

## Q&A

### Press Conference on Procedures for Selecting Mayoral Candidates

Athens, 5 April, 2006

**I. Hasapopoulos (reporter):** How this will all work in practice? There are 50.000 inhabitants in Maroussi. Will there be an open call for participation for anyone interested in taking part, of which 300 will be selected?

**A. Papadopoulos (Chair, Committee of Municipal elections of PASOK):** No, we will select a sample.

**J. Panaretos (Professor, Athens University of Economics and Business):** A random sample will be scientifically selected. A random sample means that every citizen who has the right to vote in Marousi has the same chance of being picked for the sample, regardless of whether they 18 or 75 years old, a worker, a pensioner, or a businessperson.

**I. Hasapopoulos:** How will you find this sample?

**J. Panaretos:** The sample will be derived from the voters of Marousi. They will all be eligible to vote. Just like any sample chosen for a poll in any specific municipality or area.

**N. Athanasakis (PASOK's spokesman):** Let me make the following clarification. You know that we use polling procedures, just like everyone else, to determine the level of acceptance of our candidates and policies. We will use the same procedure, with even stricter scientific criteria, to draw a sample here. But in this case, we will not stop there. Beyond the scientifically valid poll, we have the subsequent phases Mr. Panaretos talked about: we inform the sample group; the candidates have the opportunity to outline their positions; and there is a process of deliberation so that participants can reach informed decisions and make judgements.

**I. Hasapopoulos:** My question was about the sample. All those who participate do so voluntarily, is that right? Is it a requirement that they vote for candidates from two specific parties or candidates supported by PASOK?

**J. Panaretos:** It is a random sample. One of our main concerns was whether we should limit ourselves to PASOK supporters. But we concluded that the sample must be representative of all the citizens of the municipality. We cannot ignore the point of view of someone who may vote for another party, but will have something important to say about municipal issues.

**D. Botonis (reporter):** My question has to do with timing. Do the different stages you referred to mean that this will be a lengthy process? You can't just gather the sample group tomorrow morning and do this; so it will take two to three months to find out who the candidate for the municipality of Marousi will

be.

**J. Panaretos:** No.

**D. Botonis:** How long will all this take?

**J. Panaretos:** The whole process can be concluded by the end of May. It could be done in a shorter period of time, but we had to make allowances for the Easter vacation.

**D. Botonis:** If the end result of this process is a leading candidate who does not belong to or is not affiliated to PASOK, what will you do?

**N. Athanasakis:** The sample group will consist of people from all political backgrounds, but the candidates will be party members.

**M. Xenogiannakopoulou (Secretary of PASOK):** Our candidates are taking part in this process. Just as in the primary elections, all the citizens of the municipality have the right to take part in an open procedure, regardless of their political persuasion. The sample group will represent all the municipality's citizens. But as far as the candidates are concerned, according to the rules set out by the Committee on Electoral Procedures, they consist of people who have nominated themselves as candidates through PASOK's electoral procedures.

**B. Giakoumis (reporter):** A question for Ms. Xenogiannakopoulou. I realise that because this is the first time you are undertaking this experiment, there are understandably some concerns. But if you are satisfied with the turnout, the level of citizen participation, and the results, would PASOK consider institutionalising the process, possibly even using it to select parliamentary candidates?

**M. Xenogiannakopoulou:** As President Papandreou noted himself, the procedure we are launching today is also a political experiment. At this stage, we can take advantage of this process in the best possible way to select municipal candidates who have deliberated with regional committees. At the same time, as you correctly pointed out, this first trial will help build trust in the effectiveness and reliability of such procedures. Obviously, in the future we intend to apply these procedures to other party processes and appointments, alongside other innovations for public participation, such as incorporating local referenda into our municipal mechanisms.

In other words, if we can use these procedures to engage with all the citizens of a particular municipality, we believe that we can apply this political process in the broader selection of candidates. But we can also use these procedures to enhance the political debate and improve our policies through local referenda, which we intend to incorporate into our regional bodies.

**A. Marathias (reporter):** First, is the result of the preliminary elections binding for PASOK? Do we know who the candidates will be? Have you already decided a list of candidates who will take part in this

process? Secondly, as I understand it, through deliberative polling will the end group of 300 citizens, which will be a random sample drawn from the municipality, be responsible for selecting the candidate the party will support? Will this group play an advisory role or will it be authorised to make decisions?

**A. Papadopoulos:** On the last point, clearly the final decision rests with the Committee on Electoral Procedures. But it is also clear that their decision will be guided by this process. Of course, we do not yet know whether the choices will be exactly the same or not, because various political elements will come into play. However, we hope that the sample group will shape the committee's decision.

As far as primary elections are concerned, it is absolutely clear that the results will be binding, but the Committee on Electoral Procedures might also play a part in dealing with certain issues. If, for example, a candidate violates the ethical code of conduct defined in the internal Directive, the committee retains the right to intervene because this is a matter of political and ethical behaviour that concerns the values and positions of PASOK. We are not here to administer the political ambitions of candidates.

This is a technical issue here that will be discussed once things have progressed to that point. This is a novel procedure. Concerning the appropriate number of candidates to be evaluated, we are not a public service; we are not staging a public competition for aspiring candidates. There are 15 candidates in Marousi. Obviously, we cannot accept all 15, so there will be a political evaluation of the candidates.

**G. Geropoulos (reporter):** So you have obviously already set the criteria for the selection of candidates in municipalities where primary elections will take place. What will happen if the percentage won by one candidate is very close to that of another?

**A. Papadopoulos:** We are holding primary elections in order to assess who has the highest approval ratings among the wider public. We will respect the results. This is absolutely clear.

**B. Vasilopoulos (reporter):** Let me ask you about the primary elections. How many potential candidates can there be in to the process outlined by Mr. Panaretos? And what makes you believe that you can overcome the divisions between four, five or ten individuals, when this kind of rivalry is rife throughout PASOK? As far as deliberative polling is concerned, what makes you think you can disregard the entrenched party figures who dominate every municipality and still want to remain in power? People who have been around for a long time, who know the issues, can, perhaps, give better answers to the problems at hand than an ambitious younger candidate, who may have the knowledge and potential to be a candidate, but not the necessary experience.

**A. Papadopoulos:** Our candidates for the local elections were already announced yesterday; they were selected through party procedures. Of course, other people can put themselves forward as candidates. In my

opinion, the primary elections will lead many people to withdraw from the race. In many areas, young people will step forward who want to try this open process, which hopefully will allow them to sidestep the bureaucratic restrictions or party cliques that sometimes exist.

However, there is a 'safety valve' in place to protect the process from people who might take part simply to undermine or obstruct the preliminary elections, an institution we are determined to protect, so that it is not exploited by people who consider themselves part of the establishment or claim to be 'public figures', although they are more concerned with serving ulterior motives. The Regional Committees that will finalise the lists of candidates will have the right to reject people on these grounds. The same applies to the municipalities under the auspices of the Committee on Electoral Procedures. We are not a public service. The process of political evaluation will be upheld.

**B. Mourtis (reporter):** What criteria have you used to determine which municipalities will hold primary elections? Why won't these elections take place everywhere?

**A. Papadopoulos:** After extensive discussions with our Regional Committees and bodies, we experienced difficulties in some regions because, in contrast to what we anticipated, most municipalities opposed the idea of primary elections. In any case, this is a pilot project; many things will be tested so they can be further developed in future. Obviously, there is no reason to hold primary elections in areas where we support the elected Mayors. Similarly, in several places we have only one candidate as a result of local deliberations, so again primary elections are not needed. In areas where the party is collaborating with independent candidates or other political parties, primary elections are not useful. Finally, in places where the local community has concluded on a unified ballot, such elections would only make matters worse. All these factors have played a part in the number of preliminary elections.

**A. Maratias (reporter):** Will candidates in the primary elections be permitted to print and distribute leaflets and posters, use communication techniques or local radio stations to differentiate their positions from their rivals?

**M. Xenogiannakopoulou:** That is a good question because it touches on an ethical issue, which is why we have included clear rules of ethical conduct in our internal Directive. The Committee on Ethics will follow up with a set of rules. There is another side to this issue: PASOK must guarantee that all candidates have an equal opportunity to present their positions. We cannot have candidates with a clear advantage in terms of the political tools available to them. We want the process to be as democratic as possible. To this end, all candidates will have equal opportunities to present their positions on PASOK's website and our web radio station, to generate the maximum publicity. This is something we are concerned about and will do our best to accomplish.

**J. Panaretos:** Let me comment on the earlier question on who is eligible for candidacy. Experience around the world has shown that parties are extremely

concerned about their party structures and the best way to select the best candidates for elections. Primary elections and deliberative polling lead to greater citizen participation in public affairs. No other procedure that has been put forward is so democratic in nature.

There is, of course, another procedure whereby the leader of a party calls on one person and pronounces him or her the candidate. These two procedures should be evaluated to determine which is closest to the will of the people.

Let me close by saying that the President of PASOK has committed himself to see this process through to the end and he will be present during the deliberations.