

## CyprusMail

### Flawed election system needs to be addressed

**THE HORSE-TRADING** we have witnessed in the last three days, with the losing parties offering their electoral support to the highest bidder, does not paint a very flattering picture of political life. It serves as a reminder that the main concern of the political parties is to secure as big a share of the spoils of power as possible, an objective made easier by a flawed election system.

This is a system that allows the loser of the presidential elections to act like the victor and dictate his terms, in exchange for votes, on the winning candidates ahead of the second round of the election.

Indicative of this perverse situation is that both candidates contesting Sunday's election, visited the losing candidate, President Papadopoulos on Monday, to pay their respects and ask for his electoral support. They then visited the presidential party DIKO for talks with its leader.

In a rational political system, it would have been the other way round, but because the winner of the presidential elections needs to receive 50 per cent plus one of the vote a second Sunday run-off is usually needed and the intervening period is used by the defeated parties to sell their support to the highest bidder.

It is in this context we should view DIKO's 180-degree turn after Tuesday lunchtime. Before lunchtime, DIKO leader Marios Karoyian had indicated that he had struck a deal with Ioannis Kasoulides, a decision that was opposed by Papadopoulos' closest aides in the party and subsequently overturned.

DIKO had every right to change its decision, but it also had an obligation to tell its voters why it had done so. More importantly, the man who benefited the most from this decision, Demetris Christofias, needs to inform voters what he offered the Papadopoulos camp in exchange for its support. Could he perhaps have agreed to follow the same disastrous policies on the Cyprus problem as Papadopoulos? If so, the voters deserve to know about it as Christofias took a third of the public vote on Sunday on the strength of his pledge to follow a different policy on the Cyprus problem than Papadopoulos' which had taken us to the verge of partition.

According to reliable sources Christofias struck a deal directly with the president (so much for the latter's public assurances that he would "not directly or indirectly influence the elections"), who reportedly demanded that the AKEL leader maintained the Papadopoulos aides - diplomats Andreas Mavroyiannis and Tasos Tzionis - in their current posts as well as in the negotiating team. In short, Papadopoulos, despite being ousted by the voters, could still have a say on the handling of the Cyprus problem through his aides.

Perhaps Christofias will change his mind, if elected, and not keep his side of the bargain, but what if he sticks to it? The voters have the right to know the content of his deal with Papadopoulos before this Sunday's election. After all, DIKO has said that it would back Christofias because of assurances he gave regarding the handling of the national problem. The fact is that Christofias was desperate for DIKO's support in order to have a chance of winning on Sunday and could have promised Papadopoulos anything in order to secure it.

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# Cyprus needs a new approach

## Comment

John Connolly

**I**S THERE a danger that negotiations over Cyprus will drag on? Adding Cyprus to the growing list of intractable conflicts around the globe would seem to be no one's interest, least of which the people who live on this divided island.

While the world only watches Cyprus from afar, the very nature of secret talks contributes to these failures. This commentary proposes that leaders of each side of this conflict call on the United Nations to establish a new public negotiating model, based on a defined set of rules and terms, that creates a level communication playing field between the two sides.

This new form of international dialogue, "Public Talks", has been designed by the Institute for Public Dialogue in Sausalito California. It would come into play only after all other forms of negotiations have failed.

The centerpiece of this potentially global communication process is a series of small, magazine-size "Challenge Documents" distributed through as little as one newspaper and/or magazine and made available online.

Once Public Talks is established, either side could unilaterally present its Challenge Document before a very large total audience without any guarantee of a response in kind. The underlying motive for adversaries to engage in this process is not an idealistic notion of good will but rather recognition of the growing importance of public opinion. An adversary rejecting that challenge would risk international acceptance of the other side's historical narrative of that

conflict. Thus, the motive to engage in this public dialogue would be to head off erosion of support worldwide.

If both sides agree, the Challenge Document will feature both the Greek Cypriots' and Turkish Cypriots' interpretation of history. It would contain questions to each other, negotiating positions and other content inherent to the ongoing conflict. Successive rounds of Challenge Documents would allow for a full exposition of the competing views of these adversaries and would also allow for a clearer focus of obstacles to an agreement.

Every one or two weeks, one side would distribute a Challenge Document that will likely reverberate throughout the media. If accepted, this dialogue would unfold over two or three months and will engage the Cyprus community as never before in the central details of that conflict.

Citizens both in Cyprus and around the world will arrive at judgments about Public Talks in a very different way than traditional negotiations. With the latter, the public forms a judgment based on the results reported in the media. With the former, as the public becomes engaged in the central details of that conflict as never before, they will arrive at judgments based on the facts and history presented by the two sides. A judgment, perhaps unfavourable, could also be rendered upon those who refuse to engage in this dialogue.

Public Talks will not replace private or back-channel nego-

tiations, nor will it work in all situations. The widespread acceptance of this platform will make it increasingly difficult for parties of a conflict to reject participation in Public Talks.

This format may tempt some parties to obfuscate, manipulate and outright lie. If so, their credibility would be damaged by a more forthright adversary. This direct clash of opinions exposes ideas to competitive examination so that only the more credible arguments would emerge as the basis for compromise.

Public Talks depends less on personal trust between leaders than private talks. At the culmination of the process, the final signed agreement delivered into the hands of citizens on both sides will increase confidence that the terms will not be reinterpreted in divergent ways.

Public Talks conflict with the secrecy that advocates of realpolitik insist on. Secret talks will always have a role, but Public Talks presents an alternative to failed negotiations. Ultimately, history refutes those who believe that secret talks should be the exclusive negotiating process. Leaders have frequently reinterpreted agreements in order to sell them to their constituencies, but later, reality catches up. Many negotiations including Versailles, Potsdam, and Yalta, led to agreements that participants later reinterpreted in vastly different ways, causing the agreement to be disavowed. The failure of contemporary secret talks in Oslo, Dayton and Madrid points towards the need for an alternative negotiating model.

This proposal is divorced from reality because governments don't care about advertisements or messages, only

interests and power. This ignores the growing importance of public opinion in the calculus of political leaders worldwide. The rise of democracy and the increased access to information is advancing this phenomenon. There are many manifestations of this from the White House's quick responses seeking to "get in front" of a political issue, to the government stage-managing media events for its leaders, to diminishing public support leading to electoral defeat.

Negotiations could not really take place through documents designed for the public. Unlike private talks that often begin with small confidence-building agreements, Public Talks would start with the large issues that truly separate Greek Cyprus and Turkish Cyprus. The contrasting historical narratives surrounding such conflicts are easily understood and if agreement is reached, lesser issues could be negotiated privately. Moreover, a formal web site could feature relevant details.

Perhaps the most significant characteristic of Public Talks is that it will focus public attention on the compromises and trade-offs required for agreement. Successive rounds of Public Talks would be accompanied by international news reports, polls from inside and outside that region and calls from world leaders - all of which would add political and personal pressure on the negotiating parties. In this way, public opinion could create a momentum that will help to move some parties to agreement.

■ *John Connolly is Executive Director of the Institute for Public Dialogue, Sausalito, California, <http://www.ifpdia-logue.com/>*

## The queen of cookbooks should keep out of politics

**AS SOMEONE** who spent her twenties gaily flipping ready meals into the microwave, I can't help feeling that I got into cooking at precisely the wrong time. These days, the kitchen isn't so much a place to coddle eggs as a platform for debating said eggs' provenance, at great length, until you are so worn out by the battery/free range/organic debate that you can barely muster enthusiasm to raise a spatula.

Why couldn't my interest have been kindled during the reign of the redoubtable Fanny Cradock, instead of the tedious Delia Smith?

We all know that cooking is the new politics, but did Delia really need to step into the breach? If I wanted a lecture on organic-versus-battery chicken, I'd go to Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall.

But Delia has always been the no-nonsense one - which



## Comment

Laura Craik

is why it is so upsetting that she is talking such a lot of nonsense now. It is not the deliberate contentiousness of her "I love fresh shelled peas in the winter from Kenya" statement that galls (she has a new book to shift, after all) but the crassness. Does she not realise that recent events have left

Kenyan farmers with barely a pea to shell? A good politician would have picked a less foolish example. But Delia is not a politician - she is a cook. And this is further evidence of why cooks should stick to cooking.

There's something opportunistic about her intervention. Food provenance is an important debate but it is also yet another stick with which to beat time-pressed, cash-strapped mothers who already feel guilty about their culinary failings without having to worry about whether the chicken is corn-fed.

Sensing a fashionable issue to which she can attach her name (Hugh's bagged chicken, Nigella's bagged gluttony and Jamie's bagged school dinners), in nips Delia, rebranding herself as the time-pressed, cash-strapped mother's friend. Suddenly, it's OK to cheat: frozen mash, jars of tomato sauce

and even - oh, horror - ready-grated cheese.

It's quite an about-turn. Granted, Delia was never a cook in the Heston Blumenthal mould (24 hours and 52 ingredients to make the perfect trifle), but she has always been something of a Tartar. Here she is a mere three years ago, writing in her Complete Cookery Course: "No commercially made mayonnaise, or short-cut homemade version, can beat the thick, shining, wobbly texture of a proper one made yourself." Not exactly encouraging us to crack open the Hellmann's, is it?

Still, whatever her shortcomings (bossiness, bad hair and an over-reliance on salt), I am still not a Delia hater - she has helped me too much for that. Yes, her political outbursts are a recipe for disaster, but her roast beef is to die for - and for that, she will always have a place on my shelf.

### ■ Want to send a letter?

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