



**SPECIAL ISSUE:
Presidential Elections 2018 – An Overall Assessment**

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CYPRUS CENTER FOR EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
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1993-2018 TWENTY FIVE YEARS OF POLICY FORMULATION AND ANALYSIS

THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS AND THE DAY AFTER



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Despite the fact that in the first round of the presidential elections on January 28, 2018 most voters indicated their preference in favor of change, eventually in the second round, February 4, 2018, the mandate for President Anastasiades was renewed. Obviously, given the election results, the voters chose continuity as the available alternative options did not convince them.

For the first time in presidential elections, the centrist parties did not take a position in the run-off election. The main reason was the significant gap between their respective positions with those of the two runoff candidates, Anastasiades and Malas, on the Cyprus problem. Be that as it may, at the end the majority of the voters of the centrist parties voted for one of the two candidates in the second round.

The fact that coalition building in the second round proved to be difficult and was not achieved may be indicative of the existence of a polarized political climate. And this despite the fact that practically no party can rule and address the existing problems by itself, without broader political support. At the same time, the abstention rate was dramatically increased, as it reached 26,03% (143.401), while blank votes and invalid ballots reached 4,17% (22.951). These figures are not negligible. The government and the political parties should work hard in order to restore the citizens' confidence in the political system.

Obviously, if the fundamental objective of the centrist parties and of AKEL was to achieve change by removing President Anastasiades from Office, they should have proceeded with a coalition that could win even from the first round of the presidential elections. Such a center-left coalition was not set up mainly for two reasons: first, there was no willingness to find a common candidate and, second, clashing views on the Cyprus problem were unbridgeable.

Given the structure of the Cypriot political system, wider alliances are definitely required. One may raise the question whether it will be possible to have intercommunal partnerships and double majorities in a bi-zonal bi-communal federal state when it proves so difficult for Greek Cypriot political forces to achieve intra-communal alliances.

Both AKEL and the centrist parties should search for the reasons of their new defeat and failure to capitalize on Anastasiades administration's serious shortcomings. It should be reminded that while President Anastasiades had asked for a "clear mandate" in the first round, he received 35,5%; 64,5% essentially disapproved him.

AKEL will have to work hard to create a new narrative and restore the moral superiority of the left. This effort implies, among other things, a pragmatic re-evaluation of the socio-economic status of the country as well as of the Cyprus problem. Its current policy on the Cyprus problem alienates centrist and many left wing supporters. Given the current circumstances, it makes it easier for AKEL to cooperate with DISY than with the centrist parties.

The centrist parties as well need to refocus and produce a convincing narrative. While it is clear what they reject on the Cyprus problem, there is still much confusion about what they really want. It is noted at the same time that there are several trends in these parties. It should be made clear and specified what kind of a federal arrangement can be accepted. Any persistence or adherence to a unitary state is not a pragmatic option.

The day after the first round of the elections, it was stated by various circles that the results amounted to the acceptance of the bi-zonal bi-communal federation as discussed today and that the forces that questioned this framework were defeated. This interpretation is oversimplified and arbitrary. The overwhelming majority of citizens prefer a settlement that will be the outcome of an honest compromise. The harsh realities today are such that an honourable compromise does not seem within reach. In this regard it should be also stressed that the actions of Turkey in the Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone are indicative of Ankara's objectives. Within this framework Turkey questions once more the sovereign rights of the Republic of Cyprus. In addition, Turkey would like to interrelate the energy issues with the negotiations to resolve the Cyprus question.

After the elections, the greatest challenge for President Anastasiades is, given the difficult circumstances of the political environment, to achieve the broadest possible convergence on the Cyprus question taking into account on the one hand Turkey's objectives and on the other the sensitivities of all political forces and of the society. Equally important are the promotion of the rule of law and the restoration of the citizens' confidence in the political system. This implies, among other things, the effective addressing of the

socio-economic challenges, the promotion of meritocracy, the setting aside of the patron-client relations and of arbitrary decisions and practices in all aspects of public life.

PRESIDENT-RE-ELECT ANASTASIADDES DEALING WITH A NEW CYPRUS PROBLEM



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Nicos Anastasiades won a second five-year term as President of the Republic of Cyprus. New challenges now lie ahead. Some of them may prove unprecedented. As early as a few days after his re-election, the President of Cyprus came across a drastic shift of Ankara's offshore policy that militates against the interests of this Mediterranean island-state. For a couple of years now, the government of Turkey revealed an aggressive revisionist policy over Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Ankara questions the right of Cyprus to exercise effective control on its territorial waters, unless there is an arrangement of the Cyprus Problem or unless there is a consent by the Turkish Cypriot community and by Ankara itself. Up until February 9, 2018, there was a prevalent understanding that Turkey may not recognize Cyprus' sovereign rights over its EEZ, but it will stop short of thwarting any planned offshore projects, as well as it will not intervene in the drilling activities of some big Western private companies such as ENI, TOTAL and ExxonMobil. That assumed understanding, as conveyed in public by President Anastasiades himself, as well as it was perceived by other stakeholders, and at same occasions overtly stated by third-country diplomats, was based on an assumption that Turkey acknowledges the differentiation between drilling activities and exploitation/monetization activities. Ankara was thought to be willing to tolerate some offshore drilling activities on the proviso that any monetization activities will go ahead with its own consent or participation. Besides, some thought that Ankara was interested in knowing whether there were indeed any serious reserves of natural gas and oil in Cyprus' EEZ. In the end, that proved to be a false assumption.

During the Cyprus Conference in Crans Montana, Switzerland last summer, some reported that, in a tête-à-tête encounter between Mr. Anastasiades and Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr. Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, a consensus was reached about the prospects of energy resources in Eastern Mediterranean. Around the same period some thought that Turkish offshore policy over Cyprus had some limits. Some even thought that the nexus

between natural gas prospects and a comprehensive settlement on the Cyprus Problem was so effective that would have kept the situation under control. After all, the government of Cyprus showed no intention to respond to provocations or engage the Turkish fleet.

Turkey however seems to have had a latent plan to escalate its revisionist activities. That plan was revealed when Italian energy giant ENI's drillship Saipem 12.000 was en route to Soudia drilling location in Block 3 of Cyprus' EEZ. In a distance of some 25 nautical miles from the drilling location, Saipem 12.000 was literally blocked by some Turkish navy vessels. Ankara knows that once a drillship is in location it has very few options to intercept its activities. In that regard, it decided to thwart the next drilling activity of ENI and thus demonstrate its intention not to allow any more drilling activities in Cyprus' EEZ. With such an action, Turkey intends to discourage other companies from planning new drilling activities in Cyprus' EEZ or even force them to cancel any existing plans. At the same time, by demonstrating its ability to practically exercise strategic and aeronautical control over the area, Ankara signals its resolve to annul any regional agreements and/or plans between Cyprus and other regional states. In other words, Turkey revealed some more details of its new "Grand Strategy" in Eastern Mediterranean. That strategy aims at defining the terms under which any regional collaboration could be formulated.

In the context of Turkey's regional hegemonic strategy, Cyprus is stripped of any external sovereignty or its sovereignty is limited to the extent that Ankara would like it to extent. This is an unpleasant situation, not only for Cyprus but also for the companies that invested some \$ millions and plan to invest much more on exploring Eastern Mediterranean natural gas and oil reserves. At the same time this is bad news for the EU's plans for diversifying resources that will foster a comprehensive energy security policy. Turkey's military policy in Cyprus' territorial waters casts a shadow on the prospects of bilateral, trilateral and multilateral arrangements in the region, which are mutually beneficial to the security, stability and prosperity of a number of countries and their people.

Turkey does not only emerge as a troublemaker, a rogue state that distress a number of oil and gas projects in Cyprus' EEZ, but mostly as a stabling block to the realization of a community of common interest in Eastern Mediterranean. Those who believe that a political arrangement in Cyprus will make things right, just can't comprehend how far Turkey's revisionist foreign policy can get. Cyprus is just one element to Ankara's strategic vision to convert Eastern Mediterranean into a 'Turkish lake'.

Amid this situation, the President of Cyprus will be called to act and re-act. To be sure, the possibility of such a development (i.e. Turkey to take action in preventing drilling projects in Cyprus' EEZ) was one of the likely

scenarios. On several occasions, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated that Turkey will not afford the drilling projects going ahead unobstructed. This message was vividly and frequently conveyed by Turkish diplomats, as well as Turkish media announced a number of plans. Nicosia, on the other hand, does not seem to have drawn any comprehensive contingency plans to respond.

This context heralds the emergence of a new face of the Cyprus Problem or probably a new Cyprus Problem, much different than the one that preceded it. This is not any more a frozen conflict that vacillates among various ambiguities about governance, sharing of power, issues of federal integration, constituent entities, guarantor powers and military contingents. It is a conflict that formulates around the extension of the military control of Turkey beyond the territory of Cyprus to its territorial waters and its airspace. This is an express manifestation of how far Turkey is willing to go in order to limit the external sovereignty of Cyprus, as well as to neutralize the linkages that were recently forged between Cyprus and countries in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East.

Turkey is not attempting to test the President of Cyprus. It signals Greek Cypriots (and Turkish Cypriots) the only option it believes they are left with, to embark voluntarily and unconditionally on Ankara's new ambitious regional hegemonic strategy. Under the circumstances one should not expect the resumption of Cyprus talks, but a period of uneasiness and tension on the ground, the sea and the air. Before elections, Mr. Anastasiades said that his willingness to engage Turkey positively has some limits, which Ankara eagerly crossed by far. It is time to see whether and how Mr. Anastasiades plans to enunciate words to action. He will have nothing else but a sceptic audience, domestically and externally to cope with.

THE GREEK CYPRIOT LEFT AND THE 2018 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS – STRATEGY, COMMUNICATION AND PATTERNS OF COMPETITION



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In the Republic of Cyprus about a decade ago there unfolded a very particular pattern of socio-political alignments that was absent in the rest of Europe. When the global financial crisis of 2008 finally affected the island through the banks, the left-wing AKEL (that is, the party to the left of national-level social democracy) was the main party in government. AKEL governed under the Presidency of Dimitris Christofias who was in office until 2013, having by then negotiated and passed most of the troika-supported austerity legislation cementing the beginning of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Cyprus and its creditors. The dynamics of that period have had a profound effect on the results of subsequent developments and elections.

The presidential elections of 2018 as well have been expressive of how the experience of incumbency under Christofias shaped AKEL's strategy and overall vote share just after one presidential term by the Right following its own. The memories of the left's first time in the Presidency, both as a failed attempt for left-wing governance – it was in 2011 that austerity cuts had began – and as a communication fiasco of anti-left hysteria were still fresh among the electorate.

The choice of candidacy for the latest elections was a troubling affair for AKEL's organization. The initial quasi-nomination of Mike Spanos, an entrepreneur and director of the Cypriot Coca Cola branch, a person who easily fits into the 1% of the wealthiest strata of Cypriot society, betrayed both a lack of internal democracy (the candidacy was declared before official deliberation within the party organisation) and a long-established strategy of seeking alliances with liberal forces within the capitalist class.

The differentiation of Spanos himself on public television from AKEL's envisaged programmatic philosophy suggested a lack of professionalism too, whereby not even the proper discussions between the party and its

intended nominee preceded the announcement of a name. AKEL's decision not to engage in further negotiations with Spanos was largely the result of dissent from the party's member and support base, which includes more radical and class-oriented views.

This whole shebang must have done damage to the next candidacy of Stavros Malas, the person nominated by AKEL also in 2013 as Christofias' successor-to-be. Malas, like Spanos, was to be an independent candidate with the support of AKEL and not a partisan one. The latter was not an option with the 2008-2013 events still being a tool of propaganda for AKEL's opponents. Malas was also an internally contested choice, albeit evidently to a lesser extent than Spanos, because he had lost the previous contest of 2013 and because there had not been sufficient preparation concerning his persona throughout the five years following his 2013 defeat.

In any case, this was not a radical candidacy, neither a turn to the left nor a confrontational stance towards austerity. In political terms, Malas' societal and political profile, both as pre-existing and as constructed by the electoral campaign, signaled a continuation of relative consensualism towards the voters of the centre parties, a mild reformism that did not project the intention for root and branch change and a political correctness that is part and parcel of conservative politics.

Still, Malas' overall profile was different from those of both the Centre (Nicholas Papadopoulos) and the Right (President Nicos Anastasiades). Malas was clearly in favour of a solution to the Cyprus problem, criticizing Anastasiades for being intransigent. Malas emphasised social equality, opposed austerity, stressed the necessity of the separation between Church and state, was fully pro-LGBTI rights and completely refused to interact with the far right, which fielded its own autonomous and partisan candidacy (Christos Christou, leader of ELAM).

Interestingly, the populist-like discursive schema 'for the many, not the few' was borrowed by the Malas team from Jeremy Corbyn's campaign in the UK to imply the presence of an establishment centered around the state and the rich. This anti-establishment approach was not elaborated in detail, however, or with the ethos of a protest actor. A *de facto* weak point of Malas' candidacy was that he had participated as a Minister of Health in the Christofias government. This was something that the Anastasiades and Papadopoulos camps both utilized to undermine the attempt by the Left's campaign to communicate the aura of a candidacy outside of 'politics as usual'.

Malas managed to secure 98% of vote consolidation for AKEL; that is, almost everyone out of those who voted for AKEL in the 2016 parliamentary elections chose Malas. Yet in those elections, AKEL had already lost around

40.000 votes compared to 2011. At the European elections of 2014, AKEL had lost around 37.000 votes since 2009. In 2008 Christofias was voted by almost 241.000 people in the second round of the election and in 2013 Stavros Malas himself attracted 175.000 votes, whereas in the last contest he was voted by 169.000 without the main party of the intermediate space, DIKO officially supporting his opponent as in 2013.

If we compare the first rounds of the elections the picture is similar. Christofias gathered 150.016 votes in 2008 and Malas 118.755 votes in 2013 and 116.920 in 2018. These numbers have arisen as a result of both a recurrent stance of 'punishment' since 2013 in relation to the Left and of a growing apathy towards, or disaffection with national democracy in general, distressing all of the actors in the party system. AKEL has suffered what seem to be permanent losses in a gradual way but this is true also for all four main parties of the post-1974 era.

Inevitably then, the Greek Cypriot left still seems to have a long way to go before it can enjoy the levels of cohesion among progressive voters witnessed in 2008 and before. It is doubtful that this can be achieved by a further de-radicalisation and overall social-democratisation of the party, especially at a time where mainstream politics are alienating voters and the centre-left in most of the rest of Europe faces significant problems electorally as well as in terms of mobilization capacity. Certainly, the very fact that Stavros Malas did not win the election may inhibit what would have otherwise been an easier process within AKEL towards a moderating political profile and the opening of space to its left.

It is, however, unlikely that AKEL's leadership will choose a different approach to electioneering than usual and concentrate on reversing apathy among left-wing individuals, targeting more pointedly radical voters and dissociating itself from the state bodies in which its leaders and its ancillary organizations participate in the context of a tradition of consensus politics in the Republic of Cyprus.

Indicative already of this hesitance to reorient the party body vis-à-vis the electorate is the narrative repeated by cadres and the party press after the election: that the leaderships of the intermediate space 'primed' Anastasiades by adopting a line which prompted their followers to vote for neither of the two remaining candidates in the second round. This is indeed a factor that played out in favour of Anastasiades. Let's not forget that Christofias' victory in 2008 was made possible by the support of both parties of the Centre back then (DIKO and EDEK), which subsequently joined his government.

Yet the Greek Cypriot party system has evolved significantly since 2008. AKEL's political opportunity structure in the intermediate space is now less permitting for depending on tacit or formal agreements with the leaderships of DIKO, EDEK and so on. This space is fragmented to an unprecedented extent, party cues are becoming less and less effective and there is today, at a time when partition is the most visible scenario concerning the Cyprus problem, a markedly larger contrast than before between AKEL's pro-solution position and the hardened, rejectionist approach of the Centre parties.

What AKEL used to conceptualise as 'the progressive forces' have themselves changed in a direction away from AKEL – both by enabling the legislation of austerity measures by the Anastasiades government and in terms of their now more explicit opposition to a Bi-zonal, Bi-communal Federation as the basis for a solution to ethnic conflict. Events across the party system may potentially require that the Left revisits entirely what it defines as progressive in political and party terms and recasts in a transformative way its outlook on social and political alliances.

MR. ANASTASIADES WON THE PRESIDENCY FOR A SECOND TERM



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The first round of Presidential elections in the Republic of Cyprus was held on 28 January 2018 with the participation of nine candidates. The incumbent President Nicos Anastasiades received 35,50 percent of the votes, while AKEL backed independent Stavros Malas got 30,25 percent. DİKO leader and candidate Nicolas Papadopoulos was the third candidate, who garnered 25,74 per cent and lost the chance to be in the second round. The voter turnout in the first round was 71,88%, which was the lowest for a presidential election and abstention reached 28,1%.

Since no candidate secured 50 plus one vote, the run-off election was held one week later on 4 February 2018 between President Nicos Anastasiades and independent Stavros Malas. The winner was Nicos Anastasiades (71 years old), who received 55,99 per cent of the votes (215.281) and will stay in his post on a second five-year term. Independent Stavros Malas (51 years old) lost the election to his rival with 44,01 per cent (169.243). The turnout in the second round was a little bit higher than the first one, 73,97%. Abstention votes reached 26,03%, invalid votes 2,65%, blank votes 2,99%.

President Anastasiades told his followers after the results were announced that he was willing to reactivate the inter-communal peace talks, which collapsed in Switzerland last July. The AKEL criticized the President's handling of the Cyprus problem especially during the election campaign that he bears the responsibility for the failure of talks. Mr. Anastasiades said: "The biggest challenge we face is reunifying our country. I will continue to work with the same determination in a bid to achieve our common goal – ending foreign occupation and reunifying our state. There are no winners or losers, just Cyprus."

Now that Mr. Anastasiades gained more of the centrist voters, he assured his supporters that he was willing to cooperate with everyone in order to achieve the common goal – ending the Turkish occupation and reunifying the island. Mr. Anastasiades repeated that he would seek a peace deal that

doesn't include Turkey's demands for a permanent troop presence and the right to intervene militarily in a federated Cyprus.

The inter-communal talks have been going on since June 1968. The two communities living on the island, Turkish Cypriots (18%) and Greek Cypriots (80%), were trying to reach an agreement on a new constitution for the island republic, first on a unitary basis until 1974 and then on a federal basis since 1974, when the island was occupied by Turkish troops after a failed coup d'Etat against President Makarios.

Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu, told in an interview with the Greek Cypriot Kathimerini newspaper on 4 February 2018 that the new Cyprus negotiations under UN parameters could only begin, when Greek Cypriots change their mentality and are willing to share power with their counterparts in the North of the island.

After the United Nations Security Council renewed the mandate of the U.N. Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) for a period of six months on 30 January 2018, Turkish daily Hurriyet Daily News reported that Turkish Foreign Ministry underlined in a written statement that any process in the coming period for the resolution of the decades-old Cyprus problem should be based on "current realities" and on the fact that Turkish and Greek Cypriots have differing conceptions of a new federal state.

Actually, here is the crux of the matter: "Current realities" are the partition of the island since 1974 with the proclamation of a breakaway state on the Turkish occupied northern part, which is ethnically cleansed from the indigenous Greek Cypriots and has more than 300.000 Anatolian settlers. Instead of a garrison of 650 Turkish soldiers, which was a part of the Treaty of Establishment of the Republic of Cyprus in 1960, there are at present more than 35.000 Turkish troops stationed in the occupied area. What else Turkey wants now for the so-called security needs of the Turkish Cypriots, who are afraid of possible future attacks by the Greek Cypriot nationalists, to have a permanent sovereign base in the Northern part, similar to the one, proposed originally in the Acheson Plan of 1964. This has been a part of the Natoization plans of the island!

The Turkish Cypriot side went further in the inter-communal talks and asked the four freedoms for the Turkish nationals, who would remain in a reunited Cyprus. If this is accepted, it will open the way for an uncontrolled migration from Turkey to Cyprus or to the other EU member states. This possibility was already dealt in an article by Christoph B. Schiltz in German daily "Die Welt", dated January 9, 2017, which stated that many bureaucrats in Brussels started to ask questions like "Will Erdogan step into the EU through Cyprus? Will Cyprus be Erdogan's Trojan Horse?"

Since most of the constitutional issues are agreed upon, the issues of security and guarantee of the new Federal Republic is the most important aspect of the next phase of the inter-communal talks, which could be resolved with an international conference, with the participation of the five permanent members of the United Nations.

In the new five-year term of President Nikos Anastasiadis, I hope that a compromise can open the way to a genuine federal solution. The longer the partition lasts, the more the division solidifies. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been trying to influence the secular Turkish Cypriot community through religious and nationalist activities in the occupied area. The Turkish Cypriots have increased their complaints against the cultural and demographic changes, the alienation and islamization, designed by the occupying power, Turkey.*

* Erdogan expressed his anger to the criticism of the Turkish Cypriot "Afrika" newspaper, which published an article on 21 January 2018 saying that Turkey's operation in Syria was like Turkey's invasion of Cyprus. When Erdogan was informed about this, he called "on my brothers in North Cyprus to give necessary response". The result was an attack by a group of local and Anatolian fascists against the office of the newspaper and against the "Parliament".

This extreme nationalism and culture of intolerance is foreign to the secular Turkish Cypriots. That's why around 5.000 Turkish Cypriots attended a march defending peace and democracy. The march was organised by the Trade Union Platform, which represented more than 20 Turkish Cypriot trade unions and associations. It was also backed by the New Cyprus Party, the United Cyprus Party and the Socialist Liberation Party, which are not represented in the "Parliament". The demonstrators marched towards the 'Parliament' building and chanted 'shoulder to shoulder against fascism', and for solidarity, democracy and peace.

THE REAL RISK OF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS: FEARED OVER GEARED?



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On the 4th of February, Mr. Nicos Anastasiades has been re-elected to serve for a second term as the President of the Republic of Cyprus. His nomination prevailed over both Mr. Stavros Malas, who was backed by AKEL and managed to enter the second round of elections, and Mr. Nicolas Papadopoulos, who received support by the coalition of the centre parties, but nonetheless failed to pass the first round. Both 'win' and 'defeats' bear multiple reads according to diverse axes: political, economic, psychological, and sociological. I approach this analytical process by posing the following questions: Who? From what perspective? And, in what socio-political framework?

Who? The question of personalities seemed to predominate the elections as a criterion of exclusion leaving behind, from the very first round of elections, candidates who failed to convince the masses. One might argue that the centre failed not only to Hoover up undecided and discontented with the current government voters, but also the traditional voters of the centre parties, per se. Post-election turbulences in DHKO re-affirm previous concerns; if Mr. Papadopoulos lacks widespread recognition within his party, how could he possibly convince as the centre's household name? Power games in DHKO, premature candidacy for the presidency, and lack of a coherent political narrative are only but a few of the citing factors behind Mr. Papadopoulos' rather weak candidacy. In an even worse scenario, what Mr. Yiorgos Lillikas' candidacy teaches us is that (anti)campaigning on a single issue, and namely political pastoralism, may put you on the political map in periods of socio-economic despair, but can also you extinct you on the grounds of populism during periods of recovery.

To make a long story short, lack of leading personalities can rarely win you a presidential election. However, what has led to the smashing win of a questionable personality such as Mr. Anastasiades, whose political input has been often criticised, against Mr. Malas who has been praised by both the media and people for his personality traits, such as his ethos and diligence?

This observation leads me to the second lens of my analysis: *From what perspective?* To a large extent, President Anastasiades and his government have managed not only to step up to, but also reverse criticism. By mainstreaming the narrative of Cypriot socio-political and economic recovery, their campaign set off from the perspective of a success story despite of still daunting barriers and problems that were 'inherited' from the previous left government. On the other hand, Mr. Malas failed to convince voters that his perspective on Cyprus economy had nothing to do with the perceived-as-disastrous governance of Mr. Demetris Christofias, and by extent, of AKEL that backed his candidacy.

Beyond Cyprus economy, the Cypriot political problem was the second major pillar of the debates focusing on presidential elections. For the first time in the short history of the Republic of Cyprus, no coalitions between political parties were formed between the first and second round of the elections claiming no agreement on the Cyprus problem. This new fact brings me to the last question under examination: *In what socio-political framework?* What I argue is that the 2018 presidential elections have deepened the gap between the centre and the left regarding the Cyprus question. Despite criticisms for the collapse of the Crans Montana talks, Mr. Anastasiades' 'Yes' positioning to the Anan Plan for Cyprus in the 2004 Referendum, brings him closer to leftist discourses on the Cyprus problem. At the same time, Mr. Anastasiades' positioning seems to distance him from the centre that is rather explicit of their disapprovals, than their approvals, thus failing to build a strong and convincing narrative on the political problem. Some analysts urged to argue that Mr. Anastasiades' win discloses the majority's consent to his specific narrative for a settlement of the Cyprus problem based on the model of a bizonal, bicomunal federation. However, I strongly believe that it is the constructed 'fear' about the economy, and not the Cyprus problem, that coiled voters coming both from right and centre parties, mainly due to the strong belief that AKEL's governance has let Cyprus to economic austerity.

What is then the real risk of 2018 presidential elections? To my understanding, the pre-elections political scene has not 'geared' voters to reflect on issues such as the welfare state, social justice, and social cohesion. Additionally, election campaigns purposively fell short in 'gearing' voters to see the 'bigger picture' by not drawing links between the current national debates and contemporary macro-economic and macro-political structures and issues. Furthermore, concerns should be raised about the high percentages of abstention, but also the rise of the nationalist party ELAM, facts that have to be thoroughly examined by political analysts and scientists. To this end, the lessons taught from these elections and the period until the next presidential run-off provide to all political parties and actors the time and the opportunity to self-reflect and reconsider. To begin with, Mr. Anastasiades and the newly-constituted government will have to

convince us through explicit policies and strategies that the constantly augmenting neoliberal and privatised character of the economy will not underestimate focus on building a socially-just state. To do so, they have to work towards maintaining social cohesion by reinforcing meritocracy, combating nepotism, boosting youth employability, and supporting groups at risk. Moreover, both left and centre parties have a twofold mission: firstly, to reflect and reconstruct their narratives on the Cyprus political problem and economy; and secondly, to turn well-recognised technocrats into wannabe politicians, who are able to reverse the political rancour. In conclusion, all political parties and actors should come to understand and realise that only confidence inspires confidence.

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS AND THE NEED FOR UNITY



Philippos Stylianou
Reporter / Journalist

The failure of the Greek Cypriot side over the years to hammer out a common national goal and joint course of action, thus presenting a united front in the face of continuing Turkish aggression, has caused deep divisions among the politicians and the people of the island. At the same time it has allowed the unlawful positions of the Turkish side under the iron sway of Ankara to undermine to a large extent the internationally justified cause of the Republic of Cyprus.

This untenable situation came to a head with the build-up to the latest abortive Cyprus negotiations in Switzerland, compounded by the acrimony over who was responsible for the economic shambles in the wake of the international financial crisis. As the new deadlock coincided with the closing of President Nicos Anastasiades' term, the stage was set for a presidential contest markedly different from previous ones, against the negative backdrop of national discord.

Allowing for certain rare exceptions, the norm in presidential elections all along had been for each party to run with their own or a sponsored candidate in the first round and jump onto the wagons of the two remaining contestants in the second round in exchange for office. Not so this time. An alliance of the "middle space," as it termed itself, came into being early on in the pre-election period, composed of centre DIKO, socialist EDEK, rightist Allilengii (Solidarity) and the Green Party. They all supported the candidacy of DIKO leader Nikolas Papadopoulos, advocating a break with the policy of bizonal federation as a solution to the Cyprus problem towed by the two big parties, right-wing DISY and communist AKEL.

The latter two, which had hitherto been in tandem with bizonality, even throwing their joint political weight around, suddenly fell out as AKEL accused Anastasiades of ruining the chances of a solution in Switzerland in order to seek reelection. The incumbent president strongly rejected AKEL's allegations, countering that its leader Andros Kyprianou had initially given his full support to his moves in Switzerland, only to change his tune for the

sake of the elections. AKEL nominated an old stooge, Stavros Malas, as a so-called independent candidate, while Anastasiades stood for a second term with the support of ruling DISY.

Two other parties played by the old rules, remaining aloof from any election pact, each for its own reasons though. Former government minister Giorgos Lillikas of the Citizens Alliance party was the first to announce his candidacy, aiming to lead the “middle space” in the elections. He persisted in his effort to the end even after it became evident that Nikolas Papadopoulos was the chosen one. ELAM (National Popular Front), the staunchest enemy not only of a bizonal but of federal solution as such, chose a lone path with its leader Christos Christou as a candidate knowing that the others would shun it anyway because of its extremist nationalist ideology.

Despite opinion polls that showed Malas catching up with Papadopoulos, the “middle space” was confident its candidate would make it to the second round as their combined percentages in the 2016 parliamentary elections exceeded 30%, against only 25% of AKEL. Yet in a surprise count of votes on the first Sunday, the figures were reversed, with Papadopoulos getting 25,74% and Malas 30,24% and the ticket to the second Sunday.

The siphoning of about 5% of votes (around 20.000 in absolute numbers) away from the centre has been ascribed to various reasons. For one, Papadopoulos did not appear to be so categorically against bizonality as his allies were, reiterating that it did not matter what the solution was called as long as it had the right content. Another possible reason was that Papadopoulos in his election campaign lashed out mainly at Disy and only moderately attacked AKEL, since he would be counting on its support to beat Anastasiades in the run-off to the second ballot. An old rift in Diko involving its former leader Marios Garoyian is also certain to have affected the overall performance of the party.

However, fewer votes for Papadopoulos did not necessarily account for Malas’ considerable election boost. The explanation for this is more elaborate with a conspiratorial twist. According to strong speculation, too persistent to be dismissed as mere rumour, Disy may have shifted some of its surplus votes to Malas in the first round in order to eliminate Papadopoulos whom it deemed a more dangerous opponent to Anastasiades in the final showdown. Some even go so far as to suggest that Akel and Disy shared a tacit concern in getting Papadopoulos out of the way for fear that his election might unsettle the whole pattern of settling the Cyprus problem.

At this point it may be useful to recall that ahead of the 2016 parliamentary elections Disy and Akel had combined forces to raise the parliamentary threshold from 1,8% to 3,6% with the clear aim of keeping small parties out of the House. This move backfired spectacularly as the big parties suffered losses in favour of the very small ones, indeed with no fewer than three new parties being ushered in; at least one of them, "Allilengii" incorporating "Evroko" and commanding a voting power of 5,24% joined the "middle space" in the presidential elections.

All this may go to explain another of the novelties of the recent election: the complete lack of alliances between the two rounds. Analysts and commentators heralded this as a healthy break with the give-and-take of small party politics, whilst in reality it could only be the settling instead of an old score with the removal of a common 'enemy.'

Already, the election results are being vaunted as an endorsement by the Greek Cypriots of a solution based on the bizonal federation currently on the negotiating table, since the first round percentages of 35,51% won by the victorious Disy-backed Nikos Anastassiades and 30,24% by the Akel-backed loser Stavros Malas, both avowed advocates of bizonality, add up to almost 66%. This may be true calculated on the votes cast, but it falls down to 46% of the registered electorate as a whole of whom almost one third did not bother to vote.

It follows that far from being over the need for unity is more imperative than ever. No sooner did the results of the first round of the election come out than the Turkish Foreign Ministry put out a statement saying that "in the following period any procedure to be followed must be based on the present realities on the island in order to succeed." And just to make sure its message got across, Ankara, instead of congratulating President Anastassiades on his re-election, sent its gunboats to stop Cyprus' gas exploration.

In an interview with Radio Proto just before the elections (24.1.2018), Anastassiades said that he would pursue a solution for a Cyprus that would not be a protectorate, and added: "If it appears from the stance of the other side that this is not possible, I shall invite all the political forces to decide together what must be done".

In his own words then, his strong renewed mandate of 56% is one for unity and togetherness. Accordingly, the invitation to form a government of national unity should have been his immediate concern. Having already missed the opportunity of doing so, he should at least consider changing his priorities and try to find out first what must be done before going back to the negotiating table, instead of the other way round.

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS – A NEW POLITICAL ERA FOR CYPRUS



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Forty-four years after the Turkish invasion and fifty-eight years since the founding of the Republic of Cyprus, the political and economic environment as well as Cypriot society has dramatically changed over the last ten years.

First, people's focus has shifted from the National Problem to one based solely on economic and social issues. This can be explained by the overwhelming economic crisis that Cyprus has been dealing with since 2010 onwards and how the media in turn, have been covering these events.

That the recent presidential elections in Cyprus had little in common with the last one is an understatement. It is generally accepted that these elections lacked the passion, political dialogue, confrontation of programs and ideas, and voters were led to the polls as though they had to bet between 5 horses in a race.

How people vote? There is no doubt that the imposition of the Memorandum by a foreign entity such as the Troika, bringing with it personal savings deposit haircuts along with several austerity measures has led to unprecedented effects on the economy and more importantly has shaken the social fabric of the Cypriot society. Citizens' mistrust to the politicians and the party-centric orientation of the society is rapidly growing among the young generation.

Daily life challenges and financial difficulties overcome every other topic when in conversation, while every citizen ends with a quip of political exasperation. Frustration, anger and condemnation of society against the political establishment persists in society and that was echoed in the elections when abstention hit a record high of nearly 30% and others voted out of a desire to "punish" the political elite with a voto de castigo (punitive vote).

Regarding the Cyprus Problem, after the failed Geneva Conference and the intransigent/authoritarian stance of the Turkish and Turkish-Cypriot side, the chances for a solution to the Cyprus Problem are dwindling. Furthermore, there is increasing sentiment amongst the public that the negotiations have been bogged down and a change of course on the Cyprus issue is required.

Those who believe that those elections were a “referendum” among the supporters and disclaimers of a Bi-zonal/Bi-communal federation as a model and possible solution for the Cyprus Problem, either they fail to understand and analyze the electoral behavior or, even worse, they continue to live with “blinkers” and stereotypes of past decades. It is more than obvious that a Bi-zonal/Bi-communal solution is losing its “legitimacy” in both communities and the recent outcome had nothing to do with the national desires of the Greek-Cypriots.

Other crucial factors on how people have voted include liquidity in voting, voter movements beyond ideologies and parties, as experienced for the first time in 2013 in how people evaluated the reliability of candidates. The volume and intensity of those characteristics had a catalytic role for the outcome of the presidential election. Under those circumstances, Anastasiades reelection was not a surprise given that the average Cypriot has voted clearly with personal criteria and mostly seeking for continuity and stability mainly in economy and daily life.

What’s at stake? There is a great sense of deplorability and aversion due to lack of transparency in the previous governments among the citizens towards the current presidential candidates and the ideologies they represent. However, it is important to establish that at the end of these elections the political scene, as it has functioned the last three decades, will not be the same.

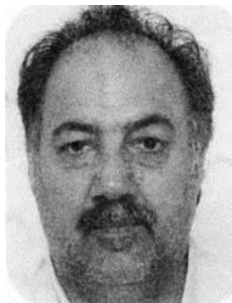
Those elections constitute a fork in the future path of Cyprus and President Anastasiades has to play a prominent role in shaping the Republic’s future. The geopolitical developments in the region with a revisionist Turkey challenging International Treaties and International Law (being in direct conflict and opposition with its neighbors and provoking Hellenism daily), will lead to tensions that the next President must face calmly, with strategic understanding but with all the insight, boldness and determination that is required of a leader.

Cyprus's energy plans must be continued at any means in a cooperative manner with its neighbors. The Republic of Cyprus must circumvent and as far as possible prevent Turkey from implementing its predatory plans both in the EEZ and on the ground by creating new fait accompli in the occupied territories.

The necessity for a new strategy regarding the Cyprus issue, the adoption of a different model of economic development, the strengthening of the rule of law and the welfare state and the immediate improvement of everyday life and quality of life constitute the range of challenges for the new presidential term.

In sum, in this fickle political era, the President of the Republic of Cyprus will have to deal with a series of internal and external issues that will influence the future not only of the state but also the course of Cypriot Hellenism in the 21st century.

THE RE-ELECTION OF MR. ANASTASIADES AND THE ISLANDS' CHALLENGES



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President Anastasiades' comfortable re-election to the presidency for a second 5-year term against Mr Malas, AKEL'S candidate, consolidates beyond doubt the further political erosion of the Left. In fact, it was essentially an uncontested electoral campaign mainly for two reasons. First, AKEL'S strategic objective was focused on the political imperative to carry over its candidate to the electoral process of the 'second Sunday'. This was directly related to AKEL'S future political presence and very political existence as the chief political opposition and as a political force to reckon with. A sigh of relief was more than obvious to the faces of the party's nomenclature. AKEL escaped from an inevitable political turmoil, had this not been the case. Secondly, it reconfirmed the dominance of the systemic political neoconservative forces on Cypriot society. A dominance which undoubtedly conditions the overall socioeconomic orientation of development.

Every society is confronted with the problem of production and the problem of distribution. That is, how wealth is created and how it is distributed. Distribution is determined by the prevailing political balance as this is depicted by periodic political contests, since we have not as yet reached a consensus on what constitutes a single conception of the good.

One may add to this, the political competence of the political personnel and its ability to exercise influence on the decision making processes and to articulate effectively the well meant interests of society, or the common good if you like. President Anastasiades' victory reaffirms the hegemony of what Leslie Manison, a former senior economist at the International Monetary Fund and a former senior advisor at the Central Bank of Cyprus and the Ministry of Finance in an article in the Sunday Mail on January 14/1/2018 referred to as crony [χρόνιοι, in Ancient Greek] capitalism. It seems that the presidential triumph is tantamount to a vote of confidence to 'a compliant government [that] aid[s] Cyprus's very own oligarchs [who]

are sowing the seeds of another crisis'. One should not expect any substantial deviation of the crony capitalistic policies of Anastasiades' second term in the presidential office, a diachronic political anathema that burdens the republic since its inception in 1960. Democratic Rally, the ruling party, from an essentially social liberal political orientation, under the current leadership of Mr. Averof Neofytou, is rapidly becoming a *sui generis* neoliberal bastion. In fact it is expected that the influence of the cronies and vested economic interests will convert the party into a political instrument in intensifying further the usurpation of the economy's economic resources and balanced sectoral development. The ruling party's facilitation of redistributive networks that allocate socioeconomic advantages to the cronies is more than evident. While the economy in 2017 had experienced a 4% growth, poverty more than doubled. From 122.000 in 2011, it climbed, according to Eurostat, to 260.000 in 2016. Tourism had seen an unprecedented rise in both numbers of visits and revenue. Yet internal devaluation is the prevailing regulatory norm of labor relations. A circumstance that hinders the de-escalation of the most pressing problem of the economy; namely the non performing loans.

It is also expected the Anastasiades' government will continue its policy of a wholesale sell out of natural monopolies to the cronies, thus converting the state to a value-added transferring apparatus for the plutocrats. If we take a brief look at the distribution of the national income the outcome is quite disappointing. Labor's share which in 2015 represented 80% of the gainfully employed, was close to 45%, whereas the employers' share, approximately 6% of the gainfully employed, the same year was close to 44%. The ruling plutocracy has also managed through its political influence over the ruling party to abolish the least growth –unfriendly property tax. The state as a result has suffered a loss of €110 millions annually in revenue. It is expected that tax demonization, despite of the widespread tax evasion and tax avoidance, with the new Anastasiades' government, it will become the norm.

Although these economic observations *prima facie* do not seem to directly relate to the future prospects of finding a viable and a lasting solution to the Cyprus issue, yet the domestic cronies due to their uncontested power and influence over the island's historical and political future pose a severe threat. Their domination which produces unprecedented economic concentration of wealth, hinders the political exploration of alternative approaches to the Cyprus issue, to the island's survival detriment [cf Theophanous, Kattos and Mavroidis Dec 2016 for an alternative and peaceful evolutionary approach].

It goes without saying, the Republic's long term national interests are contingent upon the normalization of its relations with Turkey. But until this time comes, the Republic of Cyprus should examine very seriously, as a defensive measure against Turkey's incessant aggression, the temporary

constitutional suspension of the bi-communal nature of the Republic via a well organized referendum. This should be taken as an act of political will of a sovereign people to safeguard its presence on its homeland.

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