

ETUDES HELLENIQUES

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Cyprus Presidential Elections, February 2013: A Systemic Approach

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RÉSUMÉ

Dans cet article, l'auteur adopte une approche systémique pour analyser l'élection présidentielle chypriote de Février 2013 et la compréhension du système chypriote des partis de l'ère après 1974. Dans la première partie de son article il présente les événements qui ont précédé l'élection, **a.** en commençant par expliquer comment la piètre performance du gouvernement précédent a affecté la configuration pré-électorale, **b.** les trois principaux candidats, leurs profils politiques, leurs avantages et leurs inconvénients et enfin **c.** les résultats du premier et du deuxième tour de scrutin.

Dans la deuxième partie, il étudie DISY et AKEL, les deux pôles du système chypriote des partis, comme deux réussites distinctes, mais parallèles, et il analyse les raisons de leur prédominance politique. Il met l'accent sur leur interdépendance systémique dans le contexte d'un système de partis bipolaires de gouvernance en alternance. Dans sa conclusion, il intègre l'ensemble des données et explique comment la structure du système chypriote des partis a affecté le résultat final de l'élection de février dernier.

ABSTRACT

In this article the author takes a systemic approach to analyzing the Cypriot presidential election of February 2013 and understanding the post-1974 Cypriot party system in general. His first part presentation is threefold: **a.** The events that preceded the election, starting with an explanation on how the previous government's poor performance affected the pre-election configuration. **b.** The three main candidates, their political profiles, advantages and disadvantages. **c.** The result of the first round and the run-off election.

In the second part he studies DISY and AKEL, the two poles of the Cypriot party system, as two distinct but parallel success stories and analyzes the reasons of their political predominance focusing on their systemic interdependence in the context of a bi-polar party system of alternate domination. In conclusion the author integrates the findings of the two parts and explains how the structure of the Cypriot party system affected the final result of last February's election.

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1. The Pre-Election Period and the Results

1.1. The Post-1974 Party System of Cyprus and the Election of Dimitris Christofias (February 2008)

The current form of the party system of the Republic of Cyprus is -to a large degree- an outcome of the events of the summer of 1974. The Turkish invasion and the occupation of 37% of the land of Cyprus totally altered the social, political and economic structure of the island. In the free area of Cyprus, where the Republic of Cyprus retained essential control under the Greek Cypriot community, a new political order (profoundly affected by the new state of things) emerged. Two new parties were founded in 1976, right-wing Democratic Rally (DISY) and center-right Democratic Party (DIKO). Along with pre-existing communist Rectifying Party of Working People (AKEL) and socialist United Democratic Center Union (EDEK) they became the core of the Greek Cypriot party system for the years to come. From time to time other parties emerged, however they would prove to be stillborn. Exceptions to this rule are the center-right European Party (EVROKO) and the Movement of Ecologists Environmentalists (the Ecologists), which were established in the context of socio-political developments of the past fifteen years.

Apart from the nature of the party system, another important feature of Greek Cypriot politics is the presidential system of government. The election of the President is direct, by universal suffrage and secret ballot. A candidate to be elected needs more than 50% of the votes validly cast. If none of the candidates attains the required majority the election is repeated on the corresponding day of the following week between the two candidates who received the biggest number of votes (called a run-off election or a 2nd election round). The candidate who receives the biggest number of votes at these repeated elections is deemed elected.¹ Since the first post-1974 presidential election which took place in the context of the contemporary party system, namely the election of 1983, all the elected presidents (either elected at the 1st or the 2nd round) had been nominated (or officially supported) by one of the two big parties - DISY and AKEL - and gained additional support by one or more of the smaller ones.² DISY and AKEL have never jointly participated either in the government or in the opposition.

Having these in mind we argue that the contemporary party system of the

Republic of Cyprus is a bi-polar one, since two of the existing parties – without facing significant competition by a third pole - have been steadily rotating as ruling parties. In parliamentary terms, these two parties are the biggest in the House of Representatives since 1981, with the exception of the parliamentary elections of 1985 when DIKO displaced AKEL.³

Despite the aforementioned stability, the election of Dimitris Christofias in February 2008, was a political novelty for Cyprus and – to a degree – for Europe in general: It was the first time ever that the general secretary of AKEL would become President of the Republic. Moreover, Christofias was the first self-proclaimed communist to become a head of government in the history of the European Union.⁴ The political environment of that time was rather benign, four years after the referendum for the Annan plan. AKEL was the biggest party in the Tassos Papadopoulos' coalition government (2003-2008) until a few months before the elections of 2008, when the communist party decided to withdraw in order to work for its general secretary's candidacy. Papadopoulos was supported by the centrist parties (DIKO, EDEK, EVROKO and the Ecologists). Apart from Papadopoulos and Christofias, the third major candidate was Ioannis Cassoulides, a member of the European Parliament and former minister of foreign affairs in Glafkos Clerides government, backed by DISY.

According to the polls, which preceded the elections, Papadopoulos was the frontrunner, with very good chances not only in terms of qualifying for the 2nd round, but to win reelection as well. The case of a third pole emerging against AKEL and DISY's dipole was in principle alarming for the two biggest parties: Christofias and Cassoulides could both maximize chances to win only if Papadopoulos was knocked out of the 2nd round. AKEL and DISY worked hard – contrary to the centrist parties - and achieved their primary objective: Cassoulides and Christofias qualified with 33,5% and 33,3% respectively, while Papadopoulos got 31,79% and was eliminated. In the 2nd round, after having assured official support by DIKO, EDEK and the Ecologists, Christofias was elected President of the Republic with 53,37%.⁵

1.2. Dimitris Christofias' Controversial Presidency (2008-2013)

Christofias was undoubtedly a controversial President. He is the first President in the history of the Republic who didn't run for reelection at the end of his first term as a result of his unprecedented unpopularity. His ruined

personal image and his government's poor performance prepared the ground for Anastasiades.

Mismanagement of the following three major issues doomed Christofias' political future: the negotiations for the settlement of the Cyprus problem, a lethal explosion in the "Evangelos Florakis" naval base in Mari village and the outbreak of the financial crisis.

1.2.1. Cyprus Problem Negotiations. Christofias' pre-election campaign was mainly focused on the grounds of his alleged capability to achieve a swift settlement of the Cyprus problem. Despite the fact that his rhetoric was similar to that of his predecessor's, his election signified a new order regarding the negotiation process, as well as the framework of the anticipated solution. The new president implemented his own doctrine: He believed that the settlement of the Cyprus problem could be facilitated by a "positive climate" in the bi-communal relations, which could have been the result of his personal friendship with the Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat.⁶ However, after a round of intensive negotiations between the two leaders, Christofias discovered that personal friendship wasn't enough for the settlement of a long-lasting international problem. Worst, he would soon understand that his reconciliatory intentions, accompanied by extremely unpopular unilateral concessions such as the acceptance of the legalization of 50,000 Turkish settlers at the negotiations' starting point and "rotating presidency", caused no reciprocity by the other side.

Talat deeply disappointed Christofias who thought that the former, a progressive politician, could break traditional Turkish hard-line positions and that he would contribute to the declination of the "TRNC's" reliance on Ankara. This disappointment is depicted in a memo of one of the leaders' meetings, which took place on 30 July 2009. While they were discussing the issue of "Citizenship, Aliens, Immigration and Asylum", they entered a sharp disagreement on Turkey's responsibility regarding the current phase of the Cyprus problem. Christofias wondered how Talat could "change the logic of facts" since the Cyprus problem was an outcome of the Turkish invasion. Talat rejected this perception and compared Christofias' approach with that of the former Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktash's, a hard-liner who repeatedly torpedoed the negotiations. Christofias replied that he wouldn't like to be

compared with Denktash. Talat replied that the Greek Cypriot leader was “extra-sensitive”. Then Christofias expressed his disappointment by telling his old friend that “Talat had been for many years as sensitive as he was” but this was no longer the case.⁷

Christofias and Talat failed to compromise, indicating thus the self-evident failure of the “Christofias doctrine”. However, the painful unilateral concessions Christofias had made were considered as “progress” by both the Secretary General of the United Nations and his Special Adviser on Cyprus, Alexander Downer. Opposition in Cyprus, especially the centrist parties, repeatedly asked for the “withdrawal of Christofias’ concessions”, which contributed to the former President’s unpopularity. Even AKEL’s candidate in 2013 presidential elections, Stavros Malas, tried as far as possible, to untie himself from Christofias’ “toxic” legacy.

1.2.2. The Explosion in “Evangelos Florakis” Naval Basis. Another issue that defined not only Christofias’ political fate but generally the pre-election configuration was the deadly explosion in “Evangelos Florakis” naval base at Mari village (near Limassol) and the way the President dealt with the foregoing and the subsequent events. Early in the morning of 11 July 2011, a pile of 98 containers full of arms and explosives went off, thus creating a shock wave, which terrified the whole area and destroyed a nearby power station, the biggest on the island. The destruction of the power station knocked out the Republic’s power supplies, caused power cuts for about a month and dramatically increased the electricity bills. 13 persons died (mainly military officers, servicemen and firemen), as a result of what came out to be one of the most devastating conventional explosions in history.⁸ Initial popular freeze turned to waves of rage, when the people realized that the explosion was a result of the bad storage of the cargo which was left totally exposed to the environment (especially during the summer’s extremely heightening temperatures).

The containers were initially aboard the Cypriot-flagged ship Monchegorsk, which had been intercepted by the Cypriot government, while sailing from Iran to Syria in 2009 as a result of pressure from the United States, confiscating its cargo for being in violation of UN sanctions on Iran.⁹ Proposals by the United Kingdom and the United States, either to transport the cargo elsewhere or to provide technical assistance, were rejected by the Cypriot

government mainly due to President Christofias' close ties with Syria's President Bashar Al Assad, as revealed in official documents which circulated in the media before as well as after the explosion.¹⁰ The government's mismanagement caused reactions and thousands of protesters gathered outside the Presidential Palace chanting against the President. The demonstrations lasted for weeks. They were by far, the largest and most prolonged demonstrations against a President that ever took place in Cyprus. The President himself, alarmed by the incident, appointed a well-known lawyer, Polys Polyviou, as the head of an exploratory committee which would "swiftly and effectively investigate all the aspects and the events regarding the tragedy", according to the President's relative statement.¹¹ In the meantime, ministers of foreign affairs and defence, Marcos Kyprianou and Costas Papacostas, resigned due to the looming shadows, which emerged, regarding their own responsibilities.

While investigating the case, Polyviou amassed over 15,000 pages of documents and held a series of public interviews of high profile officials, including the President himself, former ministers and National Guard high-ranking officers.¹² At the end of the process, on 30 September 2011, he issued a 643-page-long report, which was delivered to the President and the Attorney General. Polyviou considered President Christofias to be responsible for the unloading of the deadly cargo in Cyprus. He also argued that the storage of the containers "suggests a sad story of incapacity, carelessness, negligence, lack of recognition of unambiguous and predictable dangers (...)".¹³ As for President Christofias, Polyviou stated that "the President is most responsible for the incapacity, the carelessness and the negligence (...)" and that "he failed to provide or even to take primitive measures for the safety of the citizens of the Republic of Cyprus, especially with respect to the servicemen and the firemen".¹⁴ Since Polyviou clearly blamed Christofias - the man, who had appointed him - for Mari's disaster, the public opinion and the rest of the political forces expected the President's resignation. Instead, the President rebuffed the report, arguing that it "lacks reliability", he refused personal responsibility and he accused Polyviou of "exceeding his mandate".¹⁵

The President's stance intensified political and popular reactions. He was widely accused of undermining the democratic institutions. According to a poll conducted by Symmetron Analysis and presented by "Kathimerini"

weekly newspaper a few days after the publication of Polyviou's report, 73% of the questioned participants considered the President as being responsible for the disaster and 60% of them asked for his resignation.¹⁶ Even if the explosion had been avoided, Christofias' presidency would still have been controversial. However, with that deadly accident, the President met his own political Waterloo.

1.2.3. The Financial Crisis. The Cypriot financial crisis received worldwide attention in March 2013, as a result of the unprecedented decision in Eurogroup for the imposition of a levy on deposits in Cypriot banks. The President who dealt with this issue was Nicos Anastasiades, who had taken over a few days before. However, the crisis in Cyprus was generated during the presidency of Dimitris Christofias. His cabinet's decisions (or lack of them) on issues such as fiscal policy and the severe problems of the banking sector, led to a financial deadlock. According to Achilles Emilianides and Christina Ioannou: "The real causes of the crisis should (...) largely be sought in the inability of the Cypriot government to understand the mechanisms of the global financial system and its ideological denial to cooperate with the structures of international markets. (...) The unrealistic notion that the Cypriot economy would not be affected by the international financial crisis, left it exposed and largely unprepared to deal with the consequences of the crisis. This, coupled with the failure to take preventive measures against the massive problems evident in the banking sector, the economic consequences of the explosion at Mari, the 'haircut' of Greek bonds and the delay in taking measures, eventually led to economic collapse. The undue delay in effectively negotiating with the troika and the continuing deterioration of the credit-worthiness of the Cypriot banks by the Cypriot government itself, in an effort to rid itself of the responsibility, exacerbated the problem even further, thus fatally wounding the credibility of the Cypriot economy."¹⁷ Christofias' poor performance on this issue affected the voting decisions of the vast majority of the voters.

1.3. Pre-election Configuration: Anastasiades' Way to Victory

Eleven candidates ran for the presidency in the election of 17 February 2013, the biggest number ever in the history of the presidential elections in Cyprus. Three of them had good chances to qualify for the 2nd round: The president of DISY, Nikos Anastasiades, the former Minister of Health Stavros

Malas - supported by ruling AKEL - and independent Giorgos Lillikas, a former Minister of Foreign Affairs supported by Socialist EDEK, were the main candidates.

1.3.1. Nikos Anastasiades: A Clear Front-Runner. Anastasiades officially announced his candidacy on 11 February 2012¹⁸ and he became the front-runner early, mainly due to the incumbent President's poor performance. Christofias' failure in a series of issues, especially the three described above, contributed to AKEL's isolation. Until 2008 AKEL, was a natural ally of the centrist parties. However, after four years of sharp disagreements in the context of the governmental coalition under Christofias, DIKO and EDEK – which usually determine the run-off elections' outcome - turned their backs to their former left-wing allies. Moreover, Anastasiades had been preparing himself for that moment a long time ago. He attempted to clear his name over his 2004 support of the unpopular Annan plan, which led him and his party to political isolation for a long time and, to a large degree, he succeeded in doing so. Another advantage, was that he was the indisputable leader of the biggest party and he enjoyed uncontested approval among the party's supporters. This is an important determinant of election success, because of the nature of the electoral system: Since two candidates qualify for the 2nd round, those supported by the two biggest parties – DISY and AKEL - enjoy a comparative advantage. Cypriot politicians and analysts call this the “hard vote phenomenon”, namely the two big parties' ability to turn wide popular support to critical electoral power in the presidential elections.

His campaign focused on the financial crisis and his alleged capability of driving the country out of it, as a result of his leadership skills and political vigor. His main pre-election slogan was “crisis needs a leader” and “dynamic leadership”, which aimed at highlighting what was believed to be his main comparative advantages. By focusing on economy and finance issues Anastasiades could also minimize references to his Cyprus problem views, which could retrieve painful memories of 2004, especially as far as DIKO and EVROKO voters were concerned.

In terms of coalitions, a prerequisite for success in the context of the Cypriot electoral system, DISY and Anastasiades formed a coalition with DIKO. It is important to note that DIKO bares the legacy of historical Greek Cypriot

leaders and former Presidents such as Archbishop Makarios, Spyros Kyprianou and Tassos Papadopoulos, all prominent hard-liners as regards the Cyprus problem. DIKO officially ratified coalition with DISY and Anastasiades on 28 September 2012, despite the sharp disagreement expressed by the party's vice president Nikolas Papadopoulos, son of former President of the Republic Tassos Papadopoulos.¹⁹ The trickiest issue which caused tensions among the party's officials and supporters, was the fact that DIKO and DISY traditionally represent conflicting schools of thought regarding the preferred form of settlement of the Cyprus problem. This controversy gave room for accusations and political pressure, especially against DIKO's president, Marios Karoyan. On the other paramount issue, financial crisis and measures to revive the economy, they both agreed to a balanced approach based on accepting subjection to the European Stability Mechanism and proceeding to socially acceptable reforms.

Despite the promising deal which would render DIKO a co-ruling party in case Anastasiades won election, it would be extremely difficult for DIKO to persuade all (or even a clear-cut majority) of its supporters to vote for Anastasiades. Many of them considered that their party's support of Anastasiades was a political anomaly and that the deal corresponded to a mere exchange of benefits (votes for ministries and appointments in public authorities). This is the main reason why DIKO's support wouldn't be enough to secure a 1st round victory for Anastasiades, despite the fact that some enthusiasts argued that the sum of DISY's 34,28% and DIKO's 15,76% (electoral power in 2011 parliamentary elections)²⁰ could lead to this result. Apart from DIKO, Anastasiades was also supported by some high-ranking officers of EVROKO (3,88% in 2011 parliamentary elections) though unofficially, since the party decided to call its members to vote "at will".²¹

September 2012 was the month when the pre-election configuration took its final form. From that point on, until the election of February 2013, all the polls published, predicted an easy domination of Anastasiades in the 1st round, though not a 1st round victory. 12 polls published between 14 September and 2 December predicted that Anastasiades would be 1st and that his distance from his run-off opponent would not be smaller than 13%. At the same time, all these polls predicted that Anastasiades could beat both of the other main candidates at the 2nd round, though a win against Malas would have been

easier than against Lillikas. By all odds only a combination of fatal mistakes, bad luck and a run-off against Lillikas could have stopped Anastasiades' way to the Presidential Palace.

1.3.2. Stavros Malas: In Pursuit of Disappointed AKEL Voters

On 7 September minister of health Stavros Malas announced his candidacy, surrounded by AKEL leadership.²² Malas, a 45-year-old geneticist, was an inexperienced politician who had failed to get elected as a member of the House of Representatives in 2011 parliamentary elections, since he got the least number of votes among AKEL's candidates in the Paphos electoral district. After President Christofias' decision not to run for reelection, which was announced in May 2012, AKEL discussed several scenarios for the presidential election. Everybody in the party knew that beating Anastasiades wouldn't be an easy task due to its linkage to the Christofias presidency which was widely perceived as unsuccessful. Malas was believed to be the right person for a brand new beginning. According to the general secretary of the party, Andros Kyprianou, Malas, was a "young, bold and radical" candidate who could bring new ideas and a new way of governing, contrary to his opponents who had a "doubtful political past".²³ However, the party's decision caused domestic reactions by numerous members who believed that, with a low profile candidate such as Malas, the party was doomed to lose.²⁴

Malas' main campaign slogan was "new person, new proposal, new era". As indicated by the slogan his campaign would balance between AKEL's traditional left-wing policies and a promise for a new government, better than the incumbent. He had to delink his candidacy from Christofias' political legacy in order to maintain hopes to win election. AKEL's primary goal was to have Malas qualified for the 2nd round. Defeat to Anastasiades in the 2nd round could be absorbed. However, failure to reach the 2nd round would have been a political disaster since it would cause further domestic turbulence by setting forth an undesirable dilemma between the leader of the rival pole and a detestable "defector" such as Lillikas (see below). To achieve this goal, AKEL would have to persuade its supporters to accept the party's choice. It was the first time in the post-1974 elections' history that AKEL faced a real problem in exploiting the "hard vote phenomenon" since the polls predicted significant losses due to disappointment for the Christofias government's poor performance.

1.3.3. Giorgos Lillikas: A Potential “Third Way”. Contrary to Malas, Giorgos Lillikas, a 52-years-old former minister in the Tassos Papadopoulos cabinet, was an experienced politician. He studied political science in Lyon, France. He started his political career as a consultant to President Giorgos Vassiliou in the late '80s. In 1996 he was elected as an AKEL MP and achieved reelection in 2001. In 2003 he became minister of commerce, industry and tourism in the Tassos Papadopoulos cabinet, after AKEL's suggestion. In 2006, he was appointed to a new portfolio as the minister of foreign affairs. After Christofias decided to run for President in 2007, AKEL abandoned coalition with Papadopoulos. Lillikas, despite his resignation from the cabinet along with all the other ministers who were suggested by AKEL, did not follow his party and he stood by the side of Papadopoulos who trusted him the headship of his pre-election campaign. Having in mind AKEL's Leninist-style democratic centralism²⁵ Lillikas' denial to support Christofias was considered as “an act of treason” by the communists. After Papadopoulos' defeat and Chrisofias' win, Lillikas was considered as “politically doomed”. In 2010, he founded his own political bureau and started preparing his independent candidacy, which was announced on 7 April 2012.²⁶

Lillikas' candidacy faced a significant disadvantage: He was not supported by any of the two big parties, therefore he would have to overcome the “hard vote phenomenon” in order to qualify for the 2nd round. Not being committed to a political party rendered him vulnerable to accusations of opportunism as a result of his service with several Presidents and/or presidential candidates of different political backgrounds. His main advantage was the disappointment of a significant part of the people with the political establishment, especially with AKEL. He was individually supported by members (or former members) of almost all the political parties, especially DIKO officers who disapproved Anastasiades on the grounds of his views on the Cyprus problem. Being officially supported by only one party, socialist EDEK (8,93% in the parliamentary elections of 2011), he tried to apply straight to the “citizens”, bypassing thus the official party leaderships. This was mirrored on his main slogan: “The candidate of the citizens”, which was also indicative of his intention to break the “left-right” axis by incarnating a “third way”. When asked by journalists whether he was a leftist, a rightist or a centrist, he would answer that he was “a radical”, highlighting thus his will to overcome traditional politics.

The fact that it soon became evident that he enjoyed more popular support than initially anticipated, while Malas was facing problems with AKEL's "hard vote", increased his hopes that he could be the one to face Anastasiades in the 2nd round. According to essentially all the polls, from late summer through February, there was going to be a tight race for 2nd place. In case Lillikas qualified he would have good chances of winning election since he would have displaced Malas and left-wing AKEL supporters were likelier to vote for him than for Anastasiades. In any case though and despite encouraging signs, Lillikas would still have to accomplish what historical leaders - such as Spyros Kyprianou in 1988 and Tassos Papadopoulos in 2008 - failed to do: Beating omnipotent bi-polarism.

1.3.4. The Financial Crisis under the Pre-Election Spotlight. The Cyprus problem was an issue of primary importance regarding the formation of the pre-election coalitions, especially among the centrist parties, since it has been the very first issue in their agendas for years. However it was the financial crisis and the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to be signed with the Troika²⁷ which defined the rhetorical context, set by the media, the candidates themselves and their representatives. In times of unprecedented unemployment rates and with the state being essentially unable to pay its bills (including the overgrown public sector's salaries) without external help, the people were primarily occupied with their financial survival. In this context, a clash between backers and haters of the MoU was unavoidable: Anastasiades insisted on the necessity of proceeding to a bail-out agreement with the Troika, Lillikas was against it, while Malas took a rather moderate stance.

The fact that financial issues would weight heavily in voting decisions was clearly depicted on the polls' findings. For example, in a poll conducted by the University of Nicosia and presented by Mega TV on 21 January 2013, 68,2% of the people questioned replied that they considered the financial crisis as "the most important problem", while the Cyprus problem was chosen by only 17,7%.²⁸ This tendency was in favor of Anastasiades, since it concealed the unpopularity of his Cyprus problem views, especially among the centrist voters.

1.3.5. The Results. On 17 February, Anastasiades won 45,5% of the vote, while Malas had 26,9% and Lillikas 24,9%. In the run-off election of 24

February, Anastasiades achieved a landslide victory with 57,5%, the highest percentage since 1968,²⁹ and became the 7th president of the Republic of Cyprus. Malas managed to persuade the critical mass of AKEL supporters to vote for him despite significant losses, therefore AKEL achieved the politically crucial qualification for the 2nd round. On the other hand – and despite his failure to make it through the run-off election – Lillikas’ percentage was widely discussed. It was by far the highest percentage ever achieved by a candidate who was not supported by either DISY, AKEL or DIKO, followed by Vassos Lyssarides’ 10,59% in 1998.³⁰ Lillikas’ 25% was interpreted as a potential kick-starter of a new opposing centrist party or coalition.³¹

Anastasiades’ victory and Malas’ success to qualify for the 2nd round assured that bi-polarism would triumph once more at Cyprus presidential elections, since another run-off election was dominated by the candidates supported by DISY and AKEL, despite the severe political damage the latter suffered of, in the last couple of years. This outcome was the result of the two parties’ historical success in maintaining respective hard cores of disciplined voters, which tend to remain cohesive even amid domestic and national political storms. AKEL and DISY suggest two different but parallel success stories which marked the post-1974 Cyprus party system. In the 2nd part of this article we shall analyze these success stories further, under the prism of their systemic substance in the context of the interactive political bi-polarism.

2. AKEL and DISY: Parallel Success Stories³²

As already explained, post-1974 Greek Cypriot politics are marked by the polarization of the party system which is dominated by AKEL and DISY. At the same time, the political centre has been fragmented and incapable of constituting a cohesive third pole. Polarization in Cyprus has deep origins of historical and ethno-political nature, since the main socio-political clashes are defined by contrasting perceptions of civil and/or national identity, combined with remnants of Cold War ideological differences.

The roots of the political polarization in Cyprus go back to the 1940ies.³³ The volume of the polarization intensified in the 1950ies, during the anti-colonial armed struggle of EOKA,³⁴ which aimed at a union with Greece (“enosis”) promoting thus a rather right-wing agenda. EOKA’s popularity and convergence with the right-wing political agenda led to a right-wing “ideological

hegemony” of Greek Cypriot politics. AKEL (which had already been a highly influential political force in Cyprus), despite the fact that it wouldn't reject “enosis” in principle, abstained from - and actually opposed - EOKA's armed struggle mainly on the grounds of its military leader's - colonel Georgios Grivas - anti-communist convictions.³⁵ The fact that EOKA was very popular among the Greek Cypriots, led to a tug-of-war between left-wing and right-wing politics. The tug-of-war survived the establishment of the independent Republic of Cyprus in 1960 and intensified during the turbulent years 1972-1974, when EOKA B' – an extremist organization also created by Grivas – turned against President Makarios and committed actions of terrorism against its political opponents. As a result of the outlaw paramilitary activity of EOKA B', the balance of legitimization shifted: AKEL was the post-1974 “ideological hegemon” as a result of its successful strategy of bandwagoning with Makarios (see below).³⁶

In the decades of political stability which followed 1974, DISY and AKEL eventually established a dominant political dipole in Greek Cypriot politics. They have been rotating as ruling parties and as parliamentary majorities. Moreover, they have shaped respective cores of support which have been solid and big enough to assure their political domination. In the following paragraphs the reasons of their success shall be evaluated.

a. AKEL

After the coup d'etat of 15 July 1974 against President Makarios, which was organized and executed by the Greek junta and supported by members of Cypriot far-right organization EOKA B', AKEL focused its political rhetoric on the “treason” of Cyprus by the “fascists” and “conspirators”. The fact that the coup d'etat was used by Turkey as a pretext to invade Cyprus, divide the island and cause a massive humanitarian disaster, amplified AKEL's argument. Makarios, who was dominating the political system of Cyprus until his death in August 1977, wasn't just a leader: He was a symbol of democracy and struggle for freedom and enjoyed wide popularity among Greek Cypriots ranging from left to centre right. Despite his popularity though, he didn't channel this wide support into a political party of his own. Two centrist parties, EDEK and DIKO, tried to attract Makarios' supporters. However, it was communist AKEL which was organized and networked enough to draw on this socio-political stream after the passing of its leader.

This political breakthrough couldn't leave the party's ideology unaffected: The communist party would have to modify its ideology and – therefore – water down its Marxist rhetoric in order to attract non-communist supporters of Makarios, on the grounds of common democratic views and resistance to “fascism”. This happened eventually and it was the price of AKEL's transformation from a revolutionary movement to a mildly left-wing party. This transformation would be inevitable, sooner or later, as a result of the political attributes of Cyprus. According to T. W. Adams: “The communists in Cyprus cannot afford to deny the existence of immutable traditions nor are they able to avoid the hard realities of change which characterize the environment in which they must perform. AKEL should have conceded long ago that it must act on the political rather than the revolutionary level.”³⁷ On that crucial verge of history, AKEL would have to choose between dedication to Marxism and political power within the system it once envisaged to transform. It profoundly chose the latter. As a result of this historical choice, AKEL's gain was double:

First, it achieved the creation of a solid, interclass electoral base. This would not be feasible without AKEL's extraordinary, soviet-style mobilization mechanism, which not only survived the aforementioned ideological modification but it also gained legitimacy and access to more potential members and voters. This mechanism provided penetration to multiple sections of the Greek Cypriot society (enterprises, trade unions, youth organizations, sports and even the Church). As a result of this mechanism's functioning, AKEL became the focal point of a wide system of redistribution of wealth and political power. Being a member of this system becomes not only an honor, but also a necessity for AKEL's followers. For them the party is above personal ambitions. They believe that fighting for the party is like fighting for themselves. This necessity, along with the very effective domestic structures of intelligence and data collection, is the X-factor of this mechanism's success.³⁸

Second, and most important, the ideological modification obliterated any chances of development of a unitary centrist party, which would challenge AKEL's hegemony in the centre-left. 1972-1974 period and reaction to EOKA B's terrorism created a range of common beliefs and policies between AKEL and the centrist parties, DIKO and EDEK. This proved to be fatal for the two

centrist parties' electoral power and political impact in retrospect: Common beliefs allowed AKEL to gain influence among their supporters. Among other consequences, the centrist parties essentially became AKEL's hostages because pulling away from a government partnership with the communists and constituting a pre-election coalition with right-wing DISY, could cause critical election losses to AKEL and curtail their parliamentary power. This happened for example when DIKO and EDEK backed the candidacy of DISY's leader Glafkos Clerides, in the presidential elections of 1993 and 1998 respectively.³⁹ As a result of centrist support (DIKO in 1993 and EDEK in 1998) Clerides won both elections. However, both centrist parties suffered respective losses in the parliamentary elections of 1996 and 2001. During the same period, AKEL's parliamentary power was steadily increasing: 30,6% in 1991, 33% in 1996 and 34,71% in 2001.⁴⁰

b. DISY

Like AKEL, DISY's success was also defined by good timing. In 1976, two years after the Turkish invasion and one year before the death of Makarios, a new political formation was founded: People who loathed Makarios for one reason or another, members of nationalist paramilitary groups which acted during the inter-communal agitations of 1963-64, even members of EOKA B' who gained asylum in the context of national reconciliation, were politically homeless. The most important target group though was the vast majority of the moderate right-wing Greek Cypriots, mainly composed by the masses of EOKA romantics. People of humble origins, who raised their children with stories of heroism and self-sacrifice, who were proud of their Greek national identity, which had been undermined due to Greek junta's coup d' état and due to Greece's failure to protect Cyprus during the Turkish invasion. A charismatic leader, Glafkos Clerides, foresaw the window of opportunity and founded DISY, in order to capitalize on the respect he enjoyed among his center-right fellows. Clerides was ideologically different to the vast majority of DISY's founding members and supporters. He envisaged a modern liberal party, based on Western-European patterns. However, he managed to find a reason for everybody - ranging from center-right to far-right - to become a member or a voter of DISY. And these people, who were despised and fingered as "traitors" because they were rightists - therefore potential

supporters of EOKA B' - felt gratitude for Clerides who built a political home for them. This gratitude would conciliate any political divergences between the leader and the supporters, or among the supporters, and create reciprocity and a feeling of a common purpose: To become a ruling majority and "save Cyprus from AKEL's communists". As communists they defined (and – to a large degree - they still do) not the supporters of Marxist socio-economic structures but the "anti-Greeks", the haters of "motherland Greece", who reject the statement that "Cyprus is Greek". Clerides never shared these simplistic convictions. However, he compromised with them in order to create a solid electoral base.

In 2013, DISY remains a strong pole of power. Despite its political isolation after the deep division of the Greek Cypriot society in the post-1974 period, it managed to win presidential elections twice in the 1990ies. Moreover, it managed to retain its political impact even after the vast majority of its supporters defied the party's call for a "yes" vote in the referendum of 2004 for the ratification of the Annan plan as a framework of the settlement of the Cyprus problem.⁴¹ Eventually, it managed to return to power in 2013, as we described above. The most important factor of the party's success has been its robust leadership. First, it was Glafkos Clerides, founder and first president of the party and President of the Republic of Cyprus between 1993 and 2003. Now it's Nikos Anastasiades who, by walking after Clerides' steps, managed to mitigate internal clashes, especially after 2004, despite the fact that he was part of the problem. Contrary to Clerides, he was intensively questioned mainly as a result of his unpopular support of the Annan plan. He managed though to survive in the political arena, gain control of the whole party, ratify his long-prepared candidacy and win election.⁴²

c. A "Mutually Beneficial Batred"

The post-1974 political history of the Republic of Cyprus is marked by political discord. Left-wing and right-wing politics mirror a deep social division. AKEL and DISY pursue contrasting ideologies and socioeconomic agendas. In Western European terms, AKEL is a mild communist party which has compromised with the terms of liberal democracy, while DISY is a center-right party which combines features of liberalism, conservatism and moderate nationalism.⁴³ However, the discord in the Greek Cypriot society is not defined

by terms of class politics, but rather by different ethno-political perceptions which are delimited by clashing interpretations of the modern history of Cyprus.

Since 1974, the Cyprus problem has been a core issue of the political tug of war. Despite the fact that DISY and AKEL have rather similar views regarding the settlement of the Cyprus problem, contrasting ethno-political perceptions of their supporters (and mutual interests of their leaderships in maintaining bi-polarism) allowed the polarization to survive. As we explain above, they have both been successful in establishing themselves as dominant political forces in the post-1974 party system. However, individual success wouldn't be enough for them to perpetuate their domination.

The fact that the two parties have been capitalizing on the ethno-political polarization leads us to the conclusion that social discord has been the real cause of their stamina and that bi-polarity is a feature of the Greek Cypriot political system, both these two parties draw on. At the same time, the fragmentation of the political centre is in favor of both AKEL and DISY, because it assures that: 1) The two poles maintain the advantage of facing each other in the presidential run-off elections since they are respectively capable of mobilizing their electoral bases in the 1st round (the "hard vote phenomenon"). The lack of a third pole maximizes election win chances for both. 2) The intensification of the volume of the political discord, especially during pre-election periods, facilitates the mobilization of DISY and AKEL's members and voters. Since they both "hate" each other, rising tensions are mutually beneficial. 3) As long as hatred between left-wing and right-wing exists DISY and AKEL will keep capitalizing on the discord and the centrist parties will remain small and of secondary importance to the Greek Cypriot political system.

The spiral of interdependence between DISY and AKEL, along with the fragmentation of the political centre, constitute a sophisticated system which safeguards a state of alternate domination of the two poles over the political system and the institutions of the Republic of Cyprus, which is being nourished by a "mutually beneficial hatred".

Conclusions

Under the prism of an individual level of analysis, Anastasiades won the presidential election as a result of the restoration of his good name, right timing in decision making, early preparation of his candidacy, achievement of essential control of his party and coalition with DIKO. At the same time, Dimitris Christofias' low popularity as a result of his failure in dealing with issues of paramount importance deconstructed AKEL's long-lasting coalition with the centrist parties and turned centrist votes toward Anastasiades both in the 1st and the 2nd round.

However, we argue that the determinant of Anastasiades' victory lies on the systemic level of analysis: Polarization and "mutually beneficial hatred" between right-wing and left-wing led both Anastasiades and Malas to the run-off election, just like in 2008 when Kassoulides and Christofias leaved President Papadopoulos out. Pre-election rhetoric, as presented through the media, was full of polarization messages and traditional left-wing vs right-wing public arguments. Apart from explicit clashes with AKEL and Malas, Anastasiades and DISY's rhetoric against Lillikas was also focused on the possibility of having AKEL back as co-ruling party through a potential support of Lillikas in the 2nd round, in case the latter had qualified. AKEL's unpopularity applied especially to right-wing and centre-right voters, even those who still disliked Anastasiades due to his Annan plan record, depriving thus Lillikas from valuable votes. In case Lillikas had qualified, Anastasiades candidacy's fate would have been jeopardized, especially in case AKEL had issued an official (but definitely lukewarm) decision of supporting Lillikas. At the end of the day, the final result was the best possible for DISY and the less harmful possible for AKEL. Systemic interdependence between DISY and AKEL and the political centre's fragmentation defined electoral results once more.

Celebrations after win didn't last for long. Two weeks after taking over, Anastasiades had to face the harsh reality of the Cypriot economy in Eurogroup's meeting in Brussels on 15 March 2013. The unexpected imposition of a bank deposit levy along with anticipated recession and further unemployment rise, strained relations with EU partners and Russia, a traditional ally of Cyprus, as well as the first clash with the opposition overthrew Anastasiades' sky high popularity. In a poll presented by Sigma TV on 20 March, 36,4% stated that Anastasiades is mainly responsible for the levy

while only 23,7% put the blame on Christofias. Moreover, 40,6% stated that they still trust Anastasiades to handle Cyprus economy from now on, while 51,6% stated that they don't. Finally, 63,3% stated that Anastasiades' management in Eurogroup was "bad" or "very bad", while 26,8% consider that it was "good" or "very good".⁴⁴

The Republic of Cyprus suffers the worst financial crisis after the disaster of 1974. AKEL's first general secretary who was elected President of the Republic is deemed responsible for this situation as a result of bad management and wrong decision-making. At the same time, DISY's second president who was elected President of the Republic made the extremely painful decision to yield to Eurogroup's blackmail, despite the fact that before the election he had clearly stated that he wouldn't "sign any Memorandum which would include a bank deposits levy".⁴⁵ DISY and AKEL, the omnipotent poles which dominate the Greek Cypriot political system since early '80ies, are more impugned than ever.

Two factors will shape the future of the Greek Cypriot party system: First, the renewed dialogue for the political center. Despite the fact that there are no clear indications that a unification project is under way, Lillikas' high election percentage created room for such an undertaking. At the same time, a potential redistribution of political power in view of the forthcoming election for the European Parliament in summer 2014 could benefit centrist parties and politicians. Nikolas Papadopoulos' intentions of challenging Karoyan for the presidency of DIKO, EDEK's thoughts regarding its role in a potential unification project, as well as the future of EVROKO which is divided since the presidential election, will jointly define the political centre's future. Second, the future of bipolarism. As we have analyzed above DISY and AKEL's political stamina has been mainly based on the post-1974 polarization. Now the Republic of Cyprus is entering a new era. New challenges and dangers and, therefore, a brand new political context lies ahead. In case anachronistic and pointless ethno-political discord survives, then bipolarism will keep dominating Greek Cypriot politics. In other case, if a new framework of socio-political perceptions prevails and the two poles fail to adopt, then the system of interdependence between DISY and AKEL will be questioned and the two poles' political future will definitely be affected.

NOTES

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