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ELECTION BRIEFING No.29
THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS OF MAY 2006 IN THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS

George Charalambous
Department of Politics
University of Manchester
Email: georgecharalambous@hotmail.com

Key Points:

- This was the first time Greek Cypriots cast their votes since the April 2004 referendum on the ill-fated Anan Plan and references to a new just and viable solution to the Cyprus problem constituted one of the main focal points of party campaigns.
- Between the presidential elections of 2003 and the 2006 parliamentary elections polls showed an increasing popularity of the coalition leaders of the Communists and the Democratic Party and a high percentage of the electorate trusting the president Tassos Papadopoulos.
- A split occurred within the right-wing opposition party, Democratic Rally and the splinter group that left joined with the extreme right-wing New Horizons and formed the European Party.
- The two main parties, the Communists and right-wing Democratic Rally both lost support but remained first and second respectively keeping their core constituencies intact.
- The parties at the centre of the party system the Democratic Party and the Social Democrats achieved an increase of support and reached their highest percentage after years of stagnation.
- The European issue was mentioned constantly as a solution to many problems, including reunification and parties were once again divided on a left-right dimension with the communists being the only party arguing against recent treaties and directives

Introduction

On May Cypriot voters went to the polls to elect their new parliament (House of Representatives) comprised of 56 seats, for which over 480 candidates were running[i]. The results were unambiguous and it was a close election. The election, received relatively little attention from the international media, compared with the presidential elections of 2004, where many British newspapers had focused on president, Tassos Papadopoulos' allegedly nationalist past. Nevertheless, foreign commentators did agree that a potential reinforcement of Papadopoulos in electoral terms would mean little progress on the issue of reunification and the division of Cyprus

will subsequently remain a problem for Turkey's accession to the EU. Subsequently, a reinforced Democratic Party (DIKO) along with satisfactory results for the anti-Anan Plan forces signaled, for most international newspapers, the Greek Cypriots' preference to keep the island divided and a persisting passiveness of Greek Cypriot politicians to promote reunification.

The new parliament was in place on June 6 and was only slightly different to the previous one: a majority coalition between the Communists, the Democratic Party and the Social Democrat Party continued for the second parliamentary term; Democratic Rally was for the second consecutive time the official parliamentary opposition (as between 2001 and 2006); electorally the hierarchy of parties remained the same, except from the addition of a new party- European Party (EK) out of the existing extreme right New Horizons and a Democratic Rally faction; the two existing smaller parties won one seat and lost one seat, respectively, thus continuing to play the part of the outsider, combining elements derived from both government and opposition and failing to show noteworthy innovation and overcome the obstacles of the party system.

The stability of the major political actors and more broadly of the system itself was reconfirmed. The simple proportional representation system translated the Communist party's (Progressive Party of Working People – AKEL) attitude towards the Anan Plan into a 3% loss but did not close further the gap between the party and Democratic Rally (DISY), as the latter also witnessed a loss of 3%. The losses inflicted on the two main parties were not seen by either the media or the parties themselves as major, yet they were visible enough to worry their leaderships and force them to give post-elections explanations about the results. On the other hand, in both cases an electoral decrease, mostly stemming from the recent debate on the Anan Plan, was more or less foreseen by the parties themselves.

Background: Cypriot Parties and the Battle of 'Yes' and 'No'

In the early post-independence period, Greek Cypriot political party life was centered on a loose coalition of Makarios supporters called the Patriotic Front and the Communists. The front dissolved in the late 1960s; its major factions broke into discrete parties. Each of the four parties that emerged received at least 9 percent of the vote and managed to win seats in the legislature. The Republic of Cyprus has a modified proportional representation system and three of the four parties so divided the vote that winning a clear majority became an unfeasible task; the electoral law has been modified five times in the 1980s.

The Right - Democratic Rally (DISY)

The Democratic Rally (DISY) was created in 1976 and led by Glafkos Clerides; it evolved from the Unified Democratic Party (Eniaion), which was one of the factions that emerged from the Democratic Front in the 1970 parliamentary elections. Democratic Rally's platform focused on free enterprise economic policies and a practical solution to the inter-communal problem although it has been accused by the Communists for also acting an umbrella organization for ex-Junta supporters and extreme nationalists favouring an official union with Greece (enosis). It was the most explicitly pro-Western and pro-NATO of Cyprus's parties, and drew its support from middle and high-class professionals, businessmen, and white-collar employees. Its shares of parliamentary election votes were 24.1 percent in 1976 (but no seats because of the electoral law), 31.9 percent in 1981 (twelve seats) and, 33.6 percent in 1985 (nineteen seats). Between 1990 and 1996, the Democratic Rally was the largest parliamentary party and also remained in presidential office for ten years (1991-2001) under the presidency of Glafkos Clerides who subsequently retired giving the party's chair to a more controversial figure, Nicos Anastasiades.

The Communists (AKEL)

The communist movement has been a major force on the island since the 1920s, when it started as the Communist Party of Cyprus (KKK) often vying with the Church of Cyprus for the role of dominant political player and reappeared in 1941 with the creation of the Progressive Party of the Working People (AKEL). Banned in the pre-independence emergency from 1955 to 1959, the Communists have been in every parliament since 1960. It won nine seats in 1976, twelve in 1981 (32.8 percent) and, fifteen in the enlarged chamber in 1985, which represented a drop to 27.4 percent. Since then its vote share has increased significantly, polling well above 30% in subsequent elections and retaining the position of the biggest Cypriot party and most successful West European communist party.

Reflecting the serious crisis in the communist movement since the collapse of East European regimes in late 1989, the Communists held internal conferences in early 1990, during its so-called crisis when a group of reformists broke apart to form a new-leftist grouping called the Democratic Socialist Renewal Movement (ADISOK) in May 1990. The reformers included five members of parliament elected in 1985 as the Communist leaders. Democratic Socialists selected House Deputy Pavlos Dhinglis as chairman and criticized the Communists for internal rigidity and an anachronistic mentality. Shortly after the dissidents left and reverberating the effects of the collapse of 'existing socialism', AKEL moved to renew itself both at the programmatic and organizational levels, renaming itself to AKEL-Left-New Forces, vowing to prioritise the Cyprus problem and opening up to cooperation with progressive, centre-left politicians.

The centre – Democratic Party (DIKO)

The Democratic Party (DIKO), formed in 1976, was seen as the closest to President Makarios and was headed by his successor, Spyros Kyprianou. The party platform in its first electoral campaign emphasized a nonaligned foreign policy and a long-term struggle over Turkish occupation in the north. Over the years, the Democratic Party formed uneasy alliances with the two more leftist parties, the Communists and the Social Democrats. The Democratic Party won twenty-one seats in 1976, eight seats in 1981 (19.5 percent), and sixteen seats in 1985 (27.7 percent) thereafter taking a downward trend and reaching 9 seats (14.8%) by 2001. Between 1976 and 1986 the party managed to be officially supported by the Communists, subsequently draw the support of many left-wing and center left voters and sustain the presidency under Spiros Kiprianou who dissolved the partnership by breaking the 'minimum program' agreed upon by the two parties. After his death the leadership of the party went to Tassos Papadopoulos who is now also the president of the Republic drawing official support from the Communists and the Social Democrats.

The Social Democratic Party (EDEK)

Initially a socialist party was formed in 1969 by Makarios's personal physician, Vassos Lyssarides. The party advocated socialized medicine and nationalization of banks and foreign-owned mines. It was anti-NATO and pro-Arab, and favoured a nonaligned foreign policy, although those positions seemed to have softened in the late 1980s. The party supported union with a democratic Greece, opposed continued British sovereignty rights on the island, but differed from the communists in keeping its distance from the Soviet Union. Its appeal was strongest among non-communist leftists, intellectuals, and white-collar workers. Its electoral strength has been the weakest of the four parties. While between 1976 and 1991 it climbed from four to seven seats (three in 1981 (8.2 percent), six in 1985 (11.1 percent) in an enlarged chamber, however) in 1996 it dropped to five and then four in 2001 with 6.5%.

The parties had held fairly constant positions on key policy issues since the second half of the 1970s. The Communists and Democratic Rally, while at opposite ends of the ideological spectrum, were regarded as most flexible and forthcoming on settlement matters. Especially the Communists have managed to stabilize a wide support base for bi-communal rapprochement while simultaneously criticizing Democratic Rally for xenophobia and nationalist discrimination. In the 1990s Democratic Rally gradually reformulated a more visible pro-rapprochement position as did all other parties eventually. The Social Democrats and the Democratic Party had initially taken a harder line, pushing for a more punitive approach towards Turkey. On social and economic policy, the parties' ideological predilections prevailed: the Social Democrats and the Communists advocated greater government support for workers and free public health services with a very careful program of privatization necessitated due to EU membership, while Democratic Rally has for long favoured free market competition and followed a more neo-liberal course.

The most important changes in the Cypriot party system occurred during the crucial period between 1991 – when several smaller parties formed – and 1996 when they finally managed to enter parliament, once the threshold dropped to 1.8%. The first small party to form was Democratic Socialists (ADISOK), created by 'liberal' figures from within the Communists, who departed in protest of non-modernization both in ideological and programmatic terms. Democratic Socialists, entered parliament in 1991 and in 1996 merged with then president's Giorgos Vasiliou party, to form EDH (United Democrats) despite the fact that Vasiliou was officially supported by the Communists in two consecutive elections. Following the patterns of the continent in a delayed fashion, a Green party (Movement of Ecologists/Environmentalists) came into existence at about the same time – twenty years later than its counterparts in the rest of Western Europe – and for a few years remained an embryonic grouping of environmentally aware non-politicians before eventually entering parliament with one seat. When the party was formed, it was severely constrained while formulating an original and green-tainted policy program. The only reason the newly formed Ecologists managed to secure a tiny 2%, was their direct and forceful appeal to the environment. Their positions on more socioeconomic issues have been overshadowed by the elaborate analysis of a large variety of topics that the Communists – and to a lesser extent the Social Democrats –had the time to include in their policy programs, before the Ecologists came to existence. The last to enter was New Horizons, an extreme right wing party, under the leadership of Nicos Koutsou, but its program was nowhere near a replication of its French, German and Italian counterparts.

A Sonorous 'NO' and the Crying President

During the period between the 2001 and 2006 parliamentary elections significant events shaped a more volatile electoral landscape in Cyprus. Since then the country witnessed the opening of the separation border between north and south for the first time, a very successful entry into the EU along with other nine countries, following a unanimous YES in parliament and almost at the same time a controversial NO to the referendum on the Anan Plan, devised by the UN and supported by Western forces (most of all the U.S.A and the UK) as a solution to the lasting Cyprus problem[ii]. Since the Greek Cypriots disapproved the plan in the referendum and implementation of the plan was dependent on its approval by both communities, it became null and void. That meant that, while officially the whole of Cyprus entered the European Union on 1 May 2004, the *de facto* EU border runs along the Green Line, dividing the country between the Greek Cypriot-ruled and Turkish Cypriot-ruled areas. The outcome of the referendum revealed a hesitation among Cypriots, to go forward with the solution proposed. The Anan Plan, instead of reinforcing the prevailing left-right cleavage – with left parties voting 'Yes' and right ones voting 'No' – cut across traditional patterns of competition and the leaderships of all parties at the time, except,

paradoxically enough, the right-wing Democratic Rally, rejected it as a unjust and unviable alternative to the current situation[iii].

Table 1. Results on the 2004 referendum

Voting sectors	Yes	No	Turnout
Northern sector	64.90%	35.09%	87%
Republic of Cyprus	24.17%	75.83%	88%

Table 2. Official party positions on the referendum

Party	Referendum Position
AKEL (communists)	NO
Democratic Rally (Chris/dem)	YES
Democratic Party (centrist)	NO
New Horizons (extreme right)	NO
EDEK (social-democrats)	NO
EDH (liberals)	YES
Ecologists (green)	NO

Note: At the time of the referendum the New Horizons were still an autonomous party

Democratic Rally's positive stance on the referendum saw a final division over the leadership, already in a state of fragility. Popular party protagonists left to form the European Party, an alliance with Nicos Koutsou's extreme right-wing New Horizons, which had polled 3% in the 2001 elections. Playing the part of official opposition, Democratic Rally appeared very aggressive against the ruling government coalition, mostly focusing its attacks, however, on the president (and the Democratic Party leader) Tassos Papadopoulos and the Communists. Surely, the decreasing popularity of Democratic Rally's leader, Nicos Anastasiades, especially compared with that of the Communist leader Dimitris Christofias and the Democratic Party leader/President Tassos Papapdopoulos, as shown by surveys while approaching the elections, did not help the party and was a catalyst towards the final split. In the Communists as well, disagreement over the Anan Plan was wide-spread, nevertheless, splits were avoided and unity was maintained at a level of 85%. Since the referendum, the Communists was aware that the 2006 election would bring costs in terms of its final decision not to support the Anan Plan and this constituted a major concern for the party's Central Committee, with regard to the pre-election party strategy. Subsequently, the Communists were forced to amplify its calls for viable unification and its commitment to the well being of its Turkish-Cypriot supporters[iv].Starting, immediately after the referendum and throughout the election campaign, the party struggled to pass the message of complete support to the Turkish-Cypriots and illustrate an unaltered commitment towards a solution under the auspices of the UN, but viable enough in its implementation and beyond any pressures underlying Western interests. Under the image of an essentially vague 'Yes but' position, the Communist party's ultimate goal was a percentage well above 30% and realistically speaking a loss, of one parliamentary seat, down to 19 from the previous parliament. The Democratic Party stood behind their president's rejection of the Plan, who cried before ending his official referendum speech to the public, broadcast live on television. The Democratic Party officials, however, had started propagating a No very early and before any other party had reached an official decision on the Plan. A spurge of nationalism was visible among the

Democratic Party's ranks, with its leading officials, however, handling the issue very diplomatically and maintaining a pro-unification position under vague requirements. Concurrently, this did not stop headlines in Turkish and Turkish Cypriot newspapers headlining half-hearted statements. Papadopoulos' hand undoubtedly had been strengthened, they said, while the statements of all party leaders seemed reminiscent of the worst days of stalemate, rather than heralding any likely new initiative.

All these are not to suggest, however, a static coalition government in the post-referendum period and up to the elections. Firstly, the leadership was quick to realize potential costs at the international level, from the referendum's rejection and embarked on the difficult task of explaining to its European partners the results of the referendum and persuading them and the UN that it is ready to begin new negotiations. Secondly, as early as the summer of 2005 the government presented the UN and the Turkish Cypriot side with specific proposals to be discussed in potential future negotiations. Thirdly, it took very favourable measures towards the Turkish Cypriots, giving them the status of citizens of the Cyprus Republic, the right to health coverage by the state and issuing them with EU passports and the right to vote in the parliamentary elections for the first time. More recently, there also emerged an official government proposal for the return of Varosi (in the occupied Famagusta area) to its legal inhabitants and the co-management of its port by both Greek- and Turkish Cypriots, as the proper way to deal with the issue of Turkish Cypriot isolation, until a solution is agreed on.

The campaign

Campaigning in the Cypriot parliamentary elections began officially on April 13, when the House of Representatives dissolved to allow a campaigning period, but a media-based campaign began as early as January. When asked about their motivations for voting, Cypriots put the Cyprus problem in first place. Subsequently, the most popular theme of the elections naturally revolved around the recent Anan Plan. In extension, each party made constant references to a just and viable solution, some stressing justice more and others viability. Socio-economic issues were of course not absent, with the two main parties fitting their policy traditions into a Europeanized domestic economy and carrying on the custom of a society mainly divided between left and right.

Four opinion polls were carried out over the past weeks before the elections and despite predicting the lead by the Communists and Democratic Rally, the results looked ominous for both parties. The poll carried out between 1st and 10th April by Sigma TV, gave the Communists 32.4% of votes and Democratic Rally 30.5%. These two parties were followed by the Democratic Party which collected 18.3% of the vote and the Social Democrats with 7.1%. The Communists were also ahead in the opinion poll carried out at the same time by the Mega Poll institute. The party obtained 29% of the vote, Democratic Rally 27.3%, the Democratic Party 16.4% and the Social Democrats 6.4%. According to this poll, 44% of people interviewed had a positive opinion of their government's action, compared to 21% who are of the opposite opinion. Also, 28% of Cypriots had a favourable opinion of Democratic Rally as the main opposition party, compared to 67% who held the reverse opinion. Finally, with 26.7% of the vote, the Communists came top in the last opinion poll held by Mega channel, with Democratic Rally on 24.8%, the Democratic Party 16.3% and the Social Democrats on 3.9%.

While the issue of nationalism gradually subsided in Cypriot politics, leading to a more ecumenical approach towards peaceful cohabitation with the Turkish-Cypriots, the referendum and its results inevitably led to a Yes/No divide. Democratic Rally did not hesitate to criticise President Papadopoulos for archaic behaviour towards the 'Cyprus problem' and a nationalist attitude, albeit making far less references to Papadopoulos' anti-Turkish past, than during the run-

up to the presidential elections of 2003. This may have been because it eventually realized that voters were more concerned with current affairs making this an unprofitable issue to invest in. The Communists were also criticized for sidestepping their principles, in exchange for substantial political power which 'it so extravagantly valued'. Democratic Rally did try to play on the issue of inter-communal rapprochement, thus carrying forward the positive stance of most of its members, which emerged in the party's special Congress prior to the referendum, under the persuasion of party leader Nicos Anastasiades and the rest of the party's leading elite.

Democratic Rally as the official opposition party concentrated mainly on the internal situation of the governing coalition- due to certain emerging weaknesses of the coalition - and not the Cyprus problem so much due to the divisions the referendum had caused to its ranks; Democratic Rally officials continuously stated that the Anan Plan belonged to the past. Democratic Rally's 'social liberalism' was more carefully crafted this time and eventually the party stood fully in favour of neo-liberal policy making, such as the privatization or deregulation of semi-governmental organizations, which it failed to promote before, despite its ten-year term in office until 2003. The party also condemned the philosophy of 'the state as an entrepreneur' and referred to the *qualitative* upgrading of the welfare state. However, it did promote itself also as a socially-aware, political party and spent a substantial part of its manifesto on social welfare policies arguing for a sensitive approach on socially weaker strata, including young people, the elderly, single mothers and ethnic minority groups endangered by social exclusion. On the other hand, however, its proposed policies focused mostly on increasing employment (and self-employment for young people and the elderly), without any references to increasing expenses on behalf of the state. It also forcefully supported fast and effective EMU membership and complete harmonization with European standards while neglecting the issue about potential losses on budgetary expenses as a result of this.

The Communists initially appeared to fight a defensive campaign despite the immense popularity of their leader as the most appealing politician on the island. In response to Democratic Rally's pro-unification behavior it distinguished between bi-communal rapprochement 'won through blood struggle and persecution' and hypocritical rapprochement, as portrayed by Democratic Rally through opportunistic meetings with the Republican party of northern Cyprus. In an attempt to avoid 'a twist of the truth', party General Secretary Dimitris Christofias, made frequent references to its party as the most traditional supporter of rapprochement and cohabitation with the Turkish Cypriots, and pledges to the Turkish Cypriots 'to try and understand that we did not forget them'. On the socio-economic axis, a crucial concern for the Communists, they focused on the historical issue of ATA[v] (Inflation Readjustment Index), which it had secured when the Cypriot Republic was established, and utilized through the ongoing coalition government. Unsurprisingly, it repeated proudly the immense assistance that this would secure for the working-class, especially pensioners and low salary people and highlighted that a policy as progressive as ATA is not present in most West European states. In May 2006 both, the Communists General Secretary, Dimitris Christofias and trade union leader, Pambis Kiritsis, insisted on re-encompassing the three types in ATA abolished by the previous government but faced resistance from employers' unions and right-wing trade union, SEK. While during the party's Congress, President Papadopoulos had declared that 'ATA is a blessing of God and cannot be eliminated by this government', the Democratic Party avoided taking a clear position and the Social Democrats adopted a positive stance with a soft voice. Consequently, while criticizing Democratic Rally's past mismanagement of ATA, the Communists and its coalition partners did not manage to agree on a commonly acceptable reconfiguration of the index.

In direct conflict with Democratic Rally, the Communists also insisted against the privatizations of semi-governmental organizations, again considered by the party an important conquest of the

mid-19th century, which it had supported throughout its existence. An issue which was also briefly touched by the Communists, despite its status as a coalition partner, was that of the independent Competition Committee, which fined Cyprus Telecommunications Agency due to a drastic decrease on telephone calls prices. Democratic Rally was, of course, on the free market side supporting the committee's decision in the name of long-term benefits to market competition. The Communists' manifesto still encompassed many traditional, pro-working class elements, diffusing many claims that the party comfortably side-stepped its Marxist-Leninist ideology, especially since the dissolution of the former Soviet Union and the party's endorsement of EU membership in its 1995 Congress.

The Democratic Party fought the campaign full of pride at their leader's successful two years in presidential office, building on the existing positive claims that were previously put forward through the media. An enquiry undertaken by CyBC's, a polling agency credited Tassos Papadopoulos with 60% positive opinions from voters. Once again, the party referred to the damage done through bipolarization and urged for a secure strong centre, without of course getting into further details as to what the centre signifies within the context of Cypriot Politics (something that characterizes its previous manifestos as well). As a matter of fact, its manifesto was decidedly short and vague, mostly focusing on the Cyprus problem and basing its campaign on the former coalition program of Tassos Papadopoulos. It promised a 'just, dignified, democratic, functional and viable solution' to the problem and argued in favour of UN resolutions on Cyprus, the principles of international law, the decisions of international courts and the founding principles of the EU. It neither specified any designated concerns nor did it explain whether it accepted/rejected the Anan Plan as the basis for re-negotiations.

Despite the president's stable attempt to restart negotiations, and in coordination with the Communists, to assist the Turkish Cypriots, the Democratic Party campaign showed signs of nationalist elements maintaining substantial leeway within the party. In its brief manifesto, there was no mention of the Turkish Cypriots, but there were constant reminders that the party campaigned intensely in 2004 for the rejection of the Anan Plan and a declaration that the party was not 'suicidal, like those who urged the people to accept the plan'. In any case, such a short and vague manifesto (or better a declaration) was no less than a full-force statement that it wholeheartedly supported Papadopoulos' coalition programme showing undisputed unity under the president.

In contrast to the Democratic Party, the Social Democrats had a long and detailed manifesto, officially campaigning as a social democratic party and European social democracy's representative in Cyprus. In fact the Party of the European Socialists in the European Parliament issued an official statement supporting the Social Democrats in the elections and calling for its support in the elections. The Social Democratic Party's position on the national problem could hardly be differentiated from that of the Democratic Party: it stated explicitly that it rejected a second Anan Plan with minor modifications. This blurring of lines between the two parties was visible on the socio-economic axis as well. As a social democratic party, the Social Democrats attempted to illustrate a balance between socialism and liberalism in its proposals and this often resulted in the vagueness also visible in the Democratic Party's slogans and declarations. For example, it proposed that additional steps be taken so that Cyprus' EMU position would become feasible, without endangering the government's social policy or implementing strict disciplinary measures with regard to fiscal policy. At the same time, however, it argued for a strict budgetary and inflation policy in an attempt to fully satisfy the Maastricht Criteria within three years.

The newly formed European Party's pledges were strictly and distinctly neo-liberal, calling most of all for the creation of proper infrastructures and the necessary environment that would attract

investments and enterprising initiatives, strengthening at the same time the external focus of the economy. The party also claimed the necessity of modernizing the ineffective and wasteful state and improving competitiveness through withholding working costs and increasing productivity. Special emphasis was placed on the need for a drastic reform of public administration and the state apparatus in general. Brief mentions of social equality figured in this manifesto as well, with the party calling for a developmental strategy that would be based on the social dimension of the economy and the market, with growth, employment and social justice. Social security in Cyprus should be based, according to the party, on the coordinated efforts between the government-owned and voluntary private sector.

The small liberal party United Democrats decided to play on the progressive people's predilections of rapprochement and nominate the only candidacy by a Turkish-Cypriot – well known poet and activist Neshe Yasin. On socio-economic issues United Democrats tried to sell a patchwork of liberalism and social awareness, through simultaneously supporting further EU integration and the island's full harmonization with the union and emphasizing the need to support and assist the socially underprivileged. Stable growth, improved standards of living through the improvement of the welfare state in *qualitative terms* and conditions of full employment were also on their agenda. In certain issues, however, the party did not delineate specific proposals, as for instance, in the case of semi-governmental organizations for which it claimed the necessity of 'increased competitiveness' but did not call for outright privatization.

The Ecologists, while officially supporting Papadopoulos in the presidential elections of 2003, and outlining the necessity for a unified political leadership on the Cyprus problem, did not identify themselves with the coalition and criticized both government and opposition. The Cyprus problem aside, the Ecologists had few to say on other socio-economic and political issues, apart from the environment and when such an attempt was made it was short and indirect. In the absence of detailed proposals on as many issues as the other parties dealt with, the Ecologists' criticism focused mostly on issues like transport chaos, atmospheric and noise pollution, genetically modified foods and plants, dangerous dyes and the aerials of mobile telephony.

The EU issue: Longing to become European

Special relations with the EC started during the Archbishop Makarios era, when a status of EC-Cyprus relations was pursued with the ultimate goal of forming a customs union. This was followed up in the early 1990s when the Vasiliou Government, supported by the Communists in the 1991 elections, applied for EC membership despite Communist's opposition. All other parties have been traditionally in favour of EU membership, with the Communists joining them in 1995 and shifting to a softer Euroscepticism. The Communist opposition to membership fitted in well with its general approach to Cypriot politics at the time (notwithstanding its cooperation with centrist forces), since the Cypriot economy and society were virtually unaffected by the intense capitalism of the EU and Cyprus had harmonious relations with the states of the Non-Alignment Movement. The change in party line was a consequence of the collapse of the USSR and the weakening of the non-alignment movement, the resulting security concerns, public opinion and the renewal of the party Central Committee whose new members were pragmatic about a potential isolation, if the party didn't change to a position more in tandem with the times.

In Cyprus, EU membership has for long constituted a special desire on behalf of Greek- as well as Turkish Cypriots to convert Cyprus into a country with a European identity and a society with European norms, coupled with the opening up of the economy. Greek Cypriots were largely in favour of European membership. It thus comes as no surprise that all parties are pro-European and that two of the new parties (European Party and the tiny political grouping European

Democracy) used the term 'European' in their labels, subsequently campaigning in favour of Europe as a solution to everything. Nevertheless, the EU did not constitute an issue of high salience, as when Cyprus was still negotiating its EU membership, and parsimony among the parties was interrupted by the Communists' Euroscepticism.

In the election campaign all parties expressed their desire for EU involvement in the reunification negotiations – playing a complementary role to that of the UN of course – with the Communists not hesitating to be critical on British foreign policy on the issue. More important, however, would be all parties' hopes that the EU retained a strict policy attitude towards Turkey's desire to enter the union, demanding the fulfillment of all relevant criteria, including the opening up of ports to Cypriots. A firm stance on behalf of the EU, they aspire, would translate into pressure for Turkey to shift towards a more flexible position. At the international level this translated into frequent diplomatic efforts, especially targeting the countries occupying the Council presidency. on the Cyprus problem.

Democratic Rally continued its tradition of European neo-liberalism but the island's accession to the EU and its subsequent participation in the European People's Party (EPP) among fellow Christian-Democrats, was arguably decisive for determining its programmatic positions. It served as a boost for such rhetoric and Democratic Rally fully supported European integration and warned of the necessity of revising the Lisbon Agenda, so that its targets would be met shortly. The Democratic Party also favoured the neo-liberal path to Europeanization and the Social Democratic Party's rhetoric exemplified by the "increasing centrism" of existing West European social democracy. The latter's agreement to enter the EMU as soon as possible, however, did not stop it from making abstract references to a 'socialist Europe' and a 'Europe of the people'. Although the future direction of the EU was not an issue that featured extensively in the election debate, with only the Communists largely differentiating itself from the other parties, through consistent opposition to a series of issues like the Lisbon Agenda, the Growth and Stability Pact, the Bolkenstein directive (which not even the Social Democrats opposed) and the EU Constitution, Cyprus' fortune *vis a vis* the EMU managed to permeate the campaign.

The Communists persisted with their aspiration that Cyprus should enter the EMU in 2009, with one year delay, in order to retain higher levels of government spending for one more year, before strict budgetary cuts apply. This move attracted media attention on relations within the coalition since the other two parties insisted on EMU membership by 2008 showing no signs of intended compromise with the Communists. Consequently, after the elections the EMU issue gradually subsided, in an attempt by the Communists to maintain coalition stability in the face of the approaching municipal elections. United Democrats also supported the integration of Cyprus in the EMU without any postponement, arguing that with the suitable policies the integration in the Eurozone would lead to reduction of interest-rates and would contribute to the stability of economy. However, it also expressed support for the revision of the Stability and Growth Pact, which aimed at the flexibility of the encompassing criteria, so that the domestic economic conditions of each member-state were taken under consideration. This small party's minor hesitations on the EU, however, were clearly overshadowed by the more extensive analysis and active opposition of the Communists and its youth organization (EDON).

The results and after

The elections to fill the fifty-six seats did not result in major changes; both continuity and alternation featured in the post-election results. Opinion polls started early and projected potential losses by the two main parties, however bigger that they finally incurred. According to most polls, around two seats were constantly changing party until the last day, intensifying the efforts,

mostly of Democratic Rally and the Communists. Notwithstanding eventual changes in electoral percentages, the volatility *vis a vis* the 2002 election appears relatively stable with not much change to the already low average volatility of 6.20 between 1970 and 2000. In this fashion Cypriot voting behavior remains distinctly different from most other EU member-states, with only Malta maintaining a similar pattern.

Table 3. Electoral Results

Party	2006	Seats	2001	Seats	Change (%)	Change (Seats)
Anorthotiko Komma Ergazomenou Laou (AKEL) Progressive Party of Working People	**31,1%**	**18**	**34,7%**	**20**	**-3.6**	**-2**
Dimokratikos Synagermos (DISY) Democratic Rally	**30,3%**	**18**	**34,0%**	**19**	**-3.7**	**-2**
Dimokratiko Komma (DIKO) Democratic Party	**17,9%**	**11**	**14,8%**	**9**	**+3.1**	**+2**
Kinima Sosialdimokraton EDEK (KISOS) Movement of Social Democrats	**8,9%**	**5**	**6,5%**	**4**	**+2.4**	**+1**
Evropaiko Komma (EK) European Party	**5,8%**	**3**	**5,2%**	**2**	**+0.6**	**+1**
Kinima Oikologon Perivallontiston (KOP) Ecological and Environmental Movement	**2,0%**	**1**	**2,0%**	**1**	**-**	**-**
Enomenoi Dimokrates (EDI) United Democrats	**1,6%**	**-**	**2,6%**	**1**	**-1.0**	**-1**
Others	**2,4%**		**0,2%**		**2.2**	
Turnout **91,8%**			**89,0%**			

Source: Ministry of internal affairs at http://www.vouleftikes2006.gov.cy/index.aspx?ci=en-GB

In comparison to the last two elections, the two big winners were the Democratic Party and the Social Democrats, however, it would border exaggeration to argue that the centre eventually gained ground in this election. Democratic Rally's results were a consequence of both the failure of Nicos Anastasiades to present himself as a respectable figure in domestic politics and the party crisis caused by the referendum, when the European Party was formed by Democratic Rally dissidents. The Communist party's loss can be attributed to three main reasons: 1) The complicated nature of the Cyprus problem: For example, it was inevitable that a large number of working people, who voted for the Communists, would be interested in personal gains in terms of occupied personal property to be returned according to the Anan Plan and were disappointed that their interests were not eventually supported by the Communists in the name of a viable solution;

2) Coalition government participation: For many left-wing voters, the Communists as the major component of the existing coalition government was tainted by association with president Papadopoulos. 3)'Floating voters': As Christofias himself explained, during the 1998 presidential elections the Social Democrats had indirectly supported Chlorides (then party leader Vases Glossaries urged the Social Democrats members to vote 'according to their will') and many discontented members had supported the Communists, therefore helping the party to reach an exceptional level of 34% in 2001. These so called centre-left 'floating voters' now returned to their party, explaining a consequent rise in the vote of the Social Democratic and Democratic Party.

The major loser of the elections was the United Democrats, which lost its only parliamentary seat and appeared incapable of persuading voters of its value with the confusing mixture of ideologies its policy positions encompassed. The Ecologists' failure to win one more seat, despite polls showing otherwise, reconfirmed the tradition of the difficulties for parties which do not have their roots in deeply entrenched cleavages of Cypriot society.

The regional distribution of voting showed little change since the last elections and reconfirmed the established regional pattern, in terms of the left-right divide across the island. Despite an aggregate loss across the island, the Communists emerged as the most powerful party in four out of six districts, polling highest in the city of Larnaka, with Democratic Rally maintaining the highest support in the capital and Famagusta. The Democratic Party made the biggest progress in Kyrenia (with an increase of 5.6%) an area which would not be returned to Greek-Cypriots according to the Anan Plan, hinting at gains from its negative stance in the referendum campaign. The emergence of the European Party had the biggest impact in Kyrenia with 8.7%, and also explains Democratic Rally's loss in this particular district (-5.2%) which was the highest one across the island

Table 4. Electoral Results by Region (of five main parties)

	Nicosia (%)		**Kyrenia (%)**		**Famagusta (%)**		**Larnaka (%)**		**Limassol (%)**		**Paphos (%)**	
	2006	**2002**	**2006**	**2002**	**2006**	**2002**	**2006**	**2002**	**2006**	**2002**	**2006**	**2002**
AKEL	29.3	33.4	32.9	37.2	34.9	37.8	37.3	38.7	29.8	34.9	24.4	25.5
DISY	30.3	34.5	21.3	26.51	35.9	39.1	34	35.9	28	32.1	23.5	26.3
DIKO	18.9	13.7	24.9	19.23	12.2	11.5	11.1	13.2	21.2	16.9	23.5	22.5
EDEK	8.9	7	6.6	5.7	5.9	3.2	9.8	6.4	8.9	5.7	17.3	15.7
EK	5.7	-	8.7	-	5.5	-	3.9	-	6.5	-	4.6	-

Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs http://www.ekloges.gov.cy/index.aspx?ci=el-GR&indexerid=0&districtid=1

Turnout for the 2006 parliamentary elections was once again very high (compared with most West European countries), at 91.8%.Voting is mandatory (though not strictly enforced) but paradoxically enough for these troubled times, this was the lowest figure since 1976. With regard to younger voters, surveys pointed to a 'medium' interest on behalf of most Cypriot students (48.44%) and many paying no attention at all (25%), as their interests were not thought to be represented well enough through the voting in parliamentary elections. A high proportion (55.08%) of those interviewed did not belong to a partisan youth organization, which is surprisingly increasing, considering comparatively high youth partisanship rates. This revealed the continuing, if not increasing, isolation of students from politics since the 1990s. The list of factors determining the student vote in the elections was topped, once again, by party positions on the 'Cyprus problem', with a percentage around 70% seeing Democratic Rally as the most reputable party.

Three significant events followed the parliamentary elections of 2006 and all three confirm the element of continuity rather than that of change, at least in the short term. Firstly, the Democratic Rally leadership persisted confidently in its aggressive approach towards the governing coalition and chose to abstain from the meetings of the National Council (comprised of the President and all party leaders). Secondly, there begun strong speculation by the media about a possible reshuffle in the ruling coalition. The President, who initially had no such intent, eventually moved to a reshuffle. Despite this, the distribution of ministries among the coalition partners was not altered. The popularity of the president and, to a lesser extent, of the ruling coalition remained relatively high if not positively affected by this move. Although all ministerial posts were still occupied by partisans, it is also important to note the president's insistence to entrust important positions, such as director of the National Radio-Television Authority (RIK) to his circle of friends, most of the time, centre-right, non-partisan figures. Thirdly, soon after the parliamentary elections all parties engaged into negotiations and discussions concerning the municipal elections in December, with only just recently finalizing their official nominations. The media focus was on the initial disagreements among the three governing allies but eventually joint nominations were approved in all but two municipalities and the coalition appears united.

Conclusions

The party system in the Republic of Cyprus has remained stable since 1996 – when the main changes took place – and this normalization was reconfirmed in the elections of 2006. The system stands as one of the few stabilized ones among the recent accession countries but with an increase in the number of effective parties (the European Party joined the competition with 5.8% of the vote) change is possible as the next presidential elections approach. With nationalist tendencies wearing off since the 1990s and all parties agreeing for the necessity of new negotiation talks and paying considerable attention to rapprochement with the Turkish Cypriots, the left-right dimension constituted the most salient social and electoral cleavage both by voting patterns and the policy proposals of the main left-wing and right-wing parties, although not as accentuated as before the Communists had shifted to accepting EU membership as a necessary evil in 1995. Truly, a societal cleavage on a YES/NO divide (in terms of the referendum affair) has indeed emerged among the electorate but it did not overtake the current left-right one. At the party system level three kinds of responses were adopted by the existing parties during the election campaign: the negative (Democratic Party, Social Democrats and European Party), the positive (Democratic Rally) and the 'yes but' position (Communists). Yet, with two NO parties in a coalition with the Communists, a diplomatically active government and the Communists and Democratic Rally vilifying each other continuously, no clear-cut division between YES parties on the one hand and NO parties on the other, emerged.

The smaller parties' failure to stabilize and increase their electoral base and particularly the demise of the United Democrat into a moribund grouping, confirms the scarcity of new electoral groups and as a result the high costs of entry that new groupings face in the Cypriot party system. The Ecologists' failure to convince with their emphasis on the environment is reminiscent of Western Europe in the 1960s and these elections, as well as previous ones, have sent signals to the leadership about the necessity to expand its agenda. At the same time, the election seemed to make the centre now appear stronger than ever with both the Democratic Party and the Social Democrats polling their highest levels since their very establishment. This can be attributed in no small way to their leaders (in the case of the Democratic Party, mostly Tassos Papadopoulos). Papadopoulos' departure, although seen as a step back in terms of party popularity, was soon resolved through the elections for party leader, won by Marios Karoyian (formerly an official associate of the president). Nevertheless, the high percentages that secured him a clear victory as party leader suggest the absence of potential divisions. The minor decrease in the vote of the Communists and the Democratic Rally did not amount to much of a change in terms of electoral volatility or party system change. The crucial point seems to be their secure positions as the two strongest parties, respectively, and their substantial lead from the other parties. Given that the election was a close run affair between the Communists and the Democratic Rally, just like its predecessors, competition between the two parties remains intense both on domestic and international issues, with the Democratic Rally continuing a policy of explicit antagonism, even on the Cyprus Problem.

Publication Date: November 2006

This is the latest in a series of election and referendum briefings produced by the European Parties Elections and Referendums Network (EPERN). Based in the Sussex European Institute, EPERN is an international network of scholars that was originally established as the Opposing Europe Research Network (OERN) in June 2000 to chart the divisions over Europe that exist within party systems. In August 2003 it was re-launched as EPERN to reflect a widening of its objectives to consider the broader impact of the European issue on the domestic politics of EU member and candidate states. The Network retains an independent stance on the issues under consideration. For more information and copies of all our publications visit our website at http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/1-4-2.html

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[i] There are also eight observer seats reserved for the Armenian, Maronite, and Latin – meaning Roman Catholic –religious minorities.

[ii] For the first time, this year 270 Turkish Cypriots living in the southern, Greek-Cypriot dominated part of the island have registered to vote for the fifty-six House seats, following a recent passing of a law allowing them to vote after the European Court of Human Rights ruling on the matter. Previously, Turkish Cypriots were only allowed to vote for the seats reserved for them and since the Turkish Cypriot seats have been vacant for years, they have not been voting. Those living in the north are still not allowed to vote, but a case challenging this is pending.

[iii] Any solution other than a return to the *status quo ante* was deemed unacceptable by many Greek Cypriots, and opinion polls conducted over the entire period of the negotiations from start to finish had always shown around 80% opposition to the proposals.

[iv] AKEL is the only Cypriot party with Turkish-Cypriot members of both the party and its youth organization, EDON. EDH was the first party, however to nominate a Turkish Cypriot for MP.

[v] ATA featured as a main issue in many pre-election periods. The Clerides government, supported by the employers' unions and Cypriot Industrial and Commercial Chamber withdrew from ATA 3 important goods. The communist affiliated Pan Cyprian Federation of Workers (PEO) had disagreed in opposition to the right-wing Cyprus Confederation of Workers (SEK), which accepted it as a minimum measure to avoid future reductions.