2019 EUROPEAN ELECTIONS IN CYPRUS: AN EMPIRICAL EXPLORATION OF SECOND-ORDER ELECTION EFFECTS AND EUROPE SALIENCE

Marios P. Efthymiopoulos
Associate Professor, Dr.
Neapolis University Pafos, Cyprus

Contact information
Address: 2 Danais Avenue, Paphos 8042, Cyprus
E-mail: m.efthymiopoulos@nup.ac.cy

Margarita Kaimaklioti
Policy advisor
European Parliament, Belgium

Contact information
Address: Building, ALTIERO SPINELLI, 60, rue Wiertz, B-1047 Brussels, Belgium
E-mail: Margarita.kaimaklioti@europarl.europa.eu

Stergios Fotopoulos
Dr., Press and Communication Administrator
Council of the EU, Belgium

Contact information
Address: 175, Rue de la Loi, B-1048 Brussels, Belgium
E-mail: stergios.fotopoulos@consilium.europa.eu

Received: January 31, 2024; reviews: 2; accepted: March 21, 2024.

ABSTRACT

By focusing on Cyprus’ constitutional and political system in light of the most recent European elections, this article explores and empirically analyses the second-order election theory and the European salience theory. The study applies these theories to identify key trends in Cypriot voters’ electoral behavior, including their attitudes toward European integration. The contribution

ABSTRACT
starts with a brief preliminary section on the country’s historical background, geopolitical profile, and political landscape. It then provides insights on Cyprus’ electoral system, the political parties’ campaigns, and election results. The findings seek to unveil voter attitudes and political trends in Cyprus, feeding public discussion and academic dialogue on the issue in anticipation of the upcoming 2024 European election. The article aims to clarify the European South’s attitudes toward voting and what to expect in the upcoming 2024 elections, considering challenges, threats, and volatility.1

**KEYWORDS**

Cyprus, European Parliament, European elections, second-order election theory, Europe salience theory.

**INTRODUCTION**

The legacy of yet another failed UN mediation and negotiation attempt in Cras-Montana in 2017 to resolve the Cyprus issue, unite the Island, and break the last division in Europe has cast a shadow over Cypriot opinions (e.g. Grigoriadis, 2017). On May 26, 2019, six representatives to the European Parliament were elected, and tasked with the crucial role among various European assignments of persuading Cypriot and European counterparts that the Cyprus issue is far from over. After the ballots were tallied, the political party Δημοκρατικός Συναγερμός (Democratic Rally; DISY) emerged victorious in yet another European election, securing a majority with 29% of the total vote. With the ongoing and largely unsuccessful UN-led reunification process, public attention shifted towards economic recovery and hydrocarbon exploration in Cyprus’ exclusive economic zone (EEZ), marked by a touch of European participation and engagement. Early results indicated that despite political fragmentation in the House of Representatives (Parliament), political uncertainty appeared to be neither high nor proven, given Cyprus’ unitary presidential government system that maintains strong state control.

Since 2004, when Cyprus entered the EU, its national domestic government structures and politics have primarily undergone integration into what can be described as the Europeanisation process (Stavridis & Tsardanidis, 2020). The benefits of EU membership for the country are great, yet diverse. They include, among others, economic, political, legal, ethical, and social advantages that bring countries together by establishing similar administrative and operational conditions. Cyprus actively participates in the EU decision-making process, shaping policies that affect the Union’s interests. It benefits from various EU structural and investment funds and financial assistance programs. It enjoys a single market economy with rules and regulations and free movement of goods, services, capital, and people. Access to education and research opportunities through other avenues, such as the Erasmus+ program, are also of utmost importance. Cyprus’ entry into the EU has unquestionably provided the Greek Cypriots with a measure of political stability, particularly regarding the Cyprus issue (Ioannides, 2021). Moreover, Cyprus’ EU membership has heightened the challenges for the Turkish-occupied area of Cyprus in its pursuit of international recognition (Ioannides, 2021). Even though Cyprus is not yet part of the Schengen area due to the unresolved illegal

---

1 Disclaimer: The scientific views set out in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the EU. Neither the EU institutions and bodies nor any person acting on their behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained herein.
division, EU membership contributes to security, including all member states’ defence, justice, and home affairs.

The EU has not driven a wedge into Cyprus’ domestic politics. No political parties sought to woo the electorate with complex Eurosceptic messages. Cypriots are well acquainted and driven by the European ideals. Besides, Europa was a Greek Goddess also worshiped in Cyprus. Since the country’s accession to the Union, the Cypriot public opinion about the EU membership has been mainly positive, albeit fluctuations. The latter can be attributed to socio-economic issues related to an Economic Adjustment Programme with the European Commission, the European Central Bank (ECB), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This program was signed at the turn of the first decade of the 21st century.

Examining election campaigns for EP seats since 1979, when European citizens first directly elected Members of the EP (MEPs), various pundits have characterised these campaigns as second-order elections (e.g., Schmitt, 2005). This suggests that European elections are viewed as less significant than national elections by the electorate, political parties, voters, and the media (e.g. Kaelble, 2010). At the same time, national issues take precedence over European or supranational issues in these elections (Cabeza, 2018). Second-order elections are typically marked by lower voter turnout and more unpredictable voter behaviour than parliamentary elections. Anti-establishment, protest, and marginal parties achieve better results in these elections. Second-order elections traditionally serve as a platform where parties in power may face repercussions or “punishment” from the electorate (Giebler and Wagner, 2015). Voters tend to focus less on different policy platforms and more on expressing their approval or disapproval of the performance of the incumbent national government (Hobolt, 2015). Hence, the electoral outcome reflects the perceived performance of the national government rather than the popularity of individual parties or candidates. Besides, voters perceive the election as an opportunity to send a message to their national government rather than to influence European-level policies directly.

The European salience theory, which examines the level of salience or importance that voters attribute to EU-related issues, indicates inter alia that Green parties, Eurosceptic factions, and extreme left or right-wing parties can capture the attention and votes of the electorate in the European Parliament vote (Viola, 2015; Ferrara & Weishaupt, 2004). European salience theory, which assesses the extent to which voters prioritise European integration, EU governance, and EU policies among other EU-related topics, explains that the level of salience assigned may vary depending on contextual factors, including party position and party system polarisation over European integration (Braun, Hutter, and Kerscher, 2016). In this context, political parties may strategically emphasise or downplay EU-related issues based on their electoral strategies and ideological orientations.

Two pivotal research questions drive the current article, each underlining the nature of European Elections in Cyprus between 2004 and 2019. First, to what extent could the European elections be considered second-order in Cyprus? (Q1). Second, our research aims to uncover the European salience argument in the member state. Put differently, have political parties that express scepticism over European integration achieved a higher share of the vote in European elections than in national elections? (Q2).

In our first article section, we clarify Cyprus’ constitutional and political system and the country’s electoral system. A presentation of the mainstream party profiles and
their positions, including their stance on Europe, will follow on two Left-Right dimensions. At the same time, we will aim to shed light on Cyprus’ stance towards the EU, including Cypriot public attitudes towards the Union.

The second part of the research delves into national and European elections in Cyprus. This will enable one to discern the differences in parties’ performance and voters’ participation during these election contests. The discussion progresses to cover information campaigns, rules for national political campaigns, financing, and party campaign organisation. Subsequently, attention shifts to parties and candidates participating in the EP elections and their results. Finally, the Cyprus case is examined to assess the applicability of the Second-Order Election theory and the European salience theory.

1. THE CONSTITUTIONAL AND POLITICAL SYSTEM

2.1. The Executive Power

The Republic of Cyprus operates under a unitary presidential system with a clear division of powers among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. The President, elected for a five-year term by citizens over eighteen through universal suffrage, holds executive authority. Originally, the Constitution included a provision for a Turkish-Cypriot vice-president, but it has been suspended since inter-communal violence erupted in 1964 (Ker-Lindsay, 2006). The President serves as both the Head of State and Government, chairing the Council of Ministers, which consists of eleven members and oversees various aspects of governance, including foreign affairs, defence, and public services. The President also holds veto power over decisions or laws regarding foreign affairs, defence, or security (Republic of Cyprus, 2019).

1.2 The Legislative Power

The legislative power resides in the House of Representatives, a unicameral parliament with 80 seats. Greek-Cypriots occupy 56 seats, while 24 seats are nominally reserved for Turkish Cypriots. The House has the authority to amend the Constitution, invest the President in office, and approve or reject proclamations of emergency. It also controls the government, adopts the annual state budget, and exercises legislative functions (House of Representatives, 2020).

2. THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM

Cyprus employs a proportional representation electoral system, with direct elections based on closed party-lists and a preferential system. The country uses the hare electoral method, with a threshold of 1.8%. Voting is compulsory, and eligible citizens must register on the electoral roll. Candidates can run independently or as part of political parties, and each party presents a list of candidates in alphabetical order by family name. Funding for political parties is regulated by law, with state funding available to cover electoral and operating expenses, subject to specific conditions and donation limits (EuroPAM, n.d.).

Despite some parties adopting internal quotas, women’s participation in politics remains low. In the 2019 European election, only 27.7% of candidates were women,
with under-representation among elected MEPs. However, in 2022, Eleni Stavrou became an MEP, replacing former DISY MEP Lefteris Christoforou (EPP), who was appointed to the European Court of Auditors.

Table 1. MEPs’ gender balance by year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Cyprus Women, %</th>
<th>Cyprus Men, %</th>
<th>E.U. Women, %</th>
<th>E.U. Men, %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


3. POLITICAL PARTIES

Political parties hold a prominent position within Cyprus’s public sphere. A bipolar party system dominates political life, with the centre-right Democratic Rally or DISY and the left-wing AKEL (Progressive Party of Working People).

The leading political party is DISY, founded in 1976 by Glafkos Clerides, who served as President of Cyprus from 1993 until 2003. It combines conservative policies with liberal views on economic, social, and ethical issues. More concretely, DISY’s ideology is based on Christian values, principles of democracy, equality, and respect for the rule of law and human rights. The party is the most unequivocally pro-European and Atlanticist party in Cyprus. Aiming for a free, peaceful, and united Cyprus, DISY campaigned in favour of the United Nations’ reunification plan proposed by Kofi Annan in 2004. In the 2023 presidential election, Averof Neofytou was the first-ever DISY candidate who failed to make it into the runoff, creating a negative record in the party’s history. Leading members of the then Communist party founded AKEL, which shares the Marxist-Leninist ideology. AKEL positions itself as a supporter of a peaceful, lasting, and viable solution to the Cyprus issue based on International Law, UN Resolutions, and the High-Level Agreement. It advocates an independent, demilitarised, bizonal bi-communal federation with a single sovereignty. Yet, its behavior ahead of the referendum on the Annan Plan was incoherent. While it had initially suggested it might stand right behind the Annan Plan, at a later stage, its leadership said it decided to oppose the UN-backed Plan, claiming that the UN Security Council would not provide security guarantees after reunification. In the presidential election held on 24 February 2008, the fourth General Secretary of AKEL, Demetris Christofias, became the first communist President of the Republic of Cyprus. His mandate ended on 28 February 2013. In the 2023 presidential election, AKEL backed diplomat Dr. Andreas Mavroyiannis, who had been appointed in 2013 as a negotiator for the Republic of Cyprus to address the Cyprus issue but ultimately failed to be elected as the 8th President of the Republic of Cyprus.

DIKO (Democratic Party) is the third largest party in the island. It is a centrist, nationalist party, founded in 1976 by Spyros Kyprianou. As stated in its founding manifesto, DIKO promotes government centrism, with a focus on improving life, social cohesion, and the reduction of wealth inequalities. Its former leader, Tassos Papadopoulos, was the fifth President of the Republic from 2003 to 2008. DIKO along with Tassos Papadopoulos embodied the fierce opposition to the Annan Plan, contributing significantly
to the maintenance of the single most important national problem affecting Cyprus’s contemporary history. In the second round of the 2008 Presidential election, DIKO threw its weight behind Demetris Christofias, joining a coalition government with AKEL, following the election. Five years later it formed a coalition along with DISY, having backed former President Anastasiades during the 2013 presidential election announced on 21 September 2012 at a joint meeting. Eventually, the party left the Government due to a disagreement with the President over the Cyprus Problem. DIKO, along with EDEK, radical centrist/social liberalist DIPA, and the nationalist Solidarity Movement, supported for the country’s presidency the then independent candidate Nikos Christodoulides, who eventually won both rounds of the last presidential election.

Another well-established political party is EDEK (Movement for Social Democracy), the Social Democratic party founded initially by Vasos Lyssaridis in 1969. Similar to DIKO, EDEK supported Demetris Christofias in the 2008 runoff voting, creating a government alliance with AKEL after the election. Two years later, the party left the Government due to differences in the approach and strategy with the then-president over the Cyprus issue.

Εθνικό Λαϊκό Μέτωπο, ELAM (National Popular Front), is a far-right nationalist party founded in 2008. There is a military discipline within the party’s organisation, which is also reflected in its daily activities. In public, the party’s members line up in formation, marching in strict order and wearing similar outfits (Stergiou 2016). ELAM strongly opposes a federalist approach on the Cyprus Problem, showing zero tolerance towards immigrants and standing against Cyprus’s Economic Adjustment Programme (Charalambous, Papageorgiou, and Pegasiou 2015). Until 2019, ELAM was affiliated to the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn (Χρυσή Αυγή) in Greece.

Δημοκρατική Παράταξη, DIPA (Democratic Alignment) is a radical centrist/social liberalist political party founded by Marios Garoyian in 2018.

Συμμαχία Πολιτών, SYPOL; (Citizens’ Alliance) was a centrist political party, which discontinued its activities in 2021 and joined Κίνημα Οικολόγων, KOSP (Movement of Ecologists), founded in 1996. At the time of writing, its leader was the Member of the House of Representatives, Charalampos Theopemptou.

Κίνημα Αλληλεγγύη (Solidarity Movement) constitutes a nationalist party. Former MEP Eleni Theocharous founded it in 2016, after she left DISY, following a disagreement she had over the settlement to the Cyprus issue. Ευρωπαϊκό Κόμμα Evroko (European Party) was founded in 2005. Spanning an ideological spectrum from centre-right to right, the party adopted a hard-line stance on the Cyprus problem, opposing to the Annan Plan. In March 2016, it dissolved to merge into the Solidarity Movement.

By 2011, when the eurozone crisis erupted, public distrust of the political parties had increased. The percentage of Cypriots who tend not to trust them has been bigger than the EU average as of that date. According to a 2022 Eurobarometer survey, eight out of ten Cypriots expressed their distrust of these organizations.

4. CYPRUS’S STANCE TOWARDS THE EUROPEAN UNION

4.1 Party Attitudes

DISY is a member of the European People’s Party (EPP) and the most unequivocally pro-European party in Cyprus. Since 2004, when Cyprus joined the EU, DISY has won every European election, securing two MEPs. The party’s 1998 Declaration on
European Democracy, in which it outlines its position towards the EU, constitutes an important milestone of DISY’s history. The party’s founder and fourth President of Cyprus, Glafkos Clerides, played a vital part in steering Cyprus towards EU membership.

Until 1995, the prospect of Cyprus’s EU membership was subject to severe opposition within AKEL, mainly on ideological grounds. Since then, it has been following a moderately Eurosceptic line. Hopes that accession into the EU could reunify the island, in conjunction with distress and fear of the emerging new world order following the collapse of the USSR, seems to have led AKEL to soften its approach somewhat (Agapiou-Josephides, 2011). However, as the famous phrase goes: the more things change, the more they stay the same. For instance, in 2008, the party’s MPs voted against the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. AKEL, which has been the runner-up in every European election contest since 2004, is a member of the European United Left–Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL).

DIKO supports European integration and has elected one MEP in each election since 2004. While the DIKO MEP initially joined the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) Group, since 2009, the elected MEP belongs to the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D).

EDEK is also a pro-European party, which has seen an MEP elected in every election apart from 2004, when it failed to do so. It is a member of the Party of European Socialists’ (PES) family.

DIPA, a member of ALDE, is pro-European. Founded in 2018, DIPA participated for the first time in a European election in 2019, when it did not manage to reach the electoral threshold.

ELAM is a Eurosceptic political party, whose rhetoric combines strong populist and anti-systemic elements. The party does not challenge the country’s membership of the EU. It opposes deeper European integration and the sharing of further competencies with EU institutions. In other words, it takes an intergovernmental approach. ELAM’s anti-European criticism focuses on the country’s Economic Adjustment Programme, EU policy on the Cyprus issue, Turkey, and migration (Stergiou 2016). Sitting on the sidelines until 2009, ELAM received 2.7% and 8.2% in the 2014 and 2019 European elections, respectively. The party has not yet managed to get an MEP elected.

SYPOL has adopted a moderately Eurosceptic rhetoric. Sometimes it expresses hard criticism of the EU, particularly when it comes to the country’s Economic Adjustment Programme. Ahead of the 2019 European election, the party formed a temporary coalition with KOSP, which is affiliated to the European Green Party (EGP). To date, they have failed to get a representative elected to the European Parliament. As of 2021, the party joined permanently the Cypriot Green party, renouncing its Eurosceptic position. Notably, KOSP (Greens), whose stance ranges from soft pro-Europeanism to soft Euroscepticism, had engaged in a pre-electoral cooperation with EDEK, during the 2014 European election.

Former MEP Eleni Theocarous, having left DISY and the EPP Group in the EP, founded “the Solidarity Movement” and joined the Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists (AECR). In the 2019 European elections the party joined its forces with DIKO. It did not manage to retain its single seat in the AECR, as DIKO is a member of the S&D group. According to Taggart and Szczerbiak’s (2008) typology, the group shares a soft Eurosceptic approach. Although it strongly criticises the EU, it does not question the country’s membership. This occurs also with AKEL and SYPOL, while ELAM lies between hard and soft Euroscepticism.
4.2 Public Attitudes

Citizens’ attitudes towards the EU are prominent in European integration (Gabel and Anderson, 2002). More concretely, they provide information about the quality of representation in the bloc’s policymaking. Ideally, decision-makers should ensure that policy outputs and institutional reforms are responsive to these attitudes (Follesdal and Hix, 2006). With the times of ‘permissive consensus’ (Hooghe and Marks 2008) over, public opinion preferences and trends cannot be neglected without posing an existential threat to the EU itself (Agapiou-Josephides, 2016).

In 2008, 52% of people felt that Cyprus’ membership of the EU is a “good thing”, with just 15% feeling it is a “bad thing” and 32% feeling it is “neither good nor bad”. Yet, in 2010, when the Eurozone crisis erupted, the positive stance towards EU’s membership declined.

The negative stance toward the EU reached a peak in 2013 (54%) when Cypriot authorities agreed on an Economic Adjustment Programme with the European Commission, the European Central Bank (ECB), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), aimed to achieve financial sustainability in both public finances and the banking sector. The EU-wide economic downturn exerted an influence on other countries, too, in particular as far as the electoral behavior in the 2014 European elections is concerned (Hobolt and de Vries, 2016).

Until 2023 the percentage of those who have a positive image has increased from 24% in 2004 to 42%. Ahead and after the 2019 European election, 37% has a positive view, noting a slight increase of 1 percentage point compared to 2018. Regarding the EU-27 average, the positive attitudes toward the EU stood at 42% in 2019, as the lowest rate was observed in 2011 and 2013.

![Figure 1. People’s Opinion on the EU in Cyprus](https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm)

Between 2017 and 2024, the positive image of the EU has outperformed the negative one in Cyprus, reaching its highest levels between 2018 and 2023. Positive perceptions declined during the eurozone crisis, in 2013 when the traditional pro-European
attitude of Cypriots was called into question, suggesting that Euroscepticism had become mainstreamed (Agapiou-Josephides, 2011). Yet, this was just a temporary trend which was reversed. In fact, by 2023 almost half of Cypriot citizens evaluated the EU positively or reasonably positively. In addition, 71% of Cypriots claimed to be EU citizens. Meanwhile, a fluctuating trend of positive perceptions can be observed in the EU-27 average from 2011 (31%) to 2023 (45%). Yet, after this historic low point, the average of the positive image across member states grew back again (e.g. 45% in 2023).

4.3. A Brief Overview of National and European Elections in Cyprus: 2001-2019

Over time, there has been a gradual decline in voter participation in both national and European competitions. In 2004, when for the first time Cypriots went to cast their ballots to choose their representatives in the European Parliament, the turnout hit 72.5%. In 2009 and 2014, abstentions increased by 13.1 and 28.5 percentage points respectively, compared to 2004. As the eurozone crisis deepened and its social impact spread fast within Cyprus, citizens’ sentiment towards the EU seemed to have changed during this period (Katsourides, 2013). In 2019, the turnout increased slightly, reaching 44.9%, still below the EU average. A similar trend could be seen in national legislative elections. While in 2001 legislative election the turnout was 91.7%, in 2021, it stood at 65.7%.

Table 2. National and European Elections in Cyprus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DISY</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>27.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AKEL</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIKO</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GTE - Evropaikí Dimokratía (European Democracy)*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDEK**</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELAM</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIPE</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SYPOL***</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Party – Evroko</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KOSP</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solidarity Movement****</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minima Elpidas - Message of Hope</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>99.5</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>99.9</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnout</td>
<td>91.7</td>
<td>72.5</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>59.4</td>
<td>78.7</td>
<td>43.9</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>65.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The party dissolved in 2008; ** in 2001 the party was named as KISOS, while in 2014, EDEK formed a pre-electoral coalition with KOSP; *** in 2019 and 2021, SYPOL participated along in the election along with KOSP; **** in 2019, Solidarity Movement joined its forces with DIKO

A decline in citizens’ participation can be also observed in the country’s presidential elections. With the turnout standing at 90.5% in 2003, the figure was 71.8% in 2018. Although voting is compulsory on the island, there has not been a strict approach to enforcement (Agapiou-Josephides, 2016). On a general note, national elections in Cyprus, in particular presidential elections, are likely to attract more people to vote than the European election contests. One may say that Cypriots feel that there is a higher stake in the former, than in the latter.

Since 1974, the division of the island has dominated the political debate during all electoral campaigns. The 2004 European election was held less than two months after the referendum on the Annan Plan. The pro-anti plan split carried over to the European electoral contest. This cleavage persisted during the 2006 legislative elections. While AKEL maintained a rather vague stance on the Annan Plan, DIKO strongly opposed it (Christophorou, 2009). For its part, DISY focused among other things on security and unemployment, assuring Cypriots that it would bring about more power to them and security to the country. There were also other issues of contention that formed the parties’ electoral programmes and the political agenda. For instance, the prospect of the participation of Cyprus in the Partnership for Peace in 2009, was one of them.

Table 3. Presidential Elections in Cyprus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Presidential 2003, %</th>
<th>Presidential 2008, %</th>
<th>Presidential runoff 2008, %</th>
<th>Presidential 2013, %</th>
<th>Presidential runoff 2013, %</th>
<th>Presidential 2018, %</th>
<th>Presidential runoff 2018, %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Glafkos Clerides – DISY</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicos Anastasiades – DISY</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>55.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ioannis Kasoulides – DISY</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demetris Christofias – AKEL</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stavros Malas – AKEL</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tassos Papadopoulos – DIKO along with AKEL and EDEK</td>
<td>51.5</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nikolas Papadopoulos - DIKO</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giorgos Lillikas – supported by EDEK in 2013, endorsed by SYPOL in 2018</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alekos Markidis – independent candidate</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nikos Koutsou – Néi Oríontes (New Horizons)</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christos Christou – ELAM</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>99.9</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnout</td>
<td>90.5</td>
<td>89.6</td>
<td>90.8</td>
<td>83.1</td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>71.8</td>
<td>73.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Ahead of the 2009 European election, DISY carried out its most Europeanised campaign. It referred to the benefits of European integration in terms of the Single
Market, welfare, security, and climate change. In this regard, the party made a joint policy statement with the EPP. In the meantime, it criticised AKEL for following a Eurosceptic approach that subverted the role of Cyprus within the EU (Christophorou, 2010). AKEL stressed the need to safeguard workers’ rights. DIKO continued to have the Cyprus problem as the cornerstone of its discourse, with KOSP arguing that a potential solution should be based on European principles.

The political discussion held in the context of the 2011 legislative election was overwhelmed by remarks about the economy. As Cyprus was already experiencing the impact of the financial crisis on some social indicators, all political forces seemed to have focused on this topic. Migration was also an issue of particular concern and subject to heated debates. In a similar vein, public debates revolved around the economy in the 2014 European elections. European issues were seemingly downgraded. The main points during the campaign were the country’s economic downfall and the Economic Adjustment Programme signed along with the European Commission, the ECB and the IMF. Meanwhile, political parties again presented their positions on the Cyprus problem, with DIKO, EDEK, and the far-right ELAM providing the most uncompromising approaches. Only DISY and AKEL were involved in the Spitzenkandidaten process for the Presidency of the European Commission. The former hosted campaign events for the EPP’s Jean-Claude Juncker, the latter for Alexis Tsipras of GUE/UEL.

The 2016 parliamentary election, which was marked by high absenteeism and the election of two ELAM members to the House of Representatives, took place in the context of revived negotiations to resolve the Cyprus issue and the country’s economic recovery. Former pro-solution President Anastasiades along with the then Turkish-Cypriot leader Akıncı made significant progress to this date to settle the issue. In the meantime, in March 2016 Cyprus had successfully completed its three-year Economic Adjustment Programme. The same issues also monopolised the campaign for the 2019 European election, albeit under different circumstances. Pessimism and uncertainty replaced a prevalent optimism that the Greek-Cypriot and the Turkish-Cypriot communities could reach a breakthrough. In this regard, the parties involved missed a historic opportunity in the Mont Pèlerin negotiations of December 2016, the Geneva Conference of January 2017, and the deliberations held at Crans-Montana, Switzerland. Other issues that caused tension during the campaign period were: Cyprus’s first serial killer case, which led to the resignation of the police chief along with the justice minister; the collapse of the Cyprus Co-operative Bank; the discussion on the introduction of the national health system; and, the alarming rise of the far right.

Some dissidents of the big four parties created alternative political schemes over the years (Bertrand, 2017). DISY was the winner in most national and European elections, with AKEL generally the runner-up. Accordingly, DIKO traditionally attained the third position, forming alliances mainly with the left. EDEK has been the fourth largest party in seats.

In spite of the establishment of several new political parties over the years, DISY and AKEL continued to receive the largest share of votes. In the European elections, they generally performed better than in the national elections, in which their share of votes has been gradually declining since 2016.

Incidences of higher vote swings should be interpreted as exceptional with only minor effects rather than systematic with a substantial impact. These exceptions are subject to contextual factors related to the country’s political scene. In the 2004 European election, DISY and AKEL experienced a significant decrease of their share of
the votes, compared to the national legislative election held in 2001. On the one hand, DISY seemed to have lost a significant share of votes by the then newly established European Democracy party (10.8% in the 2004 European election), founded by a group of DISY MPs, who opposed to the party line on the Annan Plan. On the other hand, one might argue that AKEL paid a political price for its negative stance on the Annan Plan, as part of its voters had expressed their support to it.

In the 2014 European election, AKEL obtained almost six percentage points less than in 2011, perhaps because some voters held former President Demetris Christofias’s government responsible for the explosion at Evangelos Florakis Naval Base that resulted in 13 casualties, and for contributing decisively to the country’s financial crisis.

In 2016, DISY’s loss of seven percentage points could be correlated with the establishment of the right-wing Solidarity Movement by the dissident former MEP Eleni Theocharous. EDEK is the only political party which has traditionally performed better in European elections than in the national ones, except for 2014 when it formed its pre-electoral coalition with KOSP. Overall, small groups have been creating alliances to reach the electoral thresholds, in particular during the European elections. The alarming rise of the far-right nationalist party ELAM in the 2019 election should be an issue of concern among the island’s decision-makers, in spite of the relatively reduced share of votes in 2021 national legislative election.

ELAM is a Eurosceptic political party whose rhetoric combines strong populist and anti-systemic elements. In 2019 European election, it received more than twice the vote share it had achieved in the 2016 national legislative election. Looking at the electoral performance of the party in the 2021 legislative election and the 2023 presidential election, which ranged between 6 and 7%, one could speak about its established position in the country’s political scene. Yet, despite its mostly hard Eurosceptic position, the party does not challenge Cyprus’ membership of the EU. Overall, Cyprus lacks a hard Eurosceptic political party that questions the country’s EU membership.

Instead, one may observe two political parties, namely, AKEL and Solidarity Movement, which belong to the left/right-wing political spectrum respectively and share a soft Eurosceptic approach. Though AKEL constitutes the second largest party in the island in terms of electoral performance, Solidarity Movement did not manage to win a seat in the 2019 European election and the 2021 legislative election. As far as SYPOL is concerned, which has adopted a moderately Eurosceptic rhetoric over the years, it discontinued its activities in 2021 and joined the Movement of Ecologists, leaving its Eurosceptic voice behind.

Although populism and Euroscepticism have been closely related at the conceptual level (Rooduijn and van Kessel, 2019), only ELAM and Solidarity Movement can be perceived as populist. In fact, both political parties have adopted a hardline stance on the Cyprus problem and position themselves in (extreme) right-wing populism.

6. AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF THE 2019 EUROPEAN ELECTION

6.1 The 2019 Election Campaign

The European Parliament Liaison Office (EPLO) in Cyprus is staffed with a highly qualified and active team. With the aim of raising awareness among the EU citizens in Cyprus, the EPLO dedicated most of its activities during the first five months of 2019 to spreading the message of the importance of the EU elections and voting. According to
its Annual Activity Report 2019, the EPLO in Cyprus deployed multi-level methods and innovative approaches during the campaign. The European platform thistimeimvoting.eu was the main tool around which the campaign unfolded. A grassroots movement was born with volunteers trying to register people on the platform and campaign door-to-door. The EPLO Office in Cyprus managed to register 10,700 citizens, a number considered impressive given the population of the island.

The volunteers played a critical role in raising awareness and boosting turnout. Cooperation between the institutions was also very important in achieving this goal. Several joint actions and events of the EPLO and the European Commission Representation in Cyprus were organised. Moreover, the three Europe Direct Centres in Cyprus and various NGOs helped achieve wider public exposure.

The EPLO combined traditional and new methods of political marketing to deliver the message. It focused on press advertising and the dissemination of promotional materials, including posters, leaflets, newsletters, and a pro-European brochure. In addition, the office was very vocal in social media. While the role of the EPLO in Cyprus was very important during the EP election campaign, national parties were the main actors during the period.

The EPP’s Manifesto, The Power of WE, was a point of reference around which the campaign of DISY unfolded. In fact, Manfred Weber, the EPP’s lead candidate (Spitzenkandidat) for the European Commission’s presidency, started his campaign trail with a visit to Cyprus. DISY was the first EPP member party to give its support for his candidacy. During his visit to Cyprus, Weber promised to fight for the island’s reunification, an issue that dominates the political discussion. DISY’s campaign was Europeanised. The EPP logo had a prominent position on the brochures distributed and the posters displayed on the roads. EPP banners backgrounded pre-electoral events and European flags flown. The pro-European nature of the party was proudly highlighted even during the announcement of the parties’ candidates. Campaign events were organised in every city, with the biggest taking place in Nicosia. The party’s youth organisation also organised several events.

The stance towards the EU and the characterisation either as pro-European or euro-sceptical was an issue that was addressed by all big parties. It is worth noting that one of AKEL’s campaign videos began by dismissing the allegations regarding the party’s Eurosceptic nature, by praising the action of its elected MEPs.

The campaign of the other political parties was more nationalised, including some limited references to the EU. However, all Cypriot parties deployed similar tactics, aiming to mobilise supporters. Some of them were door-to-door canvassing of voters, advertisements on television, radio and social media, and distribution of communication material, such as posters and flyers. Certain televised debates among the leaders of the parties were also held.

On a general note, one of the main goals of the parties was the rallying of voters in order to curtail their potential flow towards other parties. The campaign period was long and intense. The big parties focused on sending strong political messages, resulting in a polarisation of public discourse and of the electorate. They made both emotional and logical appeals in their ads. Yet, there was a particularly emotive character in the language of the televised campaign advertisements.

Political parties published their lists of candidates a few months before the elections, between mid-January and the end of February. KOSP along with SYPOL presented their ticket in the beginning of March. Altogether there were 13 lists, encompassing
72 candidates. They consisted of politicians, academics, journalists and professionals. Some fresher faces were brought together with experienced figures. Candidates of the political parties which managed to elect at least an MEP had an average age of 51 years. The percentage of women running for the elections was 27.7%, while the number of the Turkish-Cypriot candidates was 12.5% of the total share.

Table 4. Elected MEPs at the 2019 European Election in Cyprus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Elected MEPs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DISY</td>
<td>Lefteris Christoforou, Loucas Fourlas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AKEL</td>
<td>Giorgos Georgiou, Niyazi Kizilyürek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIKO</td>
<td>Costas Mavrides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDEK</td>
<td>Dimitris Papadakis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Perhaps the greatest peculiarity of the campaign was the relatively increased participation of Turkish-Cypriots, as they were able to stand as candidates on a joint ticket for the first time. Since the announcement of the parties’ candidates, some anticipated increased participation of the Turkish-Cypriot community in the election. In addition, the majority of the Turkish-Cypriot voters were expected to support specific political parties and candidates. This caused a sharp confrontation between political forces, raising issues over the relationship between the two communities and over the essence of the “Cyprus Problem”.

Another question that caused tension during the campaign period was Cyprus’s first serial killer case. Outrage was triggered among the island’s citizens after a Greek Cypriot army captain pleaded guilty to killing five women and two children. The Police Chief along with the Minister of Justice resigned on the grounds of ‘political responsibility’. The collapse of the Cyprus Co-operative Bank exacerbated the disagreement between institutions and political forces in the island. The discussion on the introduction of the national health system also fuelled clashes.

The Cyprus issue continued to be the main topic of the political discourse of the island. The discussion on the need to resume reunification talks, in addition to the Turkish aggression and including Ankara’s drilling operations in the Exclusive Economic Zone of Cyprus, resulted in a heated debate. Most references concerned the attitude of the Government and the stance of international actors towards Turkey. The EU’s role in the Cyprus Settlement Process was an issue of intense discussion among parties and citizens. Not least, the alarming rise of the far right was addressed during the campaign, with the mainstream parties taking a unified stance over this question.

As for the parties’ electoral platforms, DISY published two manifestos, on European and domestic policies respectively. The first was entitled ‘The power of WE’, using the slogan of Manfred Weber’s campaign for Commissioners post. ‘The power of WE’ campaign suggested policies “to build a strong Europe that protects its citizens and values; a smart Europe of ideas and innovation; and a kind Europe that takes care of its citizens” (Weber, 2019). The second one bore the title ‘Together in Europe with
Development and Security’ and focused on reform of the state and the educational system, access to better health services, the Cyprus issue, and the migration crisis.

The slogan of AKEL’s campaign was ‘Give strength to your voice’. The manifesto of the party focused on economy, civil rights and environmental policies. In the meantime, it was critical of the EU’s alleged lack of democracy and transparency, demonstrating the party’s soft Euroscepticism.

DIKO’s manifesto entailed a pro-European stance, addressing both domestic and European issues. In the forward by the party’s president, Mr Papadopoulos referred to DIKO as the “European social party of Cyprus” (DIKO, 2019). The manifesto called for a social Europe of solidarity, but also security for all citizens. At the same time, the party mentioned the Cyprus issue, suggesting the role that the EU could play in the resolution. Brexit and its possible implications on Cypriots was included in the manifesto.

The manifesto of the Cyprus Green Party highlighted the challenges that the EU was facing and the vision of the party for a “free, ecologic, democratic, sustainable and united” (Philenews, 2019) Europe “where the human rights, the law and the equality will be applied for everyone” (Philenews, 2019). Special mention was made of the position of Cyprus in the EU. Although European issues had a prominent place in the parties’ manifestos, one could perceive the campaign as Cyprus-centred and conducted via national lenses.

Based on the information provided by the Audit Office of the Republic of Cyprus, there was no State financing to political parties or individual candidates for the 2019 European election. However, individual candidates were required to submit a breakdown of any funds received from other sources for their pre-election campaign to the Elections Department of the Ministry of Interior. According to the Audit Office of the Republic (2021), the electoral expenses of most candidates ranged between €0 and €10,000, followed by those who spent between 10,001 and 20,000.

### 6.2 The 2019 European Election Results

DISY secured two seats in the European Parliament. In fact, it has been the constant winner of all European Elections since Cyprus joined the EU in 2004. The opposition Ανορθωτικό Κομμάτι Εργαζομένων Λαού (Progressive Party of Working People; AKEL) also saw two MEPs elected, having captured 27.5% of the vote. One representative of Δημοκρατικό Κόμμα (the Democratic Party; DIKO) was elected with 13.8% of votes. Κίνημα Σοσιαλδημοκρατών, the Movement for Social Democrats (EDEK) also got one MEP, getting 10.6% of the total vote. The remaining share was split between the National Popular Front (ELAM) with 8.3%, the Democratic Alignment (DIPA) with 3.80% the Κίνημα Οικολόγων – Συνεργασία Πολιτών Citizens Alliance-Movement of Ecologist (KOSP) 3.3% and other parties totaling to 3.7 %.

DIKO came third with 13.8%, while EDEK got 10.5%, both winning one seat each. ELAM took the fifth place, winning 8.2% of the vote. The turnout of 44.9% was the second lowest recorded for any election in Cyprus, just ahead of the rate of 43.9% in 2014. Overall, 641,181 citizens went to the polls. Amongst them, 549,011 were Greek Cypriots, 1,611 were Turkish Cypriots and 10,559 were citizens of other EU Member States. The turnout rate among Turkish-Cypriots in the European elections over the years might be explained as an indifference to voting on their part, although they are encouraged to do so. In principle, Turkish-Cypriots should have felt as represented by the MEPs elected during the years, yet this has not been the case. Despite this, the election of Niyazi...
Kızılyürek could have altered this trend, increasing Turkish-Cypriots awareness and participation. In 2019, the majority of the Turkish-Cypriots voted for AKEL.

Diving deeper into the 2019 election results, we can capture a series of observations. First, Cyprus performed poorly in terms of gender balance, as zero female MEP candidates were elected. Second, the election of 26 May 2019 brought about a landmark result. More concretely, a Turkish Cypriot and Cypriot citizen, Niyazi Kızılyürek (AKEL), was elected for the first time in the European Parliament. He became an opposition member of the European Parliament and represented a portion of the Turkish-Cypriot community, which is now gathered in the northern part of Cyprus. Third, the far-right nationalist and xenophobic party, ELAM, received more than twice the vote share it had achieved in the 2016 national legislative election. The underlying message of this, in conjunction with the low turnout and the seeming lack of citizens’ trust in the political parties in Cyprus, should not be disregarded. Looking at the party’s electoral performance in the 2021 legislative and 2023 presidential elections, which ranged between 6 and 7%, one could say that ELAM seems to have a stable support base among Cypriot voters. Instead of speaking about a protest vote, pundits should perceive the development as a new political reality.

6.3 Political Developments in Cyprus after the 2019 European Election

Since May 2019, the Cypriot political landscape has changed as a result of national parliamentary and presidential elections. In fact, on 30 May 2021 voters were asked to go to the polls to choose their 80 members of the House of Representatives, 56 Greek Cypriots and 24 Turkish Cypriots. Yet since 1964 the Turkish Cypriot seats have remained vacant with the House of Representatives consisting of just 56 seats. The elections saw the victory of the Christian-democratic and liberal-conservative political party in Cyprus, followed by AKEL and DIKO. The contest saw ruling centre right DISY obtaining the highest share of the vote of 27.8% and 17 seats. AKEL followed with 22.3%, down from 25.7% in 2016, and DIKO obtained 11.3%, down from 14.5%. EDEK increased its vote share, rising to 6.7%, from 6.2% in 2011. The far-right nationalist party ELAM also managed to gain votes. They received up to 6.8% in distinction from 3.7% in 2016. The radical centrist/social liberalist DIPA, a breakaway group from DIKO formed in 2018, obtained 6.1%. Finally, KOSP, the country’s Green Party, received 4.4%, down from 4.8% in 2016.

Subsequently, in early 2023, Nikos Christodoulides was elected as the eighth President of Cyprus with 51.9% of the votes and succeeded former President Nicos Anastasiades, who won the presidential elections in 2013 and 2018 and could not run for a third mandate. His rival, former chief negotiator on the Cyprus issue Andreas Mavroyiannis received 48.1%. Nikos Christodoulides split away from DISY and ran as an independent candidate, backed by smaller centrist and right-wing parties. DISY’s candidate Averof Neofytou, who had been party president since 2013, did not qualify for the runoff.

Every pre-election discussion revolved around the political stalemate over the Cyprus issue, including how each of the main political parties or candidates could overcome it and ultimately resume the negotiations for its settlement. Cyprus remains unlawfully divided and invaded, since the illegal military invasion by Turkey in 1974, which resulted in the displacement of Greeks and Turkish Cypriots overall with those deceased or still missing in action creating a long list of casualties after the regional
conflict. Yet, apart from this crucial problem, the last presidential election also focused on the country’s economic slowdown, high inflation as well as the increase of irregular migration and corruption.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

After four European Parliament election contests, some key results are evident regarding Cypriot voters’ electoral behavior. In contrast to what the argument of the second-order election suggested, the performance of large and governing parties is somewhat mixed. They performed better in two European elections than in the previous national elections while receiving a smaller share of the vote in the other two elections. DISY gained more votes in the 2009 and 2014 European elections than in their previous legislative elections. AKEL also noted an increase of almost four percentage points in 2009 compared with 2006 and two percentage points in 2019 compared to 2016. Yet, both big parties lost votes in the 2004 European elections, with AKEL receiving a smaller share of the vote in 2014 than it did in 2011 and DISY facing a slight decrease in the 2019 European elections. Hence, Hix and Marsh’s (2007) argument that European elections may serve as an opportunity for citizens to punish governing parties, voting for smaller and opposition groups is not evident in Cyprus.

At the same time, the vote-share gains for small parties seem relatively meagre. The exception is EDEK, which has traditionally won more votes in every European election than in the previous national election, apart from 2014, when the party formed an electoral alliance with the Greens (KOSP). The far-right party ELAM increased its share in the last election for the Members of the European Parliament. Meanwhile, the so-called ‘green wave’ appeared across the EU in 2019 (EurActiv, 2019) and did not touch Cyprus’s coast. Over the years, KOSP has done worse in almost every European election than in the previous legislative one. This led its leadership to proceed with electoral alliances, one of which was with EDEK in 2014, which benefited the party.

Over time, turnout at the E.P. elections have been lower than at national legislative and presidential elections. This development is in line with the theory of second-order election. In the 2014 and 2019 E.P. elections, voters’ participation was below 45%, while in 2004, the turnout stood at 72.5%. We might say that political parties spent fewer resources during the European elections than during the national elections. An interesting insight is that in the 2019 European election, there was no State financing to parties or candidates.

Regarding the emergence of new political parties, most of them were short-lived and were created by dissidents from the big parties. Their performance was rather scanty, other than GTE – Ευρωπαϊκή Δημοκρατία (European Democracy). In terms of issue salience, political parties competed by focusing on selective issues rather than confrontation, while there was issue convergence among larger political groups (Dolezal et al., 2013). Since 1974, the Cyprus problem is the most critical concern during the campaigns. Other issues have also appeared during the years, driven by political developments. Debates were centered on economy and migration following the eruption of the two crises, as well as Turkey’s illegal activities in the Eastern Mediterranean, among other issues. European issues, which certainly did not dominate discussions, were discussed through national lenses.

Turning to the broader picture, the “electoral connection” between citizens and European politics described by Hix and Marsh (2007) was lacking. Contrary to parliamentary
democracies, the political system of Cyprus, in which the president has a fixed term of office, minimises the influence of timing on the election results. Did these aspects validate the second-order argument in Cyprus? The answer is both yes and no. Certain aspects, including party financing and turnout, did appear; others, namely the performance of large and governing parties or Greens and timing, seemed relatively narrow.

By unravelling the election results in conjunction with the European salience theory (Viola ed., 2015), one may find interesting evidence. The argument that political parties expressing scepticism over European integration probably achieve a higher share of the vote in European elections than in national elections (Ferrara and Weishaupt, 2004) is confirmed.

AKEL did better in two out of four European elections than in the national elections prior to them. The soft Eurosceptical left-wing party has traditionally adopted a critical attitude towards the EU, particularly during the election campaigns for the EP seats. The percentage of the far-right nationalist and xenophobic party ELAM more than doubled in 2019 compared with the 2016 legislative election. The situation with other Eurosceptic groups across the political spectrum is somewhat different, receiving lower levels of support. However, there was no brutal anti-European campaign, as Cyprus lacks a hard Eurosceptic political party that questions the country's EU membership.

Most of the 2019 Cypriot political parties' manifestos could be considered Europeanised to a certain extent compared with those drafted previously. DISY incorporated the platform of the EPP's lead candidate, Manfred Weber's platform, while AKEL criticised the EU's alleged democratic deficit. DIKO and KOSP's manifestos also had a European flavour. The argument that political parties aim to mobilize voters in the European elections by refining their national policy strategies without drafting manifestos concerning EU policies seems void.

Scholarly research has identified two dimensions that structure party competition during the European elections: the left-right dimension and the green/alternative/libertarian and traditionalism/authority/nationalism (Marks et al. 2006, p.156-7). Both dimensions can be observed in Cyprus, although unevenly. The former prevails over the latter, as the left-right dimension is better reflected in the electoral programs of the two big parties belonging to two different poles of the political spectrum. The green/alternative/libertarian and traditionalism/authority/nationalism better serve smaller parties' political agendas.

Party political competition in Cyprus saw confrontation that led to increasing polarisation. This occurred when debates were held on issues that could underline ideological differences, mobilize the electorate, and create media headlines. Some examples are the Cyprus problem, the closure of the troubled state-owned lender Cooperative Bank, and the country's Economic Adjustment Programme. Political parties also competed on less ideologically coloured issues on the grounds of selective emphasis.

According to the evidence from several national and European elections in Cyprus, some elements of the second order and European salience arguments can be confirmed. Others do not seem to be met. A good perspective is to seek and capture a new comparative approach between the south and the north of Europe, including the Baltic States and Cyprus and/or Greece. To capture a more comprehensive picture, further research should continue to address the validity of these questions on the island longitudinally. This prospect should incorporate the upcoming 2024 European elections, where many similar issues are expected to be raised, while far right-wing, populist parties are likely to win more EP seats.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


