



**European Parties Elections  
and Referendums Network**

## **EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTION BRIEFING NO 34 THE JUNE 2009 EUROPEAN ELECTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS**

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### **Key points:**

- The two main parties, communist AKEL and right-wing Democratic Rally gathered more than 70% of the vote, increasing their share by approximately 8% each.
- The two smaller government allies had mixed results. The Democratic Party was the main loser of the elections with a decrease of 5.64%, while the Social Democrats gained the seat they were longing for, even if in total they only achieved a minor increase of 0.94%.
- Overall, considering the particularities of the Cypriot party system, the elections had almost no anti-incumbency and/or anti-establishment bias.
- The European elections took place approximately a year after former communist party leader Dimitris Christofias was elected to the presidential office. Hence, AKEL's strong result can be seen as indicating a wide margin of action for the government, including its policy on the ongoing Cyprus problem negotiations with Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmed Ali Talat.
- Smaller and newer parties, especially the ones opposing the government's policy on the Cyprus problem and embodying elements of nationalism and 'inflexibility' in the ongoing negotiations, polled relatively low.
- Turnout was at 59.5%, much below that achieved in the 2006 parliamentary elections (89%) and in the previous European elections (72.5%). So far it constitutes the lowest in the history of the Republic, yet it was much higher than the EU average.
- The post-elections context finds the coalition divided but all sides seem to value its continuation.

On the 6th of June Cypriots were called to the polls to elect their six representatives at the European Parliament. According to the legal basis of the regulation for European Elections in the Republic of Cyprus, the system of proportional representation which

applies for Parliamentary Elections, also applies for European ones. The electoral threshold was set at approximately 16% of the vote, but at the same time, parties polling lower could still obtain a seat, on the basis of the residuals. A total of eight political formations and five independents stood for election. Altogether there were 47 candidates, without a Turkish Cypriot among them. Registered voters were 526,060 among whom 518,297 were Greek Cypriots, 1,305 were Turkish Cypriots and 6,458 were community citizens. The exercise of the citizens' voting right was obligatory but it was announced early on that no sanctions would be imposed.

These elections took place approximately a year after communist party (AKEL) leader Dimitris Christofias was elected to the presidency, with the centre parties (Democratic Party-DIKO and the Social Democrats-EDEK) supporting his candidacy in the election's second round and forming with AKEL a coalition government. Beyond the policy context, a more abstract question in the run-up to these elections was whether a communist-led government would perform as well as the communist party itself did before gaining office. It is perhaps needless to say that AKEL has aligned itself fully with the policies and tactics of its former leader's government, which appointed a number of officials from the mechanisms and auxiliary organisations of the party itself.

The year that passed, however, added a number of policy-specific burdens on the government. Most importantly, direct negotiations on the Cyprus problem commenced between Christofias and the Turkish/Cypriot leader Mehmed Ali Talat with a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation, forming the government's official basis for any potential solution to be agreed upon. By the time of the elections around thirty five meetings had taken place between the two leaders and speculation on a possible referendum in 2010 had already begun. Public opinion initially responded very optimistically to Christofias's initiative but soon the public's belief that a solution will be found deteriorated, according to polls<sup>1</sup>.

A second issue of loud debate was whether Cyprus should join the Partnership for Peace (PfP). The government was resisting calls to join, mostly on the grounds that it would discredit the government's effort for a unified and demilitarised island and also because of ideological reasons. Yet, all other parties, including the Democratic Party and the Social Democrats were enthusiastically in favour. Thirdly, the onset of the economic crisis led to a series of confrontations between AKEL and the government on the one hand and the Democratic Rally on the other hand, which despite being a clear proponent of EU-wide neo-liberalism, played the card of social sensitivity. Government measures targeted the tourist and construction industries and involved an additional package to the 2009 budget. These were fully welcomed only by AKEL, while the other parties – especially the Democratic Rally – insisted that measures were lacking in impact and used the government's actions in order to elaborate on their own viewpoint with regard to the larger and more ideological issues; those of managing capitalism and caring for the underprivileged classes.

Lastly, during the campaigning period and within the larger context of the government's educational reform programme, a proposal by the Ministry of

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<sup>1</sup> See GPO (2008), 'Survey in Cyprus' carried out on behalf of 'Haravgi' newspaper (unpublished presentation of survey results), November, slide 11; GNORA (2009), 'Survey in Cyprus', carried out by RAI Consultants, (unpublished presentation of survey results), March, slide 28; May, slide 88.

Education and Culture and the University of Cyprus to admit students in the country's public universities through international exams was fiercely opposed by the Social Democrats, the European Party and among others, the Organisation of Greek Functionaries in Secondary Education (which threatened to abstain from the public University admission exams of Modern Greek).

A constant preoccupation with the above and other domestic issues - which were largely unrelated to EU developments and important to the future of the coalition - diverted attention from EU-related issues. In addition, since most domestically salient issues of the pre-election period, revolved in one way or another around government policy, one might have expected that an anti-incumbency vote would express the country's situation in more or less all important policy areas. However, the successive polls cited above, did not reveal any particular dissatisfaction with the government in overall terms. The percentages of those fully or mostly satisfied with government policy ranged between 55% and 75% in most polls. The lower parts of this range were recorded closer to the elections.

Based on the above analysis, table 1 below illustrates the characteristics of these European elections' main contestants in the year 2008-2009. Considering that after the previous year's presidential elections, government was formed - as is common practice - on the basis of power sharing rather than on the basis of ideology, it was not a surprise to witness an inter-electoral period where polemics came and went in all directions. The Democratic Party and the Social Democrats (especially the former) challenged their ally government's policy on almost every issue outlined above, with the Cyprus problem being the main one. The nature of the coalition - primarily that it was somewhat informal and in this sense Christofias' right moves could only cost the centre parties more votes and secondarily that ministries were not given to leading party members from either the Democratic Party or the Social Democrats - meant that many centre party officials seemed not to value a consensual climate without constant and public reassurances that their opinions were taken under consideration. The Democratic Rally had been maintaining a supporting stance towards the government's policy on the Cyprus problem, while also forcefully criticising Christofias on the second main axis of political contestation; that of internal governance.

As the table shows AKEL is the only Eurosceptic party, yet with almost no critical references to the underlying ideas of European integration as a process in its public rhetoric<sup>2</sup>. That a party system where Euro-enthusiastic political elites get around 70% of the electorate's vote reflects an also pro-European public opinion, is shown by the consistently positive attitudes of Cypriots in polls, as far as diffuse support for European integration is concerned. Within such a context AKEL's policy on European integration is a difficult matter and by extension so are the moves of the government. AKEL had stood against EC/EU membership before 1995 and its mainstream status has been challenged consistently by the Democratic Rally on this basis. The party made this decision because in the absence of a socialist camp in world affairs the EU was the only option, as long as a solution to the Cyprus problem remained the primary concern. In the European elections of 2004, partly as a result of the Annan Plan referendum, AKEL polled 27%; its lowest result for more than a

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<sup>2</sup> See, Charalambous, G. (2007), 'The Strongest Communists in Europe: Accounting for AKEL's Electoral Success', *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, Vol. 23, No. 3, pp. 425-456. The party itself does not accept the term Eurosceptic.

decade. A more recent difficulty was what has been addressed as a ‘push-pull effect’ between a party and its leader, when the latter participates in EU forums<sup>3</sup>.

**Table 1: Characteristics of Parties in the Republic of Cyprus (During the Year 2008-2009)**

Party Name	Candidate supported in first round of 2008 Presidential Elections	Author’s Classification of Party System Position*	Official Status in Relation to Government	Position on European Integration
Progressive Party of the Working People (AKEL)	Christofias (won)	Radical Left	Main gov. party	Euro sceptic
Democratic Rally (DISY)	Kasoulides (lost in second round)	Right/Centre-right	Main opp. party	Pro-EU
Democratic Party (DIKO)	Papadopoulos (lost in first round)	Centre/Centre-right	Gov. Ally (also critical of gov.)	Pro-EU
Social Democratic Movement (EDEK)	Papadopoulos (lost in first round)	Centre-left	Gov. Ally (also critical of gov.)	Pro-EU
European Party (EVROKO)	Papadopoulos (lost in first round)	Nationalist right	Opp. Party	Pro-EU
Ecologists/Environmentalists	Papadopoulos (lost in first round)	Centre-left/protest	Opp. Party	Pro-EU

\*This classification is based on previous work by the author, as well as other literature. For a more analytical work see Ch. Christophorou, C. (2006) ‘Party Change and Development in Cyprus (1995-2005)’, *South European Society and Politics*, Vol. 11, Iss. 3, pp. 513-542.

This issue came to the surface during the spring of 2008, when the Treaty of Lisbon was to be voted upon in the Cypriot House of Representatives. The media were quick to point out the difference in perspective between Christofias who said he was obliged to honour his predecessor's signature in favour of the Treaty and who was allegedly against a rejection and AKEL where ideological consistency and the general mood of its members and officials forced a 'No' decision without any hesitation. A last point of controversy was Christofias’ infamous *mea culpa* in February, with regard to AKEL’s 2007 proposal to postpone the membership of Cyprus in the Eurozone by one year.

Nevertheless, the first post-presidential election polls, as well as those that followed presented an increasingly bi-polar party system, with AKEL and the Democratic Rally increasing their popularity and the Democratic Party, the Social Democrats and the nationalist right-wing, European Party (EVROKO) remaining stable, losing votes or having a substantial number of undecided voters<sup>4</sup>. It is worth adding that Cypriots were less happy at the time of the EP elections about the EU than pre-accession polls had depicted them to be. In the last year before accession, more than half of Eurobarometer respondents in the country thought membership would be a good thing, while after accession specific support for European integration declined dramatically recording one of the lowest rankings in the EU.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Ladrech, R. (2001), ‘Europeanisation and Political Parties: Towards a Framework for Analysis’ *Party Politics*, 8 (4), pp.389-403.

<sup>4</sup> First two polls cited previously (slides 31 and 64 respectively).

<sup>5</sup> See, Sepos, A. (2008), *The Europeanisation of Cyprus: Polity, Policies and Politics* (London: Palgrave), p.73-75

## The Campaign

The campaign essentially started in January although ballots were presented in April by most parties. AKEL entered the campaign with a new General Secretary, Andros Kyprianou, who succeeded President Christofias. While in the presidential elections, the European policy of AKEL's (and Christofias') campaign focused on the candidate government's proposed utilisation of EU membership to fix the domestic problems, in this electoral race it underlined the party's determination to contribute to the overall change in the EU's existing policies and challenge the EU's leading circles. The party's programmatic statements were more radical and more specific than those of last year's campaign. For instance, among other things, specific references were made to the unacceptability of past Treaties, to the distinction between the ideologies of left and right and to the 'sell-out of national wealth', whilst the EP's United European Left was again praised and systematically used in campaigning.

AKEL's slogans and rhetoric revolved around four main axes: 1) primarily, the distinction between 'asserting' and 'applauding', relating to the party's status as the only Cypriot one being critical of the EU's current standing; 2) the potential of the EU in assisting towards the solution of the Cyprus problem; 3) the distinction between 'monopolies' and SMEs and the lower and middle classes more broadly; 4) extensive focus on the need for worker-friendly labour markets and workers' rights. In this vein, AKEL's strategy was anchored in both positive and negative campaigning, the latter being focused mostly on the Democratic Rally.

The party was also an organisational step ahead. It utilised its full capacity in order to mobilise supporters. Indicative of this, it prepared a 50-page long internal document, which it distributed to its members for the purpose of providing them with information on all aspects (institutions, policies, related party activity) of the EU that they would in turn use in the mobilisation period. Also, the party's (organic) auxiliary organisations - the youth organisation (EDON), the women's organisation (POGO), the trade union (PEO) and party newspaper (Haravgi) - entered the electoral campaign as soon as the party itself.

The Democratic Rally's campaign was anchored in a dual logic: that of underlining its 'European' profile, already popular among the electorate and that of producing polemics mostly against AKEL. Since the two parties have a similar stance on the most salient issue of political competition, the Cyprus problem, the Democratic Rally played down this issue during the campaign. Also, since polls showed that the government was losing ground on the economy among soft voters of the left, the Democratic Rally responded accordingly. Out of all political actors on the island, the Democratic Rally was the only one which tried to frame the elections in the terms of pro- or against European integration. The press commented that such a strategy was based on the Democratic Rally's own evaluation that the result would be partly determined by AKEL's own achievement. Perhaps, as part of its overall strategy, the Democratic Rally was also the only party whose ballot was composed of leading or high-profile members.

The Democratic Party had entered the election race divided, partly due to its former President and presidential candidate's defeat in the presidential elections. On the one hand party leader, Marios Karoyian, seemed to favour continuing in the AKEL-led

coalition and on the other hand the so called 'hardliners', including the former President's son, Nicolas Papadopoulos, were pushing for withdrawal from the government and a clear distinction of the Democratic Party's line on the Cyprus Problem. Yet the divisions within the Democratic Party were not simply a matter of election tactics, if they were such at all. The leadership of the party seems to be divided over the pursuit of internal hegemony and each side was said to be closely tied to each of the party's previous two leaders, Tassos Papadopoulos and Spyros Kyprianou.

In an internal document that was leaked to the press, the Democratic Party presented itself to its members as the most European political force on the island and ideologically in favour of strong social protection, a social market and mixed economy. Thus, while the party's elected MEP in 2004 joined the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe group in the EP, the party now declared that its elected officials would join the socialists. Furthermore, the Democratic Party made clear in the document that in the face of ongoing negotiations on the Cyprus problem, voters must show through their vote where they placed 'red lines' insofar any agreement on the Cyprus problem was to be achieved and that all limits had already been reached. At the party's pre-election Congress in May, it seemed that Karoyian chose an anti-government stance for the race's final phase. A speech which appeared very critical of AKEL and the government and which endangered further the continuance of the coalition, seemed to be the party's only choice, since polls were showing a contraction of its vote share to the Social Democrats, the European Party and the Democratic Rally<sup>6</sup>.

The Social Democrats could not afford to remain absent from the EP once more. A seat would overshadow last year's quarrels over the renewal of the current leadership, heal the loss of the party's preferred candidacy in the Presidential elections and ensure a more effective (and believable) connection with the European Socialist Party (PES). When the PES declared official support for the Social Democrats and not DIKO, the former's pride was regained, since in the Presidential elections the PES had actually supported Christofias.

The manifesto of the Social Democrats was essentially that of the PES, with a few extra booklets on domestically important issues. The Social Democrats were clearly attempting to honour their self-label of a party distinctly left-of-centre, since most of its campaign was focused on the necessity for Cyprus as a country to win a socialist seat in the EP. That they focused their criticism on AKEL and the Democratic Rally, while not so much on the Democratic Party or the European Party, may have reflected their prime targets among the electoral body, which of course do not exclude left-leaning voters of the Democratic Party as well.

The European Party suffered losses in the Presidential elections of 2008, since many of its voters did not support the candidate chosen by the leadership but instead opted for the Democratic Rally's presidential candidate, MEP Yiannakis Kasoulides. In the aftermath of those elections the party's leadership began vilifying the party system's bipolarity and appealed to both centre parties for a common ballot in the then approaching European elections. It was only after both centre parties preferred an

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<sup>6</sup> Zorba, K. (2009), 'Oi Thematofilakes tis Evropis' (The Gatekeepers of Europe), *Politis*, 24 May, p.18.

autonomous ballot that the European Party's strategy became one 'of turning the elections into a second referendum'. This phrase, that was heard frequently by anti-nationalist movements and the media, meant that the European Party's goal was to create the dilemma of a choice between a 'patriotic' and a compromised approach through references to the 2004 Annan Plan referendum. Indeed, it may seem odd that the European Party chose to do so after its candidate in the Presidential elections of 2008 – President Papadopoulos – had suffered a defeat in the first round largely because of his fervent focus on the Annan Plan and especially since the party had lost many votes to a line of flexibility as far as the Cyprus problem is concerned.

The small Ecologists/Environmentalists party is perhaps the most unconventional among European greens. For one thing, its electoral performance does not reflect the general success of its European counterparts. Secondly, its rhetoric and programmatic positions combine advanced and detailed proposals on the environment with a position of inflexibility on the Cyprus problem. Nevertheless, the party does embody radical characteristics, at least insofar post-materialist values are a firm part of its identity and its leaders have had more experience on the streets and in committees than in government.

At the beginning of the campaigning period, the party held talks with the Social Democrats and AKEL, in order to negotiate a common ballot. However, it decided that since neither of the other two parties was willing to exchange something substantial for the votes of green supporters, an autonomous ballot would be the best choice, although it carried the risk of defeat. During the campaign, their primary concerns were the Cyprus problem and the environment. Of course, the party did position itself on all issues that came up. While not always standing against another particular party, its negative campaigning was more focused on AKEL and the government.

### Issues

When the post-election approaches to these matters are juxtaposed to the campaigning period, it appears that the inter-party and government focused polemics that revolved around them were pre-electoral strategies, whereby national politics were debated via European means. European issues themselves had very little prominence in the campaign, to the extent that various party officials, as well as the representative of the Cyprus European Parliament Office commented on this during the election and in its immediate aftermath. The EU constituted an issue of discussion mainly in relation to its role in the Cyprus problem and secondarily to the status and achievements of each party's respective political group in the EP.

Campaign debates, candidates' newspaper articles and party announcements did not touch on European issues with much more depth and sophistication than in the presidential elections. Slogans in party booklets were general, domestically oriented and never included references to the future of the EU as a supranational actor or to the most prominent problems of the community itself. Of course an absolute generalisation would be flawed. Individual candidates, who had served as MEPs before (from AKEL and the Democratic Rally) and at times some parties did touch on EU-wide issues, including the democratic deficit, the Treaty of Lisbon, the EU's proposed measures to tackle the economic crisis and foreign and security policy

matters. Mostly, however, European issues had a domestic dimension. In the case of foreign and security policy, it was the Partnership for Peace question; in the case of the Treaty of Lisbon it was each party's stance on the issue as this was reflected in their vote in the Cypriot House of Representatives one year before; in the case of the EU's response to the economic crisis, it was the government's package and Cyprus' comparatively better fortune in terms of the year's predicted growth rate and the budget.

All parties positioned themselves clearly on the positive side of the pro-integration-anti-integration axis but did not do much to spell out policy details. In so far as issues are concerned, there is a good case to be made that the second order elections model applied to Cyprus. Perhaps an additional sign of the parties themselves ascribing less importance to European elections is that in all cases, apart from the Democratic Rally, only one leading or high profile member was selected as candidate. Nor were most of last European elections' candidates re-nominated, independent of party.

## **Results**

Table 2 presents the results of the European elections in the Republic of Cyprus. Turnout was the lowest in the history of the Republic. It was 30% lower in comparison with the parliamentary elections of 2006 and 13.1% lower in comparison to the first European elections on the island. Not only does it coincide with what the second order elections model would predict but it also comes as a surprise for an island that expects the EU to play a positive role in reunifying it. At the same time, turnout is higher than the EU average and spectacularly higher than the average of the new member states; of which Cyprus is one.

The Democratic Rally was the big winner and AKEL came second. Both increased their vote share compared with both the European elections of 2004 and the Parliamentary elections of 2006. They won a total of 70% (and kept their two seats each), which is their highest combined votes far. By way of this part of the result alone, the party system's bipolarity is reconfirmed.

The minor green party, Ecologists/Environmentalists polled better than in the last European election, but witnessed a decrease in comparison to the last parliamentary elections, again without obtaining a seat. AKEL's coalition partners, the Democratic Party and the Social Democrats polled 12.28 and 9.85 respectively. The Democratic Party kept its one seat – which was essentially vacant since its last MEP became an independent – but suffered a blow of 5.64%, compared with the 2006 parliamentary elections. Within the context of deep internal divisions a second upset was thus added to what was beginning to look like a losing streak. The party's leader, Marios Karoyian, was inevitably been in a constant balancing act, which is continuing at the time of writing. The Social Democrats, although essentially delivering their usual share of the vote, did manage to win the seat they were longing for.

In all, beyond an embarrassing turnout by Cypriot standards, the rest of the voting patterns, are not directly in line with 'second order' predictions. Minor and protest parties polled very poorly, while the two biggest parties increased their percentages,



in comparison to both the last Parliamentary and European elections. Since the threshold was at approximately 16%, it is likely that many voters either abstained or chose the bigger parties, thinking that voting for the smaller political forces would have no real effect. Furthermore, these results are not in line with EU-wide patterns either. Firstly, a 59.40% turnout in Cyprus was considerably higher than the EU average of 43% and the even lower average of the new member states. Secondly, the left and centre-left governments increased its vote and/or seats, while the nationalist right was in danger of losing credibility. Small political formations and especially the green party did not make any significant advance.

**Table 2: Results of the EP Elections of 2004 and 2009 and the Parliamentary Elections of 2006 (number of seats in brackets)\***

Party	European Elections 2009 Results	Parliamentary Elections 2006 Results	European Election 2004 Results
AKEL	35.90% (2)	31.13% (18)	27.89% (2)
Democratic Rally	35.65% (2)	30.34% (18)	28.23% (2)
Democratic Party	12.28% (1)	17.92% (11)	17.09% (1)
Social Democratic Movement	9.85% (1)	8.91% (5)	10.79% (0)
European Party**	4.12% (0)	5.75% (3)	12.45% (1)
Ecologists/Environment alists	1.50% (0)	1.95% (0)	0.86% (0)
Others/ independents	1.69% (0)	12.09% (0)	5.20% (0)
Total	(6)	(56)	(6)
Turnout	59.40%	89.0%	72.50%

\*Thirty-three polling stations were set abroad. Results include those polls as well.

\*\* In the 2004 European elections the result of the European Party is actually that of the formation 'For Europe', which later joined with the party New Horizons to form the European Party.

Source: Compiled from [www.moi.gov.cy](http://www.moi.gov.cy) (National Elections Service)

In relation to anti-incumbency bias, it is worth bearing in mind two particularities of the Cypriot case. Firstly, that AKEL, the main government party, can be thought to be the only comparatively Eurosceptic political actor in Cyprus from a radical left perspective. Therefore, an increase in AKEL's vote may also be interpreted as an increase in radical sentiments among the electorate. Secondly, the Democratic Rally, which had been in power between 1993 and 2003, was actually the most important expresser of the anti-incumbency vote because of its status as the main opposition party. However, its character and history, as well as Cypriot political culture more broadly, gives the picture of a party, in Democratic Rally, which has been molded into shape within political institutions and not outside of them. In addition, the fact that it took voters mostly from the right-wing of the political spectrum does not allow one to disentangle with precision an anti-incumbency sentiment from the left-right cleavage. Also, the Democratic Rally was the strongest supporter of the government's policy on the Cyprus problem. It is therefore somewhat unlikely that these elections reflected an anti-incumbency bias. Beyond these, the most commonly accepted indicator for the existence or absence of a strong anti-incumbency vote would be the collective vote share of the three government parties – AKEL, the Democratic Party and the Social Democrats. This was 58.03%, less than 2% below the vote share of the (same) three parties in the 2007 parliamentary elections (59.91 %).

A topical distinction would also be that between those parties supporting the government's policy on the Cyprus problem (AKEL and the Democratic Rally) and the ones opposing it and generally embodying elements of nationalism and inflexibility (Democratic Party and European Party). That the former prevailed over the latter and the fact that the latter suffered many of their losses at the benefit of the 'flexible' Democratic Rally – at least temporarily – does justice to President Christofias' policy on the Cyprus problem.

Cross party movement, as illustrated in table 3 reveals no surprises. The diachronic bipolarity based on the left-right cleavage and evident in parliamentary and presidential elections, whereby right wing voters and left wing voters remain on their side of the political spectrum, is reconfirmed here as well. AKEL lost a mere 2.2% to the Democratic Rally and vice versa the percentage was 1.5. Also, cross party movement of voters was larger within each of the left and right bloc, than between them. The voters of AKEL and the Social Democrats (left bloc) mostly moved between each other and so did the voters of the Democratic Rally, the Democratic Party and the European Party (centre-right and right bloc). Even where voters from moved from a centre-right party moved to the centre-left one and vice versa (e.g. between the Democratic Party and the social democrats), it can be assumed that they did not travel a large distance on the ideological continuum.

As table 3 also shows the Democratic Rally's victory appears to be a result of both a high consolidation vote and the attraction of voters from the Democratic Party and the European Party. Additionally, the minor formations of European Democracy and the Free Citizens Movement, that ran autonomously in the 2006 Parliamentary elections both supported the Democratic Rally and enhanced unity within the right. The Democratic Party apparently suffered from losses to the Social Democrats and the European Party, most probably due to its leadership's fragmented positions on the Cyprus problem. Its losses to the Democratic Rally probably reflect the opinion of a part of its supporters that a more determined opposition to the government is required.

It is highly likely that an amalgam of ‘support for the President’, ‘opposition to unacceptable policies’, ‘nationalism and inflexibility’ and a ‘socialist perspective’ produced mixed and confused signals. In any case, that the Democratic Party was internally divided can also be seen from the figures below.

**Table 3: Cross Party Movement in the 2009 European Elections (five main parties)**

Eur. 2009	Elections	Parliamentary Elections 2006				
		AKEL	Democratic Rally	Democratic Party	Social Democrats	European Party
AKEL		92.1%	1.5%	3.6%	5.3%	
Democratic Rally		2.2%	94.0%	7.9%	2.5%	20.0%
Democratic Party		0.9%	1.8%	72.0%		
Social Democratic Movement		2.5%	0.9%	9.3%	89.5%	1.5%
European Party		0.1%	1.1%	4.8%	0.7%	77.1%

Note: These figures do not incorporate those voters who voted in electoral centres set up abroad.  
 Source: Own compilation from exit poll Sigma Channel/European University Cyprus. The sample of this exit poll was 2163 people

The European Party lost most of its 2006 voters to the Democratic Rally; a near reversal of the situation in 2006 where the newer party actually managed to win over some of the Democratic Rally’s supporters, just after its inception. The ‘logic of voting for nothing’ – again considering the high threshold – has been cited by the media as a reason for the mediocre result of the European Party and more specifically for loss of support towards the Democratic Rally. Once more, the leadership of the more recent political actor finds it hard to inculcate in its voters an identity which is distinct from the centre-right; at least, on issues other than the Cyprus problem.

The reasons and demographics of abstention remain yet to be fully illuminated, but a preliminary picture can be drawn. From the most recent pre-election poll, those who declared an intention to abstain also cited personal engagement on the day (a national holiday turned the weekend into a three day rest period), not knowing any of the candidates and the belief that the European elections would have no impact on the Cyprus problem, as the most common reasons. Other reasons that were cited included the knowledge for the first time that no sanctions would be imposed and the candidates’ promotion of their own self interest<sup>7</sup>. The lack of information is also a

<sup>7</sup> GNORA (2009), ‘Survey in Cyprus’, carried out by RAI Consultants (unpublished presentation of survey results), May, slide 80.

factor, although domestic polls largely ignored it. The fact that Cyprus is in the last ten member states concerning citizens' knowledge of the European elections year and media information on the European Parliament definitely contributes<sup>8</sup>. It is therefore, interesting to juxtapose the relative lack of information with the 'mobilisation frenzy' of the last few days before the elections, where particularly the two bigger parties approached people on a personal basis (via visits, emails and phone messages).

## Conclusions and Future Prospects

Compared to the European elections of 2004, it is ambiguous as to whether European elections in the Republic of Cyprus have moved closer to or further from the second order elections model. In 2004, the major parties suffered losses to smaller and newer political formations, the nationalist right gained momentum and abstention was at the time, the highest in the history of the Republic. However, those elections took place only one month after the Annan Plan referendum, amidst a new cleavage and with many disappointed party supporters from AKEL and the Democratic Rally. In these European elections, abstention climbed higher, but voting patterns were reversed and major parties predominated over smaller, newer and strictly anti-incumbency ones. Domestic issues did prevail on both occasions and cast a shadow over information and argument regarding the EU. In effect, these elections can be thought of as second order on two out of three criteria addressed in the analysis (turnout and issues). The lack of anti-incumbency and protest bias, exhibited in the voting patterns of Cypriots can however, partly be explained by the ingrained bipolarity of the party system.

The blow received by the Democratic Party and the mediocre result of the European Party preliminarily vindicates the government's policy on the Cyprus problem although the high threshold must not be forgotten. The result of the elections is justifiably pleasing to the government, AKEL and the Democratic Rally. However, the pro-solution political forces cannot simply rely upon this result. If studies showing that Cypriots did not vote on the Annan Plan according to partisan identity are to be given any credibility, then it is crucial that momentum is built very carefully around a second reunification plan that is favoured by the government.

At present, meetings between the President and the leaders of the three coalition parties have just taken place and there seems to be some kind of agreement on the formation of coalition coordination teams on all issues. The coalition's future is, however uncertain. Much will depend what the President decides to give away to its allies; the scheduled appointments of the boards of semi-governmental organizations are approaching and there is also speculation as to whether a position will be given to the Democratic Party in the government's Cyprus problem negotiation team. The most crucial indicator, however, seems to be the Cyprus problem. Recently, it has been announced that an additional crossing connecting the two sides of the island will be opened, thus cultivating further a spirit of agreement and hope. Yet, a further delay of good will on the actual parameters of the proposed solution, on behalf of Turkey, may deal a blow to the government's tactics - and even its main *raison d'être* - and indeed unite and strengthen nationalist interests.

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<sup>8</sup> See the May 2009 Eurobarometer survey on [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/eurobarometre/n70/EB70PresentationEP2009\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/eurobarometre/n70/EB70PresentationEP2009_EN.pdf).

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