am a European citizen, and in the European Parliamentary elections of 26 May, I will vote for Kızılyürek!' and 'I am European, I am an EU citizen, I will vote for Kızılyürek!' Nineteen ads were designed in this fashion, all advocating a European identity in a positive tone. These slogans are clever enough to help their audience recall their European identity.

From a slightly different perspective, a few ads in which voters were portrayed make indirect references to prolonged political isolation. Given that the Turkish Cypriot north of the island is regarded as an occupation force by the Republic of Cyprus, the European Union as a whole, and the international community and has no real independence, these ads propagate the idea that Kızılyürek's victory will make the existence of the inhabitants thereof visible in Europe: 'Our voice in Europe' read huge billboards throughout the three most populous cities of Nicosia, Kyrenia and Famagusta. 'To make my voice heard in Europe, I will vote for Niyazi Kızılyürek in the 26 May European Parliament elections!' say Mertkan Hamit, an activist, and Bilge Azgın, an academic. This narrative serves to propagate the fact that, no matter what the current political and economic conditions are, Kızılyürek's victory will somehow provide a recognizable 'voice' for the Turkish Cypriot community in international affairs. Additionally, three audio-visual ads promote European values and principles: 'For LGBTQ rights!', 'For gender equality!', and 'Due to the educational opportunities that the European Union will provide for the youth of this society, I am voting for Kızılyürek!'

Identity is the word for people's sense of who they are. National identity is the primary form of identity that creates a sense of belonging. It is based on the binary opposition of 'us' versus 'others', which creates unity among members of the 'us' group and highlights its difference from the 'they' group (Billig, 1995). Given that campaign advisors try to manage public feelings, here they employ an identity discourse advocating that Turkish Cypriots are European citizens and not Turkish ones, which allows the former to imagine they belong to the Western world and to fantasize about a Western way of living. The purpose is just as clear – namely, to create enthusiasm and positive emotion in the viewing public. The long-lasting identity struggle of the Turkish Cypriot community in terms of either being Turkish and Turkish Cypriot, or Cypriot and European, once again becomes



obvious in this campaign. Here, the campaigners completely ignore the Turkish part of voters' identity and divert the entire narrative to focus on a European identity. This rhetoric is highly Eurocentric, favoring Western civilization and representing a desire to reach Western standards of living. It is widely accepted that European identity represents the occident;<sup>1</sup> politically, sociologically, ideologically, and imaginatively a liberal, enlightened, democratic, free, and modern Western civilization with Romanesque architecture, Renaissance paintings, Descartes' philosophy, and Beethoven's music. Propagating the fact that Turkish Cypriots are European might be an attempt to demonstrate that they are developed, civilized, and open-minded people, in severe contrast to their Turkish identity, which is largely associated with an orientalist discourse. Highlighting voters' European identity may also be a deliberate move to elevate Turkish Cypriots above Turks from mainland Turkey. This move starkly contrasts the Eastern civilization that Turkey is associated with; an economically backward, low-waged, uncivilized, and poorly educated (by Western standards) country with a majority Muslim population, and weak democratic system (cf. Hamid-Turksoy, 2012).

The second type of ads make reference to the theme of unity, propagating a federal Cyprus: 'I want Armenian, Maronite, Latin, Turkish, Greek and all citizens to live in peace in the Federal State of Cyprus' says Kızılyürek in one poster, and 'The votes of the Turkish Cypriots are very important. These are votes for peace, brotherhood, cohabitation, and federalism' in another. In a leaflet Kızılyürek can be seen stating that 'Turkish Cypriots are part of the European Union's citizenship community. They are the original founders of the Republic of Cyprus, and they have the opportunity to re-establish the right of partnership by converting the country into a federal state.' These ads are accompanied by an image of Kızılyürek's confidently smiling face. Pro-reunification supporters are also used in these ads as the dominant speakers. For example, in four video ads, a peace activist, an English teacher, an academic, and a student state the following: 'I am for a federal solution in Cyprus, I will vote for Niyazi Kızılyürek in the May 26 European Parliamentary elections!' This type of logical ad propagates the idea that a unitary solution concerning the reunification of Cyprus is possible through federalism. Here the campaigners attempt to spread rational information processed by the conscious mind.

The third type of ads make reference to the theme of peace. Six videos, each lasting 12 seconds, use sound bites of voters saying: 'To raise the language of peace!', 'To live in peace in Cyprus!' and 'To establish peace in Cyprus, I am voting for Kızılyürek!' and, 'I am here for a demilitarized Cyprus!' and 'I am here for peace in Cyprus, I vote for Niyazi Kızılyürek!' Other slogans on leaflets that position Kızılyürek as the dominant speaker read: 'Hopes of peace are disappearing in our country. We can't just watch this happen!' and 'Hopes for peace are fading in our country, we can't stand by!' On his official homepage,

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<sup>1</sup> A political term covered in Edward Said's (1979) book *Orientalism*, a Eurocentric construction of an artificial binary opposition between the Western world (the Occident) and the eastern world (the Orient), primarily the Middle East and Asia.

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Kızılyürek also proclaims: 'I was born from the conflicts of the past, and as I dream of unity my efforts go to helping all of the Cypriots to walk along the path of peace and live together in their common homeland.' Kızılyürek, to a certain degree, was presented as the hope for peace; the hope of a community that errors of the past could be corrected. Envisioning himself as a healer of divisions, Kızılyürek knew how to exploit this, particularly with rational arguments making reference to the political instability, ethnic division, and conflict that Greek and Turkish Cypriots have endured over the last half-century. This was done skillfully in a 50-second video advertisement in which Kızılyürek expressed his commitment to transforming Cyprus into a peaceful country. Via this video, he transported the audience to an idealized Cyprus. The latter juxtaposes images of men and women of different ages hugging each other and walking or biking in the same destination with their IDs to the ballot box, thus creating an energetic carnivalesque atmosphere. Happy, joyful, and positive people are in fact everywhere, smiling faces too. The ad begins with a young woman standing in front of the window and opening the curtain. Then Kızılyürek's smooth voice and poetic pronunciation deliver the following message:

It's a beautiful day today; we are opening the curtains of our geography and taking the world in. Today, we are going to the great feast of democracy to say that we are also at this wonderful feast. Today, we are meeting millions of our own citizens. It's a hopeful day today; we are going to be integrated with our united country and with all of Europe.

The arrangement of ideas in this ad is effective. It uses a peaceful, sentimental tone to elicit an emotional reaction from the viewing public. The tone and content of Kızılyürek's speech is carefully structured to support the emotional response that uniting Cyprus with Europe (thus not with Turkey or Greece) is the only solution to the long-standing issue of Cyprus and creating a better future and life. In other words, this ad attempts to present the divided island of Cyprus as united by suggesting that there is hope for unity, and this election is a good opportunity to achieve this. Cyprus is presented as the common homeland of all Cypriots. This positive attitude is fostered especially through the application of key phrases such as 'we,' 'our,' and 'united country.'

In sum, the absence of mention of a Turkish identity and the representation only of Turkish Cypriots as European starkly contrasts with the fact that, in history, 'Turkish Cypriot identity formation was based on identification with Turkey' and was influenced by the emergence of modern Turkey, which adopted Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's secular reforms in 1920s (Kızılyürek and Gautier-Kızılyürek, 2004: 37). During that period, Turkish Cypriots constructed Turkey as their 'motherland,' as 'mother Turkey,' and as an organic whole, a 'suprafamily' to which they belonged (Kızılyürek and Gautier-Kızılyürek, 2004: 45). As Kızılyürek (2003: 198) describes it, Turkish Cypriot identity formation developed 'mainly in reaction to the Greek Cypriot national desire [for] union with Greece.' Turkey 'became the idealized romantic motherland which would

protect “the lonely children,” who perceived themselves as “the helpless remains” of the collapsed Ottoman Empire’ (Kızılyürek, 2003: 199). Moreover, in this period the Turkish Cypriot identity ‘[shifted] from the Islamic traditional one to an ethnic secular identity’ (Kızılyürek, 2003: 200), and ‘a strategy of discourse that “there is nothing Cypriot [about] Turkish Cypriots, they are just Turks in Cyprus” was adopted’ (Kızılyürek, 2003: 202). In the ads, this historic milestone of Turkish Cypriot identity formation is completely overlooked, and the focus is on merely propagating the discourse construct of European identity. We learn from the literature that individuals formulate identity accounts that link their past and present to a desired future. At its essence, identity refers to individual self-definition; i.e. how people answer the question *who am I?* or *who are we?* Identity construction, then, is the process through which individuals come to define who they are (Anderson, 1983). In respect of this contrast, it is important to note that the formation of a European identity in the Turkish Cypriot community has not been established yet; for many Turkish Cypriots it is an identity under construction, as many individuals still struggle to define themselves. The campaign was thus launched in the circumstances that Turkish Cypriots, especially the older generation, require a situated identity, or a reasonably clear sense of who they are.

#### 4.2 Visuals and symbolization

Examination of the visual symbols and colors used in the political ads reveal that both young and old and heterosexual and homosexual people from different walks of life and with different occupations – such as lawyers, civil engineers, academics, journalists, activists and students – took part in the propaganda materials as dominant speakers; all recalling that they are Europeans, and all stating in the run-up to voting on May 26, 2019 in the European Parliamentary elections that they would cast their vote for Kızılyürek. This particular choice of visuals says something about Kızılyürek’s target audience: that he seeks to embrace everyone.

Especially noted were the images of 18-year-old boys and girls with happy faces who would be voting for the first time in their lives that served as the primary backdrop for the ads, sharpening the message’s effectiveness. Eight poster ads followed this fashion. ‘My first vote is to Niyazi Kızılyürek’ read these ads, and continue: ‘I am a European, an EU citizen, and I will go to the ballot box for the first time in the European Parliament elections to free my identity and citizenship.’ In this way, members of the young generation are integrated into the campaign and presented as politically active voters. Using young people seems to be an attempt to spread a message of generational change, suggesting that youngsters are willing to negotiate fruitfully and understand politics in a new way, especially in comparison to their ancestors and older generations, who are believed to support the current status quo and hence take part in maintaining the continuing dispute in Cyprus.

Visuals here are rich in color, with warm light. The campaigners utilized particularly bright colors to associate the candidate with a positive image. No black and white colors were used at all in the entire campaign. Instead, red and white

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were predominant. This choice is not accidental, as these colors evoke the party colors of AKEL, the Marxist–Leninist and communist political party that Kızılyürek was nominated to. It is well known that AKEL supports an independent and demilitarized Cyprus and a federal solution to the internal components of the problem of Cyprus. By using red and white, campaigners aim to recall this information. On the official web page of the candidate, AKEL’s colors, red and white, were also prevalent. Another attention-grabbing symbol on the page was a white pigeon. Needless to say, white pigeons or doves are used in politics as symbols of peace, love, honor, and purity, in opposition to war and violence. The campaigners utilized this rhetoric. By so doing, they additionally recalled CTP party support for the candidate by frequently using the image of a dove carrying an olive branch in their propaganda materials.

In some ads we see a happy image of the candidate photographed with the united Cyprus flag. In these visuals the campaigners attempt to communicate a message with an object that elicits emotion. Since iconic and societal symbols can be more impactful than words, these types of visuals are often used in political contexts to draw on the emotional power associated with them. A candidate surrounded by a united Cyprus flag, for instance, can signify Cypriot patriotism and political unity on a divided island. To some degree, it can be argued that Kızılyürek was taking advantage of the flag’s patriotic and mythical symbolism.

#### *4.3 Preferences for sound and music*

We know that the use of stirring patriotic anthems, protest songs, music, and exhilarating melodies and lyrics are key propaganda techniques (Jowett and O’Donnell, 2012). When we look at the internal structure and the amount of content expressed by music in the present case, we see that all of the video ads were accompanied by the melody of the official anthem of the European Union, Ode to Joy, which comes from the Ninth Symphony by Ludwig Van Beethoven, composed in 1823 inspired by the original poem. The anthem contains no words, but instrumental music only. The melody is simple, almost elementary, and of a clear musicality to which it is easy to listen. This melody was strategically picked for this campaign because, in the universal language of music, the anthem has ideological meaning; it symbolizes European ideals of freedom, liberty, solidarity, peace, fraternity, and human happiness. This music, therefore, did not just exist per se; it was full of meaning and used to embody the idea of togetherness and unity: the key message that Kızılyürek wanted to disseminate to the Cypriot community.

For half a century, the Turkish Cypriots have been exposed to the national anthem of the Republic of Turkey: İstiklâl Marşı (the Independence March). This is a patriotic musical composition that evokes and eulogizes the history, traditions, and struggles of the Turkish people. While unappealing to Turkish Cypriots, it has been used at all public occasions as the official anthem of the Turkish Cypriot community. The Kızılyürek campaign’s choice of music that evoked the official

anthem of the EU was not accidental. To a certain degree, it might have been an attempt to debunk or disregard the national anthem of the Republic of Turkey.

It is interesting here to reflect on the fact that even though the campaign promoted the idea of Cypriot unity, using the national anthem of the EU instead of the anthem of Cyprus was a rational decision. This is because the national anthem of the Republic of Cyprus, Hymn to Liberty, is also the national anthem of Greece; a country which has negative connotations for Turkish Cypriots, sharing with them a tragic past and war trauma. So, while the campaign attempted to promote a peaceful Cyprus with the Republic of Cyprus flag, it systematically avoided using any discourse that recalled Turkey, a country with slightly negative connotations, or Greece, the counter-constructed motherland of Greek Cypriots, as this could have sparked anger, fear, and anxiety, rather than enthusiasm and hope among the Turkish Cypriot community. In sum, excluding anything that could evoke Greece was an appropriate decision as the desire of the Greek Cypriots to unify the country with Greece has been perceived by the Turkish Cypriots as a danger to their own existence, causing deep insecurity in the past (Kızılyürek and Gautier-Kızılyürek, 2004).

## **5. Conclusions**

The present research is among the first to examine the use of the visual, oral, and emotional content embedded in political ads for the 2019 European Parliament elections in Northern Cyprus. It explored the (partially) strategic modes of communication practiced in Kızılyürek's 2019 election campaign. Specifically, I have focused on propaganda materials targeting the Turkish Cypriot community. The analysis sheds some light on the use of political ads, revealing that they are part of a more complex political and social process, and that the issues they highlight function as signifiers of historical and political developments in Cyprus. The evidence yields four major findings.

First, the results, for the most part, are consistent with previous scholarship about political ads (Vafeiadis et al., 2018; Johnston and Kaid, 2002), and support the notion that, regardless of the theme, issue-related advertisements are preferred to character-based advertisements. In the case under examination, the country's political agenda was in conflict; this unstable environment was reflected in all the propaganda materials that were investigated. Specifically, the campaign was positioned around three main issue-based ads: one highlighted the European identity of Turkish Cypriots, one advocated for unity and federalism, while the final one called for peace. By emphasizing the political themes important to Turkish Cypriots, the campaign reinforced the feeling that Turkish Cypriot votes matter.

Second, in terms of the types of appeals utilized in the ads, evidence suggests that campaigners employed two different types: emotional appeals, and logical appeals, and that both have a significant relationship to the types of issues covered. Emotional appeals, designed to affect the unconscious mind and associated with feelings such as happiness, hope, and enthusiasm, were promoted

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by association with the rhetoric of a European identity; logical appeals, however, which tended to promote information designed to be rationally processed by the conscious mind, promoted an idealized Cyprus based on a unitary state and federalism. Past research has also found that ‘advertisers employ primarily two types of persuasive strategies – rational vs. emotional – to persuade’ the public (Bhatia, 2019: 435). The present results support this claim, as it was found that both emotional and rational appeals were employed.

Third, the findings also illustrate that, in terms of the tone of the ads, all were positive in nature. Research has found that positive messaging leads to more positive evaluations of a candidate (Chang, 2001). This study contributes to the literature on positive versus negative ads. Kızılyürek and his campaign advisors explicitly avoided attacking other candidates or distributing any messages that could evoke fear, sadness, or negativity; instead, they put forth a positive approach to campaigning. Since the tone of advertising affects the public mood, no sarcasm, sadness, or fear was evoked throughout the entire campaign. No negative sentiments that would lead to recall of the old, bad days of tragedy, war, division, and loss of life during the violent disputes, especially during 1974 and 1963, were encountered. On the contrary, upbeat and optimistic verbal and visual symbols were circulated by the candidate or supporting voters. Kaid and Johnston (2000) found that almost half of the time the primary speaker in positive advertisements was the candidate themselves. In the present case I found a balanced distribution of dominant speakers: the voice and the image of the candidate and real voters were almost equally represented.

Finally, footprints of overt Turkish nationalism or chauvinistic propaganda were not observed in this campaign. Instead, it can be claimed that Cypriot patriotism was promoted. We know that the open interface of Turkey with Turkish Cypriot affairs, population transfer from Turkey, the Turkish army’s control over all spheres of life, and economic and political isolation threaten the very existence of the Turkish Cypriot community, who have started to identify their motherland as Cyprus (Kızılyürek and Gautier-Kızılyürek, 2004: 51). In this campaign, a discourse suggesting a new Cypriot nationalism and Cypriot patriotism, or Cypriotism, was constructed. This focuses on the shared identity of Greek and Turkish Cypriots, and highlights their common culture, heritage, traditions, and political, economic, and social rights (Doob, 1986). Kızılyürek wants to show that he sees Cyprus as the *patrie* (fatherland) of all Cypriots. This discourse runs counter to the old ideological construct that positions Turkey as the motherland of the Turkish Cypriots, which has remained a subconscious belief of Turkish Cypriots for decades. The campaigners understood and knew their audience well; that their beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors are different to those of mainland Turks. They therefore designed a message that would fit well, and this message was a united Cyprus.

This research examined the short-term aspects of an electoral campaign and produced some interesting findings. However, there are some limitations that should be highlighted. This research did not actually test the *effects* of political messages on voters. Examining the campaign’s influence on voter choice would



certainly be a worthwhile pursuit, but this goes beyond what could be accomplished here. Also, generating a true understanding of political persuasion and propaganda requires a longitudinal analysis of the long-term effects of propaganda agents, media, social networks, cultural myths, the economy, and government on the public.<sup>2</sup>

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