

NOTES ON THE POLITICAL SYSTEM OF CYPRUS

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The following are some considerations which pertain to the structure of the political system of Cyprus and which relate also to the upcoming Presidential elections of February 2013. The Constitution of Cyprus provides that the system of government of the Republic is a presidential democracy. This structure entails that the President of the Republic, while enjoying vast executive powers, does not necessarily control the majority of the House of Representatives. The President normally needs a coalition of political parties supporting him in order to be elected and to be able to fulfil his program. This institutional peculiarity of Cyprus, if compared with other European countries, has played a pivotal role in the way political power is secured and exercised, especially with respect to the Cyprus problem.

It could be argued that no President of the Republic of Cyprus following the death of Makarios has had the opportunity to fully adopt and implement the policy he personally, or his party, believed to, with respect to the Cyprus problem, due to this institutional need to search for consensus. It is a fact that the two Presidents of the Republic who hailed from the Democratic Party, namely Spyros Kyprianou and Tassos Papadopoulos, never fully implemented their proposed policy concerning the Cyprus problem, since they tried to make concessions to their coalition partners, most notably AKEL. Even during the time when either Kyprianou or Papadopoulos were not acting in coalition with AKEL, knowing that they did not enjoy a majority in the House of Representatives, their preferred policy had been to act with caution and seek solutions which might reflect wider political consensus.

The same approach was for the most part followed also by President Vassiliou, and divergence from this approach caused him to a large extent the elections and led to the coalition between Clerides and the Democratic Party. Clerides, during his First Presidency also followed an approach of satisfying the concerns of other parties participating in his coalition, even adopting a very active foreign and defence policy, in collaboration with the Greek Government, during his First term, which might in reality be against his personal beliefs. It could be argued that the second term of Clerides was probably the only period during which a President of the Republic, enjoying also full and active support from the Greek Simitis Government, had the opportunity to adopt the policy he believed into with respect to the Cyprus problem; this policy was put to an abrupt end when Clerides lost the elections in 2003. Dimitris Christofias, while not really co-operating with his coalition partners, is a President in the post-Annan era, during which he has faced from the beginning strong opposition and this has also affected his negotiating tactics.

Following 1974, the political spectrum in Cyprus consists of a very peculiar party system, bathed in contradictions. For instance, the governing AKEL, a nominally communist oriented party, participates in the European United Left coalition, which aims to the total change of institutions to make them fully democratic, the breaking with neo-liberal monetarist policies and the resistance to imperialist enforcement and preaches that people should never lose their hope due to realities. However, with respect to the Cyprus problem, AKEL is considered as a party which argues against '*positions which have no realistic chance of being accepted*', and notes that Cyprus has to take into account the realities of the situation and the realities of the international community.

The Democratic Rally, the other largest Cypriot party, is also a party born out of contradictions. Its founder, Glafcos Clerides, has always been a politician who believed in solutions which are consistent with the wishes of the western international community and in political pragmatism. However, the Democratic Rally has been hosting, since its inception, a large percentage, or even majority of voters who, with respect to the Cyprus problem, could be no further apart from the views expressed by Clerides, or current leader Nicos Anastasiades.

Both the Democratic Rally and AKEL, have managed not only to overcome internal contradictions over the years, but also to avoid being affected from the discharge of high profile party members who went on to form their own political parties (Like Adisok which was formed by former high profile AKEL members and European Democracy which was founded by high profile DISI members). While the success of the Democratic Rally in avoiding these internal problems could be attributed to its open character, on the contrary the success of AKEL ought to be attributed to its closed character. Undeniably, the two largest parties are also safeguarding the existence of the other party, by feeding upon perceived conflicts, such as Makarios and Grivas, coup d' etat, EOKA, football teams, the relationship with Greece; all these despite the fact that in reality the greatest divide with respect to the so-called priority issue -the Cyprus problem-, has never been between the positions of the leaderships of AKEL and the Democratic Rally, but rather between the official positions of those parties and other parties, such as the Democratic Party and the Socialist Movement. Thus, the need to safeguard the political structure of the two opposing poles and thus, the extent of political support that the two parties are enjoying, cause them to form coalitions and make concessions towards the centre, in order to safeguard that the current political structure and system will continue its course.