European Elections monitor

Cyprus: first general elections after the end of the rescue plan

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Abstract:
542,915 Cypriots are being called to ballot on 22nd May next to appoint the 56 members of the *Vouli antiprosopon* (House of Representatives), the only house of parliament. 494 people from twelve different parties (5 of which have been created recently) are officially standing in this election.

Analysis

According to the polls undertaken by PMR&C the Democratic Rally (DISY) led by the present President of the Republic Nicos Anastasiades is due to win the election with 31.5% of the vote. The Progressive Workers' Party is due to follow this (AKEL) with a forecast of 31.5% of the vote. The Democratic Party (DIKO) is due to win 14.3% of the vote and the Movement for Social Democracy (EDEK), 6% of the vote.

Around 17% of the electorate are not planning to go to vote on 22nd May next (it is obligatory to vote in Cyprus) and 14% say they have not yet decided.

The parties that have recently been created might make the formation of a government difficult after the election and this in spite of an increase last year in the vital minimum percentage to be represented in Parliament.

A DIVIDED ISLAND FOR THE LAST 42 YEARS

Many young Cypriots have never known Cyprus as a united country. Since July 1974 the island has been cut in two by the «Green Line» which is under the control of the UN's Blue Berets. The UN has been stationed in Cyprus since 1963, the year in which conflict between the Greek and Turkish speaking communities first started. On 15th July 1974 the National Guard inspired by the military junta, in office in Greece since 1967, overthrew the President of the Cypriot Republic, Archbishop Makarios III and replaced him with Nikos Sampson. On 20th July Turkish troops landed in Kyrenia (north), to protect the Turkish minority. Nikos Sampson's government, together with the Greek army, managed to maintain the Turks behind a line (that then became the Green Line) before collapsing four days later. But Turkey refused to leave the territory it was occupying even after the fall of Nikos Sampson. On 30th July 1974, Turkey, Greece and the UK established a buffer zone guarded by the UN's Blue Berets and acknowledged the existence of two autonomous administrations. On 13th February 1975 the Turkish leader Rauf Denktash proclaimed an autonomous, secular, federal State of which he was elected President in 1976. In January 1977 Rauf Denktash and Makarios III agreed on the principle of a dual, federal community but the death of the latter on 3rd August put an end to the negotiations. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus proclaimed its independence in 1983. Turkey is the only State to have recognised it internationally. There are still 35,000 Turkish soldiers stationed in the northern part of the island.

The island has around 1.2 million inhabitants, a third of whom are refugees (160,000 Cypriots led their homes when Turks invaded); 313 500 people live in the northern part of the island. On 11th November 2002 the UN put forward a third peace and reunification plan (after those of 1986 and 1992). The Annan Plan (taken from the name of the then UN Secretary General) suggested the creation of a United Republic of Cyprus in the shape of a confederation of two autonomous States (a Greek one in the south and Turkish in the north) based on the Helvetic Confederation. This plan was subject to referendum in which all of the island's inhabitants could take part on 24th April 2004. The Cypriots rejected it by 75.83% whilst 64.9% of the inhabitants

in the northern part of the island approved it. 89.18% of the electorate turned out to vote in Cyprus and 87% in the north.

THE FOCAL POINT OF ELECTORAL DEBATE

In April 2013 the Troika (IMF, European Union and the ECB) granted Cyprus that was facing a serious financial crisis, international financial assistance to a total of 10 billion €, on condition that several reforms would be implemented (cuts in civil servants' pay, tax increases, including VAT, increases in social charges etc.). The island officially ended this programme on 31st March last after having used 7.5 billion €. Nicosia recovered growth in 2015 (1.4%) after three years of recession. The country's government deficit now totals 1% of the GDP (it lay at 8.9% in 2014) and Cyprus can now access financing on the markets again.

According to economic analysts the island has taken advantage of the decline in tourism in several countries like Egypt and Tunisia, the drop in raw materials' prices, which is encouraging household consumption and also of the agreement signed with Moscow in the spring of 2015. The Russians like the low corporate tax in Cyprus (12.5%). Finally Nicosia's debt included the ECB's purchase programme – unlike the Greek debt – and now provides a high yield and is extremely safe.

The island's population has however suffered from the reform policy implemented by the government led by Nicos Anastasiades (in Cyprus the president is also the head of government). The country's GDP contracted by 10%. Unemployment rose to 17% of the working population but has now dropped to 12.6% (Eurostat). The GDP per capita/ purchasing power parity (PPP) ratio is 15% below the EU average, whilst it was 3% above this five years ago.

All of the political parties except for DISY are opposed to the policy undertaken over the last five years. The Communists of AKEL have been discredited nevertheless due to their economic management during their time in office (2008-2013).

The question of the island's reunification might also feature at the heart of the electoral campaign. Head of State Nicos Anastasiades has wanted this in part, having launched discussions with the new president of the northern part of the island, Mustafa Akinci, who was elected in 2015 thanks to a programme of rapprochement with the Republic of Cyprus.

Negotiations between the two parties have moved forward, but they are in stalemate due to the question of compensation granted to Greek Cypriots who were expulsed from their properties by Turkish speakers in 1974. Moreover the recent arrival of refugees has somewhat upset the process that had been initially initiated. Whilst Ankara is asking for the revival of its access to the European Union in exchange for a more flexible approach to the refugees coming from Syria, Brussels would like Nicosia to stop blocking the opening of Turkey's membership chapters. This however is the only arm that the Republic of Cyprus has in terms of influencing its negotiations with the northern part of the island.

Head of State Nicos Anastasiades said at the beginning of the year that the island would be reunified before the end of his mandate (February 2018).

THE CYPRIOT POLITICAL SYSTEM

The 1960 Constitution has not been implemented on the island since the intercommunity fighting of 1963.

The President of the Republic of Cyprus, who is elected by universal suffrage for a five year mandate, is also head of government. According to the Constitution the presidential office can only be occupied by a Greek Cypriot, whilst that of Vice-President is reserved for a Turkish Cypriot (the seat is vacant at present). The present President Nicos Anastasiades took over from Demetris Christofias (AKEL), on 24th February 2013 winning 57.48% of the vote against Stavros Malas (AKEL). The outgoing government comprises members of DISY, the European Party (a nationalist party) and some independent MPs.

The *Vouli antiprosopon* is the only house of Parliament in Cyprus. In July 1985 MPs adopted a law which brought the number of seats available to 80: 56 (70%)

are elected by the Greek Cypriots and 24 (30%) are set aside for the Turkish community. The latter seats are vacant and therefore will not be renewed on 22nd May.

Candidates have to be aged at least 35. Any political party has to win a minimum of 3.6% of the votes cast nationally to be able to sit in Parliament.

The vote follows the Hare Niemeyer method within six constituencies: Nicosia has 21 seats; Limassol 12, Famagusta 11, Larnaka 5, Paphos 4 and finally Kyrenia 3. Voters are allowed to vote for one party (ranking the candidates from this party in order of preference) or for candidates from different parties.

Finally the Cypriot parliament has three MPs representing the three religious communities who are elected by the members of these communities alone.

6 political parties are represented in the present House of Representatives:

– the Democratic Rally (DISY) the party of President of the Republic, Nicos Anastasiades, that lies to the right of the political scale. Founded in 1976 and led by Averof Neophytou, it has 20 seats;

– the Progressive Workers' Party (AKEL), created in 1926 under the name Cypriot Communist Party (CCP) but which has relinquished some of its Marxist-Leninist ideals. Led by Andros Kyprianou it has 19 seats;

– the Democratic Party (DIKO), a centre left party founded in 1976 and led by Nikolas Papadopoulos, has 9 seats ;

– the Movement for Social Democracy (EDEK), created in 1969 and chaired by Marinos Sizopoulos, has five seats;

– the European Party (EVROKO), a nationalist party, a member of the outgoing government, the party is led by Demetris Syllouris, and has 2 seats ;

– the Ecologist and Environmentalist Party (KOP), led by George Perdikes, with 1 seat.

Reminder of the election results of 22nd May 2011 in Cyprus

Turnout : 78,70% (it is obligatory to vote in Cyprus)

Political Parties	Number of votes won	Percentage of votes cast (%)	Number of seats
Democratic Rally (DISY)	138 682	34,28	20
Progressive Workers' Party (AKEL)	132 171	32,67	19
Democratic Party (DIKO)	63 763	15,76	9
Movement for Social Democracy (EDEK)	36 113	8,93	5
European Party (EVROKO)	15 711	3,88	2
Ecologist and Environmentalist Party (KOP)	8 960	2,21	1
Others	9 177	2,27	0

Source : Cypriot Home Office

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