

REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS: PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS OF 2011

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The UN Good Offices' website¹ featuring the latest updates on the UN-sponsored Cyprus talks currently gives the accord of 110 meetings of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders, which translates into a frequency of one meeting in every 9 days. Yet, when the RoC celebrated its 50th anniversary in the Autumn of 2010, the island was still cut into two parts by the cease-fire line that was first marked in 1964.

Progress in the talks has been frequently prevented by elections, be it parliamentary or presidential, which took place either in the Republic of Cyprus (RoC), the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), Greece or Turkey. The latest Greek Cypriot parliamentary elections of May 22, 2011 were already the 5th such elections² since the revival of the bi-communal negotiations in September 2008, shortly followed by the June 12th parliamentary elections in Turkey. As a result, the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon took on a more active role and stepped in on the premise to speed up the negotiation process by inviting leaders of both communities to a tripartite meeting in New York in November 2010. In his critical report to the Security Council released after the meeting, the Secretary General labeled the unification process as "frustratingly slow" and urged the leaders not to waste the "historic opportunity" to bring the negotiations to a successful conclusion.³

While the Secretary General has been sending warning signals that the blue berets might be withdrawn from the island if there is no significant progress in the foreseeable future, in his effort to broke a solution before the RoC takes over the rotating presidency of the EU in the second half of 2012, Ban Ki-moon scheduled his fourth meeting with Christofias and Eroğlu to be held on July 7th, 2011 in Geneva. Except for incorporating Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot views and opinions on the draft agenda of the Geneva meeting, Alexander Downer, the Special Adviser of the Secretary General on Cyprus, also flew to Ankara to discuss the issue with the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ahmet Davutoğlu. It was reported that the UN team has prepared a

¹ See www.uncyprustalks.org.

² In April 2009, the National Unity Party (UBP) came first in the TRNC's parliamentary elections. In October of the same year, the Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) celebrated its victory in the parliamentary elections in Greece, which were followed by election of Karolos Papoulis the office of the President in February 2010. In April 2010, Derviş Eroğlu of UBP replaced Mehmet Ali Talat and became the third President of the TRNC.

³ See Ki-moon, B. (November 24, 2010). Report of the Secretary-General on his Mission of Good Offices in Cyprus. S/2010/603, p. 8.

“five step plan establishing a federal Cyprus”, i.e. a roadmap towards the conclusion of the UN-backed Cyprus talks.⁴

Given the presidential system of governance of the RoC, Christofias will travel to Geneva, not only in his capacity as the President of the RoC, but also as the Head of the government, which will as such be in the process of establishing relations with the newly elected legislative. The latest change in the composition of the House of Representatives of the RoC implies the transformation of the dynamics between the executive and legislative, which may consequently affect Christofias' position at the negotiating table.

Electoral system

The 1960 Constitution establishing the RoC stipulates a 50-seat House of Representatives. However, in 1985, a new bill increased the number of seats to 80, designating 56 representatives for the Greek Cypriot community and 24 for the Turkish Cypriot community. However, the seats reserved for the Turkish Cypriots have been vacant since 1963 as a result of intensive inter-communal strives. Every five years, 56 Greek Cypriot members of the House are elected through multi-party, regional proportional electoral system with a preferential element. Seats in the unicameral legislative body are allocated to 6 administrative districts in the following way:

- 20 to Nicosia,
- 12 to Limassol,
- 11 to Famagusta,
- 6 to Larnaca,
- 4 to Paphos, and
- 3 to Kyrenia.

In addition to this, the three constitutionally recognized minority religious groups in the RoC, i.e. Armenian, Maronite and Latin communities, each has one seat in the House. However, these representatives do not have the right to vote; they only have the right to express their opinions on issues that directly affect their specific religious groups.

In 2006, RoC granted the prisoners the right to vote. Also, following a Court Decision of the European Court of Human Rights⁵ in 2006, RoC passed a law that enabled the Turkish Cypriots residing in the RoC government control areas to exercise their political rights, i.e. right to vote as well as right to stand as a candidate in the RoC's elections. For example, in 2011, 486 Turkish Cypriots registered to go to ballot pools.⁶ Usually no party is able to a gain majority in the House, which leads to coalition governments and hence compromise between the individual parties by default. Voter turnout has been rather stable during the past elections, with the far-left Progressive Party for the Working People (AKEL) and the center-right Democratic Rally (DISY)

⁴ See Kanlı, Y. (June 19, 2011). UN Patience Running Thin on Cyprus. *Hürriyet Daily News*. Retrieved June 28, 2011 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=un-patience-running-thin-on-cyprus-2011-06-19>.

⁵ See Ibrahim Aziz v. Cyprus no. 69949/01 (22 June 2004).

⁶ Number retrieved from Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe / Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. (March 23, 2011). *Republic of Cyprus – Parliamentary Elections 2011: 22 May 2011, OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report: 2-4 March 2011*. Warsaw, p. 6.

gaining approximately one-third of the overall vote each and the other small parties receiving one-third combined.

Election Results

During the 10th parliamentary elections since the establishment of the RoC, the overall number of electors rose by 30% when compared to 2006. However, 60% of the 34.000 Greek Cypriot first-voters did not register.⁷ For the first time ever, RoC citizens living in Greece and the United Kingdom were allowed to vote at the polling stations that were placed in the cities of Athens, Patra, Salonica, London and Manchester. Yet, while voting is not only a right, but also a duty for the Greek Cypriots, the general disillusionment with domestic politics and apathy resulted in a record-breaking absence rate, reaching an unprecedented level of 21.3%. This number is 9% lower than in the previous elections.⁸

None of the 6 independent candidates – namely, Kostas Kyriakou, Andreas Efstratiou, Neophytos Constantinou, Pambos Stavrou, Antonis Pieridis, Loukas Stavrou – got enough support to get a seat in the House. By the same token, none of the four new parties that were registered to participate in the elections for the first time managed to pass the 1.8 % preset threshold, i.e. Cyprus Progressive Cooperation (KYPROS), Independent Citizens Movement (ZYGOS), Citizen's Rights Bureau of the popular Socialist Movement (LASOK) and People's National Front (ELAM). Out of the four newcomers, the far right ELAM that is strongly nationalist and controversial performed the best by missing the required minimum percentage of votes by only 0.72%. However, as the racial violence and nationalistic mood keep rising in the south of the Green Line, ELAM has a chance to gain a seat in the House in the upcoming elections that is scheduled for 2016.

There were only two parties that performed better than in the previous elections, i.e. the Democratic Rally (DISY), that became the absolute winner of the elections by securing 20 seats in the House, and the Progressive Party for the Working People (AKEL), which ended up with 19. The Democratic Party (DIKO) won 9 seats, Movement for Social Democracy (EDEK) secured 5 seats, European Party (EVROKO) acquired 3, and the Greens retained one. (For more details see the chart on p. 4.)

⁷ Deloy, C. (May, 2011). The Righting Opposition Takes the Lead in Voting Intentions One Week before the General Elections in Cyprus. European Elections Monitor. Paris: Foundation Robert Schuman.

⁸ Republic of Cyprus: Ministry of Interior: Press and Information Office. (May 23, 2011). *Parliamentary Elections 2011: Island-wide results*. Retrieved June 27, 2011 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.moi.gov.cy/moi/pio/pio.nsf/All/792A7E297B460BF2C2257899002A575E?OpenDocument>.

Results of the parliamentary elections in the RoC				
Party	Percentage		Seats	
	2006	2011	2006	2011
DISY	30.52	34.28	18	20
AKEL	31.31	32.67	18	19
DIKO	17.98	15.76	11	9
EDEK	8.96	8.93	5	5
EVROKO	5.79	3.88	3	2
Greens	1.96	2.21	1	1

Source: Republic of Cyprus: Ministry of Interior: Press and Information Office.

The elections were the first test for the governing party after Dimitris Christofias of AKEL replaced DIKO's Tassos Papadopoulos in 2008 as the President of the RoC. While AKEL will celebrate its 85th anniversary with a steady support of the electorate this year, Christofias, who was elected as President on the premise of solving the Cyprus problem, has been facing difficulties to move freely at the negotiating table due to opposition from DIKO, the junior partner in the coalition government. DIKO has been strongly criticizing him, mostly for accepting the proposal of rotating presidency and weighted cross-communal voting. On the top of that, Archbishop Chrysostomos II, lately, started interfering in the Greek Cypriot domestic politics. He has directed negative comments at Christofias, which included labeling him as the “president of dissolution” rather than solution, or accusing him for his “unacceptable concessions” towards the Turkish Cypriots.⁹ Christofias said he would not run for re-election in February 2013, if he fails to deliver a solution for the Cyprus problem.¹⁰ The slow pace of the negotiation process, together with the narrow victory of the right wing DISY in the recent parliamentary elections, puts DISY's leader and prospective candidate for the RoC president, Nicos Anastasiades, in a favorable position.

None of the parties managed to secure the majority in the House on May 22nd. As a result of that, it was unavoidable that there would be a coalition forming between the main stakeholders and the smaller parties. The election of the House Speaker often serves as an accurate indicator of what blocks and partnerships are likely to be seen during the presidential campaigns. The atmosphere at the first plenary of the House on June 2nd was highly competitive with three candidates running for the post of the House Speaker. AKEL and DIKO did not manage to re-elect Marios Karoyian (DIKO) due to Zacharias Koulias and Georgios Colocassides's refusal to comply with DIKO's collective decision to back Karoyian's candidacy. Following the election of Yiannakis Omirou of EDEK in the third round with the support of DISY, the two “disobedient” DIKO MPs were expelled from the party. This reveals that a grand coalition between the main pro-solution parties in the House, i.e. AKEL and DISY, is again unlikely.

Yet AKEL-DIKO coalition can presumably be a little problematic as the parties disagree on the topic of negotiations as well as a number of internal issues. During the 2006-2011 period, both DIKO and EDEK criticized AKEL for the rising unemployment rate, refusal to apply for the accession to NATO's Partnership for Peace program, the educational reform, the bill on social security funds, the pension reform as well as various aspects of the economic and fiscal policies.¹¹ Some of the

⁹ Agathocleous, J. (June 14, 2011). Christofias: A “President of Dissolution”. *Cyprus Mail*. Retrieved June 27, 2011 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.cyprus-mail.com/church/christofias-president-dissolution/20110614>.

¹⁰ Evripidou, S. (March 19, 2010). Christofias Will Not Seek Re-election If Talks Fail. *Cyprus Mail*.

¹¹ Kuger, M. (2010). *D&B Country Report: Cyprus*. Bucks: Dun and Bradstreet Limited, p. 7.

main rating agencies, such as Standard & Poor's, Moody's Investors Service and Fitch, have cut down RoC's sovereign credit and issued reports indicating the high possibility for another downgrade due to the exposure of RoC's banking system to Greece's by 30%.¹² RoC's budget deficit reached 6% of GDP in 2009. However, according to the Lisbon Treaty, EU member states are required not to exceed the limit of 3%. Therefore, the European Commission adopted a Stability Program on Cyprus that aims to reduce RoC's budgetary deficit to 4% of GDP in 2011 and 2.6% in 2012.¹³ As a result of this, clashing views of individual parties on the economic and fiscal policies that are supposed to reduce the country's budget deficit may be one of the first big trials for the new legislature.

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¹² Fitch Cuts Cyprus Rating 3 Notches due to Greece. (May 31, 2011). *Ekathimerini*. Retrieved June 27, 2011 from the World Wide Web: http://www.ekathimerini.com/4dcgi/_w_articles_wsite2_1_31/05/2011_392899.

¹³ See European Commission. (June 7, 2011). Recommendation for a Council Recommendation on the National Reform Programme 2011 for Cyprus and delivering a Council Opinion on the Updated Stability Programme of Cyprus, 2011-2014. SEC(2011) 803, p. 3.