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CASE STUDY

EUPopLink Country report - Cyprus

[version 1; peer review: 2 approved with reservations]

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Abstract

This publication, prepared within the framework of the EUPopLink COST Action (CA23102), examines the evolving relationship between populism and Euroscepticism in Cyprus. Cyprus represents a distinctive case where attitudes toward the EU are shaped by the island's division, the unresolved Cyprus problem, and the 2004 Annan Plan referendum. While EU membership was initially seen as a path to security and reunification, public attitudes became more ambivalent after the referendum and more negative following the 2013 financial crisis and EU-backed austerity, creating tensions between support for integration and concerns about security and economic control.

The publication shows that, although Euroscepticism remains limited, it is increasingly concentrated among populist actors. In line with the EUPopLink COST Action, the EU is often framed as a distant, technocratic elite opposed to "ordinary people." On the populist radical right, National Popular Front (ELAM) exemplifies the populism–Euroscepticism nexus. ELAM combines nationalist, anti-migrant, and anti-elite rhetoric, portraying the EU as a threat to Cypriot sovereignty, and national identity. Yet, like other far-right parties, ELAM has shifted toward a pragmatic strategy accepting EU membership while advocating a "Europe of Nations" and reform from within.

The paper also highlights a new, post-ideological populism through Feidias Panayiotou. Unlike ELAM's nationalism, Panayiotou relies on digital communication, anti-establishment sentiment, and distrust of elites. His critique targets the EU as bureaucratic and disconnected, while supporting Cyprus's EU membership. Overall, this paper illustrates the EUPopLink argument that populism and Euroscepticism are related but distinct. Most Cypriots support EU membership while demanding a more transparent, responsive Union.

Plain Language summary

In Cyprus, attitudes toward the European Union are closely linked to

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the island's division and the Cyprus problem. When Cyprus joined the EU in 2004, many people believed membership would bring security, economic progress, and perhaps help reunify the island. However, support became weaker after most Greek Cypriots rejected the Annan Plan in 2004 and after the 2013 financial crisis, when EU-backed austerity measures created anger and a feeling that decisions were being imposed from outside.

The main example is the far-right party National Popular Front (ELAM). ELAM argues that the EU threatens Cypriot identity, national sovereignty, and control over migration. The party does not want Cyprus to leave the EU, but it wants a weaker Europe where countries keep more power. ELAM became stronger after the 2013 crisis by blaming the EU for economic hardship and by arguing that the interests of "ordinary Greek Cypriots" are ignored.

A different kind of populism is represented by Feidias Panayiotou, who was elected to the European Parliament in 2024. Unlike ELAM, he is not strongly ideological. Instead, he uses social media and anti-establishment language to criticise political elites. He supports Cyprus remaining in the EU, but argues that the EU is too bureaucratic, not transparent enough, and disconnected from citizens.

The Cyprus case shows that Euroscepticism does not always mean opposition to the EU. Many Cypriots still support European membership, while also wanting a more democratic, fair, and responsive Europe.

Keywords
populism, euroscepticism, Cyprus

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1. Introduction

The present country report was prepared as part of the EUPopLink COST Action[1] following the EUPopLink Theoretical Framework and guidelines.[2] The European Union's role in Cyprus and the development of Eurosceptic ideas are closely linked to the island's division following the 1964–1974 events. Since EU accession in 2004 and the rejection of the Annan Plan connected to that process, Cyprus has experienced both enthusiasm and scepticism toward European integration.[3] Initially, EU membership was widely framed as a pathway to modernization, democratization, and enhanced security, particularly in relation to the Cyprus problem, leading most political parties to adopt a pro-European stance.[4] Following the 2013 financial crisis, however, EU-related debates became more critical, as the bailout and austerity measures highlighted tensions between national sovereignty and EU economic governance.[5] While left-wing actors such as AKEL emphasized the social costs of EU policies, centrist and right-wing parties continued to support integration, albeit more cautiously.[6] Public opinion has similarly evolved: although support for EU membership was high in the early 2000s, the 2004 Annan Plan referendum revealed deep divisions, with 75.83% of Greek Cypriots voting against the plan and 24.17% in favour, indicating that EU-linked reunification did not persuade the majority of the Greek Cypriot electorate.[7]

In subsequent years, public opinion fluctuated. A 2014 Eurobarometer survey indicated that 53% of Cypriots were feeling Europeans, marking a 7-percentage-point increase from previous years.[8] More recently data from the European Social Survey (ESS) which reveal a picture of how Cypriots perceive the European Union, particularly regarding institutional trust. Among Greek Cypriots, trust in the European Parliament registered an average score of 4.27 out of 10, placing it below the midpoint and suggesting low but not negligible institutional confidence.[9] Also, related to acceptance of European integration the Greek Cypriot scoring higher than the midpoint ($M = 5.54$, $SD = 2.68$). These figures point to a population that is critical of national politics but still values EU affiliation, especially in the context of economic and political stability. Complementing these findings, the 2024 Eurobarometer survey reported that 68% of Greek Cypriots believed their country benefits from EU membership, while 56% said they trust the EU as an institution.[10] While the results show medium to high acceptance to EU euroscepticism is steadily influence the Greek Cypriot citizens mindset.

2. Populist political actors

In the Greek Cypriot political landscape, populist tendencies are most evident within the far-right National Popular Front (ELAM) and, to a different extent, within Feidias Panayiotou's unexpected election to the European Parliament in 2024 representing a new, digital-era variation of populism in Cypriot politics. Akel (Progressive Party of Working People), although at times could be seen as left-wing populist, was excluded from the analysis because it is more critical of the EU than outright opposed to it. While it represents soft Euroscepticism, it lacks the moral-ethical "people vs. elite" framing characteristic of populism.[11] Akel critics focus more on solidarity among people rather than distinguish them. This distinction allows the report to focus on the populism-Euroscepticism nexus while still acknowledging broader EU critique in Cyprus.

The National Popular Front (ELAM), founded in 2008 as the Cypriot representative of Greece's neo-Nazi Golden Dawn, represents the most extreme far-right force in Cyprus, grounded in ultra-nationalist, anti-communist, and exclusionary ideologies that reject multiculturalism and a bi-communal Cypriot identity in favour of ethnic homogeneity and enosis with Greece.[12–14] Despite efforts at public rebranding, ELAM has retained ideological and symbolic links to Golden Dawn and a record of violence against migrants and political opponents, with persistent internal adherence to fascist ideals[15,16] While not advocating EU withdrawal, the party represent soft Euroscepticism, opposing EU immigration and economic policies as elite-imposed threats to national sovereignty, Christian values, and cultural identity, a stance that enhanced during the 2013 financial crisis through ethnic-based welfare populism and anti-migrant rhetoric e.g.[13] Once marginal, ELAM has since gained parliamentary representation and visibility and has increasingly engaged in transnational cooperation, seeking legitimacy within European political structures by aligning with right-wing populist parties such as Italy's Brothers of Italy and Spain's Vox and announcing its intention to join the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group in 2024.[17]

In contrast, Feidias Panayiotou can be classified as a valence populist[18] who, despite lacking a formal ideological platform, employed classic populist elements such as an anti-elite narrative and the valorisation of "ordinary people," presenting himself as an apolitical outsider challenging entrenched interests in line with Mudde' s[19] notion of populism as a "thin-centred ideology" opposing "the pure people" to "the corrupt elite." His campaign exemplifies digital or influencer populism, deriving legitimacy from authenticity and online visibility rather than party organization, while framing EU governance as distant and unresponsive and equating support for Ukraine with Cyprus's past atrocities to mobilize support around citizen empowerment rather than concrete policy positions, situating his Euroscepticism within valence populism.

Elected as an independent MEP for Cyprus in 2024, Panayiotou remains unaffiliated with any European Parliament group and holds the status of a non-attached member,[20] with no formal cooperation emerging despite reported discussions with the Greens and Liberals.[21] His EU-level engagement has remained informal and personality-driven, illustrated by ad hoc interactions such as his 2025 trip to Moscow alongside lawmakers from the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance and SMER–Social Democracy,[22] reinforcing his outsider and non-institutional political profile.

However, Panayiotou's populism diverges from traditional forms seen in parties like ELAM. It is post-ideological, lacking a coherent socio-economic or nationalist agenda. Instead, it draws upon what Moffitt[11] terms "performative populism," wherein style and emotional connection substitute for formal policy platforms. His humour, direct communication, and rejection of political professionalism appealed to a disenchanted youth electorate that views the political system as detached and ineffective. Consequently, Panayiotou's success reflects not institutional populism but populist communication and affective politics, signalling a broader shift in Cypriot political culture toward personality-driven, digitally mediated participation.

3. Positions on 'Europe' and the Populism-Euroscepticism Nexus

In the Greek Cypriot political arena, Euroscepticism is limited and highly concentrated, with the far-right National Popular Front (ELAM) constituting the only consistently Eurosceptic party, alongside the more episodic and informal Eurosceptic expressions associated with independent MEP Feidias Panayiotou.

Consequently, Euroscepticism in Cyprus manifests primarily through populist and nationalist frames, rather than through sustained ideological opposition across the political spectrum. ELAM belongs to populist radical right (PRR) nativism, linking Euroscepticism to a nationalist and exclusionary worldview that portrays the "Greek Cypriot people" as undermined by both domestic and European elites, migrants, and supranational institutions.[15] The party frames the EU as a globalist project threatening sovereignty, cultural identity, and economic autonomy, opposing EU policies on migration, asylum, and economic governance.[23]

Initially, ELAM represented the hard Eurosceptic wing of Cypriot politics, rejecting not only specific EU policies but also the principle of supranational governance itself. Party leaders repeatedly denounced the EU as an "anti-national" and technocratic structure that undermines Cypriot sovereignty and erodes national identity, positioning ELAM alongside other European far-right movements that view European integration as an elite-driven project hostile to national self-determination.[24,25] Over time, however, ELAM's Euroscepticism evolved into a more strategically calibrated position. While its ideological core remained nationalist and populist, the party increasingly tailored its rhetoric to capitalize on moments of public discontent, most notably the 2013 Cypriot financial crisis, which intensified mistrust toward EU institutions due to austerity and bail-in policies perceived as externally imposed.[26] Despite its radical positions, ELAM has managed to integrate into the political mainstream to some extent, collaborating with other parties on specific issues while maintaining its distinct far-right identity[23] ELAM's long-term vision promotes a "Europe of Nations", emphasizing intergovernmental cooperation over deeper integration and the preservation of full national sovereignty. This stance mirrors that of allied far-right parties such as Greece's Golden Dawn and Italy's Lega, with which ELAM has expressed ideological affinity and political solidarity.[23]

Its participation in transnational networks including its recent alignment with the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group in the European Parliament demonstrates an effort to embed Cypriot far-right politics within a broader European Eurosceptic movement.[27] While external events such as Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the war in Ukraine did not fundamentally alter ELAM's Eurosceptic orientation, they reinforced its anti-globalist discourse. Notably, during the most recent European Parliament elections, ELAM adopted a softer and more pragmatic campaign tone, acknowledging the utility of EU membership while arguing that Europe must be "reformed from within" to better serve national interests[28] similarly to other European far-right parties. In the case of ELAM, no official party statements or policy documents explicitly address Trump's re-election, despite occasional symbolic references and media commentary noting the presence of ELAM figures at Trump-related events in the United States.[29] This absence is consistent with ELAM's primary focus on domestic sovereignty, migration, and European integration, rather than transatlantic electoral politics.

Feidias Panayiotou's overall position on European integration is best described as ambivalent and reform-oriented rather than fundamentally oppositional. While he has repeatedly stated that Cyprus and Greece benefit from EU membership and has expressed positive affect toward the EU as an idea, his criticism targets the practice and power dynamics of European integration, not its underlying principle. For instance, he has publicly questioned the transparency of European Parliament voting procedures, arguing that methods such as show-of-hands voting lack accountability and should be reformed to better reflect voter intent, framing this as a matter of democratic reform rather than outright rejection of the

EU.[30] Consequently, Panayiotou does not advocate withdrawal from the EU, nor does he propose dismantling European institutions; instead, he calls for a more balanced, responsive, and equitable Union that better serves smaller states and ordinary citizens. His vision of "Europe" thus emphasizes unity and cooperation, but on fairer and less hierarchical terms.

In political terms, Panayiotou's stance aligns with soft Euroscepticism or valence populist, characterized by criticism of EU governance, bureaucracy, and policy priorities rather than outright opposition to integration. His position is changeable, shaped less by a stable ideological framework and more by situational critique and public sentiment. He frequently frames the EU as distant from citizens, dominated by elites, and ineffective in addressing major challenges such as war, technological change, and democratic accountability. Moreover, his commentary on international affairs, including criticism of statements by top EU diplomats and outspoken views on foreign-policy topics such as the Ukraine conflict, highlights a pattern of anti-establishment and independent positioning.[31] Events such as Brexit and COVID-19 do not influence his political strategy. Feidias Panayiotou has not issued a direct endorsement or critique of Trump's re-election. Instead, his references to Trump appear within broader, informal discussions of global political elites and democratic crises, occasionally linking Trump with figures such as Elon Musk as part of a wider critique of establishment politics rather than a specific electoral outcome.[32]

Panayiotou frames his critique of Europe in a distinctly populist manner, emphasizing a sharp divide between "ordinary people" and political or institutional elites. This rhetoric situates his Euroscepticism within a form of digital or personalized populism, rather than within established ideological variants such as populist radical right (PRR) nativism or left-wing populism. His admiration for figures like Elon Musk, who publicly criticize bureaucracy and institutional inefficiency, reinforces this anti-elite framing, portraying EU governance as bloated, unresponsive, and self-serving. Unlike ELAM's ideologically structured, nationalist Euroscepticism, Panayiotou's critique lacks a clear policy program and instead functions as a performative and communicative strategy, connecting frustration with elites while calling for a more transparent, efficient, and citizen-driven Europe rather than rejecting integration outright.

Beyond explicitly populist actors, the Greek Cypriot political landscape has also featured non-populist expressions of Euroscepticism articulated by mainstream and issue-focused political actors who criticise specific EU policies without invoking a moral antagonism between "the people" and "the elites." A clear example emerged during the 2012–2013 financial crisis, when parties such as the Democratic Party (DIKO) and EDEK (Movement for Social Democracy) strongly opposed the EU-backed bail-in and austerity measures. Their criticism targeted the economic governance of the EU, particularly the role of the Eurogroup and the disproportionate impact of crisis management on small member states, rather than rejecting European integration as a principle.[6] Similarly, Greek Cypriot policymakers, diplomats, and analysts affiliated with centrist parties have expressed scepticism toward the EU's limited effectiveness in advancing a resolution to the Cyprus problem, framing their critique in legal and strategic terms rather than populist rhetoric. These positions reflect a pragmatic and policy-oriented Euroscepticism, concerned with institutional performance, economic fairness, and diplomatic credibility.

4. Responses to Euroscepticism and consequences

Mainstream pro-European parties in Greek-Cypriot politics appear to adopt primarily an adversarial strategy toward Eurosceptic discourses, rather than straightforward dismissal or accommodation. According to Meguid's framework, mainstream parties facing niche challenger parties can respond by either ignoring the niche issue (dismissive), adopting the challenger's stance (accommodative), or confronting it with the opposite stance (adversarial).[33] In Cyprus, parties such as Democratic Rally (DISY) have publicly criticised Eurosceptic positions and identified themselves as defenders of Cyprus' European orientation. For example, DISY's public commentary on the Lisbon Treaty invoked the need to reject Euroscepticism and follow the path of a progressive EU.[34] These actions show that DISY engages with Eurosceptic discourse by explicitly opposing it, positioning itself firmly in favour of integration, which aligns with the adversarial strategy.

There is little evidence of mainstream Cypriot parties adopting an accommodative approach, shifting toward Eurosceptic policy positions to undercut radical challengers or simply dismissing the issue entirely. Given the strongly pro-EU orientation of DISY, Democratic Party (DIKO), and Movement for Social Democracy (EDEK) historically, these parties treat Eurosceptic critique as a threat rather than an opportunity to reframe their own stance. DIKO and EDEK expressed disappointment and concern when their coalition partner AKEL shifted toward more critical EU rhetoric.[34] Thus, Cyprus's mainstream pro-EU parties appear to respond in adversarial way to Euroscepticism actively defending integration and competing on the issue by polarising rather than converging.

4.1 Concrete consequences of populist political actors

The Euroscepticism of populist actors in the Greek Cypriot community demonstrates both concrete consequences and elements of opportunism, depending on the party and context. The far-right National Popular Front (ELAM) provides a

clear example where Eurosceptic rhetoric has produced tangible political effects. Populist Euroscepticism has been effective in capitalizing on domestic crises; ELAM successfully leveraged the 2013 financial crisis to gain public support by rejecting the EU bail-in plan. Furthermore, In the 2024 European Parliament elections, ELAM secured representation, reflecting the resonance of its anti-EU discourse among voters.[23] ELAM's platform ties Euroscepticism to specific domestic policy proposals, such as restricting migration and prioritizing welfare for native Greek Cypriots, indicating that the party's opposition to EU policies is not merely rhetorical but linked to concrete political objectives.[23] However, the extent of ELAM's influence at the EU level is limited. Several of its proposals, such as issuing passports to migrants to incentivize departure, have been criticized by mainstream parties as impractical and largely symbolic.

Feidias Panayiotou's stance on European integration reflects a soft and fluctuating form of Euroscepticism that is tied more to procedural critique and political detachment than to a coherent ideological opposition to the EU. Panayiotou openly admits he had no prior engagement with EU politics before his election, and he frames his role in the European Parliament as one of "bridging the gap" between politicians and ordinary people, positioning himself as independent of traditional party and institutional elites.[35] Rather than rejecting EU membership outright, he questions how EU priorities are set, for example, raising the issue of why the EU appears to prioritise support for Ukraine over attention to Cyprus.[36] He has also criticised procedural aspects of the EU Parliament, such as voting transparency, fundraising concern, and information access, positioning these critiques as defending "the truth" and ordinary citizens rather than advancing a specific Eurosceptic programme.[30] While this places him in a soft Eurosceptic stance in terms of expressing dissatisfaction with practice and governance, it lacks the structural or ideological denunciation of the EU that characterises hard Euroscepticism.

The concrete political consequences of Panayiotou's Euroscepticism appear limited but symbolically significant, and often intermingled with opportunistic, personality-driven politics rather than substantive policy shifts. His election itself with nearly 19.4% of the vote as an independent and was widely interpreted as a protest traditional parties and a desire for non-elite representation, which he leveraged through social media popularity rather than articulated EU policy positions.[37] In office, he has taken controversial actions such as voting against a European Parliament resolution on Ukrainian issues and he went to diplomatic visits to Russia framed as alternatives to conventional EU foreign-policy approaches.[38] However, these actions have not produced discernible change in EU policy and have drawn criticism from both within Cyprus and in Brussels, suggesting that his Eurosceptic activity serves partly as public spectacle or critique rather than effective political influence. His approach resonates with a digital-era, influencer style of populist politics one that mobilises attention and expresses discontent but is not necessarily anchored in concrete legislative outcomes or sustained opposition to the EU's institutional framework.

5. Short conclusion

The analysis of populist actors in the Greek Cypriot context reveals distinctive idiosyncrasies that set Cyprus apart from both continental European and global cases of populism. On the far right, the National Popular Front (ELAM) exemplifies a populist radical right (PRR) formation that belongs to nativist populism with strong ethno-nationalist narratives, framing Euroscepticism around national sovereignty, cultural preservation, and security. ELAM's discourse constructs an antagonism between the "Greek Cypriot people" and corrupt domestic and European elites, a framing intensified by Cyprus's small size, ongoing territorial division, and post-conflict political environment, where questions of sovereignty and external dependence carry heightened salience.[15] At the same time, the Cypriot case is shaped by the emergence of non-traditional populist actors, most notably Feidias Panayiotou, whose rise illustrates a post-ideological, personality-driven form of populism rooted in digital communication and anti-elite sentiment rather than structured ideology. Unlike ELAM's coherent nationalist Euroscepticism, Panayiotou articulates a soft, fluid critique of the EU, targeting institutional inefficiency, elite dominance, and democratic distance while affirming EU membership in principle.

Ethics and consent

Ethical approval and consent were not required.

Data availability statement

The descriptive data reported in this article were derived from publicly available datasets. European Social Survey (ESS) data are available from the ESS Data Archive (Round 10, 2022; DOI: https://doi.org/10.21338/NSD-ESS10-2020). No new primary data were collected for this study.

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This is a timely and useful country report on the relationship between populism and Euroscepticism in Cyprus, prepared within the framework of the EUPopLink COST Action. The article provides a valuable overview of the Cypriot case and shows how attitudes towards the European Union have been shaped by the island's division, the Cyprus problem, the 2004 Annan Plan referendum, the 2013 financial crisis, and the changing party-political landscape. The report is particularly useful in showing that Euroscepticism in Cyprus remains relatively limited but has become concentrated among specific populist and anti-establishment actors.

The strongest part of the article is its discussion of ELAM. The author convincingly presents ELAM as a populist radical right actor whose Euroscepticism is linked to nationalism, sovereignty, anti-migration discourse, cultural identity, and criticism of supranational governance. The report also explains clearly how ELAM has shifted from a more radical anti-EU position towards a more pragmatic "reform from within" stance, similar to other European radical right parties. This section is well connected to the literature on populism, radical right politics, and soft Euroscepticism.

The article also makes an interesting and potentially original contribution by discussing Feidias Panayiotou as a new type of digitally mediated, personality-driven, anti-establishment actor. This is an important and promising dimension of the Cypriot case. The article rightly identifies that Panayiotou's rise reflects a broader dissatisfaction with traditional parties and may represent a new form of political communication and populist style. This part of the report could be very useful for scholars interested in influencer politics, digital populism, and post-ideological forms of anti-establishment mobilization.

However, I have some reservations that should be addressed before the article can be considered scientifically sound in its present form.

The most important issue concerns the conceptual classification of Panayiotou. The article describes him as a soft Eurosceptic or as part of the populism–Euroscepticism nexus. Yet the evidence presented in the article seems to show mainly criticism of EU bureaucracy, transparency, institutional distance, and elite politics. These are certainly relevant forms of anti-establishment critique, but it is not entirely clear that they amount to Euroscepticism under the EUPopLink understanding of the concept, especially if Euroscepticism requires some form of qualified or unqualified opposition to European integration. The author should therefore clarify whether Panayiotou is genuinely Eurosceptic, or whether he should instead be described as a populist critic of EU governance who does not necessarily oppose European integration. This distinction is central to the article's main argument.

Relatedly, the abstract and conclusion should be revised to avoid overextending the concept of Euroscepticism. The current implication that "Euroscepticism does not always mean opposition to the EU" risks becoming conceptually too broad. Based on the evidence presented, a more precise conclusion may be that populist anti-establishment critique does not necessarily amount to Euroscepticism. If the author wishes to retain Panayiotou as an example of Euroscepticism, more direct evidence should be provided showing which aspects of European integration he opposes and how this opposition differs from general criticism of EU governance.

A second issue concerns the exclusion of AKEL from the main analysis. The author notes that AKEL may be considered softly Eurosceptic but excludes it because it lacks the "people versus elite" framing characteristic of populism. This may be a reasonable decision, but it needs to be explained more clearly. The report would benefit from a short additional paragraph clarifying why AKEL's EU criticism should be understood as non-populist, policy-based, ideological, or left-wing critique rather than populist Euroscepticism. This would strengthen the analytical boundaries of the case study.

A third issue concerns public opinion data. The article makes useful reference to Eurobarometer and ESS data, but the discussion would benefit from more careful wording. Since the cited indicators come from different sources, years, and survey questions, they should not be presented as if they all measure the same continuous trend. The author does not need to conduct a full statistical analysis, as this is a country report rather than a quantitative study. However, claims about change over time should be phrased more cautiously or supported by directly comparable survey items where possible.

A fourth issue concerns the presentation of sources and scope. Since this is a case study/country report, the article does not need a full methodological section with coding procedures or statistical tests. Nevertheless, it would be helpful to include a brief note explaining the scope of the analysis: which actors are included, which period is covered, what kinds of sources are used, and how the report applies the EUPopLink conceptual distinction between populism and Euroscepticism. This would make the article more transparent and easier for readers to follow.

There are also several minor issues that should be addressed. The article should be carefully proofread for grammar, syntax, and typographical errors. Some sentences are difficult to follow and would benefit from clearer formulation. In addition, recent developments in Panayiotou's political activity and organizational links should be updated where relevant, especially if the article presents him as an evolving political actor rather than solely as an independent MEP. The author may also consider briefly situating Panayiotou in relation to broader debates on influencer politics

and digital populism, but this should remain concise and proportionate to the case study format.

Overall, this is a valuable and indexable country report that makes an important contribution to the study of populism and Euroscepticism in Cyprus. The historical background is sufficient, the ELAM analysis is convincing, and the case is useful for teaching and comparative discussion. My main reservation concerns the conceptual leap from populist anti-establishment critique to Euroscepticism in the case of Panayiotou. If the author clarifies this classification, revises the abstract and conclusion, accordingly, better justifies the exclusion of AKEL, and slightly improves the presentation of public opinion evidence and the scope of sources, the article will be significantly stronger.

Recommendation: Approved with reservations.

Is the background of the case's history and progression described in sufficient detail?
Yes

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?
Partly

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?
Not applicable

Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?
No source data required

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?
Partly

Is the case presented with sufficient detail to be useful for teaching or other practitioners?
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: International Relations; Cyprus Studies; nationalism, identity and divided societies; the Cyprus conflict; Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot political history; political discourse and historical analysis; political violence and security studies.

We confirm that we have read this submission and believe that we have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however we have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Reviewer Report 16 June 2026

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It was a pleasure reading this case study, which I think will provide a valuable overview of populism and Euroscepticism in Cyprus for populism scholars. It is my opinion that the Cyprus case can serve to highlight a number of nuances on the relationship between populism and the European Union that are often washed away in the discourse on the subject and further our understanding of how populism maps onto political preferences. With this goal in mind, I have several recommendations for the author that may serve to more forcefully and clearly highlight these nuances.

- It is unclear to me why AKEL being softer in its opposition to the EU would lead to its exclusion from the analysis (Section 2, Paragraph 1). The stronger reason for not focusing on AKEL is stated subsequently, where it is noted that they lack the “people vs. elite” framing associated with populism. I am not an expert on Cyprus and I will defer to the author’s judgment on this, but it would seem to me that AKEL’s position prior to and during the banking crisis may have been somewhat more anti-elite and their experience being in power from 2008-2013 may have led them to tone down political attacks against economic elites. Whatever the explanation, AKEL’s categorization as non-populist is the stronger reason for excluding them from further analysis, and some further discussion of their rhetoric would be warranted. Of course, none of this implies that their exclusion from the category of populist, given EUPopLink’s conceptualization, is incorrect. It may indeed be appropriate, and based on my limited understanding of AKEL, they do emphasize popular sovereignty and veer away from anti-elite rhetoric.

- It is noted in the introduction that in 2024, 68% of Greek Cypriots felt that their country benefited from EU membership. Who do those who did not agree with the statement support? Moreover, this survey item provides the clearest measure of popular Euroscepticism among those mentioned. Also, has this question been asked repeatedly and would it be possible to show changes over time in the report? It is hard to understand shifts in public opinion when the survey questions discussed at the beginning are so different from one another.

- Given that Panayiotou is an important player in this country report, some mention of his newly formed Direct Democracy Party is warranted.

- The source in footnote 32 does not appear to directly discuss Panayiotou in relation to Trump at all in the body of the article. All it really discusses are his sentiments toward Musk and Zuckerberg, even though it mentions Trump in passing at the beginning.

- Can you position Panayiotou in relation to other populists globally operating in the social media space? This is a phenomenon that appears to be of particular relevance moving forward, and I believe that scholars of populism will find this element of the case report interesting. Aside from aligning with Musk, what constellation of actors is he embedded

within. What position in the digital space does he occupy and what linkages has he formed with other influencers? While he may not have a coherent ideology, he certainly appears to have right-wing leanings given who he has glorified and worked with.

- Is Panayiotou a Eurosceptic under EUPopLink's definition of Euroscepticism as "the idea of contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration" (Lorimer and van Kessel 2026)? In what ways is he opposed to integration? This does not come through in the case report, where all that is noted are policy preferences regarding the EU, and not opposition to any elements of EU integration itself. While criticisms of transparency and administrative bloat in the EU may fit within the framework of Taggart and Szczerbiak's (2004) soft euroscepticism, it does not seem to align with EUPopLink's definition. That does not imply that Panayiotou does not express any positions that are against European integration, whether limited in scope, merely that the article does not provide any. As such, the valence populist in Cyprus does not appear to be a Eurosceptic, only a critic of how the EU has operated.

- On a related note, this would imply that the characterization of the core implication in the abstract is incorrect: "The Cyprus case shows that Euroscepticism does not always mean opposition to the EU." The case shows that European populists are not necessarily Eurosceptics.

References

1. Lorimer M, Roch J, van Kessel S: Populism, euroscepticism, and the populism-euroscepticism nexus. *Open Research Europe*. 2026; **6**. Publisher Full Text
2. Taggart P, Szczerbiak A: Contemporary Euroscepticism in the party systems of the European Union candidate states of Central and Eastern Europe. *European Journal of Political Research*. 2004; **43** (1): 1-27 Publisher Full Text

Is the background of the case's history and progression described in sufficient detail?

Yes

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?

Yes

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?

Not applicable

Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?

No source data required

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?

No

Is the case presented with sufficient detail to be useful for teaching or other practitioners?

Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Comparative politics with a focus on the Middle East and North Africa

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.