

KATHIMERINI

# Entangled interests must be sundered

Television channel owners cannot be contractors for the public sector as well," Justice Minister Anastassis Papaligouras said yesterday, underscoring the government's determination to implement the law as it stands in the Constitution, and purge Greece's economic and political system of graft and corruption.

In the past, when others remained silent or tried to shirk their responsibilities, Kathimerini would castigate the conflicting interests of media owners who also controlled public construction firms. This was, undisputedly, a source of political and business entanglement. The newspaper has often pointed out that this connection distorts free market competition and results in monopolies and abuse of power. Furthermore, we have emphasized the need to stick to the Constitution and criticized the so-called Venizelos law (named after former Culture Minister Evangelos Venizelos), a legal loophole that allowed relatives of construction company owners to hold sizable interests in the media.

It is common knowledge that this dual status undermined healthy competition and the principles of a functioning free market economy, squandered precious funds, turned public projects into objects for unfettered profiteering, fueled political corruption and was a severe temptation to most of the media to manipulate public opinion.

The relationship was so close that a plethora of freshly minted businessmen tried to gain access to public projects and state commissions by acquiring control of a television channel, a radio station or a newspaper. Their obvious aim was to put pressure on the State, to outmaneuver or dodge competition, to fix public projects, and make a fortune for themselves and their cronies.

This vicious circle has to end, and it has to end now. The shady dealings of the previous administration, with the repercussions on politics, the economy and society, leave no room for havoring or delay. Now that things are clear and the new government has a powerful mandate from the people, it is in a position to put an end to this dual status, which has engendered the entanglement of politicians with business interests that have mired the political system in corruption.

# The knives are out

Less than a month after the March 7 general election, it has become clear that instead of going ahead with the radical changes and the "new start" he had pledged for PASOK, new Socialist chairman George Papandreou has been forced to adopt a defensive strategy based on compromise and concession.

As a result, the European elections on June 13, rather than prompting the restructuring of PASOK and marking the beginning of a counter-attack, have opened the door to party rivalries.

It is indicative of the climate within the defeated Socialist party that its new leader has deferred all the necessary moves to overhaul PASOK (a party convention, new organizational structure, new ideological identity and so on) to the coming November. He clearly thinks that the acute economic problems that New Democracy will be faced with will allow him to regain his leadership status, which was tarnished after the commanding victory of the conservative party.

However, the eight months remaining before Papandreou makes his crucial decisions about the future of his party is, politically speaking, a long period of time — especially if we take into consideration that many Socialist cadres have already begun to question his ability to steer the party. Besides, party criticism of the new chairman will more likely grow than subside as time goes by.

## 50 YEARS AGO TODAY

SELECTION: MICHALIS KATSIGERAS

March 30, 1954

**HOSTAGES:** The Foreign Ministry has sent new instructions to Ambassador in Paris Mr Raphail, on the basis of which he will reply via the Bulgarian ambassador, Mr Nedelkov, to the Bulgarian government regarding its latest proposals for a resumption of Greek-Bulgarian diplomatic relations. The Greek government maintains that Bulgaria should assume its responsibility to turn over the Greek soldiers and children it is holding hostage. **APOSTOLIDIS ANTHOLOGY:** New books: "Anthology 1708-1952," by Heracles N. Apostolidis, fifth edition, Estia Publications, Athens, 1954. **GOLD MARKET:** London, 22 - The gold market opened today (...). This world-shattering financial event took place, according to The Associated Press, this afternoon when six gentlemen arrived in London's bombed-out district, mounted the stairs of the Rothschild Bank and without any fanfare sat down at a table in a room on the first floor and had a short conversation, thereby opening the market (...). It was the first session since 1939, when war forced the British government to close the market and impose state control over gold sales.

## H KATHIMERINI

Ethnarhou Makariou & 2 Falirou, Athens 115-47 Greece • Tel: 210.4808000, Fax: 210.4808460

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Editor NIKOS KONSTANDARAS

Regional director ALBERTO J. CANO PORQUERES

E-mail: kath-ih@email.kathimerini.gr

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# AKP unrivaled in medium term

Erdogan's commanding victory in the local polls means there is no longer an opposition in Turkish politics

By BURAK BEKDIL  
KATHIMERINI ENGLISH EDITION

**ANKARA CONFIDENTIAL** No doubt Sunday's local polls were a clear victory for Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) and a stark warning to the only opposition party in Parliament.

Poll results need to be interpreted carefully, but the scale of Mr Erdogan's triumph is without doubt a refreshed confidence vote from the public after a year and a half in power.

AKP not only won in 57 cities and renewed its mandate in Istanbul and Ankara, but also widened its lead over its nearest rival to a startling, but not surprising, 24 percentage points.

That practically means there is no longer an opposition in Turkish politics.

This is how Ankara Confidential interprets the March 28 vote:

## What the figures say

Traditionally, the personality of the candidate in Turkey's local polls matters. In other words, the Turks do not always express "party preference" when voting for a mayoral candidate.

For example, former Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit's Democratic Left won only 1 percent of the vote in Turkey, but his candidate in a central Anatolian province, Eskisehir, won as much as 44 percent.

Therefore, the best figures to gauge parties' popularity are the votes for city councils for which voters express a preference for a party, not for a candidate.

**The winner and the loser:** City council results put AKP's popularity at 42 percent, far ahead of the left-leaning but strongly nationalist Republican Democrats, or CHP, which won 18 percent of the vote. That means a rise for 7.5 points for AKP from Nov. 2002 general elections, and a decline of two points for CHP. It's time the deeply conservative CHP must ask itself tough questions.

**Right-wing parties gain:** City council results show at least one more party, the nationalist MHP, passing the national threshold if Sunday's poll were a general election. MHP won 11 percent of the vote, and the center-right DYP



Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan greets party supporters celebrating victory in nationwide local elections in Ankara early yesterday. His Islamic-leaning party is practically unchallenged in the medium term.

won 9.9 percent, according to early results.

MHP raised its vote by 2.5 points and DYP by one point from the Nov. 2002 election.

Interestingly, in the runup to Sunday's vote both MHP and DYP campaigned against a settlement on Cyprus, fiercely accusing Mr Erdogan of a "sellout."

**Kurdish votes:** A coalition of seven left-wing parties, including the pro-Kurdish DEHAP, won only 4.8 percent of the city council vote. Surprisingly, the coalition lost in traditional DEHAP strongholds in the overwhelmingly Kurdish southeast.

For many years DEHAP has been associated with a Kurdish/secessionist identity. With less than 5 percent of the vote which also includes support for six other parties, DEHAP must question the wisdom of doing politics along ethnic lines.

**Cem Uzan's plight:** The controversial business tycoon Cem Uzan, whose fiercely nationalist Youth Party, or GP, had surprisingly won 7.5 percent of the vote in Nov. 2002, has not only lost his business empire after battles with Mr Erdogan, but now, it seems, his political career too. GP won only 2.7 per-

cent of the city council vote on Sunday. It does not exist any longer.

**Other losers:** Apparently the Turks are determined to send their former leaders into the political wasteland.

In addition to Mr Ecevit's Democratic Left, the legendary Motherland Party of the late Turgut Ozal which enjoyed a one-party rule between 1983 and 1991 and was coalition partner in various governments until 2002, vanished into thin air with only 2.7 percent of the vote on Sunday.

**Cem and Papandreou:** Well, that's the lighter side of the poll. George Papandreou's Hasapiko partner and former foreign minister Ismail Cem was probably the most tragic loser on Sunday. Only two votes for his party came out of the ballot box where he and his wife had voted.

## The Left and the Right

The poll results reaffirmed Turkey's swing to the Right. Right-wing votes on Sunday were at 75 percent and left-wing votes at 25 percent. Ironically, the map of political preferences shows that poorer Turks tend to vote for the

Right and the richer for the Left. Bizarre Crescent and Star!

## AKP's political identity

Mr Erdogan's wisely calculated but slow voyage from an Islamist to a center-right political identity has not only boosted his mandate but has also earned him traditional secularist strongholds in western and southern Turkey. This may urge the prime minister to further digest his journey toward the Center.

At the same time, Mr Erdogan must also deliver to his traditionally Islamist grassroots supporters. He may be tempted to use his strong mandate to introduce Islamist changes to Turkey's political order, but he must also reckon with the secularist state establishment to avoid political tensions.

Any leader could be trapped by what many analysts call "political obesity," a reference to an overly strong mandate for one party. A nearly 25-point lead over the closest rival in less than three years after forming a party is, in theory, the best recipe to make a leader feel like a sultan rather than a prime minister. Turkey's political

history is full of sultan-premier stories. But Mr Erdogan seems to be aware of the potential harm he can do himself. "Our numerical success will not make us dizzy," he said after his election victory. "The real success is to digest success." Well, he should deserve much praise if he behaves as he talks.

## Emerging political picture

The poll results show AKP is unchallenged in the short and medium term. They also showed a four-party picture is emerging in Turkish politics, with MHP and DYP warming up to a future race on the right side of the political spectrum.

On the Left, things look more difficult. CHP needs to reform itself in policy and leadership. But its leader, the stubborn Deniz Baykal, has no intention to pave the way for a relaunch. With the present policies and leadership, CHP will have no future in Turkish governance. Does Mr Baykal know that half the vote CHP won on Sunday was not for him, or his party, but was the product of a secularist networking against AKP?

## Foreign policy

The sweeping electoral victory will probably make AKP more confident and therefore more emboldened in its foreign policy. Mr Erdogan has now more leverage on critical foreign policy issues.

On Cyprus, Mr Erdogan may interpret the vote as a national nod for his efforts to reunify the island. He may even be tempted to behave in a more compromising manner to achieve his broader goals, now that he has been able to test and see if his Cyprus policy so far damaged his popularity. It seems it did not.

The poll can also be interpreted as a confidence vote, or at least as indifference, for his pro-EU policies. Mr Erdogan will now push harder for the implementation of his reforms to win a date to open accession talks with the bloc in December. The poll result is not good news for Mr Erdogan only, but also for his friends in Washington. The partnership for a future role for Turkey as part of the USA's Greater Middle East Initiative can now go ahead.

## BALKAN BRIEFS

### US official visits Kosovo in the aftermath of ethnic violence

PRISTINA (AP) - A senior US official yesterday described Kosovo's recent violence as a setback to efforts to bring peace and lasting stability to this disputed province. Marc Grossman, the US undersecretary of state for political affairs, said that the violence overshadowed international plans to make Kosovo calm enough to consider its political future. "The recent violence is clearly a setback... to the hope that we might be able to judge progress in mid-2005," he said after meeting local and international officials here. "The honest thing to say is that job is harder today than it was two weeks ago."

### Computer malfunction forces nuclear plant to shut down

CERNAVODA (AP) - A computer malfunction has forced the closure of a Romanian nuclear power plant, officials said yesterday. The plant in the city of Cernavoda, about 200 kilometers (125 miles) east of Bucharest, was shut down late on Sunday, the company which manages the plant said in a statement. Plant director Ionel Bucur said no damage was done to the environment, the plant's personnel or to local residents.

**Al Qaeda.** The head of Romania's main intelligence service claimed yesterday that reported terrorists suspected of having links to Al Qaeda have traveled through Romania while on their way to the West. Radu Timofte said suspected terrorists from Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan have transited Romania over an unspecified time, the private news agency Mediafax reported. The Romanian Intelligence Service confirmed the statements as being accurate. (AP)

**FYROM.** Four candidates, including the current prime minister, will run for president of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on April 14 to fill the seat left vacant after the previous leader, Boris Trajkovski, died, electoral commission officials said yesterday. (AP)

**Halt.** The city-state of Berlin has decided to stop deporting Kosovo Albanians because of security concerns in the Serbian province, state Interior Minister Ehrhart Koerting said yesterday. Koerting said the state would maintain its freeze on deporting Kosovo Albanians, who make up the overwhelming majority of the population, until the UN decides that it is safe enough to send them to their homeland. (AFP)

# Permanent derogations? EU law holds key to Cyprus settlement

Turk Cypriots fear freedom of movement will harm their interests

By PAUL TAYLOR  
REUTERS

**BRUSSELS** - Reconciling a Cyprus peace deal with European Union law which guarantees freedom of movement for per-

## ANALYSIS

sons and goods may hold the key to the final phase of settlement negotiations in Switzerland this week.

EU leaders pledged last week to "accommodate" within EU treaties an agreement to reunify the divided east Mediterranean island before Cyprus joins their bloc on May 1.

That is easier said than done, EU officials acknowledge privately. The parties' conflicting demands for undertakings on EU law may yet prove the ultimate stumbling block.

EU Enlargement Commissioner Guenter Verheugen has traveled to Buergenstock, Switzerland, to assist UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and Turkish and Greek leaders in the final three days of talks to seek a peace deal to end the 30-year conflict.

Verheugen's spokesman, Jean-Christophe Filori, said his task would be "to ensure that the settlement respects the principles on which the EU is founded," as spelled out by EU leaders in a statement last Friday.

Annan presented a revised 9,000-page peace plan to all sides yesterday, which sources involved in the talks said contained substantial changes.



The car of Greek government spokesman Theodoros Roussopoulos passes Turkish and Turkish-Cypriot protesters against the Annan plan at the Buergenstock resort, yesterday.

A deal, which has to be ratified by both communities in April 20 referenda, hinges partly on finding a formula for exempting the Turkish-Cypriot area of northern Cyprus from rules that allow EU citizens to settle, buy and own property anywhere in the soon-to-be 25-nation bloc.

Turkish Cypriots fear their poorer part of the island would otherwise be overrun by wealthier Greek Cypriots and would-be Greek settlers and lose its "Turkish character."

## Permanent derogations

Diplomats say Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots are demanding permanent derogations enshrined in "primary law" — that is, in a treaty — in the belief that only such cast-iron guarantees will withstand a potential European

Court of Justice challenge.

There is a precedent. Malta obtained a permanent derogation in its 2002 accession treaty barring foreigners from buying property on the small south Mediterranean island.

But EU officials say there is no chance the Turkish Cypriots will get the same because they are too late and it would take a new treaty. They say the Luxembourg-based court has ample grounds not to overturn any Cyprus peace arrangements.

All 25 present and future EU members have ratified Cyprus's accession treaty, which includes a protocol with an enabling clause allowing the EU to accommodate a peace settlement via a regulation of the Council of Ministers adopted by unanimity.

In EU jargon, that act of implementation would be "sec-