

European
Elections monitor

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ANALYSIS

Nicos Christodoulides is the favourite in the first round of the presidential election in Cyprus, Averof Neophytou and Andreas Mavroyiannis running neck and neck for second place

On 5 February, Cypriots will be called to the polls for the first round of the presidential election to elect a successor to the current head of state, Nicos Anastasiades (Democratic Rally, DISY), in office since 2013. There are 14 candidates, a record number for the island. If no candidate wins an absolute majority on 5 February in Cyprus, a second round will be held on 12 February.

561,000 people have registered to vote. Some 1,150 polling stations will be open, including 35 abroad, mainly in Greece and the UK. 10,737 Cypriots living outside the island are registered for the presidential elections. The population over 18 years of age totals 724,619 people in Cyprus. 166,000 potential voters are not registered for the presidential election. 72,000 of them are aged between 18 and 25.

The year 2023 is an important election year in the region as neighbouring Turkey will hold presidential and parliamentary elections in June and Greece will vote in July to renew its parliament.

The 1960 Constitution has not been applied on the island since the inter-communal unrest of 1963. Consequently, the President of the Republic of Cyprus, elected by universal suffrage for a 5-year term, serves as head of government.

After two consecutive terms, the outgoing head of state Nicos Anastasiades is not allowed to stand again. In his assessment, the President of the Republic said that his greatest regret was not having succeeded in reunifying Cyprus, which was his first objective. He

highlighted the fact that 10 years ago he had taken over the leadership of an over-indebted state which was no longer allowed to borrow on the markets and which had been placed under financial assistance (IMF and European Union rescue plan) and that he was leaving a country in full growth (6% increase in GDP in 2022) and with full employment.

THE CANDIDATES RUNNING

The 14 official candidates are:

- Averof Neophytou, president of the Democratic Rally (DISY);
- Andreas Mavroyiannis, independent, supported by the Progressive Party of Workers (AKEL) and the left-wing party Generation Change. He is a diplomat, former negotiator of the Greek Cypriot community regarding the partition of the island, former Permanent Representative of Cyprus to the United Nations and former Permanent Representative of Cyprus to the European Union;
- Nicos Christodoulides, independent, member of the Democratic Rally, supported by the Democratic Party (DIKO), the Movement for Social Democracy (EDEK), the Solidarity Movement (DIPA). He is a former Minister of Foreign Affairs (2018-2022) and government spokesperson (2013-2018);
- Christos Christou, president of the radical right-wing populist and nationalist party, the National Popular Front (ELAM);
- Achilleas Demetriades, independent, lawyer;
- George Colocassides, independent, former vice-president of the Democratic Party;

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- Constantinos Christofides, independent, former rector of the University of Cyprus, member of the progressive New Wave movement;
- Andreas Efstratiou, independent, businessman, unsuccessful candidate in the last four presidential elections (2003, 2008, 2013 and 2018);
- Loucas Stavrou, president of the National Community Reconstruction Party;
- Celestina De Petro, independent, former member of the National Popular Front;
- Andronicos Zervides, independent, founder and CEO of the company GPG Cyprus;
- Alexios Savvides, independent, mathematician;
- Charalambos Aristotelous, independent, member of the United Democratic Youth Organisation (EDON), youth wing of the Progressive Workers' Party;
- Julia Hovrina Komninou, chairwoman of the United Republican Party.

According to the latest opinion poll by the Rai Consultants Institute, Nicos Christodoulides is expected to come out ahead in the first round of voting with 39.73% of the votes, followed by Andreas Mavroyiannis with 23.79% and Averof Neophytou with 21.62% of the votes. Christos Christou is due to take 4th place with 4.95%. The other ten candidates would get less than 2% each.

Two televised debates have already taken place between the candidates: on 4 November and 1 December 2022. The next one will take place on 11 January. A final one is scheduled for 3 February. Finally, the two candidates qualified for the second round will face each other on 9 February.

THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN

"There is no doubt that Nicos Christodoulides has a significant lead in the polls, which is partly due to the fact that he started his election campaign, albeit quietly, long before his competitors. But if you look closely, you can see that his advantage has been declining in recent weeks," said Pambos Papageorgiou, a professor at the European University of Cyprus, adding, *"In 2018, around the same time before the presidential election, Stavros Malas, the candidate of*

the Progressive Workers' Party, was credited with 15% of the vote, but he ended up with 30%. Polls don't tell the whole story".

Nicos Christodoulides should qualify for the second round, but it is difficult to say which candidate he will face on 12 February. *"The shortcomings of the other candidates benefit Nicos Christodoulides,"* said Pambos Papageorgiou.

For the time being, Nicos Christodoulides' strategy of refusing conflict as well as posing as a victim as soon as he is attacked has benefited him. He has promised to form a government of national unity if he is elected president of the Republic. He has promised not to create his own party but to continue his cooperation with the Democratic Party.

Nicos Christodoulides and Averof Neophytou have been fighting for the support of the outgoing president, Nicos Anastasiades. Averof Neophytou had proposed to Nicos Christodoulides to organise a primary within the Democratic Rally, no doubt believing that he would have an advantage in such a fight as the party president. The latter refused the battle.

Averof Neophytou defends Cyprus' membership of NATO. He wants the EU to play a greater role in the negotiations to resolve the division of the island and he wants the appointment of a European figure within a framework to be defined by the UN to make Turkey see reason.

For his part, Andreas Mavroyiannis said that Turkey was one step away from the partition of Cyprus and that the government of Nicos Anastasiades was doing nothing to prevent it. He reiterated that Nicos Christodoulides and Averof Neophytou can in no way present themselves as candidates for change since both are from the outgoing majority and the latter has shown itself incapable of keeping its promises, no more than those it made in 2018 and those it made in 2013. After two consecutive defeats, the Progressive Workers' Party has chosen to support a candidate for this presidential election who is able to rally and unite a large number of people behind his or her name, across traditional party lines. Therefore, Andreas Mavroyiannis and Averof Neophytou face the same

challenge: Will they be able to make a breakthrough among voters sympathetic to parties other than their own on 5 February?

AN ISLAND DIVIDED FOR NEARLY 48 YEARS

Many Cypriots have never known their island united. Since July 1974, the island has been crossed by a "green line" controlled by UN peacekeepers. This organisation has been present in Cyprus since 1963, the year of the first clashes between the Greek and Turkish communities living on the island. On 15 July 1974, the National Guard, inspired by the military junta in place in Greece since 1967, overthrew the Cypriot president, Archbishop Makarios III, and replaced him with Nicos Sampson. On 20 July, Turkish troops landed in Kyrenia to protect the Turkish minority. With the help of the Greek army, the government of Nicos Sampson managed to keep them behind a line (the Green Line) before collapsing four days later. However, Turkey refused to leave the northern part of the island it occupied, even after the fall of Nicos Sampson.

On 30 July 1974, Turkey, Greece and the UK established a security zone guarded by UN peacekeepers and the three countries recognised the existence of two autonomous administrations. On 13 February 1975, the Turkish leader, Rauf Denktash, proclaimed the autonomous, secular and federated state and was elected President in 1976. In January 1977, Rauf Denktash and Makarios III agreed on the principle of a federal bi-communal state, but the death of Makarios III on 3 August 1977 put an end to the negotiations. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus declared its independence in 1983. Turkey is the only state to recognise it internationally. To date, 35,000 Turkish troops are still stationed in the northern part of the island. The conflict resulted in about 4,000 dead, 1,400 missing and tens of thousands displaced.

On 11 November 2002, the UN proposed a third peace and reunification plan (after those of 1986 and 1992). This Annan Plan (named after the then UN Secretary

General) proposed the creation of a united Republic of Cyprus in the form of a confederation of two largely autonomous constituent states inspired by the model of the Swiss Confederation. This plan was put to a referendum of all the island's inhabitants on 24 April 2004. The Cypriots rejected it by 75.83%, while 64.9% of the inhabitants of the northern part of the island approved it. 89.18% of voters turned out in Cyprus and 87% in the northern part.

After gathering momentum in 2016, negotiations on the reunification of the island between the Republic of Cyprus and the northern part of the island have been at a standstill since 6 July 2017. The two sides failed to agree on the status of Turkish forces on the island (with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan speaking out against the departure of the 35,000 Turkish troops stationed in the northern part of the island) and Ankara refused to relinquish its rights to intervene in the talks held under the aegis of the UN in Crans-Montana, Switzerland.

Since then, the two sides have seen little of each other and no common ground has emerged that might allow the resumption of talks to resolve the issue of the island's division. The last time, between 27 and 29 April 2021, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres brought together Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades and the president of the northern part, Ersin Tatar, and the heads of delegation of the three "guarantors" of the island's security (Turkey, Greece and the United Kingdom, the former colonial power) in Geneva.

"The truth is that at the end of our efforts, we have not yet found enough common ground to allow the resumption of formal negotiations in relation to the settlement of the Cyprus problem," said Guterres.

Cypriots continue to support the reunification of the island in the form of a federal state, while those in the northern part favour the recognition of two independent and equal states on the island, which would then be divided between a Turkish and a Greek community. For many analysts, the solution to the Cyprus problem will come from civil society rather than the powers that be.

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Reminder of the results of the presidential elections of 28 January and 4 February 2018 in Cyprus

Turnout: 71.88% (1st round) and 73.97% (2nd round)

| Candidates | Number of votes obtained (1st round) | Percentage of votes cast (1st round) | Number of votes obtained (2nd round) | Percentage of votes cast (2nd round) |
|--|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Nicos Anastasiadis (Democratic Rally, DISY) | 137 268 | 35.51 | 215 281 | 55.99 |
| Stavros Malas (Progressive Workers' Party, AKEL) | 116 920 | 30.24 | 169 243 | 44.01 |
| Nikolas Papadopoulos (Democratic Party, DIKO) | 99 508 | 25.74 | | |
| Christos Christou (People's National Front, ELAM) | 21 846 | 5.65 | | |
| Giorgos Lillikas (Citizens' Alliance) | 8 419 | 2.18 | | |
| Andreas Efstratiou (independent) | 845 | 0.22 | | |
| Charis Aristidou (independent) | 752 | 0.19 | | |
| Michalis Minas (independent) | 662 | 0.17 | | |
| Christakis Kapiliotis (independent) | 391 | 0.10 | | |

Source : http://results.elections.moi.gov.cy/English/PRESIDENTIAL_ELECTIONS_2018/Islandwide

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