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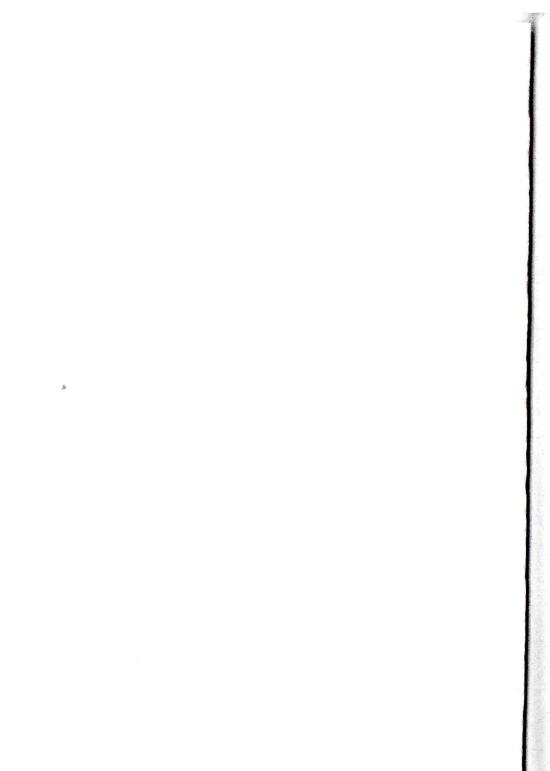# Party–Society Relations in the Republic of Cyprus

Political and societal strategies

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11 Partitocracy and democracy in Cyprus

Concluding reflections and questions[*]

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In the year 2010 the Republic of Cyprus marked the fiftieth anniversary of the accession of the island to independent statehood after a succession of occupations by foreign imperial powers since the end of the Middle Ages. Cyprus had been an independent kingdom in the Middle Ages under the Frankish Lusignan dynasty, which in the course of three centuries presided over the production of a remarkable Greek-speaking culture in the island. Following the cession of the island kingdom to Venice in 1489 by the last queen of the medieval dynasty, Caterina Cornaro, Cyprus entered a period of rule by the great powers dominating the Mediterranean throughout the early modern period. Venice until 1570–1571, the Ottoman Empire from 1571 to 1878 and the British Empire from 1878 to 1960 ruled over Cyprus and imposed multiple forms of arrested political evolution upon the insular society. Thus when Cyprus acceded to independence in 1960, its society possessed very limited experience of modern politics. It is true that British rule had introduced in its early years a rudimentary type of political representation in the form of the Legislative Council, as well as some experience of local government through municipal elections. Serious exposure to democratic government and the political education that such institutional arrangements might bring to societies remained beyond the experience of Cyprus. An equivalent absence from the island's intellectual universe involved liberal political thought and social discourse. The one strand of modernist political discourse that took firm root and came to dominate the politics and culture of the island, setting an unnegotiable and incontestable normative framework to it was the ideology of nationalism. This had been the ideological legacy of colonial rule which was carried over into the political culture of independent Cyprus.

In view of this background it should not perhaps appear surprising that in marking the fiftieth anniversary of its independence, the Republic of Cyprus chose to put the emphasis on a range of achievements of the half century of statehood, but had very little to say about the history of democracy during that period. It is true

that the early history of the Republic was marked by conflict and tragedy and thus the half-century commemorations focused especially on the tragedy but also the survival of the Republic following the Turkish invasion of 1974. The survival of Cyprus as an independent state and the successful management of the consequences of the invasion could be credited to the Republic as its greatest achievement in its fifty-year history. The other major achievement of the period could be considered to be accession to the European Union at the 2004 enlargement. That was to a considerable extent due to the credit Cyprus had gained in the sphere of economic development but also to Europe's wish to encourage a solution to the Cyprus Question.

All this was rightfully the source of the Republic's pride in celebrating its fiftieth anniversary, but to an observer, interested in appraising the Republic *politically*, the silence on the history of democracy could appear quite striking. What I should like to do in outlining some concluding reflections to this important collection, therefore, would involve an attempt to address the question of democracy in the Republic's fifty-year history. The methodological challenge involved in this project is quite serious: how could the question of democracy be addressed in a substantive and not in a rhetorical way in the context of the political history of the Republic of Cyprus? A possible method would be a level of analysis approach, whereby the question could be treated on two levels. One level of analysis would be the history of political parties in the Republic. It is on this level that the contents of this volume raise the question of democracy either directly or indirectly by considering it through the concept of 'partitocracy'. In order to understand partitocracy and how it works, how in fact it gets implanted in society and manages to turn itself into a constitutive part of the 'natural order' of things in the conscience of the people, one has to look at linkages, at the mechanisms whereby political parties connect with civil society, organized groups of supporters and individuals. The concept of linkage, which is a central research focus of several chapters in this collection, is fundamental in deciphering the structure and vitality of partitocracy. What in fact should be pointed out in addition to the evidence presented by particular chapters in the collection is the fact that the web of linkages consolidated by political parties with groups and individuals nurtures a mentality of dependence on the parties that in turn makes partitocracy possible. Returning to the levels of analysis approach it might be added that a complementary level of analysis would be to consider the substance of democracy in a 'partitocratic' political environment and to confront on this level the inevitable normative questions that arise from the consideration of the evidence presented in this collection.

The several chapters in the collection provide adequate evidence on the basis of which to approach the question of democracy in Cyprus on both levels of analysis. Before turning to the appraisal of the evidence, however, we should make explicit in what sense democracy and the operation of political parties could be equated in the context of Cypriot politics. When Cyprus became independent in 1960 only one political party worthy of the name could be discerned in local politics. That was the Cypriot Communist Party AKEL (Ανορθωτικό Κόμμα Εργαζομένου Λαού, Progressive Party of the Working People), which in the decade of the 1940s

had emerged as a dominant factor in domestic politics and one of the main inter-
locutors of the British colonial rulers, the other being the church and conservative
leaders. The role and significance of AKEL in Cypriot politics is appraised in this
collection by the editors in their own contribution. The challenge of AKEL in local
politics became a dominant preoccupation of rightist and conservative groups in
Cypriot politics from the 1940s forward, growing into a paranoia that, one might
say, determined the character of the political life of Cyprus during subsequent
decades. On the eve of independence and despite the sustained attempt to margin-
alize it by excluding it from the liberation struggle in the 1950s, AKEL could easily
command about one third of the popular vote. This became clear at the first presi-
dential election in December 1959. The character of party life in independent
Cyprus was accordingly shaped by the effort to build counterweights to AKEL.
The first election to the thirty-five Greek Cypriot seats in the House of Representa-
tives limited AKEL to five seats, while the rest went to the 'Patriotic Front', a loose
political formation into which the groups that had fought in the liberation struggle
had transformed themselves. Cyprus appeared to be acceding to independent state-
hood approximating the model of a one-party state on the third-world paradigm
under a charismatic religious leader, Archbishop Makarios, who combined the
heritage of nationalism endemic in Cypriot politics with protean forms of populism
in transacting his style of leadership.

The foregoing reminders of the early political history of the Republic were put
in place in order to set a framework within which to attempt an appraisal of the
prospects of democracy in the island-republic. These prospects did not appear
bright at the dawn of independent political life and were further obscured by the
outbreak of ethnic conflict in late 1963 and throughout 1964. As is well known,
under conditions of civil and ethnic conflict, intensified in the case of Cyprus by
Turkey's threats of invasion and actual bombing of the island in August 1964,
democratic government cannot prosper. In Cyprus some of the formalities of dem-
ocratic government were maintained, but during the decade of the 1960s, the for-
mative period of the Republic's existence, no electoral contest took place. The
terms of service of the president and the House of Representatives, due to expire
in 1965, were annually extended. A presidential election in 1968 returned Arch-
bishop Makarios to the presidency with a 96% majority – a resounding victory, of
course; whatever this might mean for the character of the democratic process in
Cyprus. The outcome of that electoral contest confirmed the monopoly of power
that the Archbishop had managed to secure as President of the Republic on account
of the eruption of ethnic violence and the threats of Turkey to invade the island. In
the name of the 'national interest' and in view of the threats to the survival of the
Republic, the political parties and especially AKEL acceded to the Archbishop's
monopolization of power in exchange for a non-aligned foreign policy, which very
well served the interests of Moscow. The concentration of power in the hands of
the president in the name of the overriding exigencies of continuing national emer-
gency, nevertheless, undermined the prospects of a democratic political culture,
limited severely the possibility of free public debate and reinforced the 'dialectic
of intolerance' that had been the primary and insurmountable obstacle to the values

of liberalism, toleration and criticism in Cyprus.[1] It was this environment that contributed to the institutionalization of political parties as components of the existing structure of power and nurtured partitocracy.

The political historian might say that the history of democracy in Cyprus began with the parliamentary election of 1970. The easing of ethnic tensions and the progress of the intercommunal talks that had been initiated in 1968 allowed a resumption of partisan alignments and the formation of political parties, which claimed the popular vote at the second parliamentary election in the Republic's history held in July 1970. That election could be considered of indeed historic significance in the development of political parties in Cyprus.[2] In fact, it produced the four-party system that has dominated Cypriot politics in subsequent decades and gave rise to the partitocracy to which this collection refers. The partitocracy is made up of two main party poles, AKEL on the left and a major party on the right under the successive names of Unified Party or (since 1976) Democratic Rally and two 'centrist' parties in-between. From time to time a party under various, mostly euphemistic, names or other small formations made their appearance, but this did not disturb the dominant, four-party pluralism. This four-party system has been characterized by remarkable stability and tenacity over a period of almost half a century. It managed to find a modus vivendi and coexist with a strong leader like Archbishop Makarios until his death in 1977. It did survive the shock of the Turkish invasion of 1974 and the deep trauma inflicted on Cypriot society and sensibility by its dire social and humanitarian consequences. In fact one might say that the party system handled the consequences of the invasion in ways that helped Cypriot society reach an accommodation with them. Eventually the party-system, although maintaining familiar rhetoric and leaving normatively unquestioned the prevailing culture of nationalism, did manage to face up to the challenges of changes that surfaced following the Republic's accession to the European Union in 2004. The resilience of the Cypriot party-system was tested but seems to have also met successfully the most serious trial faced by Cypriot society since 1974, the financial and banking crisis of 2013, which subjected large segments of the people of the island to serious hardship. The party system in Cyprus could be seen in comparative terms as a case of what has been described by Giovanni Sartori (1976: 131–45) as 'polarized pluralism'. In fact the stability of the Cypriot four-party system, which extends between the two strong poles on the left and the right, respectively, possesses considerable interest on account of its remarkable ability to reproduce itself which does not conform to the vulnerability that Sartori ascribes to polarized pluralism.

The entrenchment of the four-party system has made the politics of Cyprus democratic since 1970 if modern democracy is to be understood, as some classic definitions suggest, as 'unthinkable save in terms of parties' (Schattschneider 1942: 1). The editors quote this definition by Elmer E. Schattschneider, a pioneer of modern democratic theory. If we settle for this understanding, then Cyprus has been a democracy for most of its history as an independent state. The several chapters of the present collection, especially the authoritative studies of individual political parties and their multiple linkages with society, document in detail this

history of 'democratic' politics. If we move, however, to the next level of analysis we have proposed as part of the methodology of our approach, we dare raise the question: has it really been democratic politics in a substantive sense or has it been, to remember another distinguished political scientist, Hans Daalder (1966: 59), just a 'democratic figleaf'? Obviously raising such a question makes things more complex and more difficult, but this cannot be avoided. The questions are forced upon the reader of this collection by the extensive evidence accumulated by its various chapters describing convincingly Cypriot politics as a 'partitocracy'.

What we hear about the partitocratic character of Cypriot politics certainly conforms and confirms Schumpeter's definition of political parties, rejecting the old Burkean understanding of 'a group of men who intend to promote public welfare upon a principle on which they are all agreed' and telling us instead in a sobering and realistic spirit that 'a party is a group whose members propose to act in concert in the competitive struggle for political power' (Schumpeter 1962: 283). The quest of power is thus the motive that brings cohesion to political parties. In this perspective, democracy, as Schumpeter also insists, is no more than a method of government in this competitive struggle (Schumpeter 1962: 268–83). This understanding of things leaves a lot to be desired for a devoted democrat who would view things in the perspective of John Stuart Mill, for whom democracy is more than that, it is a school of character and a domain of fulfillment of individual potential. Its functioning both presupposes and engenders a democratic culture, premised on respect of individual autonomy and on recognition of the need to secure the social preconditions that make autonomy possible. Partitocracy by contrast presupposes only the formalities of democratic constitutionalism. On the surface it might be seen to bear out the understanding of democracy propounded by Schumpeter, but in fact it is inadequate at best and at worst a betrayal of the substance of democracy. This is what the chapters in this collection seem to tell us. Partitocracy, as the editors define it in the introduction, represents in fact an extension of Schumpeter's strictly political understanding to 'the rule of political parties in almost all spheres of social life', creating a specific culture of dependence that goes well beyond the political, permeating the entire fabric of society, instead of encouraging a sense of active citizenship. Can this be interpreted as a form of 'democratic totalitarianism' in the sense, as this self-contradictory but evocative term might suggest, of the permeation of civil society by partisanship through the tight network of linkages, whereby political parties in Cyprus attempt and to a considerable extent manage to control party followings? This collection presents plenty of evidence in support of such a reading of Cypriot politics. In this connection the methodological choice to focus on party linkages with civil society, which has guided the project overall, has been sound and has yielded very revealing findings for political analysis. Beyond the documentation of the character of political life in the particular context examined by the collection, the experience of Cyprus appears to raise major issues in democratic theory and to point to the need to rethink the fundamental stakes involved in democratic government.

It is very interesting, and I am sure it will be found important for purposes of comparative analysis, to appraise these linkages, especially the extensive use of

party patronage and the preservation and reproduction of traditional relations of clientelism through their politicization that are revealed by the contributions to this volume as the enduring basis of partitocracy in Cyprus. It is important to notice the way parties manipulate and cultivate their followers' and prospective voters' conviction that nothing can be achieved of their individual and family aspirations and targets unless they secure some form of party patronage. This attitude pervades civil society and it can be witnessed to extend from the securing of minor civil service or broader public sector jobs to university positions and even the award of top state prizes for excellence in the arts and letters. The parties are always there providing transmission belts to such rewards for party loyalty. The extent and strength of partitocracy is such that ideology plays in fact no role in the exercise of party patronage. This extends from the various 'bourgeois' parties to the communist AKEL, which as an older, better structured and experienced organization has developed in addition an extensive intra-party system of patronage and rewards for party loyalists, which included, earlier on during the Cold War period, an extensive package of scholarships for university training in the former Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc satellite states. All this to a considerable extent explains the tenacity of AKEL as a major political party but also its dismal record when it did accede to power in the years 2008 to 2013. The effective usage of patronage by Cypriot political parties and the unstated understanding among them that rewards and state patronage should be distributed proportionally on the basis of party strength closely approximates in its logic the Austrian spoil system of *proporz* (Heinisch 2002). A comparative appraisal of *proporz* in Austria and its East Mediterranean version, which is concerned primarily with the distribution of patronage and material rewards rather than apportioning shares of power, could yield very interesting insights about the character of the democratic process and the substance of democracy not in distant third and fourth-world places but in the bosom of the European Union and in the shadow of its democratic ideals.

One conclusion suggests itself from the consideration of the evidence presented in the several chapters in this volume. Partitocracy has been the major cause of the relative atrophy of civil society in the fifty-year history of the republic. Civil society has been atrophic, but not in terms of organized social life, which has been flourishing since the beginning of the early twentieth century. Rather, civil society is suffering in terms of its independence and character. The main features of CSOs' organized initiatives in civil society since the beginning of the twentieth century and until recently have been specialization, links with elites and the authorities in pursuit of common goals, financial dependence on political or state actors and the promotion of sectoral or professional interests. For the most part, civil society is tied to political processes and institutions, is far from subversive, always interested in approaching or connecting with political parties but at the same time apolitical to the extent that it tended to remain a client of politics and not an equal participant with veto potential. And so is society more broadly, either in the form of party members who are numerous but either inactive or with little influence, as the first part of the book illustrates, or as newly established, alternative or subterranean

groups, which receive much less attention than organized interests, directly or indirectly connected to the structures of the state.

In this way, partitocracy impinges also upon the strategies of many actors in civil society, which, once formed and in operation, find it difficult not to succumb to parties' forceful penetration of all things social. Differences in organizational practices do not of course cease to exist, as those between the membership practices of AKEL and DISY (Δημοκρατικός Συναγερμός, Democratic Rally) that boil down to different ideological traditions, or those between the mass character of the two main parties and the state-centered and socially more limited activity and influence of the centrist parties. But in terms of the macro-social impact of partitocracy on linkage processes, these differences still constitute qualifications to the 'partitocracy thesis', which have not yet generated much diversity as to how important parties and their agents remain in the interaction between the social and the political sphere, as well as in the decision-making processes of the Cypriot polity.

This type of atrophy of civil society in turn can explain the serious weaknesses and stumbling blocks on the way to the growth of a mature democratic political culture in the Republic of Cyprus. This is a serious failure for a political society which, as a member of the European Union, faithfully introduces into its legislation all measures and directives intended to encourage and strengthen the growth of civil society and a culture of rights and freedoms. Is this all just window-dressing, an orchestrated range of formalities that create an aura of change and democratization while leaving partitocracy intact? The question is posed here as an implication of the foregoing analysis but the answer must remain suspended for the time being.

One broader conclusion that can be further drawn from the consideration of the operation of partitocracy in Cyprus would take us back to an important conceptualization of modern democracy that is also due to Elmer E. Schattschneider, whom we encountered above as one of the political scientists who drew the necessary connection between political parties and modern democracy. Schattschneider was a critical political observer. His legacy to the discipline, after an impressive series of professional works in political science, came with a short book published in 1960 in which he was in fact issuing a warning about the dangers to democracy in mass society. His concern was expressed in the coinage of the term 'the semi-sovereign people', a term that reflected his judgment that the people's role in modern democracy has been restricted and reduced to a formality. The main source of his worry was the importance attached to opinion polls in the transaction of the tasks of democratic government (Schattschneider 1960: 128–42). Partitocracy could be seen as an additional informal system of managing power that also turns democracy's main bearer into a semi-sovereign people at best. Seen in this perspective the evidence concerning partitocracy presented in this volume adds to the experience of Cyprus a broader interest not only for comparative politics but also for normative political theory.

The evidence describes and confirms the partitocratic character of Cypriot politics, but it also invariably points to the signs of change. Incipient in many cases and difficult to discern in the partitocratic environment, still signs of the assertion

of civil society against the exclusive control of policy decisions and resources by political parties are becoming visible. It seems that membership in the European Union has been a catalyst in opening up possibilities for the assertion of civil society. The chapters on sexual politics and on migration discuss perhaps the most characteristic cases of non-partitocratic initiatives and policymaking in Cypriot politics. New movements, independent from the state, exercising pressure on government or advocating non-sectoral causes, have emerged, although these still have limited appeal and impact. A shift from complete reliance on the authorities to pressure on power holders, from the pursuit of goals that are not sectoral, person-centered, or material to ones which are more pressing for transparency, more demanding of better governance and post-materialist in nature, has evidently taken place. On the opposite side, on the evidence presented by the chapters on the party system, it appears that the parties themselves have for the most part remained indifferent or immune to the pressures of civil society, feeling secure in their linkage networks in securing effective control of their following. It may appear paradoxical that of all political parties the major party of the right, the Democratic Rally, has shown some modicum of willingness to accommodate such pressures. This is a quite important development, suggesting that this particular party, one of the two major poles in Cyprus' polarized pluralism, seems to be taking a liberal turn in its ideological evolution, overcoming internal pressures by extreme rightist elements that have traditionally been one of its vocal components. The other major pole, AKEL on the left, appears more sceptical and reserved to such challenges, especially in relation to membership practices, and seems to persist in the 'democratic centralism' that has always guided its policies.

Before drawing these concluding remarks to a close, it may be apposite to devote a few words to the normative understanding of political parties prevailing in political science literature. Political parties are described as essential to modern democracy on account of their functions as agencies of representation, participation and deliberation of the citizens in mass society. Since the *Federalist Papers*, de Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill, parties have been understood as essential components of the political life of a modern democracy, even though all these early observers remained worried and ambivalent as to whether parties could become instruments of a genuine popular democracy. As to the three functions ascribed to them by theories of political parties, what could in fact be said on the basis of the evidence discussed in this book? There can be no doubt that political parties in Cyprus do perform an essential role of representation, but this is the representation of sectional interests and clientelist networks, not the representation of society as a community with shared interests, values and aspirations. They also provide outlets of participation to the electorate in pursuit of the satisfaction of sectional and partial interests. This is not the kind of participation that adds substance to democracy by making the voice of citizens heard. Characteristically from what one reads in the pages of this volume, it appears that citizens' impact on deliberation either on the party level or on the level of government decision making is diluted by the manipulation of material rewards for party loyalty by the political parties. It would seem, therefore, that a partitocratic environment has very limited affinity with the

normative understanding of political parties as mediating structures essential for the achievement of genuine democratic government.

What also emerges from the evidence discussed in this volume is that the European context has made possible the dawn of signs of change on the horizon of Cypriot politics but the ideological inertia upon which the partitocratic system has drawn in order to preserve and reproduce itself is a much stronger factor that makes for continuity rather than change. The arguments advanced in the chapter on the Cyprus problem hint at the continuity of a discourse of nationalist legitimacy that is turning into a major obstacle to a solution of the Cyprus Question but has been a critical mainstay of partitocracy. If one looks at the broader problem of democracy in Cyprus in this perspective, it is impossible not to be impressed by the persistence and resilience of nationalist discourse as a framework of legitimacy and its impact upon the workings of democratic politics. The 'nature of the operation of democracy' in Cyprus, which was found in an appraisal written in 1980–1981, to be under the overwhelming pressure of the nationalist legacy of the colonial period, does not appear to have changed in substantial ways (see Kitromilides 1981).[3] This ideological context has favored partitocracy, which has contributed decisively in implementing it in day-to-day politics and more significantly in fighting and winning elections on its own terms to the detriment of a solution to the Cyprus Question but in the name, nevertheless, of the 'semi-sovereign people' of the divided island.

The present collection by focusing on political parties and their linkages with society captures in an empirical way the dynamics of a much more complex constellation of power relations and ideological equilibria involved in the politics of the Cyprus Question. As a contribution to the enhancement of our understanding of a complicated, often daunting problem in political analysis, which has preoccupied and perplexed many observers over the years, the present collection is not only welcome but contains in its logic and conceptualization a glimmer of hope, which although epistemological in character, is of much broader significance. The inferences that can be drawn from the pages of this collection point to a different future for Cypriot politics, and this visualization is largely made possible by the growth of a new political science concerned with the island and its politics. The new political science represented by the several authors of this collection, all of whom belong to a younger generation of scholars, by means of its professional and critical observation of political praxis in the island constitutes an independent position that may make a serious difference in the transition from partitocracy to democracy. This is a difference, germane to epistemological change that is not the least of the contributions of this collection in the judgment of an observer looking at things from the vantage point of an earlier generation.

Notes

1 See further Kitromilides (1994).
2 The 1970 election formed the object of a detailed study in Kitromilides (1972).
3 See also the reappraisal of the problem in Kitromilides (2011: 57–63).

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