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THE MAY 2026 ELECTIONS AND THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

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Voters went to the polls on 24 May 2026, to elect a new parliament, with more questions than answers in mind; the election campaign featured a barrage of messages and warnings to voters from political parties, analysts and media, even from the President of the Republic and members of the government, “not to cause a disaster” with their choice.

Yet, the way political parties and others performed and the content of their interventions offered no answers to the concerns of the people. There were no convincing arguments that the public’s lack of trust to institutions and traditional parties was unjustified; attacks on new personalities and parties contesting the elections, suggesting that they were weak and inadequate to represent the people, were not accompanied by decent behaviour and proposals that could offer solutions to existing problems. How could such conduct prove that they were a more reliable choice over their opponents? The suggestion that it would “certainly be a disastrous choice” if citizens did not change their minds and voted for the new formations was weakened by the way traditional forces and the government acted. The latter’s attempts to prove that they deserved the trust of the citizens without hesitation had a limited effect.

In a highly competitive contest, with almost twenty parties and formations campaigning for seats, two out of three were excluded from the new House of Representatives. Among them, the socialists of EDEK, the second oldest party in Cyprus and the Ecologists-Environmentalists, founded in 1996.

With the exception of the extreme right ELAM which doubled its seats to eight and AKEL that increased its vote share and reversed a declining course of fifteen years, all the others have reasons to regret their performance. ALMA, the former Auditor General’s party and Άμεση Δημοκρατία Κύπρου – Cyprus Direct Democracy party, of Fidias Panayiotou, the youtuber MEP, were expecting a double digit share but

they fell just under 6% of the vote and secured four seats each out of the 56. More serious is the exclusion from the parliament of four parties which secured more than 3% of the vote and of the Ecologists (2%), which means that 15% of the voters plus another 2% for other minor formations will remain unrepresented. Added to an abstention rate of 33% and tens of thousands failing to register to the electoral rolls, this raises a serious question of limited representation, below 50% of the electorate. It also points to a double obligation for those elected: First, to find ways for mobilising absentees, raise interest in political participation and increase turnout in elections; second, when legislating, they have to do so also to the benefit of both the people that voted for parties that did not make it to the House; for the whole citizenry.

A specific duty and an obligation emerge for the parties beyond ELAM, a party that denies its own past, refusing to acknowledge its links to the extreme right-wing Golden Dawn of Greece. There should not be any collaboration with it, unless it acknowledges and renounces the core values of its roots, the Nazi ideology, racism and the dehumanisation of people, of "others". The five parties should consistently demand of ELAM to renounce everything that is an infringement to fundamental rights and to uphold all core democratic values.

Statements by party officials and consultations behind closed doors for the election of the President of the House of Representatives pointed to a failure by parties and officials to act in accordance to core principles; some were ready to give in and come to agreements with ELAM at any cost. In the end, the agreement of Annita Demetriou /DISY and Fidas Panayiotou in order to secure the votes of his Direct Democracy for her re-election confirmed that voters' doubts and the discrediting of traditional parties were well founded. The acceptance by DISY of terms and conditions that indicate an absence of seriousness and a lack of commitment to laws and the Constitution, and which, according to their own words "would be a disaster for the economy and the society", has shown their inadequacy and inconsistency. While Ms's Demetriou re-election was hailed by commentators as a major, decisive step affirming her as a serious candidate to the Presidency of the Republic for 2028, the specific agreement has exposed a very problematic approach; established political parties and leaders have an obligation to uphold democratic values and the rule of law and call on new parties to abide themselves by these principles. Giving in to new parties' demands that are inconsistent or in breach of democratic rules is itself proof of inadequacy for holding State positions. Such behaviour compromises the smooth and lawful administration of the country's affairs to the benefit of all citizens. The re-elected President of the House and the new parliament have an obligation to firmly abide by the Constitution and the rule of law.

In respect of the work ahead, the House's agenda should address the real problems of the country, problems that were not touched during the campaign or even in the five years since 2021; Among them, inequality, cost of living, technology, digital transformation, artificial intelligence and their implications, the digital health of young people and the whole population. Not to forget the economic consequences of wars in our region and beyond. They should question alliances and ask what they mean for the rights of Cypriots and all displaced persons. The emerging serious threats facing media pluralism and much more.

In brief, the old parties need to abide by the rules of Democracy, 'educate' and call on ELAM and Direct Democracy to also uphold democratic values and norms, and legislate in the interests of the society. They need to prove they can do better than those they kept dismissing as incompetent and clueless. We should not find ourselves in 2031 issuing the same warnings.