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*THE RISE OF FAR-RIGHT POPULISM
IN CYPRUS: THE CASE OF ELAM*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS	3
1. INTRODUCTION	4
Research Puzzle and Question	7
Previous Research	7
Structure	8
2. LITERATURE REVIEW, THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODS	10
2.1. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework: A Critical Political Economy Approach to the Rise of Far-Right Populist Parties	10
Fearing the destruction of national identity	10
The separation of state responsibilities and state sovereignty	12
The EU's role in reducing state sovereignty	13
The de-politicization of society	16
2.2. Methods	17
Limitations	18
3. CASE-STUDY: THE RISE OF ELAM IN THE ROC	20
ELAM: Background	20
ELAM: A far-right populist party	21
The economy and the appeal of ELAM's rhetoric	23
4. ANALYSIS	25
4.1. 2008-2012: A multifaceted crisis in the making	25
4.2. The implications of the Troika bailout	30
4.3. The effects of political apathy in the RoC	33
4.4. A fragmented party system and the substantiation of ELAM's approach	39

5. CONCLUSION	44
BIBLIOGRAPHY	47
Primary Sources	47
Secondary Sources	51

Abbreviations

AKEL	The Progressive Party of Working People
DIKO	Democratic Party
DISY	Democratic Rally
ECB	European Central Bank
EDEK	Movement for Social Democracy
ELAM	National People's Front
EOKA	National Organization of Cypriot Struggle
EU	European Union
EUROKO	European Party
GD	Golden Dawn
RoC	Republic of Cyprus
TRNC	Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus

1. Introduction

Over the last decades, the appeal and success of far-right populist parties has been rising at alarming rates in Europe and even beyond, raising the question of whether right-wing populism has progressively become a political trend (see Akkerman *et al.*, 2016: 31-52; Mounk, 2018). Particularly in the West, the electoral and political power of these parties has been multiplying in disperse yet parallel waves. From Hungary to Cyprus, Belgium, the United States and Brazil, far-right populist parties have achieved political representation in national parliaments, coalition governments, and have even become governing parties, making shifts towards conservative legislations and policies more frequent (Zanotti and Rama, 2020). Their ability to shape modern democratic governance by shaking liberal values and mainstream politics on both national and transnational levels, makes studying the causes of their rise exceedingly relevant and necessary. The globalized and integrationist nature of today's liberal democratic system of governance means that specific events, circumstances, and transformations on a national scale can have global or at least regional effects, and vice-versa (Rydren, 2005: 414-415). This is especially true for the “new right¹”, epitomized by the National Front's electoral breakthrough in France in 1984, which triggered a process of ‘cross-national diffusion’ (idem: 416). Therefore, the analysis of one case can potentially inform that of other cases.

This thesis addresses the case of the succession of the National People's Front (Εθνικό Λαϊκό Μέτωπο, ELAM), a far-right populist party, into the Parliament of the Republic of Cyprus (RoC hereafter) in May 2016. Since 2011 when it first appeared in the Republic's political landscape, ELAM's rise has been both steady and striking considering the rate by which its voter base grew, as well as the extremity and vulgarity of its actions and rhetoric. Today, ELAM's penetration into the Greek-Cypriot society is greater and stronger than ever. Its appeal is likely to keep growing, potentially achieving the goal of its leader, Christos Christou: to reach the executive office of the President (Kividiotis, 2019). Its continuous success in electoral processes poses a mounting threat to the Republic's political, economic, and social stability, and this is precisely the reason for which its rise should be subject to greater academic

¹ Rydgren distinguishes extreme right-wing movements in Europe in the 1970s and 1980s from those of the pre-1945 period, as they were able to free themselves from the stigma of the ‘old’ extreme right.

research. This thesis investigates the conditions that enabled ELAM's election in 2016 from 2008 onwards, by focusing on how political and economic shifts have profound impacts on electoral outcomes.

The case of ELAM is interesting for two reasons. First, it is born out of a conflict-ridden society whose collective memory is tainted by the scars of an ethnic divide (often referred to as the Cyprus question or problem) which still dominates sociopolitical discussions² (Katsourides, 2013b: 503). Tensions between Cyprus' two largest ethnic communities³, the Greek-Cypriot and the Turkish-Cypriot, first broke out during the period leading up to Cyprus' independence from British rule (1878-1960) (Fisher, 2001; Vural and Rustemli, 2006). The London-Zurich Agreements (1959) legitimized the creation of the RoC, while Britain, Turkey, and Greece acted as guarantors of peace. The agreement, however, did not succeed in reducing already-existing tensions. It exacerbated them predominantly due to unequal power-distribution and sharing disputes. This led to a short-lived period of 'peace' defined by ethnic-driven violence that caused the establishment of international peacekeeping troops on the island (UNFICYP, n.d.). The formal separation of the two communities was triggered by a coup instigated by the Greek junta (1967-1974) in July 1974. Turkey immediately responded by invading to protect the Turkish-Cypriot community, legally enabled by its role as guarantor power. Soon after, a ceasefire was declared which is still in function today, while a UN peacekeeping mission (UNFICYP) was established to control the Buffer Zone. Through an exchange of populations, the RoC continued to function but resided only over the Greek-Cypriot community and other minorities, while the Turkish-Cypriot community established the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) in the Northern part of Cyprus, in 1983, which is only recognized by Turkey (idem).

² Various historical accounts have been written about the Cypriot conflict, however, they are mostly contradicting, as the narrative promoted by each side (left/right or Greek-Cypriot/Turkish-Cypriot) is fabricated in a way that serves and reaffirms their own political goals, cementing the public's understanding, therefore, their accuracy can be questioned (Papadakis *et al.*, 2006). Nevertheless, all references in this thesis to the Cyprus question are based on verifiable facts without focusing on the actors' motives.

³ The Cypriot society traditionally comprises different peoples, languages and cultures, out of which the Greek language persisted and determined the modern identity of the majority of Cyprus' residents (Michael, 2010), while there is also a sizable community of Turkish-Cypriots since the Ottoman rule (1571-1878). The construction of each community's nationalism developed along the lines of that of their respective 'motherlands', resulting in a still prevalent "*uncompromising clash of nationalisms*" (Aktar *et al.*, 2010: xiii).

The geopolitical situation has since “*been temporarily ‘stabilized’ without a settlement*”, albeit numerous processes of intercommunal talks aiming to find a solution (Trimikliniotis and Bozkurt, 2012: 2). Specifically, in 2004, a referendum took place for which both communities were required to vote on the island’s reunification based on a UN proposal known as ‘the Annan Plan’. 76% of Greek-Cypriots rejected it, whereas 65% of Turkish-Cypriots accepted it, creating further schism between them (Sachs, 2004). In February 2014, the leaders of both communities participated in open-ended negotiations for the creation of a bi-communal bi-zonal federation. These UN-led negotiations lasted for three years with periodic interruptions (MFA, n.d.). However, there was no consensus or prospect to compromise from either side on vital issues such as territorial adjustments, security, guarantor powers and the military, therein, leading to an impasse. As a result, the majority of Greek-Cypriots do not believe that substantial transformations could be made in the short-term (Reporter, 2016), irrespective of progress in reconciliation efforts on an individual level (see Psaltis *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, as the conflict has been at a stalemate since 1974, but the threat of war has never truly disappeared from the Greek-Cypriot collective imagination, it is paradoxical that the rise of a far-right populist party erupted in that specific moment in time.

Secondly, in the 2016 Parliamentary elections, ELAM challenged the long-standing dominance of mainstream parties. Nonetheless, ELAM’s anti-establishment and racist rhetoric (see Chapter 3) remained unchanged throughout the party’s existence. This raises the question of whether its discourse can solely account for its sudden appeal to a population that previously disregarded or rejected it, or if other factors consolidated this unprecedented phenomenon. If we look closer to the wide variety of people who voted for ELAM (see data.gov.cy, 2017), it is clear that people with dissimilar political orientations and previous political affiliations have had contradicting motivations when voting. Similarly, Zanotti and Rama (2020) note for Vox in Spain, its supporters are not necessarily xenophobic, anti-EU, anti-environment or homophobic. On the contrary, they are merely responding to political figures who express legitimate concerns about the lack of representation extended to society as a whole, in an unusually drastic and rather crude way.

Research Puzzle and Question

In this light, it is noteworthy to examine what led to this tipping point in the RoC. What made it possible for ELAM's electoral base to more than double within five years (Parliamentary Elections, 2011, 2016)? There were no substantial changes, or even prospects that the geopolitical situation would undertake significant permanent transformations, and the party's agenda and rhetoric cannot solely explain its election. So, what led Greek-Cypriots to diverge from supporting mainstream parties to embracing radical approaches at that specific moment? As election results do not occur in a vacuum, but are "*the end product of a series of events and developments that precede the actual process of voting*" (Katsourides, 2014b: 56), it is important to question the causes which enabled the growth and success of a far-right populist party in the RoC.

Therefore, this thesis' research question is: *Which factors facilitated the rise of the far-right populist party, ELAM, in the Republic of Cyprus in 2016?*

Previous Research

Although there has been a resurgence of scholarly studies tackling the rise of far-right populist parties (i.e. Rydgren, 2005; Mudde, 2010; Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018), they tend to focus on their success on national scales and the subsequent impacts both domestically and internationally, rather than on the causes of their rise. Regarding the case of ELAM, only a handful of studies examine its appeal, and most address it in terms of its rhetoric and in the context of its Greek counterpart, Golden Dawn (GD hereafter) (i.e. Charalambous and Christoforou, 2018). Even fewer studies focus specifically on the roots of ELAM's progressive rise in the Greek-Cypriot political landscape, tending to attribute more value to ELAM's capitalization of cultural grievances. In this way, the importance of recognizing the deeper underlying faults of liberal democracy is sidelined, or rather, overlooked. For example, Katsourides (2013c) argues that both cultural and politico-economic conditions materialized in a particular place and time, were seized by ELAM to gain more prominence. Nonetheless, his analysis is limited to the pre-2013 conditions, thus failing to allocate adequate significance to

the prolonged implications of the bailout agreement on the Greek-Cypriot economy, political process, and society.

Furthermore, even though the study touches upon the loss of legitimacy of the political system, it neglects the key role of European integration in this process, which undermines and debilitates the efficacy of the liberal democratic system in the RoC. Therefore, more studies should focus on the multifaceted ways in which regional and international forces intersect, interact, and are connected with national ones. Questions revolving around the effectiveness of modern politico-economic structures and ideals should be addressed, particularly regarding their implications on each other and how they are manifested in dissimilar national contexts.

This thesis aims to contribute to existing literature on these exact grounds. By employing a political economy analytical framework, it builds on Katsourides' (2013c) analysis, by teasing out the core shortcomings of liberal democratic governance within the context of the RoC, focusing on if and how it played a part in the rise of ELAM; therein enriching the research gap on the causes of ELAM's rise. Hence, it studies how the crude effects of the financial crisis on the Greek-Cypriot society and political system delegitimized both the government and the EU, and provoked an era of political apathy that paved the way for ELAM's electoral success a few years later. Moreover, considering that the Cyprus problem occupies large portions of Cypriot politics, the degree to which politico-economic considerations overshadow its importance among the Greek-Cypriot population in the aftermath of the financial crisis is examined.

Structure

To trace the conditions which facilitated the rise of ELAM in 2016, it is necessary to understand the politico-economic circumstances which may cause the rise of far-right populism on a transnational scale. Besides presenting a brief synopsis of the cultural, political, and economic factors most prevalent in the ample literature, Chapter 2 elucidates on the use of the political economy theoretical framework and outlines the methods of analysis. Chapter 3 briefly lays out ELAM's history, ideological affiliations and political agenda while presenting the main characteristics of far-right populist parties and draws a connection between the

fluctuating state of the economy and the rising appeal of ELAM's rhetoric. The next chapter consists of the analysis which presents the interconnected factors that laid the foundations for ELAM's success, divided into four sections. Lastly, the conclusion evaluates the degree to which the conditions outlined in Chapter 2 relate to the case of ELAM, answers the research question posed, and offers insight into the possible trajectories for future academic research.

2. Literature Review, Theoretical Framework and Methods

Among existing literature, there are several justifications for the rise of extreme-right populist politics and movements; the most prevalent being economic, political and cultural grievances. This chapter briefly presents these causes and justifies the adoption of a critical political economy analytical framework, aiming to demonstrate the extent to which the loss of sovereignty of national actors and institutions, and of the liberal democratic system as a whole, have contributed to the gradual yet robust increase of such parties on a global scale. Then, it outlines the process tracing method used to answer the research question, and the limitations of this study.

2.1. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework: A Critical Political Economy Approach to the Rise of Far-Right Populist Parties

Fearing the destruction of national identity

Cultural grievances, specifically, the fear of destruction of national identity is identified in literature as a prevailing explanation for this phenomenon. Scholars who emphasize the importance of these grievances argue that this is because they go beyond economic disparities and are instead driven by broader ethnic transformations of the West. For example, Eatwell and Goodwin argue that the era of ‘hyper ethnic change’ has deeply instilled among national populations the idea that these changes could pose a threat to, or rather lead to the eventual destruction of national culture, values and way of life (2018: 131-175). This fear is built on the construction of a perceived security threat tied to ethnic identity, externalized through an intense resentment of immigration⁴.

There are several explanations for the acceleration of this fear. Abbas (2017) argues that in the aftermath of the Cold War, there have been changes in how security issues are understood and interpreted, with politicians and the media being the driving forces of this turn. Immigrants have been identified as potential threats that are critical to the weakening of state security, particularly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US and the subsequent attacks in Europe. This perception can in turn make the racist and xenophobic behavior and rhetoric

⁴ Typically directed towards non-European immigrants and domestic ethnic minorities (Mudde, 2007: 210).

of extreme-right populist parties more relevant and appealing. Other scholars attribute it to the idea that the presence of immigrants in a specific country or continent is responsible for the creation of that country's socioeconomic problems⁵ (Tasci, 2019: 12). Eatwell and Goodwill (2018) argue that this is because the vast majority of Western populations are strongly committed and attached to their country, and thus raise popular concerns regarding the demographic and cultural risks involved in such a rapid process of ethnic change. Therefore, through efforts to politicize “*demands for national identity (nationalism), homogeneity (xenophobia) and for order, hierarchy, and strong leadership (authoritarianism)*”, the appeal of far-right populist parties grows (Katsourides, 2013c: 569).

Certain scholars argue that cultural factors play a leading role in the appearance of these movements because the emotional reaction to growing fears of immigration and the destruction of national identity are mutually exclusive to financial prosperity (Inglehart and Norris, 2016). However, there are significant gaps in allocating absolute importance on cultural grievances when explaining the rise of such an overly complex phenomenon, as it cannot be justified through merely one factor. Eatwell and Goodwin (2018) point out that in realistic terms, culture and economics often influence and interact with each other, hence, the outbreak of this phenomenon is rooted in the combination of cultural and economic-related grievances. Nonetheless, what this approach fails to see is that although cultural grievances pinpoint a number of problems as contributors of populism, they do not problematize the causes for its rise. In other words, they neglect the reasons that enabled the climate in which these fears blossomed. Instead, this thesis argues that the reason for the prominence of this explanation is the importance allocated to it in the rhetoric of far-right populist parties. This line of argumentation is elaborated in Chapter 3, specifically for ELAM. The rest of this section outlines the most pertinent factors for the examined case-study, and how they are interrelated, through a critical political economy lens.

⁵ i.e. lower wages, higher unemployment, increased crime rate, reduction of educational standards in schools.

The separation of state responsibilities and state sovereignty

Within existing literature, a connection is drawn between the loss of state sovereignty through the separation of state responsibilities and the rise of far-right populism, due to the affinities between capitalism and democracy. Several studies link capitalism with its impacts on the liberal democratic system, in that the introduction of neoliberal economic policies⁶ has inherently limited to a minimum the interventionist role of states through the gradual yet rigid separation of the economic sphere from the political one (i.e. Cerny, 1999; Stein, 2016; Kiely, 2016; Wolfgang, 2016). In contrast to traditional mercantilist policies in which the state was responsible for guaranteeing economic security and welfare to its citizens, the neoliberal policies that set and drive today's globalized economy are centered around a dominant capitalist system, and thereby thrive on the self-regulation of liberal market economies (O'Brien and Williams, 2016: 14).

It can thus be argued that the shape and content of capitalism has had a constitutive impact on the way in which populist approaches have materialized across time and space. This refers to capitalism's persistent efforts to expand production processes through market competition and exploitation to accumulate profit (Dunn, 2009: 75). Consequently, there is little available space for governments to regulate the economy (Cohn, 2012: 5). Further, capitalism's facility to keep the capital collected by production dispersed across several countries eliminates the state's authority to control large global corporations and protect its population from the abuse of complete commodification of goods, services and labor (Wolfgang, 2016: 24-25). In Wood's words, "*the social allocation of resources and labor does not, on the whole, take place by means of political direction, communal deliberation, hereditary duty, custom, or religious obligation, but rather through the mechanisms of commodity exchange*" (1995: 29). Accordingly, the deep institutionalization⁷ of neoliberal policies on an international scale reveals an underlying desire to weaken the governmental institutions that would act as a shield for the protection of the social welfare system; in favor of the temporary

⁶ i.e. technological and logistical advancements in the production process, the globalization of capital, and pro-market policies (Gonzalez-Vicente and Carroll, 2017: 991).

⁷ This phenomenon is rooted in the endorsement of neoliberal and capitalist ideals by all "*instruments of political socialization (...): political parties, the family, the mass media, educational institutions*" (Stevkovski, 2015: 44).

power and ultimately, profits, of a small minority of the global population (Chomsky, 2011: 119-136).

These mechanisms create a space in which the elected government's ability to regulate is restrained. Therefore, capitalism is able to create a non-democratic way of governance by systematically de-politicizing fundamentally political issues, such as production, property, and labor (Duzgun, 2020). The economic sphere is thus somewhat privatized and de-democratized, as states are not required, rather, are encouraged not to intervene in the self-regulation process, except when absolutely necessary. Accordingly, an economic sphere is created, in which politics cannot intervene, nor make systemic changes. Consequently, for the first time in the history of democracy, the subsequent schism created between the two spheres resulted in democracy's narrow interpretation in merely political terms without taking into consideration the role and power of economic features.

Subsequently, the constraints posed on the state's fiscal ability to tackle socioeconomic grievances leads to the total debilitation of the practical worth and by default, the legitimacy, of political institutions and actors. During times of financial crises, the state's failure to safeguard the national economy and protect its population from further socioeconomic hardships, taints public trust towards its own government, and by extension the system of governance which employs and restricts the government's abilities. In this regard, Kiely (2016: 16) argues that this system values liberalism more than democracy, and economic liberalism more than the political one. This gives way to far-right populist parties to capitalize on this growing gap between public trust of democratic institutions, and the role of capitalist development during the crisis. In other words, the capacity of a state, or rather the lack thereof, to effectively manage the economy plays a significant role in the success of far-right populist parties.

The EU's role in reducing state sovereignty

State sovereignty is further reduced by the increasing power of the European Union (EU hereafter) over its member-states (Macartney, 2014: 402). This argument is based on the fact that the EU's centralized power and reach is built on the unyielding engagement of its member-states to integrate their monetary systems and decisions, resulting in less control

over their national economies. Specifically, this occurs through fiscal monitoring and commitment to fiscal policies that limit government deficit to 3% of its GDP and public debt to 60% (European Council, 1997); the collection of capital and responsibility of regional monetary policies of the European Central Bank (Wolfgang, 2016: 19); and in certain cases, the imposition of austerity measures that have the power to reconstruct and profoundly impact the economy and society (Katsourides, 2016b: 61-63). Even if governments wish to prioritize the recovery of their national economies during times of economic downturn, the EU's decision-making process concerning the economy is usually undertaken in Brussels and dictated by the hegemonic role of Germany (Kiely, 2016: 17). Such limited control halts the implementation of protectionist policies and the discrimination against cooperation with foreign markets in an attempt to safeguard the effective practice, or rather existence, of world markets (O'Brien and Williams, 2016: 10-11).

The omnipresent role of private enterprises throughout the administrative side of governments and the EU further limits their capacity to take decisions that might disrupt the advantageous position of these enterprises (Cohn, 2012: 42). As a result, the state's monetary and fiscal sovereignty is practically non-existent, demonstrating the mutually reinforcing relationship between the forces of neoliberalism and the expansion and deepening of the integration process. European integration built a technocratic and democratically non-accountable space of governance, in which no popular or electoral pressure at the national level can transform on its own. Thus, the EU's restraints on national control is a significant dimension of a transnational crisis of states losing their sovereignty.

When examining European integration, it is important to mention its vital role in securing the irreversibility of an economic model that ultimately reduces state sovereignty. The entire European monetary system regulates through the implementation of a neoliberal technocratic model (Kiely, 2016: 16). Yet, the development of this model resulted in the construction of a "finance-dominated accumulation regime" with mediocre growth (Stockhammer, 2009: 2), largely differing from what was originally envisioned when it was introduced in the aftermath of the 1970s financial crisis. The expectation was that a renaissance of high employment rates, increased consumption and investment would take place, while the self-regulation of markets would eventually bring about economic prosperity

and socioeconomic welfare (Innes, 2018). Rather, states hardly ever recovered from the transnational unemployment crisis, and the advancements in welfare state and social security provisions made post-1945 have been drastically transformed, if not utterly destroyed (Wolfgang, 2016: 16). The unprecedented socioeconomic inequalities and existing relations of exploitation and domination amongst nations, class, race, and gender have been exacerbated (Peterson, 2003: 8-13). The 2008 financial crisis affected the EU as a whole, while it revealed the shortcomings of the liberal capitalist open market system which allowed multinational corporations to manipulate and even distort the international market (O'Brien and Williams, 2016: 16). The EU's response to the crisis through the imposition of austerity measures further provoked economic hardships on national populations (Busch *et al.*, 2013). This proved that the promotion neoliberal policies offers false hopes for economic progress on a collective level, further delegitimizing state sovereignty (Sandbrook, 2000: 1072). Simply, the formation of an integrated globalized system has gradually accumulated the power to overshadow core liberal democratic values and implicitly create unequal levels of authority and sovereignty. As Stein notes, *"sovereignty and democracy work to constrain globalization, globalization and sovereignty generate a democratic deficit, and globalization and democracy lead to limitations upon, and even the transcendence of sovereignty"* (2016: 297).

Macartney (2014: 401) argues that the EU's recent democratic deficit can lead to *"growing social unrest over the Europeanized mechanisms of economic adjustment process"* as they have failed to safeguard public welfare, whilst restraining the ability of governments to do so domestically. It is thus evident that the EU is willing to go to any extent possible to salvage its economic foundation with little regard to the consequences of its measures. Once society is extensively damaged by the failures of this system, its rejection by differently influenced fragments of society is inevitable, leading to citizen disengagement with the political system and especially with its leaders (Cerny, 1999). Kiely (2016: 17) suggests that the success of right-wing populist figures is due to their rejection of both neoliberal rationality and liberal reason; notions that were considered to be the same within the confines of technocratic governance. This can cause wide distrust among citizens as their sense of accountability fades; raising concerns of mistrust which undermine the role and efficiency of liberal democratic governance, hence legitimizing the arguments of extreme right populist parties.

The de-politicization of society

Existing literature directs attention to the processes of de-democratization and de-politicization of society, as a tool to explain the growing success of far-right populist parties. These processes are manifested through the adoption of neoliberal policies that aim to reduce the amplified role of the government in favor of the protection of individual freedom (Kiely, 2016: 9). In the face of collectivist politics, the ability of individual prosperity to enable renewed opportunities for further marketisation is endangered due to the curtailing of spontaneous acts of the market (idem). Analyzing this dynamic, Gonzalez-Vicente and Carroll emphasize the hegemonic role of national and international elites in market capitalism “*as being beyond politics*” and link it with the emergence of populist mobilizations (2017: 992-993). This is an inevitable connection which serves the broader understanding of the contestation of far-right populist parties with globalization and liberal democratic governance. In this sense, the power of the masses is not simply neglected, rather, it is seen as a threatening force that needs to be tamed. Neoliberalism is thus a process of atomization that demonstrates the structural incompatibility between capitalism, neoliberalism, and democracy. It is impossible for these notions to be fully realized at the same time, as each one constraints and transforms the other (Stein, 2016: 297).

Building on this line of argumentation, Dubey (2017) suggests that intense nationalism is prevalent today due to the failure of alternative systems – namely capitalism, multilateralism, socialist internationalism – to supersede state-oriented nationalism. Their effectiveness was limited to mitigating nationalism without substituting it. Once these systems fail to safeguard the public’s socioeconomic welfare, their sovereignty, along with that of national states and transnational institutions that enforce them, largely weakens. People become less interested in lending their input through political participation and/or activism, as it becomes clear that their ability to steer public policies and decisions is minimal (Mounk, 2018). In this respect, Miller (2018) points out that modern democracy is “*the rule of the politicians*” rather than that of a sovereign people. In this light, the dynamic between liberalism and modern democracy is debilitated, and can trigger “*a fragmentation of identities, (...) the erosion of the idea of the public interest*”, and a reduction of the scope of control and accountability of citizens (Cerny, 1999: 2; see Wallerstein, 2004: 23-41,76-90).

In turn, those who do not feel that they are represented by or within the system, are more likely to be attracted to populist approaches due to their ability to foster inclusiveness (Kaltwasser, 2012: 185,200). Consequently, the political and democratic space progressively shrinks, enabling the subsequent rise of far-right populist parties. This is further explored by Saull (2017: 596) who suggests that the mobilization of far-right populist ideals might be a necessary feature for the continuous reestablishment of liberal democracy. Simply put, public disengagement with political processes and reduced political importance of the masses constitutes an inherent part of neoliberal governance that will continue to be reproduced as long as the capitalist system thrives through neoliberal policies. Thus, far-right populism is a perennial phenomenon that will continue coexisting alongside democracy as long as liberal democratic governance produces the same grievances (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018).

Evidently, there is a mutually reinforcing relationship among the dynamics and forces of neoliberalism, and the expansion and deepening of the rise of right-wing populism in Europe. The most impactful effect of economic crises on the political system is the stigmatization and subsequent degradation of political forces. Although the loss of state sovereignty is a consequence of the aforementioned factors, this does not mean that it, itself, does not constitute a factor that facilitated the rise of far-right populism, as it allows for the substantiation of far-right populist agendas which ultimately disrupt and shake the liberal democratic process to its core. Therefore, to answer the research question posed, this thesis draws from the interrelated politico-economic grievances that allowed for the manifestation of populism, and examines the extent to which these elements play out and produce the same outputs in the RoC.

2.2. Methods

To trace the factors that brought about the rise of ELAM in 2016, this thesis employs a qualitative process tracing empirical framework on a single case-study. This method enables the tracing of the causal chain and mechanisms that led to the rise of a far-right populist party in a specific context and moment in time. Bennet and Checkel define process tracing “*as the*

analysis of evidence on processes, sequences, and conjunctures of events within a case for the purposes of either developing or testing hypotheses about causal mechanisms that might causally explain the case” (2015: 7-8). There are two aspects of this method: the deductive and the inductive. The former assesses whether certain effects of a hypothesized causal chain are observed in a specific case. The latter applies evidence of one case to develop a theory explaining it and providing supplementary implications that could be tested in other cases. This thesis incorporates both aspects, as it evaluates the causes outlined in Chapter 2.1, but also identifies elements specific to the Cypriot context. Thus, this study could be used for comparative analyses by providing analogous empirical material or simply prove that this particular case serves as an anomaly (O’Brien and Williams, 2016: 27).

To identify the causal chain, the process tracing technique tests the correlation between independent variables and the dependent variable’s outcome (Bennet and Checkel, 2015: 6). Ergo, considering that the increase of ELAM’s electoral base is the dependent variable, an assessment on the factors that took place between the outbreak of financial crisis in 2008 and ELAM’s election in 2016 that might have facilitated this rise is essential. To achieve this, this thesis builds its argumentation on an extensive selection of literature, incorporating both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include independent and EU-commissioned surveys, public opinion polls and statistics; EU and government publications; newspaper articles; party documents, videos, and interviews. Regarding the secondary sources, this thesis makes use of academic articles, journals, and books.

Limitations

Assessing the possible factors that facilitated the rise of ELAM in Cyprus is challenging. First, there is no guarantee that the data on voting rationale are completely accurate due to possible preference falsifications. That is, when people express different views in public than their true preferences because of the expectation that the former provides greater benefits or better serves their reputation (Frank, 1996: 116). As a small community, the individual and collective (family) reputation of Greek-Cypriots holds a vital space in each person’s perception. Paired with the traditionally close ties and affiliations that entire families have with political parties (Katsourides, 2014b: 57), the probability for preference falsifications is quite high.

Second, although the approach would be more well-rounded if interviews were conducted, the limited timeframe for the completion of this thesis did not allow fieldwork. In addition, scrutinizing and classifying interviews would not allow this thesis to reach a certain degree of analytic depth within the available word count. Third, as Cohn (2012: 3) notes, each person's theoretical views determine not only the theory with which an issue is explicitly examined, but also defines the facts used throughout the analysis as well as the significance allocated to them. Thus, the interpretation of facts is undoubtedly subjective, causing their examination to be subject to investigation and selection bias (Thies, 2002).

3. Case-Study: The Rise of ELAM in the RoC

The scrutinization of a single case can provide insight into the broader understanding of the common factors that drive large-scale changes in social formations and state systems, transpired across time and space (Trimikliniotis and Bozkurt, 2012: 1-2). Accordingly, how this phenomenon was articulated in the RoC, through the closer examination of the Republic's only far-right populist party, is investigated. Here, relevant information on ELAM's history, ideological leanings and political agenda, and the context in which it got elected in 2016 is briefly outlined.

ELAM: Background

ELAM was formed in 2008 but was only legally recognized as a political party in 2011 (Katsourides, 2013c). Its official debut was materialized in the 2011 Parliamentary elections, when it gained a mere 1% (Parliamentary Elections, 2011). Ever since, its appeal has been progressively growing: ELAM gained almost 1% in the 2013 Presidential elections, 2.7% in the 2014 European Parliament elections, 3.7% in the 2016 Parliamentary elections (gaining two seats), 5.7% in the 2018 Presidential elections (right after the three mainstream parties, Democratic Rally (DISY), the Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL) and Democratic Party (DIKO)), and 8.2% in the 2019 elections for the European Parliament (Parliamentary Elections 2013, 2018; European Elections, 2014, 2019; Parliamentary Elections, 2016). This is significant as ELAM's rise threatens the long-standing domination of mainstream parties.

The party itself existed before 2008 as a vigilante group (Charalambous and Christoforou, 2018: 452-3) under the name 'Golden Dawn Cyprus Branch' (Katsourides, 2013c: 573). It is led by Christos Christou, a former active member of Golden Dawn (GD hereafter) (Wodak, 2015: 193). Both facts indicate the party's political and ideological affiliations to Greece's neo-Nazi party, albeit the lack of evidence of their financial linkages. In fact, the party's agenda is dictated by GD's ideological declaration in a unidirectional manner but accustomed to the Cypriot context. Both parties are "*inspired by a nationalist vision premised on the struggles of an imagined ethnic community*" (Charalambous and Christoforou, 2018: 451), centered around the embodiment of a pure Greek 'race', of which the Greek-Cypriot population is an integral part (Aktar *et al.*, 2010). The anciency and depth of this relationship

is denoted in ELAM's depiction of the Greek identity of Greek-Cypriots as ever-existing and as the most prided element of Cyprus' history. Yet, this assimilation is manifested in a radical way, which stimulates racist and xenophobic behavior directed towards anyone who is not Greek. In addition, ELAM's emphasis on the prominence of traditional ideals (through its main slogan "fatherland, religion, and family" which was first used by the Greek military junta) indicates a desire, or rather an intent, to revive the moral principles of the pre-globalized Greek-Cypriot society.

ELAM: A far-right populist party

ELAM's affiliation with GD and certain acts of violence of its members can lead one to identify ELAM as a neo-Nazi party (Council of Europe, 2016). However, the lack of a universal method of categorization of right-wing extremist parties hinders any attempt to place one party under a specific ideological umbrella (Mudde, 2007: 32-33). This thesis classifies ELAM on the basis of Mudde's (2000; 2007) taxonomic methodology: according to the party's official literature⁸. Based on the study of Charalambous and Christoforou (2018) which investigates the correlation between far-right parties and populism through a content analysis and categorization of ELAM and GD's press releases from 2010 to 2015, this thesis categorizes ELAM as a far-right populist party (see pp.466: table1).

The primary characteristics of far-right populist parties include extreme nationalism, authoritarianism, nativism, and democratic illiberalism (Mudde, 2007: 21-27); manifested as a polemical tool that taps into public exasperation (Urbinati, 2019: 7). The connecting point between them is the construction of a distinct national identity – often implying its superiority. Yet, in reality, the identity of the ingroup ('us') is built on the delineation of the boundaries of nonnative identities ('them') in which the features of the ingroup are vaguely defined, while those of the outgroup are explicitly denominated (idem: 63). By demonizing the 'other', these parties construct an 'enemy' who is discursively portrayed as posing an existential threat to the proper functioning of society and the purity of the nation's identity. In this respect, ELAM repeatedly points to the significance of a national crisis to designate a national enemy (Turkey)

⁸ For greater accuracy, this examination should be limited to externally and internally-oriented publications of the party itself, to avoid the influence of foreign perspectives (Mudde, 2000: 20-22).

and project antagonism towards the Turkish-Cypriot community through exhaustive employment of ultranationalist messages which convey conflict-based collective imaginaries (Charalambous and Christoforou, 2018: 465).

It is emblematic for these parties to not only ascribe enemies typically of dissimilar religious and/or ethnic backgrounds, but also of current governments, elites, and regional/international monetary unions (Finchelstein, 2017: 22-24). By designating both internal and external enemies, populist parties are able to galvanize the masses and deepen their frustrations, while portraying themselves as the only ones who can effectively address existing socioeconomic problems (Gonzalez-Vicente and Carroll, 2017: 1001). The adoption of such an extreme form of nationalism is inextricably linked to the prioritization of the interests of the native population. Accordingly, ELAM advocated in favor of exiting the Troika agreement and the Eurozone as a solution for economic recovery (see ELAM, 2014). Within ELAM's discourse, the recurrent use of this tactic demonstrates its propensity to exploit anti-establishment and anti-democratic popular resentment (see Sigmalive, 2013b; ELAM, 2017a, 2017b).

Thus, the underlining emphasis of populism on democratic illiberalism is substantiated not only through the consequences of the economic crisis, but also through the discrediting of previous governments. ELAM expressed its widespread distrust of the Greek-Cypriot political establishment by exposing corrupt politicians (of mainstream parties) who were center-stage in the collapse of Laiki Bank (Triga *et al.*: 2019: 113). In turn, ELAM portrays itself as the only party that can truly represent and protect the people (Charalambous and Christoforou, 2018: 461). This is a typical populist rhetorical strategy that presents party representatives as heroic martyrs. Adopting similar tactics to GD, it actively organized charitable efforts (i.e. blood donations, assistance to fire-fighters, donations of food and school material) strictly for Greek-Cypriots (Sigmalive, 2013b); attempting to make its presence, particularly its protective and representative role, known to the public, to make up for its exclusion from mainstream media platforms before 2016 and fuel their anti-mainstream narrative and personification (Triga, 2017: 269).

The economy and the appeal of ELAM's rhetoric

Yet, these characteristics and rhetoric which touch on cultural dynamics, cannot fully explain the causal depths of their success. Indeed, the appeal, concretization, and success of far-right populist rhetoric tends to be contingent to the state of the economy. Scholars argue that ethnic resentment towards foreigners is formed more easily and frequently during times of socioeconomic instability (Arzheimer, 2009; Esses *et al.*, 1998), explaining why the rhetoric of extreme-right populist parties tends to be substantiated at specific moments in history.

Within the EU, the member-states most hardly hit by the Great Recession were those in the South, predominantly, Greece, Portugal, Spain, and Cyprus. Figure 1 illustrates the extent of the impacts on the Greek-Cypriot economy, where unemployment rates more than doubled by 2011 alongside a slump in the annual GDP. The economy seems to have been well on the path of recovery after only two years since implementation of the financial assistance program (2013); notwithstanding the fact that unemployment rates were similar to 2012, which was already substantially high in comparison to the early 2000s. Indeed, the RoC exited the program in 2016, without even using 30% of its bail-out-allocated funds, because of positive economic growth (1.75% in 2016) and reduced unemployment rates (Fiedler, 2019: 16). The plan therefore effectively succeeded in diminishing the financing needs of the government and creditors (*idem*).

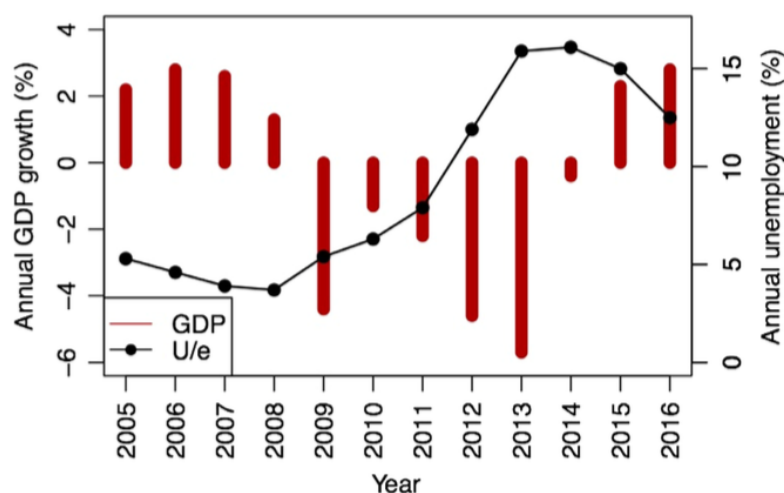


Figure 1. Annual GDP growth and unemployment rate in the period 2005–2016. Source: Author's citation of Eurostat data.

Figure 1: RoC's GDP growth and unemployment rate (2005-2016)

Source: Triga, 2017: 262,fig.1

However, this did not halt the rise of ELAM, nor the manifestation of unconventional solutions targeting the poorer social classes – the unemployed, working, and low-middle classes, and the youth. These classes are affected the most by fluctuations of the economy, thus the most inclined to positively respond to far-right populist rhetoric, according to Mierina and Koroleva (2015). When people are in an economically disadvantaged position, racist perceptions have the power to aggravate popular concerns and cultivate further alienation amongst society. Rao *et al.* (2018) argue that fluctuations in incomes, even if small, can push people towards extremist parties. This tendency allows for political parties to appeal to affected citizens through the politicization of demands that emerge alongside economic deterioration, namely, national prioritization, identity, and homogeneity. There is available space within the political sphere for populist parties to validate their hitherto non-mainstream and extreme approach that focuses on the aforementioned demands (Mounk, 2018). Therefore, this thesis argues that cultural grievances grow as a by-product of widespread economic suffering and distrust of the political system. Thus, politico-economic factors have more weight in ELAM's ability to break established electoral thresholds.

4. Analysis

Questioning the correlation between the impacts of a financial meltdown and the electoral success of far-right populist parties, this chapter traces the mechanisms that led to the abrupt increase of electoral power of ELAM in the RoC. This thesis argues that the outbreak of the economic crisis after 2008 triggered a political crisis in which public trust towards the political system as a whole progressively diminished, having grave repercussions on the state's and the EU's sovereignty. The development of this multifaceted crisis impelled an environment of political apathy and damaged the party system, which allowed ELAM's radical approach to stand out and thus be substantiated.

4.1. 2008-2012: A multifaceted crisis in the making

In 2008, Demetris Christofias, of the left-wing AKEL⁹, became the President of the RoC when the economy was solid with 3.3% government surplus (Orphanides, 2014: 1) and when the Republic entered the Eurozone (European Union, n.d.). The political landscape was mainly preoccupied with the Cyprus question, triggered due to the rejection of the 2004 Annan Plan referendum by previous incumbent Tassos Papadopoulos (DIKO¹⁰, in office 2003-2008). Yet, probably for the first time, economic concerns eclipsed discussions on reunification, as the impacts of the 2008 financial crash unfolded in the Cypriot context (Katsourides, 2014b: 51). This section examines the series of events and political decisions, and their implications on society, which worsened the economic crisis, triggering a political one.

To begin with, the decision of the Christofias administration¹¹ (in office 2008-2013) to increase social spending by 42%, including higher retirement benefits, pensions, minimum wage and government employees, led to massive deficits of government expenditure (Orphanides, 2014: 5-7,44: fig.5). Coupled with the dependency of the economy on foreign markets – which was spiraling since the outbreak of the 2008 crisis – the Republic saw a negative fiscal growth by 2009, and thereby went into recession (idem: 40: fig.2). Further, the

⁹ Formed in 1941, this was the first time AKEL became the governing party.

¹⁰ A center-right party, formed in 1976, was a governing party in two, two-term instances.

¹¹ The administration was structured on a coalition with DIKO and EDEK occupying four ministries and presiding over the parliament (Charalambous, 2012: 162).

exposure of Greek-Cypriot banks to Greek debt caused Cyprus to lose its access to international credit markets by May 2011, further weakening an already overwhelmed banking system¹² and generated widespread economic uncertainty (idem: 4). This led domestic (Central Bank of Cyprus; opposition parties; press), and EU actors (European Council; European Central Bank (ECB)) to pressure the government to conform to EU fiscal standards and obligations. The Christofias administration, being the EU's only leftist government, avoided doing so. This stance was considered as irresponsible within the context of an integrated market system, and the government was therefore blamed for the ECB's decision not to support the Cypriot bond market which later provoked the necessity for a bailout agreement (idem: 9).

The intensification of this phenomenon came with Troika's measures on Greek sovereign debt, including an agreement for private sector involvement (PSI) in October 2011 (European Union, 2011). Greek-Cypriot banks were vastly overly exposed to sovereign bonds of Greek banks, leading to a loss equivalent to one fourth of the Republic's GDP (Triga, 2017: 262). Also, its two main banks – Bank of Cyprus and Marfin-Laiki Bank – were devastatingly affected. This was a turning point for the declining state of the Greek-Cypriot economy, as, *“the EU, its structures and its decisions regarding the Greece rescue have been the main reason for the contagion of the financial crisis from Greece to Cyprus”* (Fiedler, 2019: 19).

The added financial burden signaled a necessity for external assistance. Yet, the government avoided turning to the EU for as long as possible¹³, and when it did, it prolonged the negotiation process until the end of its term, while aiming to avoid the application of austerity measures by exiting the Eurozone¹⁴ (Katsourides, 2014b: 66). The Cypriot case is unique in that the economy was unstable for more than a year before the government sought assistance from Europe, in contrast to Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain who had finalized this process within three weeks (Orphanides, 2014: 2-3). The delay caused the economy to further deteriorate. Unemployment rates reached almost 15%; the youth being the most

¹² A strong banking sector was essential because it represented one third of the RoC's GDP in the pre-crisis period (Fiedler, 2019: 3: fig.3).

¹³ Instead, AKEL sought support from Russia in the form of a loan agreement, but was soon forced to negotiate a deal with Troika because the Republic's sovereign bonds were declared as junk bonds in June 2012 and thus could not meet the ECB criteria for emergency liquidity (Triga, 2017: 263).

¹⁴ Although this was never realized, it is noteworthy that AKEL's strategy triggered an anti-memorandum discussion which was later used by ELAM as a tactic to capitalize on the implications of the memorandum.

affected demographic with approximately one third being unemployed by 2013 (idem: 41-42: fig.3). Additionally, *“the banks’ balance sheets deteriorated even further, non-performing loans increased (...), [t]he budget deficit (...) was adding roughly €1 billion per year to the cost, further increasing the eventual amount of the bailout, and [t]he cumulative real GDP drop between the second quarter of 2011 and the first quarter of March 2013 was 6.7%”* (Michaelides, 2016: 126).

This generated an environment of extensive economic instability, proving that the way in which the economic downturn unfolded, negatively impacted the sovereignty of national institutions which were unable to withstand EU pressures and act beyond EU-set boundaries. Put differently, the inability of the Christofias administration to safeguard the economy without using the means offered by the EU, illustrated the extent to which the economic integration of EU member-states limits the way that national economies are managed. Indeed, this was not the first time the leftist government succumbed to EU-predetermined policies which it would have vetoed if allowed to take autonomous decisions. For example, it conceded to freezing wage increases for a two-year period and to imposing a 2% higher VAT rate, both of which it had previously opposed on the basis of its ideological standing (Katsourides, 2012: 203). This shows how going against the confines of EU regulation can not only negatively affect the economy but can also have severe political ramifications. The legitimacy of the incumbent is widely weakened, as he/she cannot take charge of regulating the economy or adopting certain measures on a national scale that are likely to improve public welfare. This delegitimization also reflects negatively on the liberal democratic system itself, as it clearly sets limits that cannot be easily surpassed and that do not serve the people’s wellbeing. Either way, a crisis of the political system is inevitable, as in the Greek-Cypriot case.

Before analyzing further the implications of the economic crisis on national governance, it is important to mention an event whose consequences were pivotal in the escalation of this process. In July 2011, an explosion at the Mari Naval Base¹⁵ caused the death

¹⁵ In January 2009, a Greek-Cypriot vessel seized an arms shipment containing almost 100 containers carrying hazardous munition substances on its way to Syria from Iran that was violating the international arms embargo. The shipment was stored in an open field under direct sunlight, which caused them to overheat and explode (CNA, 2016).

of 13 people and the destruction of the island's main power station which distributed 60% of the Republic's electricity, causing long-term power outages (Ioannides, 2013). The economic cost¹⁶ of the explosion was reflected in the 4.5% decline of the GDP at a time when a positive real GDP growth had been recorded (Orphanides, 2014: 13). Unemployment, despite already being at a record high 7.6% before the explosion, almost doubled by the end of Christofias' term (idem: 41-42, fig.3).

The government faced enormous backlash for not taking the necessary measures to prevent the explosion, such as delivering the cargo to the UN (Charalambous, 2012: 166). Accordingly, the level of public trust towards the government plummeted (see Triga, 2017: 276: fig.6). There was even a public outcry for the government's resignation in the form of massive demonstrations (Orphanides, 2014: 14). Christofias was accused of "negligence and carelessness" by a government-appointed lawyer assigned to investigate the incident, demanding that he resume responsibility and resign (Theodoulou, 2011). Whereas, several government officials were prosecuted for "*manslaughter and causing death by negligence, neglect of official duty and actions that cause physical harm*" (Ioannides, 2013). Noticeably, the Mari incident triggered a period of both economic and political instability, as AKEL was faced with frequent attacks and hostilities in the Parliament (Katsourides, 2012: 203) whilst both the Movement for Social Democrats (EDEK¹⁷) and DIKO dismantled the governing coalition in 2010 and 2011 respectively (Charalambous, 2012: 166). This volatile environment challenged AKEL's aptitude to materialize its proposed agenda fully and effectively, both on the economic and social fronts.

The effects of the economic crisis on the political system (on both national and EU scales) generated a multifaceted crisis. Its effects were mostly displayed in reduced voter turnout, soaring disapproval of the President himself, and in holding AKEL accountable, punishing it at the 2013 Presidential elections. Katsourides (2012: 204-205) suggests that AKEL forms part of a broader pattern of radical left parties enduring the far-reaching effects of liberal

¹⁶ Zachariadis and Poullikkas (2012) show that the emergency measures taken by the Christofias administration (i.e. power outages and promoting individual saving electricity measures) prevented greater long-term economic costs.

¹⁷ Formed in 1969, EDEK is a social democrat party. Despite holding government positions through coalitions, it was never capable of surpassing DISY, AKEL or DIKO in elections (Charalambous, 2012: 164).

democratic governance once in power “because their political discourse was historically distinguished by the emphasis they attached to the need to change the political system”. In other words, the ineptitude of left parties leaves their followers disappointed. On the contrary, the economic voting¹⁸ theory argues that “*voters act rationally to punish or reward the incumbents depending on their perception of the progress of their national economy*” (Triga, 2017: 264). On these grounds, Hernández and Kriesi (2016) demonstrate that the European countries most affected by the Great Recession, especially those which faced dramatic events such as the Mari explosion and/or a Troika intervention, were more prone to incumbent punishment.

However, these arguments do not consider that perhaps for the first time in the country’s history, there was public outcry against the political system as a whole (Katsourides, 2014b: 53-59). Such decisions showcase that the structure of today’s capitalist-driven global governance is so rigidly established in the RoC, particularly as an EU member, that it goes beyond any ruling party’s ideological positions. AKEL was faced with significant constraints to its ability to regulate the economy, namely, the lack of international influence typical of small countries, its dependency on the EU, the capitalist state system and the globalization process, which rendered it impossible to achieve any long-term or systemic changes. This revealed the underlying constraints of integrated market economies and triggered a process of delegitimization of national and European institutions. In turn, this process produced the necessary conditions that pushed people into either being less engaged in politics or seeking effective and immediate solutions and strong leadership elsewhere (see Chapter 4.3).

It is thus evident that until Christofias’ term was over, the deteriorating state of the economy directly affected state and EU sovereignty, having serious repercussions on the entire liberal democratic system; a process that was deepened by the adoption of a Troika rescue package.

¹⁸ Economic voting refers to the process in which voters cast their votes on the basis of the candidates’ economic influence and perceived capacity to effectively and successfully manage the economy (Lewis-Beck and Paldam, 2000).

4.2. The implications of the Troika bailout

The economic uncertainty looming over the Greek-Cypriot society triggered a trend already prevailing in other Southern European countries: political instability and illegitimacy. The transfer of power from the left-wing AKEL to the right-wing DISY¹⁹ through the election of Nicos Anastasiades in February 2013, was not enough to reverse or even halt the development of a political crisis. This section examines the ways in which this phenomenon was reinforced after the adoption of the bail-in agreement in March 2013.

Throughout the negotiation process with Troika, there was public outburst against the adoption of a financial assistance program. As a response, the Parliament rejected the first deal offered by Troika (Katsourides, 2014b: 53). Yet, failed attempts to acquire assistance elsewhere, forced the government to accept a new Troika deal on the 25th of March 2013, which included a loan worth 10 billion euros, Marfin-Laiki Bank shutting down, while *“levying all uninsured deposits of 100,000€ there, and levying up to 60 percent of uninsured deposits in the Bank of Cyprus above 100,000€”* (idem). The nature of the second deal transformed the agreement from a bail-out to a bail-in plan, generating wealth losses on both an individual and collective level (Triga and Papa, 2015: 198).

This is interesting considering that only a minority of the Greek-Cypriot society is highly disadvantaged economically compared to other developed countries – non-manual salaried labor represents more than 70% of the earning population, mainly comprising *“white-collar, working in public and semi-public fields, in the banking sector and in small-to-medium-sized service enterprises”* (Katsourides, 2012: 204). The deposit cuts therefore directly hit a considerable portion of the population on an individual level, while on a collective level, lower disposable incomes meant that aggregate consumption and subsequently output, had negative multiplier impacts on the economy and specifically on unemployment (Hardouvelis, 2016: 258-259). Thus, the Republic’s capacity to prosper economically was dramatically reduced, GDP dropped by almost 6% by mid-2013, whilst unemployment reached approximately 17% (Katsourides, 2014b: 53). The financial sector suffered long-term damages

¹⁹ Created in 1976, DISY is a right-wing party, in power under Clerides (1993-2003) and Anastasiades (2013-) who was reelected in 2018.

due to withdrawals of foreign investments (roughly 18%) shortly prior to the agreement, and limited investment activities from 2013 to 2016 (Fiedler, 2019: 16). Although the imposition of further strict austerity measures²⁰ facilitated the quick recovery of the economy, their implementation was counterproductive for the population itself, as living standards deteriorated while social inequalities increased (Ioannou and Charalambous, 2017: 8). Consequently, large parts of the population became more vulnerable, hence susceptible to endorse populist parties.

The public reaction was twofold. On the one hand, the inability of the government to reject the implementation of the agreement and of additional austerity measures provoked further economic uncertainty and dissatisfaction with the government. Polls conducted immediately after the agreement show that more than 60% of respondents did not trust President Anastasiades (see Sigmalive, 2013a cited in Katsourides, 2014b: 66). Triga and Papa (2015) illustrate that public anger and accountability was directed towards the banks, previous and current governments as well as corrupt elites, due to the rejection of the first aid package by the same actors who later became its biggest supporters. Part of this blame was directed towards the incumbent himself, as he was often referred to as a ‘traitor’ whose decisions served foreign institutions and powers instead of its own population (idem: 208). However, Charalambous *et al.* (2015) note that there was no incumbent punishment in the case of Anastasiades – in direct contrast to Christofias – in spite of the harsh economic policies of his government. DISY was paradoxically rewarded during the 2014 European elections by being the most popular party and gaining almost 2% more votes than the previous elections, whereas AKEL saw a decrease of more than 8%. However, this election also had the highest abstention rate ever recorded in the history of the Republic (at 56%) (IDEA, n.d.), indicating that reduced political participation constitutes a direct consequence of the political system losing its legitimacy, parallel to the escalation of economic turmoil.

On the other hand, the fact that this was the first bail-in deal pursued by the EU²¹ was perceived as a betrayal from an institution whose role was hitherto seen as protective

²⁰ i.e. cuts in social benefits, state budgets, pensions, subsidies/benefits, and salaries of civil servants while property taxes and value-added tax (VAT) on fuel, tobacco and alcohol peaked, and the imposition of co-payments and budget cuts in the public health system (Katsourides, 2014b: 56).

²¹ Later incorporated into the international regulatory framework for banks, the Basel III Agreement.

(Katsourides, 2014b: 53). This impression²² refers to the idea that EU membership would bring economic prosperity on both a national and personal level, solutions to sociopolitical problems, and security against Turkey (Katsourides, 2016b: 61). By contrast, after 2013, the EU's reluctance to fairly address the implications of the Great Recession and existing socioeconomic inequalities²³ was met with public anger and exasperation (Katsourides, 2014b: 67). The way in which the second Troika deal unfolded was seen as "*the dangerous outcomes of capitalism*" and of European integration (Katsourides, 2016a: 201). Its harshness was received as an illegitimate and unfair defilement of the Greek-Cypriot community, insinuating that it was purposefully executed to weaken Cyprus' economic position and political power to exploit its natural resources (i.e. gas) (Triga and Papa, 2015: 197-199). So, Greek-Cypriots consider themselves as victims who cannot react to the will of major powers.

Simultaneously, the restraints posed on the government's ability to take autonomous decisions made apparent that weak state sovereignty is an important effect of European integration. The agreement made clear that the EU's overwhelming powers and the extent of European integration regulate the state's governing tools, subsequently limiting its sovereignty (Katsourides, 2016a: 211). Even as DISY's attempt to portray its close affiliation with the EU²⁴ as a stabilizing and navigating factor for the economic hardships that would follow, there was marginal public trust towards political institutions on both domestic and European fronts (Katsourides, 2014b: 53,60). This led parts of the Greek-Cypriot society to view the EU, particularly Germany, as the perpetrators of politico-economic turbulence.

For this reason, a prevalent 'liberating' solution within the Facebook groups studied by Triga and Papa, was exiting the Eurozone as a form of resistance to EU constraints imposed on local governance (2015: 208). This reaction accelerated the EU's delegitimization among the Greek-Cypriot society. By spring 2015, almost half of the Greek-Cypriot population had a negative image of the EU and defined the economic situation (specifically high unemployment)

²² Public sentiments towards the EU are stirred by the media and reinforced by the discourse of political parties who have close ties to mainstream newspapers and television channels (Katsourides, 2016b: 65).

²³ See Pye (2017) for the EU's limited ability to implement the human rights provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon (2009) in the Eurozone.

²⁴ DISY's position on the Cyprus question forms the basis for its close ties with the EU (because major powers were reluctant to accept a *de jure* partition of Cyprus), which enabled DISY to secure Cyprus' accession to the EU (Loizides, 2012: 198).

as the most important EU-related problem that the country was facing (European Commission, 2015: 8,15-18). Clearly, the 2013 financial crisis transformed Greek-Cypriot perceptions of the EU, from a politically oriented 'soft' Eurosceptism, to a deeper, more economically rooted Eurosceptism (Katsourides, 2016b: 66,83). Thus, the following period saw an enhancement of an already-existing, multi-layered legitimacy crisis by way of questioning the extent to which liberal democratic governance in the RoC effectively functions.

The implications of the economic crisis triggered a legitimacy crisis not only of national actors and institutions, but most importantly, of the liberal democratic system. Such shocks and shifts produced mounting levels of mistrust that contributed to the rise of far-right populist parties. Yet, to draw this connection, it is crucial to first analyze the impacts of profound political disillusionment and apathy.

4.3. The effects of political apathy in the RoC

A steep decline in voter turnout has been recorded on a global scale (see Solijnov, 2016: 25: fig.4). In the RoC, widespread disinterestedness of the masses became apparent through high abstention rates, reaching its lowest²⁵ in the 2014 European parliamentary elections. Nonetheless, the fact that out of the EU states that made a deal with Troika, the RoC is the only one in which this effect remained minimal, is paradoxical because the costs it endured directly affected individuals, which should have generated greater levels of public disillusionment. While the previous two sections identified this phenomenon as a direct consequence of a politico-economic crisis, this section assesses how the degree of politicization of the Greek-Cypriot community after 2008 implicitly relates to the rise of ELAM.

By merely examining Figure 2, it is evident that there was an abrupt decrease of voter turnout from 2008 onwards, denoting signs of political apathy towards the ineffective functioning of liberal democracy. This drop reflects a parallel decline of public trust in the

²⁵ Voter turnout is calculated according to the number of registered voters – in 2016, there were 543,186 registrations out of a population of approximately 1,200,000 people (Worldometer, n.d.).

political system, particularly in the EU, as turnout in EU Parliamentary elections was never as high as in national elections, and after the bail-in agreement, it plummeted by an unprecedented 20%. After the 2014 elections, 46% of absentee voters declared that they abstained because they did not feel that the RoC benefited from its EU accession (Katsourides, 2015: 335). Additionally, 57% of young registered voters refrain from voting in EU elections because they do not approve of the EU (European Commission, 2013: 42). Indeed, 77% of Greek-Cypriot youth does not attribute any importance to EU elections, having the lowest score among EU member-states (idem: 27). This exposes concerns regarding the tenability of neoliberal policies and structures, given that public disillusionment exacerbated alongside the enforcement of the EU-imposed rescue plan.

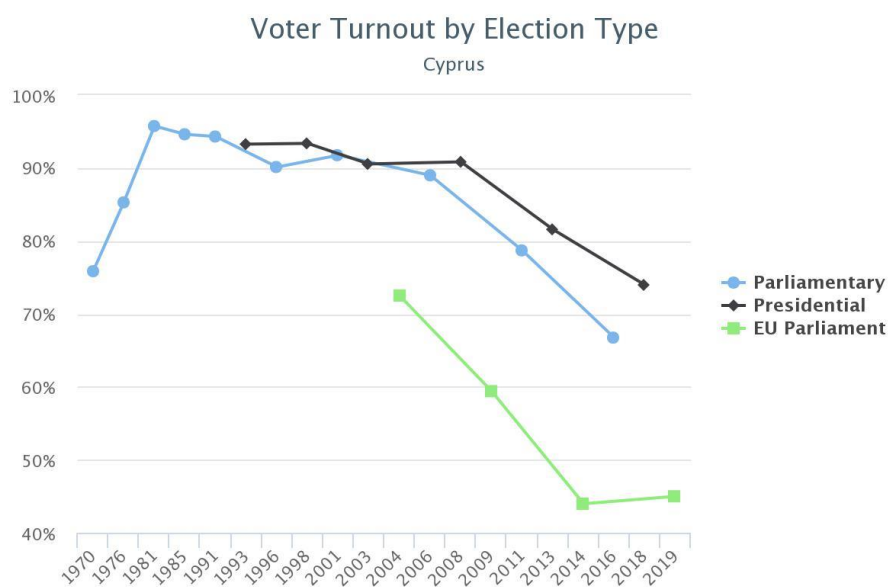


Figure 2: Voter Turnout by Election Type in the RoC (1970-2019)

Source: IDEA, n.d.

Compared to the average EU citizen however, Greek-Cypriots trust the political system more, and thereby participation levels in national elections tend to be higher (Katsourides, 2013a: 89). For instance, voter turnout in the 2016 Parliamentary elections was at 67%. But for Greek-Cypriot standards, this percentage is relatively low considering the mounting levels of voter turnout shown in figure 2, reaching its peak in 1981 with 96%. It should be noted however, that in the RoC, voting is mandatory, even though sanctions are no longer imposed when the law is disregarded (OSCE, 2016). Accordingly, voting constitutes the most prominent form of political participation. Hence, abstaining from voting is either undertaken as an act of

protest, or simply as indifference towards political processes. Abstaining from voting is a key outlet to demonstrate one's outrage and complete dissatisfaction with political processes at large, in contrast to voting for another party (Katsourides, 2015: 320). On the other hand, the limited space available for governments to maneuver, discussed in the previous two sections, makes the idea of choosing a political candidate or party to govern inconsequential and futile. Either way, abstaining from voting is in most cases a conscious choice, intended to demonstrate citizens' rejection of the entire political system (idem: 335). Ultimately, notwithstanding the traditional voting patterns of Greek-Cypriots, the increasing levels of voter abstention denote an atmosphere of loss of faith in political processes.

Following this pattern, all other forms of political participation²⁶ have been mostly absent from Greek-Cypriot civic culture. In the 2008 European Social Survey (ESS), the RoC scored below the ESS average for awareness of and interest in political and current affairs. The findings indicate that only a minority of the Greek-Cypriot population actively participated in political processes by joining lawful public demonstrations (2.3% in one year), working with political parties²⁷ and/or action groups (7.8%), supporting political parties and/or candidates (7.6%), signing petitions (5.6%), and boycotting certain products (5.8%) (ESS, 2008). This phenomenon is particularly striking among the Greek-Cypriot youth (European Commission, 2013). The only exceptions were the demonstrations following the Mari explosion and prior to the signing of the 2013 bailout agreement (Katsourides, 2014b: 52). Nonetheless, the demands established during both protests were ignored by the respective governments, indicating that this form of activism does not produce the desired results in the Greek-Cypriot political landscape. Therefore, the expectation that change can occur through such actions was essentially removed from the collective imaginary. This attitude created an atmosphere of political apathy which nourished a culture of 'couch activism', in which individuals, particularly the youth, prefer to "*watch events, evaluate developments and formulate opinions while sitting*

²⁶ Conventional indicators of civic participation include voter turnout, running for office, party membership, taking part in lawful demonstrations, actively campaigning for political parties and candidates, and more (Green, 2010). While unconventional methods include signing petitions, membership in civil society or other non-governmental organizations, and boycotting (Katsourides, 2013a: 91).

²⁷ This is paradoxical, as political parties in the RoC act as agents of citizen mobilization due to their capacity to engage citizens and determine political behavior (Katsourides 2013a: 87). When this is no longer the case, it raises concerns about the state and role of political parties in that specific moment in time.

*on his/her couch at home, watching the political drama unfold on television*²⁸ (Katsourides, 2013a: 87). Consequently, acts of political activism and collective mobilization remained minimal, mostly passive, and largely symbolic (Katsourides, 2016a: 195). This raises concerns about the efficacy of democratic governance, considering that the premise of democratic theory is built on the assumption that individuals are inherently political animals (Katsourides, 2013a: 87).

This apathy seems paradoxical given that the history and political past of countries can determine the degree of political participation of its citizens (Katsourides, 2013a: 101). Based on this, the unresolved Cyprus problem should have caused a considerably high level of political involvement. Yet, Katsourides (2015: 335) notes that this occurs because Greek-Cypriots do not believe that political participation can improve their living standard. Additionally, the fact that citizens are lawfully obliged to vote and serve in the army (for men) or follow a civil defense course (for women) could be seen as sufficient to fulfill their civic duties. Further, the absence of a strong civil society presence that encourages political participation (CIVICUS, 2005), and the low cumulative power of, membership and active involvement in trade unions could have also contributed to this phenomenon (Katsourides, 2012: 204).

This raises the question of whether the weak state of political activism is an implicit effect of neoliberal policies and if this in turn triggers a process of de-politicization, accompanied by the complete eradication of regulatory institutions and frameworks. The replacement of the collective nature of political mobilization by a process of individualization of political demands points to that direction. As Katsourides (2013a: 101-102) put it, *“one feeds the other and both feed abstention and indifference. (...) Negative sentiments about the political and party system are mounting and could transform into an opposition to the system itself rather than merely opposition to the political office holders”*. Simply put, as the sense of collectivity and the power of collective action loses its meaning, citizen engagement seems worthless. Meanwhile, public exacerbation intensifies, having serious repercussions on

²⁸ The findings of the 2010 Eurobarometer revealed that 77% of Greek-Cypriots receive information about politics predominantly from television, while only a minority does so through newspapers (Katsourides, 2013a: 89).

democracy. Dissatisfied voters turn to politicians, political parties and ideals who are critical of mainstream political agendas, thus enabling far-right populist parties to capitalize on the fragmentation of the political system.

However, Katsourides (2016a) claims that there were minimal effects on the Greek-Cypriot political and party systems when compared to other Southern European countries. This is based on the fact that there was low social turmoil, the crystallization of mainstream parties remained relatively unchanged, and no new significant political actors emerged as a direct impact of the crisis. However, by the point this article was written, ELAM was already gaining momentum (Charalambous et al., 2015: 413), first indicated in the 2013 Presidential elections and then verified in the European elections of 2014, as ELAM's support grew from 0.8% to 2.69% (Presidential Elections, 2013; European Elections, 2014). This illustrates that individuals who do not see themselves represented within the political sphere can more easily take radical decisions or be swayed by non-mainstream politics (Katsourides, 2016a: 212).

Further, this argument also overlooks the findings of Triga and Papa (2015) who noticed the emergence of a new trend of political activism as a direct consequence of the extremity of the bailout agreement in the RoC. The study shows that social media offer a novel space for collective action through the enhancement of traditional protest forms. Facebook groups were seen as an outlet for people of all socioeconomic backgrounds to express their dissatisfaction with the rescue plan and subsequent austerity measures, blaming the president for following a self-serving political agenda, and demanding the RoC's exit from the Eurozone or the default of the national economy (idem: 188,193). Thus, the Greek-Cypriot collective identity was formed through either ideologically informed nationalism or a persistent anti-president and anti-government rhetoric which became further politicized as the crisis evolved. What both dynamics have in common is the power to create a sense of unity that overcomes existing differences and is a cause for mobilization. Evidently, the crisis triggered the establishment of a politicized collective identity, formed through shared grievances and/or common political interests. The outburst of such sentiments indicates a growing desire for people to regain power, which in turn implies a degree of politicization in which collective action is seen as more and more necessary. Nonetheless, the danger of this phenomenon lies in the way it will be capitalized by political parties.

Although the study finds no direct connection between the Facebook groups and ELAM, a closer examination of ELAM's rhetoric shows that the party shares similar concerns. Throughout ELAM's 2016 electoral campaign, the dissemination of anti-establishment rhetoric and critiques against the political system whilst portraying itself as a lawful and uncorrupt party were essential features of its strategy (see ELAM, 2016). By questioning the effective execution of the Republic's democratic system, it added onto the delegitimization of the political system. Hence, ELAM was able to capitalize not only on the society's underlying dissatisfaction with the implications of a neoliberal integrated system which prompted public disillusionment, but also on the renewed desire for action. By doing so, its discourse and political agenda became more appealing to socially and economically vulnerable groups, to disenfranchised voters, and the unemployed (Chatzistylianou, 2019). This generated a heterogeneous support base that has common grievances and determination to overcome them. In short, voting for ELAM was considered a protest against these policies and a way to hold the aforementioned actors and institutions accountable.

This tendency was further exploited by ELAM who cultivated a culture of fanaticism by primarily targeting politically disengaged youths in schools, universities, and football games, particularly supporters of nationalist football teams (Katsourides, 2013: 584). Their indoctrination included weekly lectures for party and youth members, party gatherings, rallies and anti-occupation protests in which ELAM members preached about the heroic acts of EOKA²⁹ fighters (i.e. ELAM 2015a, 2015b). During these events, they promoted hate speech, chanted anti-Turkish slogans, and on occasion burnt the TRNC flag while exclaiming that "Cyprus is Greek". As a traditionally high politicized society, it was easier for ELAM to awaken sentiments of political activism, by calling Greek-Cypriots to get up from the couch and fight Turkish occupation. Consequently, ELAM reinvigorated public interest in political participation, as 88% of ELAM supporters stated that the party's positions and approach fully galvanized their vote (Politis, 2019). Ergo, ELAM was capable of using its rhetoric to mobilize citizens through the composition of an exclusive in-group that is more prone to identify with far-right, anti-

²⁹ EOKA (National Organization of Cypriot Struggle) was a Greek-Cypriot guerilla resistance movement that fought to end British colonial rule on the island, active from 1955 to 1959 (Ioannou, 2019: 278-279).

systemic and anti-establishment appeals. The party's populist rhetoric is thus essential to its ability to inspire a renewed, radicalized political activism.

Certainly, low political participation has proven to be a fundamental indicator of public disillusionment showing the extent to which the faults of liberal democracy created conditions that left available space for the substantiation of ELAM's rhetoric. Simultaneously, it has proven to be a key tool for ELAM's electoral momentum, as the implications of the crisis made citizens more determined to take up action. The next section investigates the effects of the politico-economic crisis on the electability of mainstream parties and of ELAM.

4.4. A fragmented party system and the substantiation of ELAM's approach

The increasing lack of public trust towards political actors and institutions fueled a crisis of representation that destabilized the party system (Charalambous, 2012: 165). This led to *"party re-alignment or de-alignment, increased party system volatility and the emergence of non-mainstream parties"*, analogous to other Southern European cases (Triga, 2017: 264). As politics became polarized and volatilized, there were greater electoral insurgencies in which unconventional, and often radicalized, politicians and party agendas were preferred over mainstream politics. This section examines how the crisis of the party system paved the way for ELAM's electoral success, and to what extent ELAM's appeal was contingent on an approach that separated it from mainstream parties.

The structure of the party system in the RoC is caught up in a tri-partisan warfare, with three parties occupying the political sphere³⁰: DIKO (center-right), DISY (right-wing), and AKEL (left-wing); followed by the fourth largest party, EDEK (center-left) (Katsourides, 2014a: 656). The way that the Republic's political system is structured, compels political parties and actors to depend on the formation of political alliances, as it is difficult for one candidate or party to gain majority by itself (Katsourides, 2013a: 88). This implies a constantly changing dynamic amongst mainstream parties to secure their position. The incapability of political parties to

³⁰ Since the Republic's formation, other than Archbishop Makarios, all other presidents were supported by one of three parties, each one sharing approximately one third of the electorate (Loizides, 2012: 198,189: table10.1).

fulfill their electoral promises and to build long-standing and effective governing coalitions, contributed to the growing distrust of the party system. The 2013 elections are particularly interesting because, although two candidates of mainstream parties succeeded in the second round and Anastasiades became president with 57%, a growing rejection of mainstream parties alongside a desire to disrupt bipartisan party politics and renew the political system, was indicated. There were more candidates than any previous presidential election (eleven in total), unprecedented abstention rates (16.8% in the first round and 18.4% in the second) and changing voting behaviors (increase in voting outside traditional party loyalties³¹) (idem: 63-65, table4). Furthermore, participation in electoral campaigns shrank, which reflects the changing dynamics and relationship between citizens and political parties (Katsourides, 2015: 320). Importantly, the appeal of populist rhetoric was already ongoing, as an anti-Troika and anti-federation candidate, George Lillikas (independent), ranked third, followed by ELAM's candidate, George Charalambous (Presidential Elections, 2013). Therein, the mounting electoral volatility showed the loss of faith in the ruling parties.

This posed a threat to the future success of mainstream parties, as the possibility of being on the receiving end of punitive action was quite high (Triga and Papa, 2015: 193). This line of argumentation is linked to the economic voting theory, which ensures that during socioeconomic crises, particularly in hardly hit countries, mainstream parties are cast out while peripheral parties benefit (Zanotti and Rama, 2020). In the RoC, this phenomenon unfolded during the 2016 legislative elections, which indicate the parties' political strength by revealing the *"impact of the electoral outcome on the handling of state affairs"* (Triga, 2017: 261). On one hand, AKEL was discredited due to the perceived onus of the Christofias administration in the prolongation and intensification of the economic crisis. On the other, although exiting the bailout agreement attributed certain credibility to Anastasiades and his party for steering economic recovery, economic growth and stability were far away from their 2008 peak (Triga, 2017: 264-266). Moreover, structural problems remained unfixed, namely *"the weight of the non-performing loans on the Cypriot economy"* (Triga et al., 2019: 107).

³¹ Party loyalties are contingent on a system of party patronage, and on the unresolved ethnic conflict (Katsourides, 2014b: 57). There is a deeply instilled clientelist tradition among the Greek-Cypriot society that acts as *"an important vehicle of integration in the political system and a form of political participation"* (Katsourides, 2013a: 90).

It is important to mention that DISY and AKEL passed a bipartisan electoral law that increased the institutional threshold for parliamentary representation from 1.8% (in place since 1995) to 3.6%, just before the 2016 elections (Triga, 2017: 266). Considering that this election had the highest candidate number (494 for 56 seats) and political parties (18), this reform was interpreted as a deliberate change preventing the election of new parties, and particularly of ELAM which had gathered 2.7% in the 2014 European elections (idem: 262,267). Nevertheless, this strategy failed, challenging the advantageous position of mainstream parties. The support of several non-mainstream parties (i.e. ELAM, Citizen's Alliance, Solidarity Movement, Green Party) rose steadily. ELAM acquired two seats by marginally surpassing the new electoral threshold, gaining 3.7%. All mainstream parties saw their electoral base either moderately or dramatically decline: DISY lost 3.7% of the votes, AKEL 7.1%, DIKO 1.3% and EDEK 2.8% (Parliamentary Elections, 2016). Thereby, the 2016 elections epitomize the loss of momentum of mainstream parties and mark the beginning of ELAM's electoral success.

Yet, to fully grasp what facilitated ELAM's success, it is important to understand how its rhetoric and actions offered an approach that widely differed from that of mainstream parties. Firstly, ELAM greatly highlighted its ideology and values, to prove how different it was from other parties. Secondly, ELAM, like other far-right populist parties, focused on the politicization of issues that were not typically addressed within mainstream politics, like those discussed in Chapter 4.3, to target voters more inclined to cross-cut partisan allegiances (Triga, 2017: 267). Actually, mainstream parties in the RoC have wide voter bases, typically spanning across the entire socioeconomic spectrum, allowing for non-mainstream parties to appeal to supporters of different parties (Charalambous, 2012: 159-160). Thirdly, ELAM drew attention to its robust opposition of any type of reunification by insisting on the establishment of a unitary non-bicommunal state, as this issue constitutes a source of instability for the party system (Triga, 2017: 269). The significance of this issue lies in its ability to form another axis of political and electoral competition (Loizides, 2012: 195) as it has traditionally been the main criteria for Greek-Cypriot voters (Triga and Papa, 2015: 212). This continued during the 2016 elections, although it was marginally outshined by the deteriorating state of the economy (Politis, 2019).

ELAM's rigid stance stood out, particularly in contrast to DISY, whose position can only be characterized as paradoxical considering its ideological leanings. DISY fervently campaigned in favor of a 'yes' vote in the 2004 referendum and has henceforth persisted as an avid supporter of Cyprus' reunification through a political settlement alongside AKEL (Loizides, 2012: 187). However, DISY's stance faced backlash within its own ranks, as members who opposed the Annan Plan left to form the European Party³² (EUROKO) (idem: 188). It also faced backlash from the society, as several DISY politicians including Anastasiades endured public harassment and violent attacks during the period leading up to the referendum (idem:187). This created reasonable rupture among society and the party system, as *"the population no longer seemed willing to accept a priori the authority of the political parties"* on this issue (Katsourides, 2014b: 56). ELAM was able to appeal to a considerable portion of DISY's constituency which included people historically affiliated with and/or sympathizers of the guerilla group, EOKA, and the ultranationalist paramilitary organization, EOKA B³³, that rejected DISY's endorsement of and role in the negotiations for reunification under a de-centralized federation (Loizides, 2012: 185-186). Contrary, ELAM proudly presented its affinities with EOKA B (Katsourides 2013c: 582). Moreover, ELAM's position resonated with internally displaced people (almost one third of Greek-Cypriot community), older generations that lived through the war, those who had property in the Northern region, and whose relatives are missing since the war³⁴.

Nonetheless, most, if not all, new parties adopted an anti-reunification stance (see Symmaxia Politon, n.d.; Allilegii, n.d.; Cyprus Greens, n.d.), in addition to DIKO and EDEK (Christophorou, 2007: 114: table1). However, ELAM's attempt to revive the EOKA spirit, explained in Chapter 4.3, not only reignited an ebullition of fervor for the 'liberation' of the island from the hands of the 'enemy', but also promised drastic and uncompromising action. This offered hope to those directly affected by the war, in direct contrast to the approach of other parties. The positive reception of this stance reflected public demands for strong

³² EUROKO dismantled before the 2016 elections.

³³ EOKA B (1971-1978) sought Cyprus' reunification with Greece through terrorist tactics and is associated with the Greek military coup (Ioannou, 2019: 279).

³⁴ More than 2,000 Greek- and Turkish-Cypriots disappeared until 1974 (Sant Cassia, 2006). The Greek-Cypriot government treats them as 'missing persons' as no bodies or reasons for their death have been recovered. This approach, however, affected the way Greek-Cypriots (especially the relatives of the missing) perceive the idea of reunification.

leadership, homogeneity, and national identity (Katsourides, 2013c: 569). This is particularly interesting because during the period leading up to the 2016 elections, the negotiations were suspended. Therefore, there were no substantial transformations regarding the Cyprus question (UNFICYP, n.d.). Accordingly, this issue did not create specific conditions that could provide fertile ground for ELAM's rise, yet, its position on the issue remained central for voters, strengthening its appeal.

Ultimately, the crisis of the party system laid the foundations for ELAM's entry into the parliament, despite the obstacle of surpassing an augmented electoral threshold. It allowed for the rise of non-mainstream politics, and subsequently, for the substantiation of ELAM's rhetoric, actions, and values, transforming the shape and content of the political landscape. Additionally, the inability of other parties to respond to ELAM's approach, contributed to its advancement in the elections. Interestingly, the traditional dominance of mainstream parties still prevailed, albeit being challenged by ELAM's unprecedented triumph. However, this does not mean that this is irreversible, as the underlying failures of liberal democratic governance in the RoC, outlined in this thesis, have not yet been addressed.

5. Conclusion

In 2016, ELAM was elected for the first time in the House of Representatives of the RoC. Subscribing to the common characteristics of far-right populist parties, ELAM's electoral campaign focused on the promotion of anti-establishment, anti-immigration, and racist discourse. Nonetheless, this is not enough to explain the reasons for the emergence of such a watershed moment. The roots of the causal factors that facilitated the rise of ELAM in 2016 have been traced here. Employing a critical political economy analytical framework, exposed the ways in which the failures of an integrated liberal democratic system have manifested in the RoC and contributed to ELAM's rise.

The plunging turns the economy of the RoC took after 2008 not only created deep financial grievances, but also triggered a political crisis which destabilized the political system by undermining the sovereignty of both national and EU institutions. Under Christofias, a chain of ideologically-rooted decisions and abnormal deviations worsened and prolonged the hardships of Greek-Cypriot community. Though this had negative consequences on the incumbent and his party, the implications on the political system were far greater, which became more evident in the aftermath of the bailout agreement in 2013. The inability of neither the Christofias nor the Anastasiades administrations to freely regulate the economy as an EU member, particularly the inevitable imposition of the rescue plan, made clear that the EU's overwhelming powers dictate the (limited) tools with which states can autonomously govern.

Consequently, this nourished public disinterestedness and alienation from political processes. The politicization rates of the Greek-Cypriot society faded, exposing the deeply embedded legitimacy crisis of the political and party systems, rooted in the manifestation of the faults of liberal democracy. Once political participation no longer seemed as a viable stepping-stone for effective improvements of public grievances, the de-politicization of society was inevitable. Yet, such patterns of indifference triggered a sense of radicalization, as people became keener to mobilize behind a party who presented itself as capable of effectively addressing common grievances. ELAM's far-right populist tactics were thus essential to its ability to inspire a renewed, radicalized political activism.

Another implicit effect of the political crisis was the realization that mainstream parties failed to procure economic and political stability, transforming the landscape of the party system by shaking their continuous domination while enhancing the appeal of non-mainstream parties. ELAM specifically, appealed to voters whose faith in prominent politicians and parties, and in the political system as a whole, was already weak. By promoting its far-right populist agenda, it exploited growing public dissatisfaction and exasperation towards mainstream governance, particularly its rigid and exclusionist approach to the country's ethnic conflict.

Thus, the most important outcome of the financial crisis was the realization that the Republic's institutional and political systems cannot withstand its consequences, particularly the detriments of a vigorous political crisis. Ultimately, this stigmatized the structure and effective functioning of today's capitalist-driven, globalized liberal democratic system, revealing that it does not serve first and foremost the people, but instead, it works to advance the profits of the few while safeguarding the sustainability of the system.

Therefore, in answering the research question posed, four interconnected factors that facilitated the rise of the far-right populist ELAM in the RoC in 2016 are identified. Firstly, the emergence of a politico-economic crisis was decisive in tainting the sovereignty of political actors, institutions, and the system as a whole. Secondly, EU integration played a significant role in the acceleration of this process. Consequently, a multifaceted crisis broke out, cultivating an era of de-politicization of society, which left available space for ELAM to awaken a sense of unity and the necessity for political mobilization amongst society. Lastly, the above three factors had inevitable implications on the party system, which faced a crisis that enabled the substantiation of anti-mainstream politics. This paved the way for ELAM to make its positions stand out and turn the crisis to its favor. Therefore, the latter two factors were implicit effects of the former ones, but all four enabled ELAM's rise.

Ultimately, these factors demonstrate the underlying faults of an integrated system of governance, which produce conditions that make the rhetoric and agenda promoted by far-right populist parties more relevant and appealing. If these circumstances would not have occurred, then it would have been more difficult, even impossible, for their approaches to be

substantiated. ELAM thereby thrived in a climate of economic adversities, public disillusionment with the political and party systems, and renewed forms of political participation, without offering concrete, suitable, nor achievable solutions that directly deal with the issues at hand.

Yet, the evident exposure of these key parameters on a transnational scale, as discussed in Chapter 2, raises questions about the interrelatedness of phenomena that are manifested in modern, integrated politico-economic structures. Is political indifference an inherent phenomenon of the neoliberal capitalist system? Does this system continuously reproduce the same grievances that generate similar outcomes? If so, does globalization endanger democracy? Does a crisis of democracy inevitably lead to the rise of populism? Or is populism simply a legitimate revolt of the masses against their shrinking political importance? Can democracy feasibly survive in the long run if toxic cycles of radical racism, xenophobia and homogeneity are constantly reproduced? These questions lay the ground for further academic research that should focus on the implications and outcomes of the success of far-right populism in today's destabilized political climate; and what this indicates about the effectiveness and future of liberal democracy.

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