

Rightwing candidate Nicos Anastassiades pulls easily ahead in the first round of the Cypriot presidential election.

Abstract :

Nicos Anastassiades, leader of the Democratic Assembly (DISY), supported by the Democratic Party (DIKO), easily won the first round of the presidential election in Cyprus on 17th February with 45.46% of the vote. Former Health Minister (2011-2012), Stavros Malas (Progressive Workers Party AKEL) came 2nd with 26.91%. He just came out ahead of George Lilikas, former Foreign Minister (2006-2007) supported by the Movement for Social Democracy (EDEK), who won 24.93% of the vote. The other 8 candidates won less than 1% each.

Turn out totalled 83.14% of the vote i.e. -6.48 points in comparison with the first round of the presidential election on 17th February 2008. It is obligatory to vote in Cyprus but increasingly the sanctions anticipated by the law against abstentionists are not implemented.

Nicos Anastassiades and Stavros Malas will be facing each other for the presidency of the Republic in the 2nd round of voting on 24th February next.

Results of the 1st round of the Cypriot Presidential election on 17th February 2013

Turnout : 83.14% (it is obligatory to vote in Cyprus)

Candidates	No. of votes won (1st round)	% of votes won (1st round)
Nicos Anastassiades (Democratic Assembly, DISY)	200 591	45.46
Stavros Malas (Progressive Workers' Party, AKEL)	118 755	26.91
George Lilikas (Movement for Social Democracy, EDEK)	109 996	24.93
Giorgos Charalambous (People's National Front, ELAM)	3 899	0.88
Praxoula Antoniadou Kyriakou (United Democrats, EDI)	2 678	0.61
Makaria-Andri Stylianou	1 898	0.43
Lakis Ioannou (People's Socialist Movement, LASOK)	1 278	0.29
Solon Gregoriou	792	0.18
Kostas Kyriacou	722	0.16
Andreas Efstratiou	434	0.10
Loukas Stavrou	213	0.05

Source : Internet Site of the Cypriot interior ministry (<http://www.elections.gov.cy/English/Islandwide>)

"The Cypriot people have decided to turn the page – the message is clear" stressed Tassos Mitsopoulos, Nicos Anastassiades spokesperson on the announcement of the first esti-

mates that anticipated the rightwing opposition winner in the first round. The rightwing candidate was standing as the most apt to negotiate an international aid plan, which will be vital

for Cyprus's future. In all events he is the one who favours it most even this means high austerity. The polls confirm this idea since they say that 37% of the Cypriots believe the DISY leader to be the best placed to manage Nicosia's negotiations with the Troika comprising the International Monetary Fund, the Commission and the European Central Bank.

"The country's survival depends on the presidential election. The people have to choose by giving a strong mandate to a government for national salvation in order to face the economy's immediate problems," indicated Nicos Anastasiades, adding "Cyprus has never experienced an economic crisis like this and the country's survival is in the balance."

Cyprus is indeed in the midst of turmoil. On 21st December last the island's sovereign rating was taken down two notches (CCC+) for the third time since August 2012 – and this went together with a negative outlook on the part of the ratings agency Standard&Poor's. Just a few days later on 10th January 2013 Moody's downgraded the country's rating by three notches (Caa3). Outgoing President of the Republic Demetris Christofias (AKEL) denied the degree of the economic crisis for a long time, before accepting that it was necessary for Nicosia to sign an aid plan but without accepting the conditions of it, notably the privatisation of the State-owned companies.

The island has not had access to the bonds market for the last two years and since June 2012 has been requesting foreign financial aid, notably because of the losses suffered by its banks, which fell victim to the collateral of the Greek crisis. The Cypriot financial establishments speculated immensely on the Greek debt; between 2009 and 2010 they repurchased 5 billion € (a quarter of the country's GDP) in Greek state bonds. The island needs 17 billion € - not a high sum in euro zone terms, but which is equivalent to one year of the Cypriot GDP – 10 billion of which for its banks. The Troika has accepted to help to a total of 7 billion € – which a priori is not enough.

In June next Cyprus has to reimburse 1.5 billion € – a first

reimbursement tranche of its debt. *"The recapitalisation of the banking sector and the reimbursement in June of a part of the Cypriot debt equivalent to 1.5 billion € will be challenges made to the new government,"* indicated Alexander Michaelides, a professor of Finance at the University of Nicosia.

In 2004 Nicos Anastasiades was the only candidate to have supported the Annan Plan (the name of the UN Secretary General at the time) who suggested the creation of a United Republic of Cyprus in the shape of a two nation confederation, in which the two states would be largely autonomous (one Greek in the south, Turkish in the north) based on the model of the Helvetic Confederation. On 24th April 2004 the Cypriots rejected the plan by 75.83% (64.9% of those in the northern part of the island voted in support). Unlike its present leader, DISY called for a "no" vote in the referendum. A remarkable thing this year is that the question of the island's reunification is no longer front state. *"For the first time in 39 years the electoral campaign is not focused on the island's division but on the state of its finances,"* writes Nikos Venizelou, an editorialist with the daily *Phileleftheros*.

"We shall now have a two round election. The ballot boxes will be the only judges. There will be a battle in the second round and we can win," declared one of the leaders of the Progressive Workers' Party, Nicos Katsourides.

With nearly 25% of the vote, George Liliakas finds himself kingmaker. *"We have many things in common with the electorate of George Liliakas, historically speaking and in terms of the stakes that Cyprus now faces,"* declared Stavros Malas, who supports the Troika's rescue plan but is against any austerity measures. *"Together we can emerge from the economic crisis via development and without an austerity plan which is damaging to society,"* he added.

The former Foreign Minister supported by the Movement for Social Democracy is refusing to choose between the two candidates in the second round for the time being.

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