

Cyprus's new president

## And now?

NICOSIA

**Clerides out, Papadopoulos in—and reunification further off than before?**

**T**HE election of Tassos Papadopoulos as president of Cyprus—in practice, the Greek-Cypriot south—comes at a critical moment. On February 26th Kofi Annan is due in Nicosia with a last-ditch revised version of the United Nations plan for reunifying the island. Mr Papadopoulos and his Turkish-Cypriot counterpart, Rauf Denktash, will be given 48 hours to agree a deal. If they cannot, when Cyprus signs its EU accession treaty in Athens in April the prospective EU member will, de facto, be only the Greek-Cypriot part of the island.

Mr Papadopoulos surprised pollsters by winning outright, with 51.5% of the vote in the first round, to oust Glafcos Clerides, the 83-year-old incumbent. He leads the centre-right Democratic Party, but was also backed by the communists—the biggest vote-getters on the island—the socialists and the Greens. A feisty lawyer of 69, as a young man he was in EOKA, the guerrilla group that led the movement for independence from Britain in the 1950s.

He has also been considered the leader of a “rejectionist” faction opposed to compromise with the Turkish Cypriots. But he is trying hard to re-invent himself as a dedicated negotiator for peace. He promises that Turkish Cypriots, isolated and impoverished—not least by an international embargo—in Mr Denktash's self-declared republic in the north, would have a chance to prosper in a re-united island.

Humph, say they. Mr Denktash said flatly that with Mr Papadopoulos in charge in the south “the road to a solution is closed.” So far, Mr Denktash has been the bigger obstacle, refusing to hand the Greek Cypriots all of the 9% of



**Ten-finger exercise for Papadopoulos**

the island's territory called for in the UN plan. But he could perhaps be arm-twisted by Turkey's new government, which is keen to see a real, re-unified Cyprus in the EU.

Many Turkish-Cypriots are keen too. Now the doubts are about Mr Papadopoulos. His communist backers broadly favour a deal; his own supporters want changes—more Greek Cypriots, they say, should be able to return to the actual homes they fled in 1974, as Turkish troops invaded to prevent Cyprus being hijacked into union with Greece. Many who voted for Mr Papadopoulos because of his rejectionist image would opt for the status quo.

But there is a catch. The EU agreed to let Cyprus sign up, even disunited. But actual membership in May 2004 still requires ratification by all EU states. Some might yet cause trouble.