

# Communist wins Cyprus vote

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From correspondents in Nicosia

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**COMMUNIST party chief Demetris Christofias won a historic victory in Cyprus's presidential election overnight and immediately vowed to launch a new drive to reunite the island after 34 years of division.**

His jubilant supporters - some in luxury convertibles - cruised the streets of Nicosia, the world's last divided capital, waving Cypriot flags and banners of communist icon Che Guevara, their car horns blaring.

Mr Christofias, 61, secured 53.36 per cent of the vote against 46.64 per cent for conservative former foreign minister Ioannis Kasoulides in an election billed by the local media as one of the most crucial in the history of Cyprus.

"I offer a hand of friendship and co-operation to the Turkish Cypriots and their leadership. I urge them to work together with us for the common good of the people in a climate of peace," he told a victory rally.

Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat, head of the breakaway Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, called Mr Christofias to congratulate him and the two have agreed to meet, an aide to Mr Talat said.

"We foresee a productive co-operation for the benefit of the two communities for a viable and just solution to the problem," Mr Christofias said.

He had pledged during the election campaign to renew contacts with the Turkish Cypriots in the north of the strategic Mediterranean island after negotiations stalled under outgoing president Tassos Papadopoulos.

Mr Christofias becomes the European Union's sole communist head of state and his victory makes Cyprus the only European country with a communist president apart from ex-Soviet Moldova - over 16 years after the Soviet Union collapsed.

The island's continued division has been a key stumbling block in Turkey's own efforts to join the EU.

Cyprus has been divided along ethnic lines since Turkish troops invaded in 1974 in response to a Greek Cypriot coup aimed at union with Greece. A UN peacekeeping force has been deployed on the island since communal unrest first broke in 1963.

The international community hoped that the ouster of Mr Papadopoulos would lead to a revival of peace efforts after his hardline policies led to stalemate. He last met Mr Talat in September but their talks went nowhere.

He led Greek Cypriots in voting down a UN reunification plan that was overwhelmingly endorsed by Turkish Cypriots in referendums in April 2004. One month later a divided island joined the European Union and on January 1 Cyprus entered the eurozone.

Mr Kasoulides, a 59-year-old MEP who won the first round a week ago when voters dumped Mr Papadopoulos, pledged to work with his rival in efforts to solve the Cyprus problem.

Mr Christofias - whose AKEL party has close ties to Moscow - beat Mr Kasoulides by more than 33,000 of the 469,000 votes cast overnight after winning the endorsement of three smaller parties that had backed Mr Papadopoulos.

A spokesman for the British High Commission said Cyprus's former colonial ruler would work with Mr Christofias.

Local media reported that Mr Christofias had promised the centre-right DIKO party of Mr Papadopoulos three ministries including foreign affairs and the socialist EDEK party two.

The deal could limit his freedom of manoeuvre on the Cyprus problem as the two centre parties historically take a far less flexible approach than either AKEL or the right-wing DISY.

"I hope he will be the man to solve Cyprus's problems but it will be more difficult now because of the promises he has made to other parties to win their support," said student George Xinisteris, 21.

There is concern over how he will handle the economy as AKEL is not known for its love of the free market or as a convert to globalisation. It has a Eurosceptic tendency and is wary of NATO, but Mr Christofias has rejected claims he is anti-European, and insisted he will not nationalise the economy or discard any international agreements.

Cyprus hosts two large British military bases that house a string of super-sensitive listening posts that provide Western powers with intelligence on the Middle East and the former Soviet Union.

Cyprus has no post of prime minister and executive power rests essentially with the president who is elected for a five-year term.