

European  
Elections monitorfrom **Corinne Deloy**  
Translated by Helen LevyD-7  
7 days before  
the poll


# The Rightwing Opposition takes the lead in Voting Intentions one Week before the General Elections in Cyprus

The Chamber of Representatives, the Cypriot Parliament was dissolved on 26<sup>th</sup> April last. 531,136 people including nearly 200,000 in the district of Nicosia alone (191,517) will be electing the 56 members of the new assembly on 22<sup>nd</sup> May next. Only 10,000 of the 34,000 young people who have turned 18 since the last general election on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2006 have registered on the electoral rolls. It is obligatory however to vote in Cyprus. Abstention can be sanctioned by a 342€ fine and a prison sentence of up to 6 months, but this law is not applied. 486 people living in the Northern part of the island registered on the electoral rolls. The number of seats per constituency has been modified in time for these elections: Nicosia will elect 20 MPs (- 1); Limassol, 12; Famagusta, 11; Larnaca (+ 1), 6; Paphos, 4 and Kyrena, 3.

406 people from 9 political parties (142 in the district of Nicosia, 86 in Limassol, 77 in Famagusta, 50 in Larnaca, 34 in Paphos and 23 in Kyrena) and also six independents (3 in Limassol, 2 in Nicosia and 1 in Paphos) are officially running on 22<sup>nd</sup> May. Nine people are standing to represent one of the three communities (Armenian, Maronites and Roman Catholics) which sit in Parliament. Each of these representatives is elected by the members of his community only. He has no voting rights within the Chamber of Representatives except for when it concerns the community he represents.

Four new parties are standing for the first time in these national elections. The People's National Front (ELAM), a far right party led by Christodoulos Ioannides, is fighting to "protect Greek interests." "The problem with Cyprus is that it has been invaded and occupied by the Turks. The Turks are not our brothers. The history of Cyprus from 1960 to 1974 showed that Turks and Greeks cannot live together," declared the extremist leader. They want to see the establishment of a strong central government to take care of both Greeks as well as the Turkish minorities. It also wants to counter immigration, notably the illegal kind which is synonymous to an increase in unemployment and crime. 16 people will be sporting the colours of the People's National Front on 22<sup>nd</sup> May next.

At the other end of the political scale there is the People's Socialist Movement (LASOK). Led by Lakis Ioannou, this far left party supports the establishment of a federal government to settle the Cypriot problem but agrees with the People's National Front in so far as it

wants to limit the number of migrants on the island. 17 people are representing LASOK.

Led by Thekla Petridou, Cypriot Cooperation (KYPROS) supports greater immigration control and the teaching of Greek in schools. 28 people are running for this party on 22<sup>nd</sup> May. Finally the Citizens' Movement (ZYGOS) founded in January by academics and businessmen supports the idea of a government comprising experts, arguing that political parties defend their own interests before those of the citizens. The party wants to counter corruption. Ten people are running under the Citizens' Movement's colours.

The leader of the main opposition party, the Democratic Assembly (DISY), Nicos Anastasiades accuses the government, that is led by President of the Republic Demetris Christofias (Progressive Workers' Party – AKEL) – in Cyprus the head of state is also the head of government and in this case apart from his own party he governs with the Democratic Party (DIKO) and some independent politicians – of creating "an illusion

of prosperity". Nicos Anastasiades says that Cyprus is one of the European countries in which the prices of electricity, and also milk, coffee, bread and other basic products are the highest.

The party's second in command and leader in Parliament, Averof Neophytou criticised Mr Christofias's decision to borrow 200 million € on the internal market. In his opinion the government's attitude proves that the ratings agencies were right when they downgraded the island's rating. Two credit ratings agencies, Standard and Poors and Moody's indeed criticised Nicosia for the inadequacy of its fiscal measures, the lack of structural reform on salaries in the public sector and the size of its social transfers which comprise two-thirds of State spending and which are impeding the reduction of the public deficit and the debt.

According to Averof Neophytou, Demetris Christofias's government has no plan to counter the socio-economic crisis that is affecting the country and *"is leading us into an unending downward spiral with negative consequences for the economy."* The Democratic Assembly is asking the President of the Republic to take steps quickly on retirement pensions and to work towards regaining international market confidence. The Chamber of Representatives passed a bill on 21st April last that abolishes the multiple pensions system (people who received several retirement pensions will now receive half of the last salary that they were paid when they were still working). However MPs will not be affected by this new text. According to many analysts the new law will not lead to significant savings (around one million € per year) notably due to the great number of exceptions to the rule. *"The problem with multiple pensions diverted our attention from other major issues such as a global reform of retirement pensions,"* highlights Averof Neophytou.

Employment Minister Sotiroula Charalambous (AKEL) said that all of those who say that the viability of the pension's scheme is in danger are *"putting forward unfounded ideas."* Outgoing Finance Minister Charilaos Stavrakis (independent) stressed that the issue was a "time bomb".

Demetris Christofias has regularly boasted the country's latest economic results. GDP growth lay at 1% last year, a figure that was higher than forecast. It is due to rise to 1.5% in 2011 according to the European

Commission and to 1.7% according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The government achieved its goal in terms of public deficit: last year it totalled 5.3% ie below the 6% threshold, the limit that was set by Brussels. Demetris Christofias said that the government would do everything it could to achieve the goal set for Cyprus by the EU ie to reduce public deficit below the 4.5% mark. Unemployment lay at 7.2% of the working population in March. Amongst young people it now lies at 20.2%.

Progress Workers' Party spokesperson Stavros Evagorou said, *"we must not be over optimistic but the Cypriot economy is on the right path. The results based on the European Commission's estimates are satisfactory."*

*"Salaries in the public sector will not increase because we don't have enough money in the coffers,"* declared Finance Minister, Charilaos Stavrakis, who said that the government was going to start discussions with the pan-Cypriot civil service union (PASYDY) to make savings of up to 35 million €. Head of State, Demetris Christofias says that he has met union members on several occasions, information that has been denied by the union's leader Glafcos Hadjipetrou.

The Democratic Party's Vice-President Nicolas Papadopoulos said that the number of civil servants had increased contrary to government statements (which his party is a member of). Nicolas Papadopoulos said he was sorry that Charilaos Stavrakis refused to discuss retirement pensions and civil servants' salaries; it seemed he said that Mr Stavrakis did not want Cypriots to know what the country's real socio-economic was prior to the election.

The governor of the Central Bank of Cyprus Athanasios Orphanides has requested the rapid establishment of structural reform. He said he was pleased that the country's authorities had acknowledged the need to restrict public spending and to reform the retirement pension regime – a necessary but inadequate step according to this financial expert. According to Athanasios Orphanides, Cyprus's structural problems have been evident for many years but the will to achieve high growth levels prevailed over the need to find rapid solutions to the country's problems. *"With a government under observation for excessive deficit our national economy is running a serious risk,"* concluded the Central Bank governor.

At the end of April both Cypriots and Turks met again as part of the negotiations on the island's reunification under the aegis of the UN. "Turkey must change its position and become more flexible so that we can reach a settlement," declared the President of the Republic Demetris Christofias after the meeting.

Greek Foreign Minister Demetris Droutsas (Panhellenic Socialist Movement, PASOK) guaranteed the Cypriots that Athens supported them in finding a solution for the island. "We support the work of the Cypriot President Demetris Christofias in the quest for a solution based on UN decisions and in line with the "acquis communautaire" for a united Cyprus free of Turkish soldiers," he said qualifying the presence of Turkish troops on the island as "shameful".

The European Commission has granted 25 million € to Nicosia. This money is for the Turkish community. "This proposal again shows the EU's commitment to settling the Cypriot problem. This fund is a strong statement

from Brussels saying that it is expecting that the talks over the island's reunification will be concluded successfully," stressed European Commissioner for Enlargement and the European Neighbourhood Policy, Stefan Füle. The fund granted by the European Commission must be used to support the country's reunification in several areas (education, civil society, rural development, the environment and also work by the Committee for people who have disappeared and also for the opening of crossing points).

According to the polls the Democratic Assembly is due to win the general elections on 22<sup>nd</sup> May. It is due to come out ahead of the Progressive Workers' Party and the Democratic Party. Many political observers are expecting that the opposition party will try and form a government coalition with the Movement for Social-Democracy (EDEK) a party chaired by Yiannakis Omirou. The Chamber of Representatives that is elected on 22<sup>nd</sup> May will meet for the first time on 2<sup>nd</sup> June next.

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