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Coordination in Cyprus's Presidential System – A mistakenly underrated necessity

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Abstract

Cyprus differs from other European Union (EU) countries as it is the only one that has a presidential system where the President is both Head of the Executive and the State. Under this constitutional setting, the President stands out as the dominant political figure and enjoys exceptional powers with limited checks and balances. Interestingly, no institutional arrangement, based on the Weberian bureaucracy model, has been established to support the President in fulfilling his duties and overseeing coordination of government policies. It was only on a few occasions and for issues of strategic significance, mainly relating to the relations of Cyprus with the EU, that properly structured coordination mechanisms were successfully set up, but for a pre-defined duration, at the end of which they were dismantled, rather unsurprisingly. In the absence of formalised support, successive Presidents have opted to rely extensively on the Council of Ministers and on ad-hoc coordination arrangements that lack transparency and a clearly defined structure. Such arrangements have rather been formed and staffed based on personal relations, partisan politics and the perceptions, priorities and needs of the President in office. The latest attempt by President Christodoulides aiming at instituting organs and procedures for the coordination and monitoring of the implementation of the Government's programme, though in theory will fill a gap in the core executive, in practice has not yet been tested and one needs to be cautious over its potential success.

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I. Introduction

Cyprus is a Mediterranean island with a long and complex history that has been the subject of conquests and colonisation by various foreign powers throughout the centuries. In its modern history, Cyprus was leased to Great Britain by the Ottoman Empire in 1878, and at the beginning of World War I, when the Ottomans declared war on Britain, the British went ahead to annex the island. Importantly, in 1960, following the 1955-59 struggle for 'Enosis' (union with Greece), the island was granted independence, based on a political arrangement reached between the 'Guarantor Powers' (Britain, Greece and Turkey), without this necessarily reflecting the free will of the people living on the island. The Constitution for the newly established Republic of Cyprus (RoC) provided for a presidential system in a unitary state but put in place a form of power-sharing between the two main ethnic communities on the island, the Greek Cypriots (G/Cs) and Turkish Cypriots (T/Cs). As part of this arrangement, concessions were made to the T/C minority which was less than 20 per cent of the population at the time. Indicatively, the President of the Republic (PoR) would always be a G/C while the Vice-President a T/C, both voted exclusively by their respective communities.

A critical assumption of those that developed the Constitution was that it laid the foundation for the two communities to cooperate in the governance of Cyprus but in hindsight this proved to be a fallacy. In late 1963, the President of the Republic (PoR) Archbishop Makarios introduced certain constitutional amendments which he claimed would better the functioning of the Republic, but the T/Cs considered these a threat and withdrew from all state institutions, amidst armed conflict and human casualties.

Following the withdrawal of T/C officials, key state institutions became inoperative, and the overall functioning of the state was jeopardised. In response, the House of Representatives (in the presence of solely G/C MPs) adopted *Law 33/1964 on the Administration of Justice (Miscellaneous Provisions)* in order to address the enormous constitutional and legal difficulties that hindered the state's functioning. Law 33/1964 introduced several changes in Justice and, most importantly, merged the Supreme Constitutional Court (comprising three judges – a Greek, a Turk and a neutral) with the High Court (comprising four judges – two Greeks, a Turk and a neutral) into a new Supreme Court with no Turk or neutral member.

The Supreme Court and Law 33/1964 were challenged in the *Attorney-General v Ibrahim case* as contradicting the constitutional provision that provided for Turkish Cypriot participation in the composition of the court. In response, the attorney-general invoked the *Doctrine of Necessity* which was considered essential for preserving the fundamental services of the state, including the administration of justice. In its decision, the Supreme Court confirmed the constitutionality of Law 33/1964, securing thus the functioning of the state, but laid certain prerequisites for applying the doctrine of necessity². Since the events of 1963-64 and until today, the government and state institutions of the RoC are comprised exclusively by G/Cs, with some posts remaining vacant.

²For the application of the doctrine of necessity, the following prerequisites must be satisfied: (1) An imperative and inevitable necessity or exceptional circumstances should exist, (2) There should be no other remedy available, (3) The measure taken should be proportionate to the necessity, and finally (4) The measure must be of a temporary character limited to the duration of the exceptional circumstances.

Critically, in the years following these events, mistrust between the two communities further deepened with acts of violence from extremist groups reaching a climax in 1974. On 15 July 1974 a coup d'état against President Makarios was orchestrated by the Greek Junta (the illegal military dictatorship in Greece that was soon to collapse) and carried out by far-right G/C paramilitaries. This was followed by the Turkish invasion of 20 July 1974. Turkey acted on the basis of the Treaty of Guarantee where, as a Guarantor Power, it was given the right to take action on the island with the sole aim of re-establishing the state of affairs agreed in 1960. Nevertheless, the invasion resulted in the illegal occupation by Turkish troops of Cyprus's northern part since then instead of a return to the 1960 state of affairs. Even though *de facto* the Government of the RoC cannot exercise effective control over the occupied areas, it remains the sole legal and internationally recognised government on the island. On the contrary, the declaration of a separate breakaway state in the north, made in 1983, has failed to gain any international recognition since then, apart from Turkey.

The unresolved national issue and the constitutional rigidities arising from the non-participation of T/Cs in government, have inevitably shaped the Cypriot domestic institutional and political settings. Successive G/C Presidents, having assumed the role of representing the G/C community in UN-led negotiations, have prioritised the pursuit of a peaceful resolution to the issue. At the same time, any possible revisions to the Constitution are so politically complex that they are avoided, except in exceptional cases. As a result, a sixty-year-old Constitution still provides the legal framework for the functioning of most state institutions, including the Presidency. It is within this specific legal and political context that the governance structures and the coordination mechanisms of the core executive in Cyprus have to operate.

Moreover, another factor of significant relevance to this study relates to the size of Cyprus. With a population of just over a million, Cyprus is the third smallest EU member state (bigger than only Malta and Luxembourg). Regarding its coordination practices, it has evident similarities with other small member states, such as Luxembourg (Jugl and Squillante, this volume) and Ireland (Connaughton, 2018, Boyle, 2018) but also Greece (Featherstone and Papadimitriou, 2015; Spanou in this volume). Such characteristics include: a unitary and centralised state where horizontal coordination across government relies mostly on informal mechanisms and personal connections, rather than on long-standing institutionalised processes. As the findings of this study will reveal, Cyprus matches this set of characteristics.

The chapter findings are based on an extensive series of interviews with current and former government and state officials, journalists, and academics (see Annex 1), on other primary sources such as legal documents, reports and media articles and on a review of the relevant literature (which is rather limited).

The outline of the chapter includes a review of the legal frame and historical path of executive coordination, a two level analysis looking at inter-party and intragovernmental coordination, practical examples of how successful coordination was achieved in cases where *ad hoc* arrangements applied, the failure to achieve long-standing coordination with reference to the government of Anastasiades (2013-2023) as a case study and, finally, observations on the ambition of the newly elected Christodoulides government to introduce solid coordination and monitoring mechanisms, but which have not yet been put into practice.

II. Legal Frame and Historical Path of the Executive Coordination in Cyprus

The presidential system provided by the 1960 Constitution makes Cyprus a unique case among the EU members states, which are all variants of the parliamentary regime. The Cypriot President is the Head of State (RoC Constitution Article 36) and, at the same time he/she is the head of Government, exerting the executive power jointly with the T/C Vice President through a Council of Ministers (CoM) composed by 7 G/Cs and 3 T/Cs (RoC Constitution Article 46). With reference to the 'doctrine of necessity' and given the non-participation of T/Cs in government since 1963, all ministerial posts have been filled by G/Cs, while the post of Vice-President remains vacant³.

The executive power exercised by the PoR refers to a number of matters (RoC Constitution Article 48), yet only the most relevant for the purposes of this study will be noted (Interview No. 10). Firstly, the President has the authority to designate and terminate the appointment of G/C Ministers, who, in contrast to parliamentary systems cannot concurrently serve as Members of Parliament (MP). In addition, the President is responsible for the convening of the CoM meetings, for setting its agenda, presiding its meetings and taking part in the discussions thereat without any right to vote. Furthermore, the Constitution grants power to the PoR to appoint the independent state officials and the judges of the Supreme Court.

In the provisions of the 1960 Constitution, the checks and balances regarding presidential powers relied greatly on the presence of a Vice-President, with part of the executive power assigned to him/her (RoC Constitution Article 49), including the right to veto on certain policy issues. According to Ker-Lindsay (2006: 24), the constant vacancy of that post since 1963 has boosted the powers of the Cypriot President, who enjoys *de facto* complete control over all the levers of government and over the entire executive process. From the hiring and firing of ministers, setting the administrative agenda, through to challenging the legislation shaping the executive process, all these can be controlled effectively and quite easily by the President, should he/she so wish. Ker-Lindsay (2008: 121) even goes one step further to note that, in both absolute and comparative terms, the President of the RoC holds such significant power that he exerts more influence over his state than any other leader in the European Union.

Additionally, the Constitution provides for a Joint Secretariat of the CoM (comprising of both G/C and T/C) though in practice, post-1963, there is only a G/C secretary who has the charge of the CoM's Office. Article 60 instructs the secretary, in accordance with any instructions received by the CoM, to attend its meetings, keep the minutes thereof and convey the decisions of the CoM to the appropriate organ or authority or person. The Budget Laws provided for a permanent position of secretary of the CoM, a provision which was abolished (CoM Decision 41.168, 1 June 1994) and instead a civil servant from the higher civil service hierarchy is now seconded to the Secretariat of the CoM to assume this role (Interview No. 8).

Further to the provisions of the Constitution relevant to the core executive, other legislation was passed in 1960 that provided for the creation of key posts at the core of the executive. In the *President and Vice-President of the Republic (Grants and Offices) Law of 1960* (Law Number 12/1960) there was

³ The ministerial positions increased to 11 since the parallel system of the two Communal Chambers was abolished and following the separation in 1965, all the administrative functions of the Greek Communal Chamber were transferred by law to a newly created Ministry of Education (Pashiardis and Tsiakiros, 2015).

provision for the post of two Deputy Ministers (one under the President and one under the Vice-President) and two Directors (one for the Office of the President and one for the Office of the Vice-President). The two Deputy Ministers were assigned the role of running the Presidential and Vice-Presidential offices respectively under their instructions, but without any other specific duties and responsibilities being outlined. In the legislation passed, there was a clear provision that explicitly highlighted these posts would be filled by civil servants but following an amendment to the Law in 1993, this provision was adjusted to allow for political appointments (Interview, No. 9). In contrast to other Ministers, the Deputy Minister to the President has not been supported by a permanent structure composed of career civil servants that would allow for continuity and the development of relevant technocratic knowledge and “institutional memory”⁴. While for other ministries, the relationship between the political appointees and the administration is stable, in the sense that whenever there is a change in political leadership, the norm is for civil servants to remain in place and continue to provide technocratic support to the new Minister in office, for the Deputy Minister to the President no such administrative structure exists and neither does it exist for the Office of the PoR.

The rather simplistic governance structure at the Presidential Palace that was in place at the point of the withdrawal of T/Cs proved inadequate to support the President in the complex, multifaceted issues that governments have had to deal with, and in the everyday running of the executive branch. To support their work, the successive Presidents of Cyprus have had unchecked flexibility to form positions and/or hire consultants and advisors at the Presidential Palace that would supposedly assist in formulating, coordinating, and monitoring government policies. More specifically, through the annual budget laws, the President may include provisions for specific posts at the Presidential Palace, or even define a sum that will be allocated to special advisors that have no predefined duties and responsibilities (Interview No. 1). It is remarkable that there is no limit regarding the number of such appointments, as long as the cost complies with the annual state budget law; moreover, in cases where the projected cost is surpassed, supplementary mini budgets may be requested.

Importantly, the annual state budget is prepared by the Government (with the Ministry of Finance coordinating and leading this process) and presented to the Parliament for approval. Once approved by the Parliament, the budget becomes a law (the Budget Law of a given year) and regulates the government's spending and revenue-raising activities for the fiscal year. Even when the political parties supporting the President do not enjoy a majority in parliament, compromises are always found regarding the annual national budget, without the opposition parties necessarily examining in depth beforehand the arrangements for officials and staff at the Presidential Palace. This may have been done intentionally, as part of a greater give-and-take arrangement that involves exchange of favours between political parties and the President in office, or merely because some MPs do not have the capacity, time, or willingness to thoroughly scrutinise budget proposals (Interview No. 3). Mavratsas (2003) stresses a ‘culture of consensual politics’ in Cyprus, especially after 1974, where political parties refrain from intense confrontations, for example over the annual budget, that would create instability and display a lack of unity.

Importantly, the term of all presidential appointments expires with the end of the President’s term in office, and there is no provision that allows for appointments to continue under another status in the

⁴ Featherstone and Papadimitriou (2015) refer to the notion, borrowed from Max Weber, of “institutional memory”, and the lack of it, in their analysis of the case of Prime Minister’s office in Greece.

civil service, unless they are reappointed by the next President as advisors or consultants. In practice, such tailor-made arrangements within loose governance structures have been based primarily on interpersonal relations of trust or where the result of partisan clientelism and party influence (Interviews No.1 and No.3).

III. The Cypriot coordination conception and (lack of) ambition – a two-level analysis

The governance structure under such a prominent President is directly relevant and helpful when analysing how coordination takes place within the Cypriot core executive. For such an analysis, a two-level approach makes sense: one level focuses on intra-governmental coordination between ministries and other public agencies and the second level is one of inter-party coordination, in cases where a coalition of political parties (and not one single party) back the President in office.

Coordination between political parties

The situation varies according to electoral results. Parliamentary and Presidential elections do not coincide, and it may be the case that the elected President is backed by a coalition of parties or alternatively a single party. The constitutional framework simply requires the President to achieve a majority in elections irrespective of whether none or multiple parties support him/her. In cases when the President has secured the support of more than one parties, observations show that the ways and means of organising the political coordination between parties forming a coalition government is totally dependent on the President's attitude and on his preferred informal *ad hoc* arrangements. For instance, such consultations can take the form of morning coffees at the presidential palace between party leaders (Interview No. 10). In fact, no attempt has been pursued or even discussed as a possibility to establish a permanent coordination mechanism that would last beyond a President's term in office. In those cases where the political parties supporting the PoR do not enjoy parliamentary support, the government in office will reach out to opposition parties, again in an informal manner, when trying to secure a majority in parliament.

Nevertheless, a particular type of more formal political party coordination, beyond strictly pro-government alliances, has existed among political parties across the spectrum: this concerns the 'Cyprus Problem'. As noted already, the unresolved national problem remains an issue of utmost importance for successive Presidents who also act as the chief representatives of the G/C community in UN-led peace talks. The traditional approach of the G/C side and successive Presidents was to pursue unity and achieve at least a common understanding between all G/C political parties about the Cyprus Problem (in line with what was previously mentioned as 'consensual politics'). To do so, President Makarios, in the aftermath of the Turkish invasion in 1974, formed a 'National Council' grasping the leaders of all political parties represented in Parliament, plus former presidents. Ker Lindsay (2008) underlines the two key purposes for the creation of that Council: firstly, to act as an advisory body for the President in the negotiations for a settlement of the Cyprus Problem; secondly, to act as a mechanism for building national unity by bringing together the leaders of all the political parties within the G/C Community thus overcoming the fragmented, highly confrontational political setting of the early 1970s.

Though initially the National Council was considered a vital coordination forum, its role and necessity have been increasingly questioned, and so has its legitimacy and credibility. As for the effective contribution of the National Council, George Perdakis, a former leader of the Green Party, noted that it ended up being little more than a forum for political parties to score points against each other and even went as far as to compare the Council to a chicken coop (Katsourides 2013). Such an approach captures the general sentiment that formal coordination between political parties, even regarding the Cyprus problem, has proven to be fragmented and inept. Even more, no substantial adjustments have been adopted to ensure the better functioning and coordination of political parties on this critical issue. Currently, the National Council meets when the President unilaterally deems it necessary, in order to brief and discuss with party leaders any significant developments on the Cyprus problem. Even in cases where political parties openly request the convening of the National Council, the final decision rests solely on the President (Newsbomb, 2013; Sigmalive, 2016). This illustrates the power enjoyed by a President who has the responsibility for any decision taken regarding coordination among political parties and is in no formal manner accountable to the National Council or any other institution for his actions.

Intra-governmental coordination

The second level of coordination concerns the activities of the high-level officials who work in and for the various ministries and other relevant departments and public agencies, who design policy proposals and then, after decisions are taken, implement the policies. Such a coordination and monitoring mechanism is expected to be located close to the Presidency and to the core executive, enabling the President to directly oversee the implementation progress of the government's programme.

Concerning moments when Cyprus had to deal with challenges of strategic importance, it is worth noting three examples of setting-up of successful, yet short-lived, formal coordination mechanisms, aimed at allowing the country to achieve successfully critical national goals (for a more thorough analysis see Pegasiou, 2017).

The first example concerns the EU accession negotiations, that lasted from 1998 to 2003. In February 1998, President Clerides decided that a political appointment was necessary to lead accession negotiations, set to start in March 1998, and to head the relevant team of civil servants from the Planning Bureau. Former President Vassiliou, a well-respected and dedicated pro-European politician, was thus selected for the position of Head of the Accession Negotiations (CoM Decision 47.496, 6 March 1998). Vassiliou enjoyed the necessary political backing by President Clerides that allowed him to authoritatively coordinate with all relevant government departments and progress with the accession negotiations timely and efficiently. That remarkable performance was praised by the European Commission Reports, Cyprus becoming the first country to successfully conclude its accession negotiations within the agreed timeframe. Yet, the great success of such an *ad hoc* arrangement did not lead to the institutionalization of a permanent, regular EU coordination mechanism post-accession, which would allow Cyprus to better manage its EU membership and negotiations. Interestingly, even when the then President Tassos Papadopoulos suggested that an EU Office should be created under the PoR and a relevant CoM decision was taken (CoM Decision 63.696, 26 April 2006) the decision was never implemented.

The second moment was the first time Cyprus had to take over the rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union, in July 2012. Again, in the absence of any stable coordination mechanism in Nicosia, the Government of President Christofias proposed a legislation (and secured the support of other political parties) that provided for the creation of the position of a 'Deputy Minister for European Affairs' placed on top of a 'Secretariat for the EU Presidency', created for a limited duration, until the completion of the EU Presidency (The Presidency Deputy Minister for European Affairs (Temporary Provisions) Law No. 123(I)/2011). The Secretariat, under the Deputy Minister of European Affairs, was staffed mostly by Planning Bureau personnel, and was assigned the role of overseeing the administrative and political coordination of the Presidency. This arrangement proved a success for the Government and allowed for the smooth, productive, and successful cooperation of all involved government services and entities. The overall success of the Cypriot Presidency was even acknowledged, in Brussels, through public statements by EU officials (Euractiv, 2012). However, with the successful completion of the Cypriot Presidency, the Government then in office failed to establish a permanent coordination mechanism for EU affairs. As a result, it is still within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that a Secretariat for European Affairs, compulsorily headed by a career diplomat enjoying the rank of ambassador, deals with ongoing EU negotiations. Very recently, the Christodoulides Government has committed to introduce a Deputy Ministry for European Affairs in the coming months, who would oversee the groundwork, preparations, and handling of the next Cypriot Presidency of the Council (set to take place in the first semester of 2026).

Another noteworthy coordination challenge was the one faced by the Anastasiades government, immediately after its election in 2013: the implementation of the memorandum agreed with the international lenders as part of the financial package offered to Cyprus in 2013. The President opted to hand over to the Minister of Finance, Harris Georgiades, the discussions with the lenders and the progress of the programme. In response to a coordination gap and a rather inefficient communication method that was established with the Troika whilst negotiating the Memorandum, Minister Georgiades was adamant to highlight the need for an *ad hoc* coordination mechanism that would monitor the implementation of the Memorandum. The Ministry of Finance had the leading role in this arrangement. At the political level, the Minister of Finance headed an inter-ministerial committee comprised by the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Tourism, the Minister of Labour and Social Securities, the Minister of Health, and the Deputy Minister to the President. In addition, the Planning Bureau coordinated at the technocratic level the interaction between the relevant government services (CoM Decision 74.995, 24 April 2013). This practical arrangement succeeded in securing its purpose which was Cyprus' timely exit from the Memorandum, but, once again, did not provoke the formation of any new institution focusing on coordination (Pegasiou, 2017).

Such successes in coordinating these imperative tasks highlighted in the eyes of Cypriot leaders the usefulness of having effective coordination channels between ministries and other government agencies. However, the lessons learnt and the 'best practices' adopted were not strong enough to allow for these critical junctures to interrupt a path-dependent process which otherwise reinforced the authority of the President while it undermined the need for formal coordination⁵. Promoting the

⁵ Of relevance here is the historical institutionalist approach, whereby institutions are to be studied by looking at their historic structure and development, highlighting the importance of path dependencies, challenged at certain 'critical junctures' which may redefine the future path followed (Streeck and Thelen (2005); Capoccia and Kelemen, R. D. (2007)).

idea of a permanent coordination mechanism for the operations of the executive branch of government would effectively lead to the development of new institutional arrangements in Cyprus. Successive Cypriot governments have failed, or merely avoided, to display the necessary commitment and determination to overcome legal and political complexities and thus set the governance of the core executive on a new path whereby formal institutional coordination organs and mechanisms, dedicated to coordinating governmental actors and overseeing the implementation of government policies, would be established.

Instead, acting within a President-centred governance structure, the successive Cypriot Heads of State and Government have freely opted for those arrangements that suited them best to achieve a certain degree of coordination on a few salient issues, while at the same time they heavily relied on trusted appointments and the Council of Ministers meetings to coordinate government actors on any matters that would arise. The composition of the Council of Ministers and the frequency of its meetings (once a week) have allowed the Council to *de facto* act as a coordinating arena on inter-ministerial issues. Otherwise, when further coordination is deemed necessary for handling special government initiatives, projects or policies that cut across different ministries, the President entrusts such a mission, on a case-by-case basis, to either one of his close associates, the Deputy Minister or the Director of the Presidential Office, or, alternatively, to one of the Ministers who is assigned the role of heading an inter-ministerial committee (Interviews No. 2 and No. 6).

To better explain how such *ad hoc* arrangements may, or may not, work, a more thorough review of the recent Anastasiades government as a case study is offered in the next section.

The Anastasiades government (2013-2023)

When President Anastasiades took office in 2013, there was no institutionalised coordination procedure inherited from previous governments, and during his two terms in office, no formal coordination mechanism, nor a clear governance structure, were established.

Within an ill-defined governance structure, Anastasiades, guided by personal and clientelistic criteria, created several new posts via the annual Budget Laws, carried out an unparalleled number of political appointments, and recruited, without any formal hiring process, an unprecedented number of advisors or associates to serve at the Presidency (Interviews No. 2, No. 3, No. 4 and No. 6). These appointments, the exact number of which remains difficult to define, were not governed by a structured procedure nor a framework and lacked transparency, making it difficult to understand their duties and responsibilities and, if in any, way coordination of government policy was included in these⁶ (Audit Office of the RoC, 2019).

Within such a structure even coordination between the Presidential Palace personnel was at times fragmented. There was a horizontal polyphony, and even cacophony, in a small and non-hierarchical structure where most (if not all) of the appointees reported directly to the President (see Diagram 1). For instance, none of the interviewees could convincingly tell how the duties of the government

⁶ Securing access to such information did not prove to be an easy process, confirming the findings of an EU report showing that Cyprus ranks last among its EU partners in relation to access to Government Information (Interview No. 7) (Malloupas and Stylianides 2018: 163).

spokesperson, the deputy government spokesperson, and the head of the Press Office at the Presidential Palace differ or overlap and who reports to whom.

[Diagram 1 – SEE END OF DOCUMENT]

Given this structure, coordination over the actions of the President was also impeded. Indicative of this was the preparation of the employment contract of the former Governor of the Central Bank, Chrystalla Georghadji, in April 2014. The preparation of the contract was not guided by any institutionalised process, no official service being formally assigned the role of drafting and concluding such employment contracts for high officials appointed by the President. When, a few months later, there were leaks in the press regarding the details of Georghadji's contract, it was revealed that the contract was drafted by the Director of the President's Office who merely sent her a copy of the previous Governor's contract, and then recommended one of the advisors of the President, Makarios Drousiotis, to conclude the process. Makarios Drousiotis later published a book, highly critical of President Anastasiades and his governance practices, and made specific reference to this incident. According to Drousiotis (2020), future Governor Georghadji acting within a process riddled with flaws and allegedly with the consent of the President, unilaterally changed certain provisions of her contract (removing a clause of no conflicts of interests and inserting another one to raise her annual salary), signed the contract and returned it.

Drousiotis oversaw the conclusion of the process but later acknowledged that it was wrong for him to accept the handling of a case for which he had no official briefing and guidance. Instead, Georghadji should have communicated directly with the President, with whom she had previously reached an understanding. In a report prepared for the Deputy Minister to the President, Constantinos Petrides, Drousiotis recorded the events as they unfolded and, in response, Deputy Minister Petrides noted that unfortunately, with no institutionalised procedure and in such a framework it is difficult to assign responsibility over any issues that may arise⁷. Such an example reveals the procedural ineptitude of the Presidency over the management of employment contracts for public posts (one of the key duties and responsibilities of the President) and is indicative of how everyday affairs were managed relying mainly on the professionalism and sense of duty of certain officials.

Drousiotis also notes, that he (or any other associate) underwent any training regarding the duties and responsibilities after being hired as a consultant at the Presidential Palace. This led to the creation of a chaotic situation at the Presidential Palace that was not to be effectively resolved by the end of Anastasiades term despite certain initiatives undertaken to resolve coordination issues.

Attempts to achieve better coordination

In dealing with certain aspects of coordination, the Anastasiades government did adopt certain initiatives to upgrade coordination and monitoring procedures and, in so doing, assigned the Secretariat of the Council of Ministers with specific responsibilities that the new Government has yet

⁷ Importantly, the findings of the book by Drousiotis have never been challenged in any way by those mentioned in it, while the findings in the book have been backed with primary resources and detailed references.

to officially revise. Firstly, the Secretariat must prepare and circulate the agenda for each meeting of the Council of Ministers, which is according to Article 56 of the Constitution a responsibility of the President. Secondly, the Secretariat has to prepare the minutes and dispatch the Council of Ministers decisions to the competent authorities or bodies. Thirdly, the Secretariat must monitor the implementation of the decisions taken in Council. This is not a constitutional provision, but an innovation introduced by the Council itself (CoM Decision No. 75.023, 8 May 2013 and CoM Decision No. 78.403, 3 March 2015). With no effective mechanism to monitor the implementation of the decisions of the CoM, the Secretariat would supposedly be supported in monitoring the implementation of development projects and government policies by the Exandas portal. This e-portal, introduced in 2019, was an initiative aiming to enhance coordination, accountability, and transparency, providing citizens and institutions the chance to receive online information about the implementation of government pledges (CoM Decision No. A.77.906, 26 November 2014). Only a few months after its launching, the contribution of the Exandas portal is questionable since at some point it became not accessible and is still not available online (at least until July 2023). Furthermore, no information is offered as to when, if and how this portal will operate again⁸.

Fourthly, the Secretariat has been assigned the responsibility for the preparation of briefing notes for the Council of Ministers. For every item on the agenda of the Council, the Secretariat should prepare a summary and a Note/Proposal to inform the Ministers ahead of meetings on issues to be discussed and decided. Furthermore, in an *ad hoc* manner, the Secretary has been carrying out a monitoring exercise whereby before an item is included on the agenda, a process of checks concerning the legality of the issue is enforced as a precursor to the final stage of the submission of topics to the Ministers for discussion and necessary decision-making. Although there is no provision for the Secretariat staff to screen the submitted documents (to check, e.g., whether they are consistent with the current legal framework or consistent with previous ministerial decisions), this is a practice initiated by the Anastasiades government. Lastly, the Secretariat has the responsibility for the publication of certain decisions of the CoM (RoC Constitution Article 57).

Even though these (limited) innovations intended to foster better coordination, it is imperative to underscore that they contribute to reinforcing the overarching role of the Council of Ministers assembled around the President, compensating at the highest political level for the lack of coordination organs and mechanisms at a lower administrative level. As a consequence, it is not infrequent that policy items inscribed on the agenda of the Council of Ministers have not obtained any prior agreement or consent among the involved ministries and other stakeholders. While this is not the norm, it is deemed acceptable in the Cypriot context, since during the sessions of the Council thorough discussions and debates are facilitated before arriving at a final decision. The Cypriot case therefore illustrates the pivotal role of the Council of Ministers as an effective inter-ministerial coordinating and negotiating arena, wherein the involved actors can engage in debates and make deals on any issue, under the lead of the President who, as the unique Head of the Executive, presides over and supervises the entire process (Interview No. 8).

⁸ Previously available at <https://exandas.presidency.gov.cy/>, the website can no longer be reached.

IV. The latest attempt by the Christodoulides Government: Identifying a Chief Coordinator?

Although there is lack of quantitative data regarding the degree of enforcement of governmental decisions, our interviews indicate a clear disappointing finding regarding the implementation rate of the decisions taken at the core of the executive (i.e. the CoM) (Interviews No. 8 and No. 10). This is, to a great extent, attributed by our interlocutors to the lack of effective inter-ministerial coordination and to the inability of the Cypriot regime to set up a permanent structure and robust mechanisms to coordinate between ministries and centrally monitor the proper implementation of government decisions and public policies. Overpowerful ministries may in cases show a reluctance or sluggishness in implementing certain decisions such as the case for the (non) creation of a “European Office under the PoR” that was decided by the Papadopoulos government in 2006 but was never implemented. Lack of coordination, control, consistency and accountability mechanisms end up undermining, if not the status, for sure the role and real powers of the President and the collective powers of the CoM.

The most recent and indicative example of this ineffectiveness is the flooding of the Ministry of Finance basement, where the government servers were hosted, leading to a shutdown of government e-services. While this happened in April 2023, in November 2022 the Anastasiades government had decided to relocate the government server hub from the finance ministry to the premises of the Cyprus Telecommunications Authority. This decision was never implemented or at least not implemented in time. As a result, following a water tank leak in the basement of the ministry of finance, the servers were no longer operable causing huge unrest and a public outcry. In response, the deputy minister of Research, Innovation and Digital Policy after firstly apologising then noted that an investigation was ordered to look into why the CoM decision was not implemented in a timely manner and the government server hub had not been earlier relocated (Cyprus Mail, 2023a). The results of the investigation are still pending and is doubtful if and when these will be published.

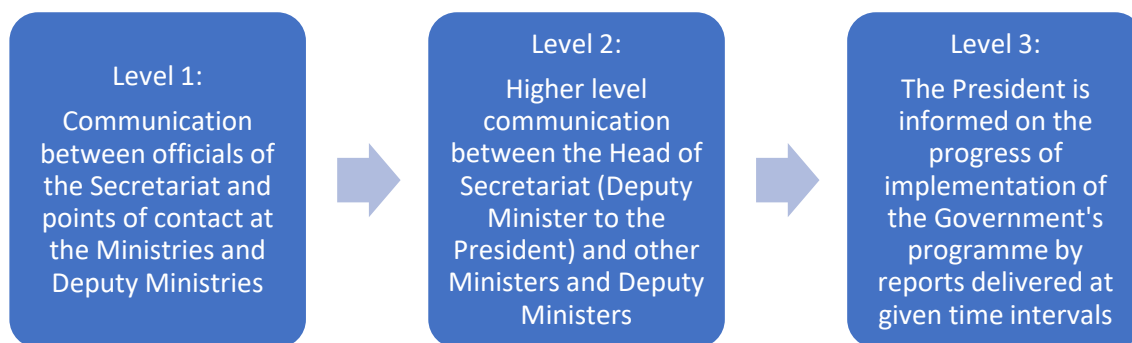
Well aware of this reality, as a former Minister of the Anastasiades Government, the newly installed President Nicos Christodoulides (who took office in March 2023) seems to have prioritised the creation of coordination mechanisms that shall enhance the implementation of government decisions. Acknowledging the need to improve the governance of the country, the Christodoulides Government has presented a new framework which intends to (re)design the coordination mechanism for overseeing the implementation of the government programme: The framework was initially leaked in the press in great detail (AlphaNews Live, 2023) and it was later presented on 25 May 2023 in a televised interview by Deputy Minister Irene Piki (CyBC, 2023). Less than three months after her appointment, Deputy Minister Piki, who has been assigned ownership of this project, presented the ‘Secretariat of Coordination and Monitoring of the Government programme’, which should take shape in autumn 2023. It is noteworthy that Ms Piki is not a politician but a career technocrat from the Ministry of Finance, with ample experience in managing horizontal issues and coordination among different government services.

Already, rudimentary operations are underway under the Deputy Minister, with the assistance of two civil servants. The project of the Secretariat is to expand these operations by recruiting volunteering public servants who will act as contact persons with the Ministries and Deputy Ministries. The call for applications was open to all civil servants until end of May 2023. The Government outlined that preference will be given to candidates with at least three years’ experience in project management, monitoring and or strategic/policy planning.

There is also a provision in this initiative, as presented by Deputy Minister Piki, for the Secretariat of Coordination and Monitoring to act as a mediator between, for example, Ministries that disagree on an issue and will assist in resolving such disagreements. Additionally, it will identify in a precise manner who is responsible for doing what regarding each decision. Such a provision attempts to deal with previous coordination failures that led to many CoM decisions never being implemented.

The entire process involves a three-level mechanism. At the first level, the officials working at the Secretariat will establish a direct communication with the Ministries and Deputy Ministries; at the second level, the Deputy Minister to the President together with the Ministers and Deputy Ministers will hold regular meetings to monitor and control that the policy objectives are implemented according to the 'road map' of each Ministry and Deputy Ministry; at the third level, a system of regular reporting by the Secretariat to the President of the Republic will keep him informed of the state of implementation of his Government's projects.

Figure 2: Coordination under the Christodoulides Government



All Ministers and Deputy Ministers will be required to codify the governance programme, set their priorities, examine how and when each action included in the electoral programme of the President will be implemented and which resources are needed to implement it. In theory, that strong policy monitoring and coordination initiative taken by the current Cypriot Government seems promising in terms of better governance. Moreover, the person appointed as the inaugural Deputy Minister to the President, heading the Secretariat and leading the process, has the profile, experience, and capacity to succeed.

Nevertheless, past experience has shown that path dependence, domestic blockages and inter-institutional rivalries at the national level may not permit for new organs and innovative institutional arrangements to develop fully and perform successfully in a sustainable manner. Even more, President Christodoulides has already failed to deliver on other public commitments thus casting doubt over his ability/intention to follow through with government decisions. Specifically, following revelations in the media in relation to unqualified staff hired at the Presidency and certain ministries, President Christodoulides met with the Auditor General on 10 May 2023 and he publicly committed to adopt the recommendations of the Auditor General so as to assure a quality process for such appointments. He assured that a specific proposal, developed in collaboration with the Auditor General, Law Commissioner, and Legal Service, would be presented at the next Cabinet meeting (Financial Mirror, 2023). Nevertheless, two months later the Auditor General commented that still four advisors working

for the government were unlawfully employed and suggested procedures to end their employment should begin immediately (Cyprus Mail, 2023b). It seems that a long-standing culture of non-implementation still prevails and may prove difficult to reverse.

V. Conclusion

The presidential regime of Cyprus, as it has been functioning for over 60 years, has allowed for the President of the Republic, who combines the roles of both Head of State and Government, to enjoy major powers, unparalleled to other EU Member States leaders. Even more, the authority and effective power of the President has been reinforced, decades after decades, in a path-dependent process whereby the Presidency, at an institutional level, remains unchallenged.

What is remarkable, and somehow specific to Cyprus, is that such an increasing political domination of the President has not been accompanied by a Weberian bureaucratisation of a formal, stable and strong 'Centre of Government'. In comparison with the case of France, where Presidents are supported by a central institution in the form of a presidential team, that follows the principles of Weberian bureaucracy and assists them in carrying out their duties and responsibilities, the Cypriot President lacks such support. Even more, there have been no attempts to design a clear governance structure for the staff surrounding and supporting the President at the Palace, and there has been no institutionalisation of inter-ministerial policy coordination organs and mechanisms, despite the evident need for such arrangements. It was only on a few occasions and for big issues of strategic significance, mainly relating to the relations of Cyprus with the EU, that properly structured coordination mechanisms were set up, but for a pre-defined duration, at the end of which they were dismantled, rather unsurprisingly.

Instead, successive Presidents have opted to rely greatly on the Council of Ministers weekly meetings as the main coordination arena. Additionally, political appointments next to the PoR have also been assigned the role of coordinating and monitoring the implementation of certain government policies but in an ad-hoc manner and their success rate relies mostly on the personality and capabilities of the individual.

In conclusion, Cyprus is an example of a small polity where interpersonal relations and informal ways of doing things in government are so essential that the actors have avoided, so far, to establish permanent, formal organs and mechanisms of policy coordination even though they have witnessed how efficient they can be on a few decisive occasions. In this regard, year 2023 could be a turning point, since the newly elected government of President Christodoulides has just introduced an ambitious reform aiming at instituting organs and procedures for the coordination and monitoring of the implementation of the Government's programme. Nonetheless, wisdom obliges one to acknowledge that enforcing such an institutional transformation remains a formidable challenge, considering the setbacks encountered in previous unsuccessful attempts. Even more, the President's early track record and his failure to fulfil his own related public commitments makes one even more sceptical about the prospect of success.

Annex 1: Interviews Conducted

All interviews were conducted on the basis of protecting the anonymity of the interviewee.

Interview	Position(s) Held / Institution	Date
1	Director of Press Office at Presidential Palace, Government Spokesperson, Deputy Minister to the President	6.9.2022
2	Director of President's Office	9.9.2022
3	Journalist, Author, Consultant at the Presidential Palace	13.9.2022
4	Group of high ranked officials at the Audit Office of the Republic of Cyprus	14.9.2022
5	Director of President's Office	14.9.2022
6	Director of President's Office	16.9.2022
7	Civil Servant appointed at the Presidential Palace - <i>followed by exchange of clarification emails</i>	19.9.2022
8	High ranked civil servants at the Secretariat of the Council of Ministers - <i>followed by exchange of clarification emails</i>	17.5.2023
9	Legal Academic	15.9.2023 30.1.2023
10	Journalist	11.4.2023

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Diagram 1 – Organisational Chart of Core Executive under Anastasiades President

