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 29-30 September 2023

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This report presents a comprehensive summary of the Cyprus Forum 2023, organised by Oxygen for Democracy (formerly known as Oxygono) in collaboration with the Delphi Economic Forum. The forum convened local and international leaders across various sectors to delve into the theme of "Transparency."

Within these pages, you will find a brief overview of the discussions and commitments forged during the forum. We express our gratitude to all participants, including political leaders, professionals, media representatives, academics, and contributors from civic society, for their invaluable input.

This report serves as a post-event synopsis, providing a snapshot of the Cyprus Forum 2023 and its impact on advocating transparency in governance, business, and society. We trust that this information will serve as a valuable resource for future efforts in advancing sustainable and accountable practices in our region.

The views presented in this report, commissioned by Oxygen for Democracy in collaboration with the Delphi Economic Forum, are solely those of the authors. They do not necessarily represent the official stance of either organising entity, their associated member states, or affiliated organisations.

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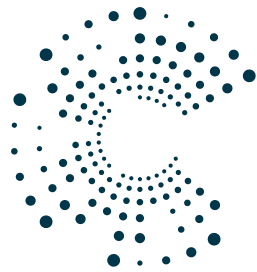
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DAY 1: 29 SEPT. 2023





There is more work to be done regarding transparency and restoring citizens' trust in institutions

Nikos Christodoulides, President of the Republic of Cyprus

In his welcome address at the 4th Cyprus Forum, President Christodoulides stressed the importance of transparency and rebuilding citizens' trust in institutions. He acknowledged that there is more work to be done in this direction and committed to taking measures, including coordination and cooperation with the legislative authority and independent bodies.

The President added that the absence of transparency is sometimes linked to corruption, a pressing concern within Cypriot society, adding that the prevailing perception is that all those involved in public life either contribute to or fail to prevent corruption in the country, irrespective

of the laws and regulations in place.

“Regardless of the laws and regulations we adopt and the decisions we make, if we do not change this perception within society, we will not achieve our goal,” he said.

Following, the President cited Eurobarometer data indicating that the rule of law in Cyprus is now increasingly questioned. He highlighted this as a significant challenge and underscored that the absence of transparency can erode public trust, fuel suspicion, and distance citizens from electoral processes and political life.

President Christodoulides discussed specific initiatives aimed at promoting transparency and combating corruption outlined in the governance programme.

Among the initiatives mentioned was the establishment of an internal task force within the Presidency, a move commended by the recent Council of Europe Group of States Against Corruption (GRECO) report on Cyprus, which offered valuable recommendations for preventing corruption and promoting integrity.

“I firmly believe that implementing these recommendations will associate Cyprus with international best practices,” the President said.

He also highlighted the introduction of open selection processes based on merit for the appointment of Boards of Directors of Public Legal Entities (Semi-Governmental Organisations), through the newly established Advisory Council.

President Christodoulides announced the imminent adoption of a comprehensive Code of Conduct for government members, providing a roadmap for their conduct throughout their term. “The issuance and implementation of the Code of Conduct will not only be the realisation of a specific action in our Governance Programme but also a direct response to GRECO’s recommendation from the fifth evaluation round,” he noted.

Concluding, President Christodoulides commended the Cyprus Forum for successfully establishing itself, within a short span of time, as a significant institution and a platform for diverse voices and ideas. He praised its ability to bring together individuals from various backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives, contributing to pluralism and the exchange of opinions on a wide range of issues, including the promotion of reforms for the benefit of society and the formulation of modern policies for decision-makers.



Parliament stands resolute in making a significant stride forward in transparency

Savia Orphandou, Member of the House of Representatives on behalf of Annita Demetriou, President of the House of Representatives, Republic of Cyprus

The parliament, attuned to the evolving expectations of society and committed to upholding the principles of transparency and accountability, stands resolute in marking a significant stride forward, House President Annita Demetriou said.

In her speech which was read by Democratic Rally (DISY) MP Savia Orphanides, the House President said that the parliament has undertaken a collective action for the implementation of substantial measures aiming to foster transparency and political integrity.

She noted that the major reform in terms of securing transparency and accountability has come through the preparation and approval, in February 2021, of a Code of Conduct and Ethics

for MPs and their staff that has been compiled by the Services of the House in consultation with academics, legal experts and other stakeholders.

“The Code of Conduct deals, among others, with various situations of conflicts of interest, including, issues of personal/ private interests, incompatibility, gifts and other advantages, third party contacts and lobbying while also providing clear guidelines as to the obligation of MPs to disclose accurately all relevant information to the House”, she said.

She also referred to the endorsement by the House in 2022 of the legislation that established an Independent Anti-Corruption Authority noting that this legislation vested the Authority with all the essential powers required for the effective execution of its responsibilities, namely budgetary independence, a distinctive appointment procedure for its members designed to mitigate undue influence, and more importantly, comprehensive investigative capabilities to thoroughly scrutinise and evaluate information pertaining to potential corrupt activities.

Ms Demetriou also referred to the law governing lobbying activities and the legislation on the protection of whistleblowers pointing out that all these legislative measures and the Code of Conduct of the House are the results of a collaborative and collective endeavour based on consensus and fostered by a constructive dialogue and goodwill from all parties involved.

The House President also noted that we certainly need a brave shift in mentality and attitude, as individuals, institutions and politicians must prioritise openness and accountability in their actions and decisions, adding that a comprehensive civic education plays a vital role in fostering a culture of transparency by empowering citizens with the knowledge and tools to actively engage in democratic processes and hold their leaders accountable.

WELCOME NOTE NICOLAS KYRIAKIDES FOUNDER, CYPRUS FORUM¹¹



We want to put Cypriot political perspectives on the world stage

Nicolas Kyriakides, Executive President of the Cyprus Forum

“Our goal is to provide decision-making centres with recommendations and connect Cyprus with international policy hubs, effectively serving as a showcase for Cypriot political perspectives on the world stage,” Nicolas Kyriakides, Executive President of the Cyprus Forum, stated in his welcome speech.

He was addressing a diverse audience as the organisation celebrated its fourth year of fostering dialogue and collaboration. He noted that the annual event has grown substantially since its inception and now boasts 215 speakers, with over 70 of them hailing from international backgrounds, showcasing its global reach and significance.

Kyriakides echoed the sentiment of Symeon Tsomokos, of the Delphi Economic Forum, who, in previous years, referred to the Cyprus Forum as “the showcase of the Cypriot political scene to the outside world.”

This year, the Cyprus Forum underwent a format change, with opening ceremonies replaced by parallel sessions held in venues near the Municipal Theater, symbolically situated within the heart of the state's institutions and the Leda Palace, Mr Kyriakides explained.

He noted the importance of transforming this area into a space for an open exchange of ideas among individuals from diverse ideological backgrounds. He explained that the Cyprus Forum aimed to create a secure environment for such exchanges during the conference days.

Regarding this year's theme, Mr Kyriakides said, "We observe a pressing need to focus more on the correction of democracy and institutions as inequalities and the rise of extremes create a dystopian reality, perhaps more fragile than ever before."

Furthermore, he announced that Oxygono is being renamed to "Oxygen for Democracy," effective from January 1, 2024, in alignment with the organisation's mission.

The Cyprus Forum's Executive President also revealed plans to participate in policy-making conferences in Brussels in October and Washington in February. Discussions are underway for the establishment of an autonomous conference in London in 2024, aimed at strengthening relationships with local thought leaders, politicians, and organisations that will elevate the Cyprus Forum's influence, he said.

Kyriakides disclosed the dates for next year's Cyprus Forum, scheduled for September 27th and 28th, 2024. He shared that discussions would revolve around institutional topics, accompanied by discussions on foreign policy, economics, the environment, technology, and other significant matters.

In closing, Kyriakides dedicated this year's conference and ongoing efforts to his late father, Harris Kyriakides and highlighted the importance of working relentlessly for transparency and justice, stating, "It is crucial to continue our efforts for transparency and justice, as many of our fellow citizens may potentially be wronged by institutions, intentionally or unintentionally".



The Cyprus Forum can contribute towards restoring social trust in institutions

Yiannis Thomatos, Executive Vice-President of the Delphi Economic Forum

Yiannis Thomatos, Executive Vice-President of the Delphi Economic Forum kicked off the Cyprus Forum with his opening remarks, drawing parallels with the journey of the Delphi Economic Forum.

He noted that the Delphi Economic Forum began its journey outside Greece in Cyprus, and has now expanded its influence across the Balkans, Washington, Brussels, and Toronto, with a commitment to addressing regional and global challenges.

“This is because we believe that our region should be represented not only in decision-making centres but also internally, just like the Cyprus Forum, where discussions are held that will progress towards a sustainable development model,” he said.

Addressing the main subject of the fourth Cyprus Forum – transparency – Mr Thomatos pondered on the definition of the word.

“Let’s think about what transparency means. What is transparency? Transparency is the quality of a material to allows us to see through it. This material in the context of the conference could be nothing other than democracy and governance. If we take a look at the headlines of the entire Western world, of the whole world, we will see that there is a pattern behind all these headlines, and that is the weakening of democracy. Inequalities are increasing within states. Social cohesion is taking hits. Expressions of authoritarianism are somehow multiplying, and we often see expressions of violence, indicating that society, in some way, is unravelling,” he stressed.

“We all feel that institutions are not functioning and that we have no way to fix them. This feeling that institutions are not working is also the main cause of the trust crisis. So, transparency and accountability are not empty words. Seeing how a decision was reached, what lies behind that decision, is necessary to restore this trust,” he continued.

Mr Thomatos added that events such as the Cyprus Forum contribute towards strengthening trust in institutions. He also made special mention of the fact that this year, the Cyprus Forum was bigger than ever before, with over 200 speakers, one-third of them coming from outside Cyprus.

“What does this mean? It means specialised organisations contributing to shaping the content, and this entire universe that I described to you is a wealth of knowledge,” he said.

Concluding, he thanked the Presidency of the Republic, the Parliament, the European Commission in Cyprus, and the European Parliament in Cyprus, as well as the organising teams behind the Cyprus and the Delphi Economic Forums.



The rule of law is essential for protecting democracy and fundamental rights

Vera Jourova, European Commissioner for Values and Transparency

Cyprus is commended for establishing an independent anti-corruption authority, showing political commitment to the rule of law, European Commissioner for Values and Transparency, Věra Jourová said.

In her keynote speech delivered through a video message, Ms Jourová noted that this authority is “encouraged to become fully operational and gain the trust of civil servants and the population.” The Commissioner also said that Cyprus is praised for its support of the European Media Freedom Act, emphasising the importance of transparency in media ownership and state expenditures on media advertising.

Ms Jourova said that Cyprus’ efforts to reform the justice system are acknowledged, but concerns

are raised about the advisory and prosecutorial roles of the law office and the independence of the prosecution service. She also noted that Cyprus is encouraged to address challenges related to interpreting and applying legal exceptions to access public sector information.

Jourova also said that the European Commission adopted a package of measures to fight corruption in the EU and globally and this includes updating and strengthening the legal framework to combat and prevent corruption, covering both the public and private sectors.

She also spoke of the efforts to harmonise the definitions of criminal offences in line with international standards and increase the level of criminal sanctions across the EU. Ms Jourova further said that national law enforcement authorities ensure effective investigations and prosecutions of corruption and have improved the cooperation procedures among all involved parties.

The Commissioner also spoke about prevention, noting that building a culture of integrity comes through information campaigns, research, and education programmes. She noted that EU Member states are urged to adopt mechanisms for open access to information, managing conflicts of interest, and regulating interactions between the private and public sectors. Specialised anti-corruption bodies are to be established with adequate resources and training. "The EU's foundational value is the rule of law, which is essential for protecting democracy and fundamental rights," she stressed.



EU aims to foster reunification by promoting trade

Judit Rozsa, Director of Resources, Coordination and Aid Programme in the Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support of the European Commission

The European Commission is working hard to ensure that EU trade directives benefit all Cypriots and provide an impetus for a solution to Cyprus problem, said Judit Rozsa, Director of Resources, Coordination and Aid Programme in the Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support of the European Commission.

Ms Rozsa made special reference to the Halloumi/Hellim project, stressing that Turkish Cypriot producers can benefit from the registration of the cheese as an EU Protected Designation of Origin (PDO). She noted however that this comes with obligations, namely compliance with EU standards, pointing out that the Halloumi/Hellim scheme is a “mini reunification lab”.

She highlighted that the Turkish Cypriot community has embraced the Halloumi/Hellim project, and they are working on meeting the necessary EU standards, and several producers have

already received the PDO label or, are in the process of obtaining it. “Our goal is to see Halloumi/Hellim sold over the Green Line in 2024”, the EC official said.

Rozsa noted in her speech that reason dictates that Cyprus and its people will be best served if the island overcomes its current division and is reunited, pointing out that Cyprus’ reunification will allow the whole of Cyprus to benefit from full EU membership.

She said that the EU and the European Commission facilitate the reunification on a three-pillar level, namely settlement talks, Aid Programme and Green Line trade.

Referring to the settlement talks she said that they help ensure that the negotiations reflect EU rules and requirements because a reunified Cyprus will need to continue being a well-functioning member state. “We do this in close collaboration with the UN,” she said.

Rozsa also referred to the EU aid programme for the Turkish Cypriot community, which has one and only one overall objective, namely to facilitate reunification. She said that since 2006, the EU has allocated close to 700 million Euros to this programme, which is substantial, given the size of the Turkish Cypriot community. The programme, she added, has financed more than 2,000 scholarships for Turkish Cypriots to study in the EU, and experience European values and way of life.

She concluded by saying that there is no viable alternative to the resumption of negotiations within the UN framework.

“We all have to make a better case for how a reunified Cyprus would benefit both communities. I hope that what I have outlined here this morning will contribute to this important objective for Cyprus,” she said.



Indications there may be “real movement” on appointing UN envoy

Colin Stewart, UNSG Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus

There have been some indications that finally there may be some real movement on the question of appointing a United Nations envoy, UNSG Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus, Colin Stewart said addressing the 4th Cyprus Forum.

In his keynote speech, Stewart also noted that leaving part of the island with no choice but to rely on a third country for everything only deepens the separation and undermines the chances of a mutually acceptable settlement of the Cyprus issue.

He also called for the resumption of the “crucial” bi-communal work on education as a matter

of priority.

Stewart said that, for most of this past year, there has not been much tangible change with respect to the Cyprus issue, but that very recently, “we have started to see some hopeful signs”, and he specifically referred to three such signs.

He added that there have been some indications that, “finally there may be some real movement on the question of appointing a United Nations envoy”. That would be a real game-changer, he said, adding that the road back to negotiations remains a long and convoluted one, but having a dedicated envoy to begin a sustained conversation would be a crucial first step.

Stewart said that these were signs he calls “hopeful”, and that contrast sharply with the situation of recent years while they suggest that we may now be on the verge of a course reversal. “If my optimism is well-founded, and we start to see positive movement soon, that will certainly be welcome news”, he said.

He also noted that next year, the UN peacekeeping mission in Cyprus, UNFICYP, and the Secretary-General’s good offices, will be marking 60 years in Cyprus. He said that for 60 years, the UN has been trying to keep the peace and to help the parties arrive at a resolution to the Cyprus Problem. “A resolution that is long, long overdue”, he noted.

The UN official also referred to the need for confidence-building measures or gestures that strengthen intra-island integration, while also praising the work of the 12 Technical Committees established by the leaders to improve the livelihoods of all Cypriots, he said.



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There is a lot to be done to change perception on politicians' impunity

FIXING DEMOCRACY

- Marie Lintzer, Head of International Partnerships, French High Authority for Transparency in Public Life
- Scott Greytak, Director of Advocacy, Transparency International U.S.
- Dr. Odysseas Michaelides, Auditor General Of the Republic of Cyprus
- Julie Fisher, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Republic of Cyprus
- Haridimos Tsoukas, The Columbia Ship Management Professor of Strategic Management, University of Cyprus

There is a lot to be done to change the perception of impunity of politicians, Cyprus' Auditor General, Odysseas Michaelides said.

In his opening remark, Michaelides referred to the role of the Supreme Audit Institutions (SAI) in each country, in the fight against corruption, even if preventing and uncovering corruption is not their responsibility, as he said.

He added that the primary responsibility for the prevention and detection of fraud rests with both those charged with governance and management. "Most important of all: The tone must be set at the top", he said, adding that governments need to develop effective strategies to manage the risk of fraud by considering both fraud prevention and fraud detection.

Highlighting the global context of these challenges, Ms Marie Lintzer, Head of International Partnerships at the French High Authority for Transparency in Public Life, remarked, "There is a crisis of trust of citizens in their representatives and democratic institutions worldwide." Lintzer further noted alarming survey results in France, where "six out of ten citizens do not have confidence in their government."

On his part, Mr Scott Greytak, Director of Advocacy at Transparency International U.S., pointed out a concerning trend: "There's basically a stagnation in the fight against corruption, corresponding strongly to the global rise of authoritarianism and the decline of democratic ideals."

In the discussion that followed, Mr Michaelides also referred to the attacks against Cyprus' Audit Office, noting that they serve political purposes and that there were established pillars of independence that must be protected by the State. He also said that SAIs should be strictly politically neutral and maintain their standards.

US Ambassador in Cyprus, Julie Fisher, added that governments have a responsibility to their voters to be able to answer to major challenges such as climate change, pandemics, and inequalities, and must be able to produce results, noting the importance of good governance. During the discussion, she referred to a statement made by President Christodoulides, that he will be judged at the end of his administration, and noted that this fundamentally "goes to the heart of our democracies, what will they achieve, that is, towards their citizens".



Lessons from North Macedonia: A Blueprint for Resolving Complex National Issues

FIRESIDE DISCUSSION

- Nikola Dimitrov, President and co-founder of the Balkan Center for Constructive Policies - Solution Former Foreign Minister of the Republic of North Macedonia
- Athanasios Ellis, Editor in Chief, Kathimerini English edition

Mr Nikola Dimitrov, former Foreign Minister of North Macedonia, shed light on the process of resolving international issues, such as the Cyprus problem, in conversation with Mr Athanasios Ellis, Editor-in-Chief of the English edition of Kathimerini.

The discussion delved into the lessons learned from North Macedonia's successful resolution of its long-standing name issue, offering insights into the role of negotiations and the crucial role of political will.

Starting off, Mr Ellis framed the conversation by seeking to uncover the formula behind North Macedonia's success in overcoming its decade-long name issue.

Dimitrov shared his experiences, stating, "We did it ourselves. The Prespa agreement that solved the name issue was homemade." The former Foreign Minister underlined the importance of understanding the concerns of all involved actors, noting, "A serious compromise is such that some people say leave both sides equally unhappy."

Emphasising the need for political leaders to prioritise long-term benefits, despite the challenges faced during the negotiation process, he urged courage: "You invest political capital. Then, as you move on, and when you come close to a solution, the cost of failure is also increasing."

Reflecting on North Macedonia's current relationship with Greece, Dimitrov stressed, "We paved the way for something that is so natural for two neighbours, and this is friendship."

As the conversation shifted to the applicability of North Macedonia's lessons to the Cyprus issue, Dimitrov cautioned, "Miracles are possible, but we should be modest and stop here when it comes to making analogies between the two problems."

In the final segment, the discussion touched on transparency issues in the accession process for countries in the Western Balkans. Dimitrov acknowledged that European integration alone is not sufficient for bringing about real change.

He emphasised the need for domestic agents of change, stating, "For real change at home, you have to have citizens, civil society, courageous leaders, and politicians."

Concluding, he identified rampant corruption and political clientelism as challenges, urging for a shift towards meritocracy in governance.



Accountability, transparency and meritocracy are the guiding tenets of the government

FIRESIDE DISCUSSION WITH THE PRESIDENCY

- Irene Piki, Deputy Minister to the President
- Nicolas Kyriakides, President, Cyprus Forum

Deputy Minister to the President Irene Piki provided insights into the government's commitment towards achieving reforms. In dialogue with Mr Nicolas Kyriakides, Executive President of the Cyprus Forum, Ms Piki underscored the three foundational tenets guiding the current administration: "Accountability, transparency and meritocracy," as she affirmed.

Yet, she acknowledged the inevitability of errors, asserting, "Mistakes are always made and will always be made. The important thing is to have the reflexes in place so that mistakes can be corrected."

The conversation shifted focus to the governance programme and its series of reforms aimed at enhancing the rule of law and furthering meritocracy. Ms Piki delineated the establishment of an Advisory Council and the formulation of a stringent code of conduct for state officials as central initiatives. The Advisory Council, created in July 2023, will oversee the appointments to boards of public legal entities, while the state officials' code of conduct, soon to be adopted, introduces robust provisions against conflicts of interest and unethical practices, Ms Piki said.

Further probing into the workings of the Advisory Council, the Deputy Minister to the President argued that it would introduce an unprecedented level of openness to the appointment process of semi-governmental boards. "A board is made up of people who are highly esteemed in their fields," Piki explained, and they are to nominate thrice the number of needed members for selection. An important innovation is the open call for interested individuals, ensuring the candidates' qualifications are paramount. Ms Piki added, "We have all put in that it would be good to have equal representation of men and women on the Boards of Directors."

Moreover, the government is in the process of implementing a code of conduct for public officials, with Ms Piki highlighting the influence of the GRECO Rule of Law Report towards this decision. This new code delineates explicit provisions for handling conflicts of interest, hospitality, and gifts, thereby setting a high standard for public servants. "An independent ethics adviser will also be appointed by the President of the Republic," Ms Piki disclosed, emphasising the role of guidance over mere punishment.

On the rule of law, Ms Piki explained that the Cabinet is actively monitoring the implementation of various reports, including GRECO's, and considering reforms around the Attorney General's dual role as a legal adviser to the President and Public Prosecutor. This requires "a very, very good and serious discussion," she noted.

Regarding anti-corruption efforts, Ms Piki spoke of the significant role played by the anti-corruption authority and the close cooperation between the government and this body. She also touched upon the government's plan to equip the authority with the necessary resources, calling it "a really, really important reform."

Addressing the creation of a Secretariat to coordinate government work, Ms Piki clarified that coordination does not equate to control over the ministries, which retain autonomy over their policies. This distinction ensures a synergy necessary for effective governance.

"The big gamble is to succeed in changing the culture." She stressed that while laws and attitudes are critical, education plays a fundamental role in this transformation.

In closing, Ms Piki reiterated the President's stance, identifying transparency and the fight against corruption not only as governmental pursuits but as national imperatives, urging that every individual with power and responsibility must act as a role model to drive the cultural shift that the country hopes to achieve.



Forums can shape global agendas

CONFERENCE DIPLOMACY

- **Yiannis Thomatos, Executive Vice President, Delphi Economic Forum**
- **Alena Kudzo, Vice President for Policy and Programming, GLOBSEC**
- **Fabienne Hara, Deputy Director General, Paris Peace Forum**
- **Chiara Rosselli, Co-Founder and Executive Director, APROPOS Group**
- **Terry Martin, TV News Anchor, Journalist**

“I’ve moderated conferences all over the world, but delving into the nature of conferences themselves is a unique opportunity,” said journalist and news anchor Terry Martin, setting the stage for a discussion on the global influence of forums on policymaking.

The panel comprised speakers entrenched in the workings of forums: Yiannis Thomatos, Executive Vice President of the Delphi Economic Forum; Alena Kudzo, Vice President for Policy and Programming at GLOBSEC; Fabienne Hara, Deputy Director General of the Paris Peace Forum; and Chiara Rosselli, Director of the nonprofit Apropos and Head of Open European Dialogue. Each panellist shared insights into the forums they represent and their strategic objectives.

Mr Yiannis Thomatos shed light on the genesis of the Delphi Economic Forum in 2015, emphasising its focus on sustainable and inclusive growth amidst Greece's economic challenges. He said that the Cyprus Forum symbolises an extension of the Delphi Economic Forum. "We share the same values with Cyprus Forum, discussing trends and sustainable growth policies, bringing us together in promoting significant conversations."

Ms Alena Kudzko, representing GLOBSEC, noted the organisation's dual goals: generating impactful ideas and ensuring their resonance among decision-makers. The Bratislava forum, an annual event, serves as a platform where diverse voices converge, fostering discussions that transcend traditional boundaries, she explained.

Ms Fabienne Hara, from the Paris Peace Forum, provided a broad perspective on the institution's origins in 2018. "The global context was really challenged by the rise of nationalism and populism in various parts of the world, including in Europe and in America and elsewhere. At that time, the global multilateral system, the UN system was really being challenged", she added emphasising the need for dialogue and cooperation to address emerging challenges. Ms Hara highlighted the forum's role in the early stages of developing norms, laying the groundwork for future international treaties.

Ms Chiara Rosselli introduced the Open European Dialogue, a unique platform fostering constructive exchanges between elected members of parliament. Presenting the forum's impact, she narrated stories of politicians reconsidering alliances and gaining nuanced perspectives on issues like the refugee crisis.

The conversation then pivoted to the challenging task of measuring the success of forums. Yiannis Thomatos acknowledged the difficulty in quantifying impact directly but emphasised the energy and relationships forged during the forums, with long-term results surfacing over time.

Alena Kudzko noted the importance of continuity, ensuring that ideas discussed during forums lead to actionable outcomes, with success measured by the resonance of these ideas among decision-makers.

Fabienne Hara shared a concrete example of the Paris Peace Forum's impact, citing the Net Zero Space Initiative born from a working group discussion. This initiative, now supported by over 60 entities, demonstrates the forum's ability to catalyse collaborative efforts on global issues.

Chiara Rosselli suggested "For us the impact, the sort of success that we always look out for, is our members developing a more profound understanding of the political positions of others", citing examples of political perspectives evolving and collaborations transcending traditional party lines.

As the discussion turned to the issue of funding, Ms Roselli stressed the importance of diversifying sponsorship sources and maintaining a balance that ensures independence. Similarly, Mr Thomatos highlighted the necessity of checks and balances within forums, ensuring sponsors do not unduly shape the narrative.

Ms Kudzko underscored GLOBSEC's pride in maintaining independence, achieved by avoiding reliance on a single major donor. The organisation's diverse funding mix serves as a self-regulating mechanism, preventing disproportionate influence, she said.



Public and private sector synergies are essential to Cyprus' technological future

FIRESIDE DISCUSSION ON TECHNOLOGY

- Philippos Hadjizacharias, Deputy Minister of Research, Innovation and Digital Policy
- Stylianos Lambrou, CEO & Co-founder, Heart Group

Mr Philippos Hadjizacharias, Deputy Minister of Research, Innovation, and Digital Policy, and Stylianos Lambrou, CEO of the Heart Group, and founder of the Reflect Festival, engaged in a conversation regarding the synergy between state and business regarding the technology sector, as well as Cyprus' technological future.

Lambrou started the discussion by commending the Deputy Minister on his work so far and acknowledging that he has brought much-needed entrepreneurial experience and managerial skills to a role that is traditionally associated with technical expertise. "I think this position needed

someone whose entrepreneurial experience and management skills are more important than the technical skills for the responsibilities you have," Lambrou said.

Mr Hadjizacharias shed light on his vision of the ministry, framing it as a unique entity. He emphasised that the ministry operated as a company with a distinct mission: "We're working with the intention of producing more and more services, and most importantly, to improve the well-being of our citizens."

Lambrou, acknowledging the challenges in governance, stressed the potential of technology to streamline processes, stating, "However, throughout the years, the system, personally, I think, is quite broken. It needs to become more efficient, because I think with technology, with less input, we can get more output."

The Deputy Minister responded by outlining his strategy for making the public sector more agile and responsive, emphasising the importance of teamwork and efficiency. He stated, "Our goal is to work as a team. And what is a team? Team means together, everyone achieves more. So, what I always keep saying to them is that this is my mentality: lead without a title. My door is always open."

Transitioning into the pivotal role of private-sector collaboration, Lambrou highlighted the importance of public-private partnerships. He shared insights from his role in Tech Island: "As a co-founder of Tech Island, which is a non-profit organisation, we're trying to accelerate the growth of the tech ecosystem in Cyprus, we're seeking to work with the government because we really believe in the public and private partnership," Lambrou stated.

The Deputy Minister expressed gratitude for such initiatives, emphasising the need to attract more international companies and investors.

Leveraging Entrepreneurship for Growth

Lambrou, as a co-founder of Tech Island, delved into the importance of fostering entrepreneurs and a mindset shift towards entrepreneurship. He stressed the need for Cypriots to embrace risk-taking and learn from failure, especially in the tech sector.

"My question is, how important is it to develop entrepreneurs in Cyprus, and how entrepreneurship can help the ecosystem to grow?" Lambrou asked.

The Deputy Minister responded by acknowledging the pivotal role of the private sector, stating, "First of all, allow me to say that the private sector is the cornerstone of the economy. Without the private sector, there is no economy." He highlighted the significance of cultural change, especially in promoting STEM subjects from an early stage in education.

Legislation and Innovation Branding

In the final segment, Lambrou posed two interconnected questions: the status of legislation supporting innovation and strategies to enhance Cyprus's innovation brand.

Concerning legislation, the Deputy Minister shared a positive update, announcing progress in the spin-off legislation, a crucial step in facilitating innovation and commercialisation.

"From my ministry, the job is finished. Yes, we've done everything required for the spin-off

legislation. We have given everything to the Ministry of Finance. I'm more than confident that it is going to be submitted," the Deputy Minister confirmed.

On the topic of enhancing Cyprus's innovation brand, the Deputy Minister unveiled plans for specialised sandboxes and the imperative need for data centres in Cyprus. He also emphasised the necessity of flexibility in the banking system to cater to foreign investors effectively.

In his concluding message, the Deputy Minister conveyed a positive outlook, stressing the government's commitment to digital services and fostering collaboration between the public and private sectors.



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EU should prioritise debt sustainability and climate-related spending

Knowledge partner:



CYPRUS
ECONOMIC
SOCIETY

WILL THE EU FISCAL FRAMEWORK REFORM SUCCEED?

- Zsolt Darvas, Senior Fellow at Bruegel and Senior Research Fellow at Corvinus University of Budapest
- Ioannis Tirkides, Economics Research Manager, Bank of Cyprus

In a discussion on the European Union's fiscal framework reform, moderated by Ioannis Tirkides, Economics Research Manager at the Bank of Cyprus, Mr Zsolt Darvas, a senior fellow at Bergen and an associate fellow at Corvinus University in Budapest examined the proposed changes and their potential impact on member states.

Mr Darvas began the discussion by highlighting the pressing need for reform in the EU's fiscal rules. He pointed out that the current rules were dysfunctional, overly complex, and focused too much on year-to-year surveillance. "Despite their intentions, the existing framework failed to achieve sustainable fiscal positions during economic downturns," he said. Darvas argued that the proposed reform presented a significant departure from the current system by focusing on public debt sustainability in the medium and long term.

The core of the new proposal requires member states to submit medium-term plans, known as fiscal structural plans, ensuring that public debt-to-GDP ratios decline over a 10-year period, even under stress scenarios, he explained. This approach, according to Mr Darvas, aligns with economic logic and offers a more effective way to assess a country's fiscal health.

However, Mr Darvas acknowledged that there were concerns about the reliability of debt sustainability analyses and the potential for manipulation. To address these concerns, the European Commission introduced several safeguards. One of these safeguards, the "no backloading condition," prevents the postponement of fiscal adjustments to later years. While Mr Darvas supported this safeguard, he expressed reservations about others, such as the "debt safeguard," which required a lower debt-to-GDP ratio after four years.

During the discussion, Mr. Tirkides raised concerns about the potential impact of the new framework on government budgets, particularly in light of various urgent spending priorities. He emphasised the challenges posed by climate investments, increased interest costs, and rising defence spending.

Mr Darvas agreed that these challenges were significant but cautioned against opening the door to numerous exemptions from fiscal rules, as it could lead to a lack of fiscal discipline.

Regarding the urgency of climate investments, Darvas argued that climate change was irreversible and demanded immediate attention. He highlighted the need for massive public spending on climate initiatives, which might be hindered by the new fiscal rules. "Failing to meet climate targets," he warned, "could set a poor example for other countries worldwide".



Unless we work together as a global community, we can't achieve our net-zero targets on time

Knowledge partner:



CLIMATE CHANGE, THE EU AND THE WORLD (ENGLISH) ECONOMY

- Heather Grabbe, Non-resident fellow at Bruegel and Visiting Professor at University College London
- Ioannis Tirkides, Economics Research Manager, Bank of Cyprus

In a virtual discussion on climate change, the EU, and the global landscape, Ms Heather Grabbe, a non-resident fellow at Bruegel and visiting professor at UCL, addressed the critical issues surrounding climate policies and their economic implications.

Heather Grabbe commenced the discussion by stressing the global nature of climate change,

noting that carbon emissions recognise no borders. “Climate change is a global issue. Unless we work together as a global community, we can’t achieve our net-zero targets on time,” she highlighted.

The conversation delved into the transformation of climate policies from a protective agenda to a transformative one. The severe physical impacts of climate change, exemplified by extreme weather events, have elevated climate policies in political and economic priorities. The urgency is underscored by the costs of not achieving net-zero targets, making it imperative to integrate climate considerations into economic policy debates.

Highlighting the magnitude of the impending transformation, Ms Grabbe identified a shift from a system focused solely on promoting GDP growth and efficiency to one requiring increased resilience. “This transformation,” she argued, “would involve phasing out old industries and welcoming new ones, redefining the global industrial landscape.”

The issue of supply chain resilience emerged as a key concern, especially in the context of renewable energy production. With renewable energy often being locally generated, industrial production is likely to relocate to regions with abundant renewable resources, altering traditional industrial geographies. This shift, however, brings about challenges of dependency, particularly on China, a dominant player in the supply of critical raw materials for clean technology.

Ms Grabbe also emphasised the need for dematerialisation, reducing overall resource use to combat climate change. The current lack of focus on resource efficiency, she warned, poses a significant challenge, with resource consumption having tripled since 1970.

The discussion concluded with a call for global cooperation, acknowledging the asymmetry in carbon emissions and their impact. As Europe takes strides towards achieving its emissions goals, it is crucial to consider the embedded emissions associated with imported goods.



Intelligent targeting can revolutionise social policy by maximising outcomes and minimising costs

Theodore Panayiotou, Rector, University of Limassol

In a keynote speech, Theodore Panayiotou, the Rector of the University of Limassol, delved into the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) in reshaping social policy.

Commencing his speech, Dr Panayiotou argued that traditional horizontal policies, while widely employed, often yielded mixed results, and incurred high costs.

The speaker argued that targeted social policies have gained prominence among policymakers

as a solution, as identified by the Harvard professor and economist, Amartya Sen.

Drawing from Professor Sen's work, Dr Panayiotou asserted, "The more accurate the subsidy is in reaching the poor, the less the wastage, and the less it costs to achieve the desired objective."

However, the speech highlighted the inherent complexities of targeting, including information asymmetries, moral hazards, administrative costs, and the assumption of passive beneficiaries. Based on Professor Sen's insights, Panayiotou identified key challenges, including the risk of fraud, invasion of privacy, and the social costs associated with investigation and policing.

Moving on, the Rector urged a shift in perspective, emphasising the active agency of recipients in shaping policy outcomes. Therefore, he proposed a solution: leveraging AI for intelligent targeting.

Through data-driven decision-making, targeted assistance, and fraud detection, AI can optimise resource allocation, minimise waste, and ensure support reaches those who need it most, he explained. "Doing more with less through intelligent targeting and preventative policy," as he described. This approach, according to Dr Panayiotou, hinges on proactive measures and precise resource allocation facilitated by AI, a paradigm shift crucial for achieving social policy objectives while minimising costs. Dr Panayiotou also noted the need for careful consideration of privacy, ethics, and transparency in AI-driven social policy.

Transitioning to preventative policies, Panayiotou highlighted the proverb, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Incorporating artificial intelligence for prediction, prevention, and intelligent targeting "not only saves financial resources but also improves the overall quality of life for individuals and communities," he added.

Concluding, the speech outlined specific areas of public policy, including healthcare, education, employment, environmental protection, and poverty alleviation, where AI can revolutionise effects and maximise outcomes.

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International tax secrecy: Steps have been taken but still a long way to go to improve Cyprus' reputation

Knowledge partner:

EU-TAX
Observatory

CYPRUS' ROLE IN TAX SECRECY: POLICIES FOR THE FUTURE

- **Christiana Erotokritou**, Deputy Chair Democratic Party - MP - Chairperson Parliamentary Committee on Financial and Budgetary Affairs, Democratic Party - House of Representatives
- **Kyriakos Iordanou**, General Manager, Institute of Certified Public Accountants of Cyprus
- **Panayiotis Nicolaides**, Director of Research, EU Tax Observatory, Paris School of Economics
- **Paul Monaghan**, Chief Executive, Fair Tax Foundation
- **Yiannis Seitanides**, Chief Finance Editor, Politis, Daily Newspaper

In a panel discussion on Cyprus' role in international tax secrecy, moderated by Yiannis Seitanides, Chief Finance Editor of Politis, participants from the fields of politics, finance and accounting shared their insights on the country's challenges and prospects, as it battles to improve its reputation.

Member of Parliament and Deputy Chair of the Democratic Party (DIKO), Christiana Erotokritou began by acknowledging past mistakes related to Cyprus's financial policies. However, she expressed confidence in the ongoing efforts to rectify these issues, to position Cyprus as "a legitimate and responsible hub for doing business regionally and globally."

Emphasising the commitment to combat illegal activities, Erotokritou highlighted the positive assessment from MONEYVAL, showcasing Cyprus's progress in achieving zero non-compliant ratings. She outlined legislative measures, including the law for the prevention and suppression of money laundering and the mandatory UBO registry. Ms Erotokritou concluded by affirming the importance of integrity and transparency in shaping Cyprus's future.

Following, Kyriakos Iordanou, General Manager of the Institute of Certified Public Accountants of Cyprus, provided insights from an industry perspective. Mr Iordanou underscored the importance of tax transparency and the country's efforts to align with international standards. "We are moving towards a much more open, transparent, and robust financial services system," he stressed.

The discussion then shifted to tax evasion, with Panayiotis Nicolaidis, Director of Research at the EU Tax Observatory shedding light on four key areas: offshore wealth, foreign offshore real estate, profit shifting by multinationals, and tax schemes. Nicolaidis reminded that addressing tax evasion is a policy choice and called for further action to tackle these issues.

Paul Monaghan, Chief Executive of the Fair Tax Foundation echoed concerns about Cyprus's reputation, stating, "Cyprus is still viewed by many as both a tax haven, a secrecy jurisdiction, and a centre of corruption."

Monaghan urged Cyprus to end its opposition to progressive EU directives, reopen corporate beneficial ownership registers, and allocate resources for robust implementation of existing legislation.



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Sustainability: Community-driven solutions could be the way to go

Knowledge partner:



INNOVATION FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE: THE INTERSECTION OF STEM, CIRCULAR ECONOMY, AND EU-FUNDED INITIATIVES FOR A BETTER FUTURE

- Manuel Antonio Mota Nunes, Deputy Mayor and Councillor for Environment, Nature and Climate Action
- Alexandros Charalambides, Associate Professor, Cyprus University of Technology
- Demetris Petrides, Industrial Extension Officer, Circular Economy Unit, Industry & Technology Service, Ministry of Energy, Commerce and Industry
- Xenia Karekla, Sustainable Urban Mobility Consultant & Associate Director
- Andreas Kasis, Research Lecturer, KIOS Center of Excellence
- Olia Tsivitanidou, Co-founder & Managing Director, Inquirium
- Christina Achilleos, Founder/CEO, InnoEUSphere

Mr Manuel Antonio Mota Nunes, Deputy Mayor of Lousada and Councillor for Environment, Nature and Climate Action kicked off the discussion by talking about the various projects that his municipality implemented implicating the local community, its specificities and tradition. One of the projects concerned organic waste management (people composting at home), biodiversity (paying people to keep trees alive) and hydraulic energy production (repairing abandoned water mills). He then went into detail about the water mills project, explaining its value for the community, due to the mills' historical importance. He explained that "the restored mills led to increased tourism and the restoration of the landscape and the riverbanks." In closing, he argued that this is a project that can be done in Cyprus, as the country boasts a large number of water mills.

Ms Xenia Karekla, Sustainable Urban Mobility Consultant & Associate Director argued that local authorities must first consult with the local communities, or else their sustainability interventions will not succeed. She highlighted the risk of implementing "interventions that are not created with the end-users in mind, as they may not align with people's daily lives and preferences." She also talked about the risk of setting up a tram system in Nicosia that does not serve the people's needs and essentially becomes an empty object that moves around the city, taking up space. She then went on to speak about a couple of projects she was involved with - specifically a mobility hub system and an accessibility project - which highlighted the importance of designing projects with the needs of the target community in mind.

Karekla added that she sees a "huge mismatch between societal needs, government implementations, and international actions." She said that while sustainability has focused on public transportation, which is profitable for governments after Covid-19, people are either working from home or walking and biking more, rendering this vision rather backwards.

Dr Alexandros Charalambides, Associate Professor, Cyprus University of Technology agreed that "the participatory approach is the way to go." He also argued that the tram system is not going to be a useful mode of transportation for Nicosia and that it's the most useless element of the country's mobility strategy. He then went on to report that the biggest problem academics face is that "they are not in touch with the businesses and people who are going to use their technology."

He stressed the need to fund research that will actually solve problems and reduce bureaucracy and the "ticking of boxes" in each industry, which makes actors sight of what's important.

Mr Demetris Petrides, Industrial Extension Officer, Circular Economy Unit, Industry & Technology Service at the Ministry of Energy, Commerce and Industry talked about the ministry's strategies and action plans, including the New Industrial Policy and the National Circular Economy Action Plan. To draft these plans, the Ministry brought together organisations, federations, academia, and key stakeholders.

Dr Andreas Kasis, Research Lecturer, KIOS Centre of Excellence talked about his experience with being awarded the Marie Curie Fellowship and how it helped him become an independent researcher and see how his academic research could be implemented in reality. He argued that "in order to achieve the green transition, we need to have a significant penetration from renewable energy sources in our electricity network." However, renewable energy production is hard to predict and said that the project's aim was to create suitable controllers in thermostatic units to prevent the power system from collapsing.

Ms Olia Tsivitanidou, Co-founder & Managing Director, of Inquirium Ltd said that the key takeaway from the discussion was that “to have real impact we need to engage the local community and people we are targeting and have close collaboration between academia, industry, and the government.”



Urgent need to strengthen legislation combatting human trafficking

Knowledge partner:



THE TRUTH ABOUT BUSINESS: THE PREVALENCE OF MODERN SLAVERY ACROSS THE BUSINESS SECTORS AND WHAT WE MUST DO TO ERADICATE IT

- Alexandros Alexandrou, Director of the Department of Labour
- Michelle Brewer, Judge
- Jane Lasonder, ISTAC member, Speaker, author founder Red Alert task force
- Kevin Hyland, International Expert on Modern Slavery, Santa Marta Group
- Dave Adamson, Lead Standards Development Manager, British Standards Institution, London
- Keith Lewis, Consultant Survivor Leader, British Standards Institute
- Rachel Witkin, Counter-Trafficking Practice Consultant
- Katerina Stephanou, Modern slavery compliance consultant; Founder, CEO, Step Up Stop Slavery

Ms Katerina Stephanou, Modern Slavery Compliance Consultant and CEO of Step Up-Stop Slavery kicked off the discussion, speaking about the organisation's aim for the creation of a National Referral Mechanism in Cyprus to effectively tackle the issue of trafficking. She went on to refer to some figures, mentioning that there are about 50 million people around the world, living in "modern slavery".

Mr Alexandros Alexandrou, Director of the Department of Labour said that "sexual exploitation and labour exploitation are the most common forms of human trafficking in the Republic of Cyprus." He also stressed that our country "has ratified all the international and European conventions concerning human trafficking" and went on to mention Cyprus' actions to combat trafficking (establishment of a multidisciplinary coordination group against trafficking, adoption of a national action plan, creation of a special division in the Cyprus police dedicated to identifying victims of trafficking, state shelter for victims). He also said that all victims who are third-country nationals have full access to employment during the judicial examination of their case, while victims who wish to work can visit the public employment services, where they are provided with counselling and professional guidance to find suitable work.

Mr Kevin Hyland, International Expert on Modern Slavery, Santa Marta Group stressed that today's complex supply chains, which are riddled with human trafficking, point to the need to take action at the legislative level. He mentioned examples of jurisdictions (such as Germany, EU, France, the UK, Canada, the US and Australia), promoting or implementing laws that oblige companies to make sure that their global supply chains are free of trafficking and exploitation by penalising non-compliance. He stressed the need to start treating human trafficking as a serious crime comparable to terrorism or corruption and for a shift from project-based approaches to long-term policies.

As there was a technical problem, Mr Keith Lewis, Consultant Survivor Leader at British Standards Institute was not able to share his experience of being trafficked for eight years in forced labour and becoming a survivor leader himself. However, another member of the panel, Ms Rachel Witkin, Counter-Trafficking Practice Consultant, stepped in to tell his story. She said that in her conversation with him, he described his journey "from homelessness to working as a builder for 10 to 12 hours, seven days a week for a trafficker who was violent and controlling." He was working in hazardous working conditions, often in plain sight of clients, as he was working in their own houses while living in a shed with no access to running water or a toilet. The trafficker, who was also often defrauding customers, would intimidate the workers to stop them from speaking to the Police. The survivor, Keith, now works as a leader against human trafficking at the British Standards Institute and advocates for the importance of linking health and safety licensing with anti-trafficking measures.

Mr Dave Adamson, Lead Standards Development Manager, British Standards Institution, London spoke about the development of an ISO standard on human trafficking and modern slavery. He argued that "standards offer an agreed-upon terminology, processes, procedures, protocols, and methodologies and can complement relevant laws and legislations". He also talked about the recently published British Standard on Modern Slavery, which can help organisations understand what modern slavery is, referring to the organisation's aim to use it as a basis for the development of an international standard. It is expected that the ISO standard will be developed within two to four years. The contributions of survivors like Keith will be instrumental in this effort. The document that will be agreed upon, will enable all types and sizes of organisations to recognise instances of modern slavery.

Judge Michelle Brewer said that over the past few years, businesses that engage in human rights violations have started being called into account, citing the cases of NGOs in Europe who have filed complaints of such violations to the International Criminal Courts. She added that in the UK, civil cases are being brought against businesses concerning human rights violations overseas. She went on to cite the case of British American Tobacco, in which Malawian farmers sued for unjust enrichment due to forced labour. She argued that this “signals a trend of businesses being held accountable in their home countries for overseas violations.” She pointed out that even if the case doesn’t end up going to court, the reputational damage from facing litigation alone could be enough to deter companies from using exploitative practices. She then went on to refer to the case of a German wholesaler – whose exploitative practices caused Pakistani workers to die in a factory fire – in which, despite legal obstacles, public pressure from litigation led to their compensation. The judge concluded by asserting that businesses need to take responsibility, as failure to do so will result in reputational damage due to their exposure in court.

Jane Lasonder, survivor, ISTAC member, Speaker, author and founder of Red Alert task force urged people to open their eyes and not overlook individuals who they suspect may be victims of exploitation. She said that people must start caring about the “invisible” people they encounter in their daily lives and shared her own story of exploitation as a child. She talked about the fact that despite going to school every day with visible signs of neglect, violence and malnourishment, no one ever asked if she was okay or if she was safe. Nor was she asked any questions by the doctors and nurses when she visited the hospital for serious injuries. When she ended up living in the streets of London when she was still underage, nobody cared that she was drunk and not at school. She closed with a call to action, urging people to take action when they see someone they suspect is a victim of slavery and ask them a few questions to determine whether they need to be taken to safety, adding that NGOs like Step Up Stop Slavery can provide resources and information on how to proceed.



Insights on Democracy's Erosion and Paths to Renewal

FIRESIDE DISCUSSION: A WORLD OF INSECURITY: DEMOCRATIC DISENCHANTMENT IN RICH AND POOR COUNTRIES

- **Pranab Bardhan, Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Economics, University of California, Berkeley**
- **Ioannis Tirkides, Economics Research Manager, Bank of Cyprus**

Mr Ioannis Tirkides, Economics Research Manager at the Bank of Cyprus, and Pranab Bardhan, Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Economics at the University of California, Berkeley, discussed the decline of democracy and the rise of extremism and the far-right across the globe, drawing on Dr Bardhan's book entitled "A World of Security, Democratic Disenchantment in Rich and Poor Countries."

Dr Bardhan opened his presentation by outlining four key distinctions of his book compared to others addressing similar themes. Firstly, he said that his book takes a comprehensive global approach, examining not only Europe and North America but also developing countries, with a

particular focus on India, Turkey, and Brazil. As he stated, "My book covers not just Europe and North America, but also developing countries. In many developing countries, the same problem of erosion of democracy or democratic disenchantment exists."

Secondly, while many economists attribute the erosion of democracy to economic inequality, Bardhan contends that insecurity, encompassing both economic and cultural dimensions, plays a more significant role in this phenomenon. He pointed out that working-class individuals often rally behind billionaire right-wing leaders, challenging the idea that inequality is the primary driver of this trend. As Bardhan emphasised, "The major issue that I focus on in my book is insecurity, not inequality. That's the title of the book, 'A world of insecurity.'"

Thirdly, Bardhan scrutinised China's alternative model of authoritarian capitalism, arguing that it is not the right solution, even though it possesses certain strengths. He explained, "Chinese provide an alternative model of authoritarian capitalism. And I showed that that is not the right model." Finally, he added that his book offers both a diagnosis of the problems and solutions, advocating for a rejuvenation of social democracy, particularly emphasising anti-monopoly policies and labour's role in corporate governance.

The discussion then turned to two critical aspects of Bardhan's research. Ioannis Tirkides raised questions about the correlation between economic and cultural security and the impact of labour's presence in corporate governance on innovation.

Bardhan acknowledged the interplay between economic and cultural security, noting that while economic insecurity can sometimes drive cultural insecurity, the two are not always causally linked. As he noted, "Sometimes economic insecurity drives cultural insecurity, but I think it is not just that."

Regarding labour's role in corporate governance and its impact on innovation, Bardhan stressed that evidence suggests labour representation in governance does not hinder profitability or innovation. He highlighted that there are different forms of innovation, including incremental innovation, which is less disruptive and often emerges from collaborations with workers.

Dr Bardhan also noted that certain social democracy measures, such as job security, can give workers a stake in the company, fostering constructive contributions to innovation. He pointed out, "Labor's representation in the corporate governing boards will, can influence not just the rate of innovation, but the pattern of innovation."

Mr Tirkides further probed into the relationship between job security and labour's influence in corporate governance, pointing out differences between countries like Germany and Japan, which offer more job security and have a history of strong labour influence, and other European countries where labour tends to be more alienated from corporate decision-making.

Bardhan agreed with Tirkides, highlighting that social democracy often involves providing some level of job security, which can incentivise workers to become stakeholders in the success of their companies. Concluding, he cited Denmark as an example of a country with active labour market policies that provide support and retraining to workers, ultimately fostering a stakeholder-oriented approach to capitalism.



Courts play a crucial role in balancing transparency and individual rights

Christos Clerides, President of Cyprus Bar Association

In a keynote speech Mr. Christos Clerides, President of the Cyprus Bar Association, brought to light the concept of legal privilege, that mandates the confidentiality of information shared between lawyers and their clients.

Mr Clerides stressed the duty of lawyers as “gatekeepers,” responsible for upholding this privilege while navigating legal obligations imposed by authorities.

The President of the Bar spoke about how legal developments, particularly focusing on direct reporting obligations tied to cross-border arrangements, with an eye on tax implications, can put lawyers in a difficult place. “This places lawyers in a precarious position where they must balance their duty to maintain legal privilege with the obligation to report information that may

have tax implications," he said.

In his address, Mr Clerides also navigated through the exceptions and challenges that arise within the legal framework, especially when obligations intersect with rights. The obligation to report money laundering emerged as a focal point. The court established that reporting money laundering did not disproportionately infringe upon legal privilege, demonstrating the delicate line between compliance and confidentiality, he noted.

However, the President of the Cyprus Bar Association highlighted exceptions, such as defending clients against accusations of tax fraud, where legal privilege prevails. The balancing act between the public interest in transparency and the protection of individual rights emerged as a recurrent theme throughout the discussion.

As he summarised, "It is essential to recognise that the courts play a pivotal role in determining the extent of legal privilege. The courts assess the balance between the public interest in transparency and the protection of individual rights."



Cyprus has taken steps to fight corruption and implement sanctions against Russia

Irfan Siddiq, High Commissioner of the UK to Cyprus

British High Commissioner to Cyprus, Irfan Siddiq, praised the cooperation of Cyprus as regards the implementation of sanctions against Russia while acknowledging Nicosia's efforts to fight corruption.

In his speech, Siddiq, referred to "open and closed societies, the democracies and authoritarian regimes," noting that over the last few decades, there has been a rise in authoritarian states and there are more challenges to the rule of law. He spoke about the rise of China, populism in the West, and the war of Russia against Ukraine.

Referring to the UK's actions after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, he said that the British government has implemented sanctions and measures against sanctions evaders.

"In order to protect the rule of law," he said, the United Kingdom is "building deeper partnerships, including with Cyprus." He noted that over the past year, they have significantly wrapped up the collaboration with the Republic of Cyprus government with the aim to ensure that financial sanctions are enforced.

He explained that the United Kingdom is providing expertise to Cyprus, particularly to the Ministry of Finance on sanction enforcement.

He added that there is a lot that can be achieved by working together and that progress has been made. Collectively, he said, "these efforts and broader efforts ensure the integrity of the liberal democratic model and the integrity of the commitment to open societies."



Citizens expect strengthening of the rule of law in Cyprus

Irene Charalambides, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Vice-President, Special Representative on Fighting Corruption, House of Representatives of the Republic of Cyprus

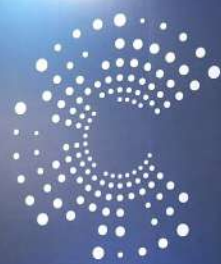
Irene Charalambides, Member of the House of Representatives, Vice-President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and Special Representative of the Assembly for Combating Corruption stressed citizens' expectations regarding the reinforcement of the rule of law in Cyprus by political leaders.

During her address, Ms Charalambides highlighted the fundamental importance of having sufficient checks and balances in place. She noted that the Parliament should be capable of providing solutions to their absence by leveraging its authority to exercise parliamentary oversight and promoting necessary legislative and constitutional amendments.

Charalambides also addressed the central role of the Attorney General's office in the architecture of oversight and checks, particularly in efforts to prevent the recurrence of serious scandals that have negatively impacted the country's economy and international credibility.

The parliamentarian further asserted that when the strict separation of powers, as envisaged by the Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus, translates into a lack of effective checks and balances, it fails to meet the transparency requirements of today's society. She stated, "The view that the Parliament cannot properly scrutinise and criticise the work of the executive branch is outdated. It excessively restricts the scope of parliamentary oversight. It cannot address the concerns of modern citizens, where the prevailing trend at international and European levels is the enhancement of transparency and accountability at all levels."

Additionally, Charalambides underscored the necessity of continuing efforts to strengthen the judiciary, the rule of law, and transparency to ensure that Cyprus becomes a state where the powers of each institution are monitored and balanced.



Cyprus Forum.

Learn more together



Laws regulating lobbying are essential for restoring trust in politics, but proper implementation is of paramount importance

Knowledge partner:



REGULATION OF LOBBYING

- Elena G. Patera, Member of the Independent Authority Against Corruption
- Demetris Demetriou, Member of the Parliament of Cyprus, Chairperson of the Committee on Institutions, Merit and the Commissioner for Administration (Ombudsman)
- Antonis Frangoudis, Director, Economic Affairs and Administration Department, Cyprus Employers and Industrialists Federation (OEB)
- Nikolas Shiakallis, Financial Consultant - Treasurer of C.I.F., Cyprus Integrity Forum
- Angelos Kaskanis, Executive Director, Transparency International Greece
- Anna Damaskou, Adjunct Faculty - European Institute of Management and Finance

Anna Damaskou, Adjunct Faculty at the European Institute of Management and Finance and moderator of the panel started off the discussion by defining lobbying as “any direct or indirect communication with public officials or politicians, aimed at influencing them in order to make decisions that serve the interests of a specific entity or special interest group.”

Describing lobbyists as the “eyes, ears, and mouth” of the entities they represent, she highlighted their role in decision-making processes using an analogy from the US, where it is estimated that around 3 billion dollars are spent each year on lobbying. Making mention of the ‘revolving doors’ phenomenon, she noted that more than 40% of American legislators are employed in the sector after they leave elected office.

On her part, Ms Elena G. Patera, Member of the Independent Authority Against Corruption, outlined the watchdog’s mission, aimed at enhancing transparency in public decision-making processes. She explained that Cypriot legislation around lobbying provides for the mandatory registration of all special interest group representatives on a public register. Such representatives must also disclose their lobbying activities, including the intent and content of meetings, through biannual reports. State officials are similarly required to submit reports of their communications with lobbyists.

Mr Demetris Demetriou, Member of the Parliament and Chairperson of the House Committee on Institutions, Merit, and the Commissioner for Administration (Ombudsman), described the bill on regulating lobbying which was voted in 2022 in Cyprus as a “milestone” in the political life of the country. “I feel liberated, not constrained because I will finally be obliged to report meetings that I currently either avoid or undertake with hesitation,” he said.

However, Mr Demetriou urged caution, noting that the law’s success hinges on proper implementation, standing as a testament to whether it can truly bring about a shift in how people perceive political processes.

Speaking on behalf of the Cyprus Employers and Industrialists Federation (OEB), Antonis Frangoudis, Director of the Economic Affairs and Administration Department of the organisation, noted the pivotal role that lobbying plays for special interest groups.

A “lawful act of political participation,” as he called it, lobbying, provides access to decision-makers while enabling them to learn the realities on the ground by industry stakeholders. “Such an inclusive policy-making process provides opportunities for better informed and ultimately better policies,” he noted.


Mr Nikolas Shiakallis, Financial Consultant and Treasurer of the Cyprus Integrity Forum (CIF) noted that the recent legislation regulating lobbying, as well as the creation of the Independent Authority Against Corruption, are indicative of a society which requests a catharsis and stressed the need for a proper implementation of the law.

Likewise, Angelos Kaskanis, Executive Director of Transparency International Greece, said that while on paper, there exist laws which regulate transparency around lobbying in the neighbouring country, implementation lags behind.



Sweeping reforms needed to strengthen transparency and accountability in the Attorney General's Office

Knowledge partner:

Centre for Good Governance 

THE ROLE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL AND CHECKS AND BALANCES

- James Hamilton, Independent consultant, Venice Commission
- Costas Clerides, Attorney General of the Republic of Cyprus (Ret'd), Member of the Supreme Court of Cyprus (Ret'd)
- Achilleas Emilianides, Professor & Dean, School of Law, University of Nicosia
- Nicos Tornaritis, Parliamentary Leader of DISY and Chairman of the Legal Affairs, Justice and Public Order Committee, House of Representatives Republic of Cyprus
- Elena Kleopa, Attorney of the Republic
- Panagiota Vatalou, Presiding Judge/Head of the First Instance Court of Chania
- Christina Karakosta, Policy Officer, European Commission, DG Justice, Rule of Law Unit
- Louis Telemachou, Ambassador, Secretary General of the General Secretariat of European Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Michael Tsangarides, Political Economy Student, Princeton University

In a candid reflection on his time in office, Former Attorney General of Cyprus, Costas Clerides shared his insights on the “enormous powers” of the role in Cyprus and the issues stemming from their concentration in one person.

“Where there is a concentration of many powers in one body, where there is a lack of control, transparency, and accountability, these violate the basic principles of the rule of law,” he stated.

Mr Clerides expressed concerns about the potential for conflict of interest and the absence of checks on decisions made by the Attorney General. “One cannot be a legal adviser to a minister and at the same time examine the possibility that he may have committed an offence,” he explained.

The former Attorney General continued with a personal note, expressing his desire for more rigorous scrutiny of the office’s decisions, potentially by the Supreme Court, to avoid unchecked authority. “Why should I feel that I took on all the weight and all the responsibility for a very serious decision and remain unchecked?” Clerides questioned, advocating for a system that provides for greater accountability.

Mr Clerides proposed an array of reforms based on his experiences, advocating for a transformation of the Attorney General’s role and a separation of powers into two different officials; one who would act as Attorney General and one who would act as legal advisor to the President and the Council of Ministers. “The separation of the Attorney General’s powers is essential. It is unacceptable for the dual powers to be combined in the hands of a single institution,” he insisted.

In his conclusive remarks, Clerides underscored the urgency for a serious inquiry into the matter. He quoted the eminent legal scholar Nikolaos Saripolos, stating, “The constitution exists for the state, not the state for the constitution.”

Nicos Tornaritis, the Parliamentary Leader of the Democratic Rally (DISY) and Chairman of the House Legal Affairs, Committee voiced concerns about the current state of the Republic of Cyprus’ institutions, stressing the need to enhance transparency and accountability.

Mr Tornaritis agreed with Mr Clerides that “it is inconceivable” for someone to simultaneously serve as a legal advisor to the President and head criminal investigations, which could potentially involve the President, implying a conflict of interest.

He advocated for a comprehensive review of the President’s powers and a clear separation of legal governmental advice from prosecutorial powers, reinforcing the call for a robust and independent legal system. He assured that the House Legal Affairs Committee is ready to discuss and implement checks and balances, especially concerning the powers of the President, which as he indicated are greater than those of states across the world.

On his part, Professor Achilleas Emilianides, Dean of the School of Law at the University of Nicosia, expressed his scepticism about the efficacy of separating powers as a universal remedy for legal imbalances, addressing the intricacies of the Cypriot society where close personal bonds are inevitable and influential. He said that it does not fully convince him “as a cure-all solution.”

Mr Emilianides argued that a critical starting point for any reform should be a reevaluation of the legal service’s autonomy. “Transparency is the focus, along with increasing the autonomy

of legal service officials,” he remarked, emphasising the need for real-time publication of legal opinions as a step toward greater transparency. He criticised the current state where such opinions remain unpublished, suggesting that officials, including the Attorney General, should be open to immediate scrutiny and academic analysis.

Mr Emilianides also doubted the potential efficacy of potential judicial reviews of the Attorney General’s decisions. He expressed concerns about further burdening the courts and questioned their role in addressing political considerations intertwined with legal decisions. “To hold that the court itself will make checks on powers, I think that *de facto* gives the court a different role because the court should not primarily consider political criteria,” he contended.

Concluding, he proposed an alternative: the implementation of a hierarchical control system within the legal service itself.

Echoing Mr Emilianides’ comments, Ms Elena Kleopa, Attorney of the Republic, argued that the introduction of judicial review of the Office of the Attorney General could place “an unbearable burden on the courts” due to the additional workload that it would create, while it could be constitutionally incompatible.

However, she acknowledged that while no hierarchical or judicial control over prosecutorial decisions currently exists, there is a recognition of “the need for some form of control,” in line with European standards. The Law Office is actively reviewing recommendations from the 2023 GRECO Rule of Law report, she said.

Panagiota Vatikidou, Head of the First Instance Court of Chania-Greece and Bureau Member at GRECO noted that the Council of Europe’s anti-corruption monitoring body urged Cyprus to strengthen the independence and accountability of its public prosecutors, including by providing for a possibility of review of the decision of the Attorney General not to prosecute or to discontinue proceedings.

She emphasised that the body found that due to its structure, the Office of the Attorney General in Cyprus had the potential to exert “undue influence” and urged the country to comply with GRECO’s suggestions.

Likewise, Christina Karakosta, Policy Officer at the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Justice, mentioned GRECO’s Rule of Law Report’s findings on Cyprus, highlighting the need to separate the Attorney General’s role as legal advisor to the President and Public Prosecutor.

“I think the timing is good for modernising the institution of the Attorney General in Cyprus, to restore the trust of citizens and improve the rule of law in the country,” she concluded.

Weighing in on the discussion, James Hamilton, Former Director of Public Prosecutions of Ireland and a former member of the Venice Commission—an advisory body of the Council of Europe on constitutional matters - emphasised the pivotal elements that define a well-functioning Prosecution Service.

He underscored the need for decisions to be made independently, devoid of undue political influence, much like the evolved systems in common law countries.

In the case of Ireland, Mr Hamilton recounted the conscious uncoupling of the roles of Chief Adviser to the government from the Chief Public Prosecutor to mitigate conflicts of interest—a reform echoed across common law jurisdictions. He noted that “the historic role of the English Attorney General” and similar positions were restructured to serve the public interest better, with no allegiance to the governing body’s objectives.

“You can’t serve two masters,” he added.



Transparency is a key Imperative in Global Diplomacy

Joshua Huck, Deputy Assistant Secretary, U.S. Department of State

In his speech, Joshua Huck, Deputy Assistant Secretary at the U.S. Department of State, emphasised the critical role of transparency in addressing political, economic, and diplomatic challenges, while commending Cyprus for its efforts in combatting corruption and reinforcing democratic governance.

He acknowledged that corruption is a pervasive issue affecting countries worldwide, including the United States. Mr Huck stated, "I want to be clear from the start that corruption is a problem that affects all countries, including my own. This is something that no one is immune to, and we all must face it."

Mr Huck stressed the importance of multilateral cooperation and bilateral relationships in the fight against corruption. He emphasised the need for countries to work together, saying, "We know that no one country can combat corruption alone. We want to work with as many

countries as possible to take on this threat and to promote transparency in any way that we can.”

Transparency, Mr Huck argued, is fundamental to ensuring government accountability. “We found to our cost that when our institutions lack transparency, those are exactly the situations that benefit malign actors,” he said.

The U.S. official also highlighted the role of independent media in promoting transparency and accountability. He commended the efforts of journalists and media outlets in bringing cases of abuse of power to light. Mr Huck recognised that protecting journalists from unjust libel suits or intimidation is crucial to maintaining a robust media that can contribute to social development, transparency, and peacebuilding.

Following, he praised the Republic of Cyprus for its commitment to upholding E.U. and U.N. sanctions against Russia. He commended the country’s proactive approach to investigating sanctions evasion cases and its transparent coordination with like-minded partners. Mr Huck stated, “The Republic of Cyprus’s performance in this regard is a testament to the resilience and innovative spirit of the Cypriot people and its economy.”

In closing, Mr Huck expressed hope that the Cyprus Forum would contribute to the ongoing global conversation on promoting transparency, fighting corruption, and strengthening democratic institutions.



The EU only stands to benefit from further transparency and youth participation

Knowledge partner:



EU PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS – WHY VOTING MATTERS?

- Demetris Papadakis, Member of the European Parliament
- Eleni Stavrou, Member of the European Parliament
- Maria Kola, President of the Cyprus Youth Council, Data Analyst
- Evie Theocharous, Board member at Cyprus Youth Diplomacy, “Former Cypriot Youth Delegate to the Council of Europe”
- Yağmur İzcan, Legal Advisor of the Human Rights Platform
- Georgina Athanasiou, President of the Executive Committee of Oxygeno

In a panel with young people from across the Cyprus divide, Member of the European Parliament (MEP) with the European People’s Party (EPP) Eleni Stavrou highlighted the vital functions of the European Parliament, emphasising its roles in the legislative process, budget adoption, and democratic oversight of European institutions.

Ms Stavrou also underscored the critical importance of citizen participation in electing representatives, to all levels of government, from local to supranational. "Apathy and lack of participation in elections," she said, "lead to rewarding politicians who do not represent us and with whom we do not agree on the direction of our country, and the European Union suffers for this."

Addressing transparency within the European Parliament and the Qatargate scandal, Ms Stavrou, while recognising the need for openness, expressed concerns that some measures proposed to address corruption might be excessively stringent, "tipping the balance to the other extreme." She noted that, as in any organisation, offenders exist, yet it's crucial to find a balanced approach to ensuring transparency.

On his part, MEP with the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) Demetris Papadakis reiterated the need for political participation, especially from young people.

"It is a fact that the youth are fed up with words, with appeals. You need to step forward and judge the politicians very harshly. To present your views. To demonstrate. To express yourselves as young people, as they do in the rest of Europe. If you do not claim your rights, you will not receive anything. Confront the established conservative mentalities which are holding us back," he said.

The MEP also highlighted the role the European Union plays in the daily lives of its citizens, from regulating environmental issues, such as with the Green Deal policies, to the Horizon Europe funding programme, and made special mention of the bloc's response to the coronavirus pandemic. "I can't dare to imagine what would have happened in Cyprus with the COVID-19 vaccination programme if we weren't a member of the European Union," he stressed.

Moreover, addressing Euroskepticism and the issue of EU enlargement, Papadakis said, "Often we are asked a contrived, in my opinion, question. Whether we want more or less Europe. I'll start with a motto that I always use - we want a better Europe."

Speaking on the role the EU can play in bringing Turkish and Greek Cypriots closer together, the S&D MP praised the election of Niyazi Kizilyurek as an MEP for Cyprus.

"With the election of our colleague Niyazi Kiziljirek as a Turkish Cypriot MEP, a message was sent that there we have no issue, because the majority of those who voted for Niyazi were Greek Cypriots, so there is no ethnic division as some people want to present it, those who cultivate the two-state solution," Mr Papadakis added.



“If you don’t vote, you don’t count”

Christiana Xenofontos, Vice President of the European Youth Forum

In a keynote speech, the Vice President of the European Youth Forum, Christiana Xenofontos, emphasised the role of young people in today’s rapidly changing society and called for enhanced youth participation in the European political landscape.

Drawing attention to Eurobarometer statistics showing that while 55% of young voters intend to cast their ballots, 67% of older generations do so, Xenofontos addressed the oft-repeated misconception about the youth: “Truth is that young people are not inactive citizens. They are more active but in other forms of activism, in other forms of participation.”

Highlighting the efforts of young activists and their significant contribution to social causes, Xenofontos mentioned, “Fridays For Future inspired the European Green Deal.” She further noted the involvement of 61% of young individuals in various youth clubs across the EU.

However, the disparity in representation is evident. Xenofontos pointed out the under-representation of the youth demographic in the European Parliament. “While one in five

Europeans is between the ages of 18 and 35, just one in fifteen MEPs are in the same age group," she stated.

Addressing the core of the issue, Xenofontos argued that young people's concerns often go unheard by political entities, leading to disillusionment with the voting process. She highlighted the need to see more young candidates on political party lists and articulated, "Young people need to be able to see their demographic represented in political power structures if they are to believe that political administrations can make positive changes on their behalf."

In a move to bridge this divide, the European Youth Forum has unveiled a 'Youth Manifesto,' she said. This manifesto encapsulates a comprehensive list of twenty demands targeting policy areas that could reshape Europe's future for its youth.

Xenofontos also urged a reevaluation of democratic participation restrictions, shedding light on countries where, at the age of 16, youths can work, drive, or even get married, yet lack the right to vote. "They pay tax - and have no say over how this is spent. They are criminally liable, yet have no say over the criminal justice system that governs this liability," she remarked.

She called for change and inclusivity, noting that young people bear the brunt of today's pressing issues. "From climate change to environmental degradation, the COVID-19 pandemic, and social and racial justice — all these areas have serious consequences for young people, now and in the future," she stated.

Xenofontos ended her speech on a hopeful note, encouraged by the advancements in Belgium and Germany where many youths will soon be voting for the first time. She concluded, "In order to truly engage the next generation of young people... we need to finally give them this right to vote."

Cyprus Forum.

Learn more together



Participatory budgeting could provide a path to democratic renewal

Knowledge partner:



PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING, PARTICIPATION AND MEDIA TRANSPARENCY

- Fernando Mendez, Senior Researcher, University of Zurich
- Bogdan Mihai Radu, Senior Lecturer (PhD), Babeş-Bolyai University, Romania
- Paschalia (Lia) Spyridou, Assistant Professor, Cyprus University of Technology
- Nikandros Ioannidis, PhD Candidate - Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Cyprus University of Technology, Cyprus
- Vasilis Manavopoulos, Project Manager, DEMOTEC
- Dia Evagorou, Communication Officer, Demotec Project and Officer at Communication, Marketing and Promotion Service, Cyprus University of Technology, Cyprus University of Technology

Experts from various countries delved into the concept of participatory budgeting (PB). The panel, comprised of political scientists, researchers, and journalists, aimed to foster an open dialogue on this practice that seeks to engage citizens directly in the policymaking process.

The panel featured Dr Bogdan Mihai Radu, a political scientist from Romania, who shared insights from a research project called “Demotech.” This large EU-funded initiative involved seven teams from six countries working together for over two and a half years to investigate the viability and potential outcomes of participatory budgeting.

He explained the essence of participatory budgeting, describing it as a scheme where citizens directly decide or are consulted about portions of a public budget. He noted that this is not a theoretical concept but a practical tool implemented in about 1700 cities worldwide, with notable instances in Madrid and Paris. Even Cyprus had tried it twice, he said.

“Participatory budgeting is a democratic innovation, engaging citizens and connecting them to the policymaking process. Citizens decide or are consulted about portions of a public budget, making them active participants in shaping their communities,” he noted.

The panel’s objective was to explore whether citizens actually wanted participatory budgeting in their cities. To answer this question, a large representative survey was conducted across various countries. shared that the initial findings indicated a diverse range of opinions, influenced by factors such as constitutional mandates, practical considerations, and the cultural context of each country.

Mr Vasilis Manavopoulos, a project manager for the “DEMOTEC” project funded by the Horizon 2020 scheme, highlighted the different forms of participatory budgeting tested on the ground in seven countries. “These variations,” he explained, “allowed for flexibility in implementation, including methods where citizens vote on infrastructure projects or propose their own.”

Dr Radu continued speaking about democratic malaise, noting the growing distrust of traditional democracies. He argued that participatory budgeting and other democratic innovations could serve as remedies, providing citizens with a more active role in decision-making. However, he cautioned about the potential threats, noting correlations between support for participatory budgeting and a preference for authoritarian politics in some countries.

The discussion then shifted to the media’s role in shaping perceptions of participatory budgeting. Mr Fernando Mendez, a senior researcher at the University of Zurich, highlighted the importance of framing analysis, examining how news stories and social media discussions framed PB. The findings indicated an overwhelmingly positive representation, with themes of democratic values and resource allocation dominating the discourse.

Nikandros Ioannidis discussed interviews with journalists from Cyprus, the UK, and Romania, exploring their willingness to cover participatory budgeting. The results revealed a positive inclination, with journalists seeing themselves as active facilitators of social change. The challenges identified included the lack of citizen interest, skills, and concerns about personal interest influencing participatory processes.



Internal controls can safeguard lives and prevent catastrophes

Anna Zavou-Christoforou, Commissioner of Internal Audit

In her presentation, Ms Anna Zavou-Christoforou, Commissioner of Internal Audit, highlighted the significance of internal controls and their potential to impact lives significantly. She stressed how weak internal controls can lead to catastrophes with far-reaching consequences.

She noted that a strong internal control system can mitigate losses across various domains, including financial losses, human lives, and valuable resources. The heart of Zavou-Christoforou's presentation revolved around the train collision in Tempa, Greece in February 2023, which led to the loss of more than 50 lives. This incident was initially attributed to "human error," but Ms Zavou-Christoforou argued that it was, in fact, a result of negligence in implementing the right controls at a railway station.

She emphatically stated, "In fact, it was negligence to apply the right controls at the railway

station. Such controls, if applied, this would have never happened.” Ms Zavou-Christoforou’s intent was to dissect the incident and identify the specific weaknesses in the internal control system that led to this catastrophe. A recurring theme in the presentation was the notion of identifying the weakest link in any system. She argued that finding this weak link was essential for preventing human intervention from resulting in a catastrophe.

The speaker also compared Greece’s system of educating train drivers with that of Germany’s, noting that whereas in Greece drivers are trained for two to three months, in Germany train drivers undergo a three-year intensive training programme.

Ms Zavou-Christoforou also addressed the Greek Prime Minister’s attribution of the Tempi incident to “human error” and emphasised the importance of accountability. She argued, “It wasn’t a human error; it was a result of a lack of internal controls. Internal controls have not yet been implemented.” She called for the implementation of vital internal controls, such as warning signs, automatic braking systems, emergency buttons, and other safety measures.

Concluding, Ms Zavou-Christoforou expressed concerns that without these controls, similar tragedies could occur in the future, with governments continuing to blame human error.



Stelios Foundation

DAY 1: 29 SEPT. 2023





Regional Reconciliation and the Abrahamic Accords: A New Era in Middle Eastern Politics?

Knowledge partner:



CHANGING CONTOURS IN THE NEW MIDDLE EAST

- Dr. Ebtesam Al-Ketbi, President, Emirates Policy Center
- Luigi Scazzieri, Senior Research Fellow, Centre for European Reform
- Zenonas Tziarras, Lecturer, Department of Turkish and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cyprus
- Oren Anolik, Ambassador of Israel in Cyprus

The evolving political landscape of the Middle East, shaped by reconciliation efforts, regional alliances, and the influence of global superpowers, was the focus of a discussion featuring insights from Dr. Ebtesam Al-Ketbi, President of the Emirates Policy Center, Israeli Ambassador to Cyprus Oren Anolik, and Luigi Scazzieri, Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for European Reform.

In a shift from the traditional zero-sum game that has long characterised Middle Eastern politics, key regional players are now actively seeking a 'win-win' approach argued Dr Ebtessam Al-Ketbi while noting that countries of the region are exhausted from past rivalries and conflicts. "They [Middle Eastern countries] were looking for something else that would suit all of the players, moving from a zero-sum game to win-win."

This sentiment was reinforced by Ambassador Anolik, who noted, "The game changer of what's happening in the region in recent years is the Abraham Accords. It's not just our focus on what we see as the main threat to the region, which is Iran. It also goes into economy, trade, investment, tourism, health, culture, and people-to-people relations."

The role of global superpowers, notably the United States, China, and Russia, remains a critical factor in shaping Middle Eastern dynamics. Dr Al-Ketbi pointed out the impact of the U.S. signalling a reduced presence in the region, prompting countries to seek self-reliance and new alliances. This includes a possible normalisation between Israel and Arab countries as a response to this power vacuum.

"The announcement of the U.S. that they are departing the region and that the region has to take care of itself led to normalisation between Israel and some of the Arab countries," she said.

Ambassador Anolik highlighted the potential of new alliances, like the emerging Israel-Saudi Arabia normalisation, while acknowledging the continued threats from forces like Iran and its proxies. The Ambassador's concern about Iran's regional ambitions and activities presents a stark contrast to the otherwise optimistic tone about regional collaboration. "Iran is a multifaceted, multi-layered kind of threat, not just to Israel, it's a threat to the region, is a threat to the peace-loving people of the world," he said.

Luigi Scazzieri added another dimension, discussing the delicate balance regional countries must maintain in their relationships with global powers. The Middle East is becoming increasingly multipolar, with countries like the UAE choosing economic ties with China while maintaining military relations with the U.S. This balancing act, according to Scazzieri, is symptomatic of a region adapting to rapid geopolitical shifts and the complexities of global rivalries.

Despite the progress in regional cooperation, challenges persist. Dr. Al-Ketbi cautioned, "You have to escalate with all the players, Israel, Iran, Turkey, the main players in the region. Would you say that this part of the region has a rosy picture now? No, it's not. Because this is a region of conflict."



More intra-EU cooperation needed to manage migration effectively

Knowledge partner:



MIGRATION

- Andrew Geddes, Professor of Migration Studies/Director of the Migration Policy Centre
- Anna Iasmi Vallianatou, Academy Associate, Europe Programme, Chatham House
- Anke Schlimm, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Cyprus
- Salina Grenet-Catalano, Ambassador of France to Cyprus
- Joyce Antone Ibrahim, Manager, World Development Report 2023, World Bank Group
- Corina Drousiotou, Coordinator/Senior Legal Advisor, Cyprus Refugee Council
- Katja Saha, Representative, UNHCR
- Nektaria Stamouli, Eastern Mediterranean correspondent, POLITICO Europe

Participants in a panel on migration spoke about how the EU tries to implement solidarity measures to ease the burden for countries of first arrival like Cyprus.

Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Cyprus Anke Schlimm referred to two remarks of the German President who said that “migration is not going to go away and that we

have to find ways and means how to deal with this situation” and that “our hearts are big but our pockets are limited”.

The German Ambassador also said that what Germany is trying to do is a “paradigm shift”. “We want and we need as a country of destination more skilled workers and we are in desperate need of skilled workers,” she said.

Schlimm stressed that within the EU solidarity is very important. “That is why Germany and France and some other countries put up a voluntary solidarity mechanism” she noted, adding that countries of first arrival like Cyprus need to be supported.

Ambassador of France to Cyprus Salina Grenet-Catalano said that “migration is one of the most difficult and sensitive issues for most European countries” nowadays, indicating that extreme trends in political systems try to exploit this issue in order to steer fears on populations and to gain votes. “We are not immune to this but we need to deal with these issues in a proper manner and a calm manner in order to avoid extreme situations,” she said.

Manager of the World Development Report 2023 on Migrants, Refugees, and Societies Joyce Antone Ibrahim noted that migration has not been managed very well and indicated that “we have to redefine how policies have been made both bilaterally and multilaterally”. She also noted that there is a need to have more strategic bilateral cooperation, very targeted, between countries.

Professor of Migration Studies and Director of the Migration Policy Centre at the European University Institute, Florence, Italy, Andrew Geddes noted that even though migration policies have become since WWII more open and more expansive, in the last twenty years they have also become much more selective. “This is a key dynamic in Europe, selectivity”, he noted.

Anna Iasmi Vallianatou, Academy Associate at the Europe Programme of Chatham House, noted that securitisation of migration leads to a vicious circle of failed policies and goes hand in hand with other trends, including the effort to externalise migration to non-European countries, a strategy that has backfired and is being used by these countries for geopolitical blackmailing against the EU.

Corina Drousiotou of the Cyprus Refugee Council indicated on the participation of refugees that “we talk about refugees mostly in the absence of refugees” and that “we are so left behind in this area that the only way we could step it up is with effective measures, giving resources, there is a lot of talent out there and assist them to have a voice of their own.”

Katja Saha Savarimuthu from UNHCR said that in Cyprus today we have 32,500 asylum seekers and 16,900 refugees and protection holders.

She noted that negative attitudes often create assumptions that asylum seekers are in fact economic migrants who are seeking better opportunities in richer countries. As a result, as she explained, we have seen very restrictive asylum policies and measures enforced by governments in recent years, including restricting access to asylum procedures.

“All asylum seekers regardless of how they arrive or from where they arrive should have access to effective asylum procedures,” she pointed out.



Cyprus Forum.

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TRANSPA

29-30 Sept

Nicosia Municipal Theatre The Classic Hotel



The EU and NATO must safeguard the political and military security of Eastern Europe

Knowledge partner:



SECURITY AND STABILITY IN THE BALKANS AND BLACK SEA REGION

- Emil Avdaliani, Professor. Director of Middle East Studies, Geocase/European University
- Sasho Kjosev, Full Professor, PhD, Faculty of Economics, University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" in Skopje, North Macedonia
- Dan Mihalache, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Romania to the Republic of Cyprus
- Ian Lesser, Vice President, The German Marshall Fund of the United States
- Yuliya Kazdobina, Security Studies Program Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism", Head of the Ukrainian Foundation for Security Studies
- Amanda Paul, Senior Policy Analyst, European Policy Centre

Panel moderator, Ms Amanda Paul kicked off the discussion by providing some background information on the region and its history. She argued that before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the EU had become "rather complacent on the issues of security in the region, as there was a sort of misplaced belief that war would never return to Europe."

Mr Ian Lesser, Vice President of the German Marshall Fund of the United States agreed that before the war, "we had become quite complacent about Russia's aggression in its neighbourhood and beyond. This is because we were operating on the basis of an understanding of deterrence that we inherited from the Cold War." He added that the longer a conflict goes on, the accumulated risk of something going wrong in the Balkans, the Black Sea and the Baltics, is growing, adding that unfinished EU integration in the Western Balkans and other areas holds its own risks, especially during this time of conflict.

Romanian Ambassador to Cyprus, Dan Mihalache, was asked about what steps should be taken to strengthen security in the Black Sea - which is something that Romania and other countries on the Eastern flank had been calling for, for many years.

The Ambassador agreed that the Black Sea is a weak point of security due to the characteristics of the region. He explained that this is because Europe is less sensitive to the eastern flank and its concerns. He said that a very positive development was the recent approval of the National Defence Authorization Act by the US Senate, which included the Black Sea Security Act. "This showed that Black Sea security is important for NATO and its members". He argued that NATO must increase its military presence in the Black Sea and set up a relevant task force for this purpose.

Asked about how peace can be restored in the quickest way, Ms Yuliya Kazdobina, Security Studies Program Senior Fellow at Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism", said that the only way to restore peace in the Black Sea is to liberate Crimea from the Russian occupation. However, she argued that reaching a peaceful negotiated settlement most likely is not going to work with Russia, as they preserve the ability to escalate, and they escalate whenever they see fit. As such, she argued that "what we must do is try to keep Russian fleets as far as possible from Ukrainian shores." She argued that the mines need to be cleared first and then Ukraine's ability to export not only grain and agricultural products needs to be restored, as Ukraine is an export-oriented economy. This will require an increased NATO presence in the region.

Asked about whether there is political will driving the momentum for the EU integration of the Western Balkans, Dr Sasho Kjosev, Full Professor in the Faculty of Economics at the University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" in Skopje, North Macedonia, he said that "there is an ongoing process both within the EU, aimed at preparing its institutions for a new round of enlargement, and with helping the Western Balkans implement reforms and enhance their capabilities to join the EU." However, he argued that nationalism in these countries is on the rise, with support for joining NATO dropping every year.

Ambassador Mihalache, on his part, said that there are a lot of anti-European parties and sovereignty movements, who are protesting European bureaucracy and Brussels and that this will be evident in the next European Parliament elections scheduled for June next year. He said that the entire project is put under question, arguing that Europe must reinvent itself.

Dr Emil Avdaliani, Professor at European University and director of Middle East Studies at the Georgian think tank Geocase agreed with the Romanian ambassador, adding that "now is the

time to grant candidate status to Georgia or else the EU might not have a very good chance in the future to establish itself as a geopolitical actor in the region.”

Asked by the audience about whether bringing in Balkan countries which are witnessing a rise of ethnic nationalism could perhaps destabilise the EU, he said that “the people of the region need some sort of encouragement from Brussels.”



Africa's Rising Importance in Global Politics

Samson Itodo, Executive Director, Yiaga Africa

In a keynote speech delivered via a video call, Mr. Samson Itodo, Executive Director of YIAGA Africa, stressed the critical role of Africa in global politics and the economy.

Mr Itodo identified three major points that served as the foundation of his keynote address. Firstly, he stressed Africa's growing importance on the global stage, exemplified by its recent inclusion as a member of the G21. He believed that this development gave Africa a much-needed voice in global decision-making.

"The centrality of Africa's role in global politics and global economy explains why a few weeks ago Africa was admitted as a member of the G21," Itodo stated.

Secondly, Itodo highlighted the intense competition for Africa's resources, with the European Union, the United States, Asia, and Russia all seeking a foothold on the continent. He pointed

out that these nations were attracted to Africa not only for its markets but also for its abundant natural resources.

“It’s a scrambling for Africa because, beyond the markets that exist within it, Africa is home to a lot of resources and natural resources,” he explained.

Itodo drew attention to the significance of Africa’s development in the context of global discussions on climate change and economic crises. African leaders have been at the forefront of efforts to reform the global financial structure, particularly concerning issues related to debt relief and climate finance.

“I strongly agree with the heads of state that it’s important to have a conversation about the Global Financial Infrastructure in such a way that it doesn’t further indebt Africa,” Itodo stressed. Moreover, Itodo emphasised the importance of addressing the growing discontent among African citizens, citing instances of protests and military takeovers in various African countries. He argued that the discontent stemmed from the perception that exploitative local elites and foreign partners were hindering Africa’s progress.

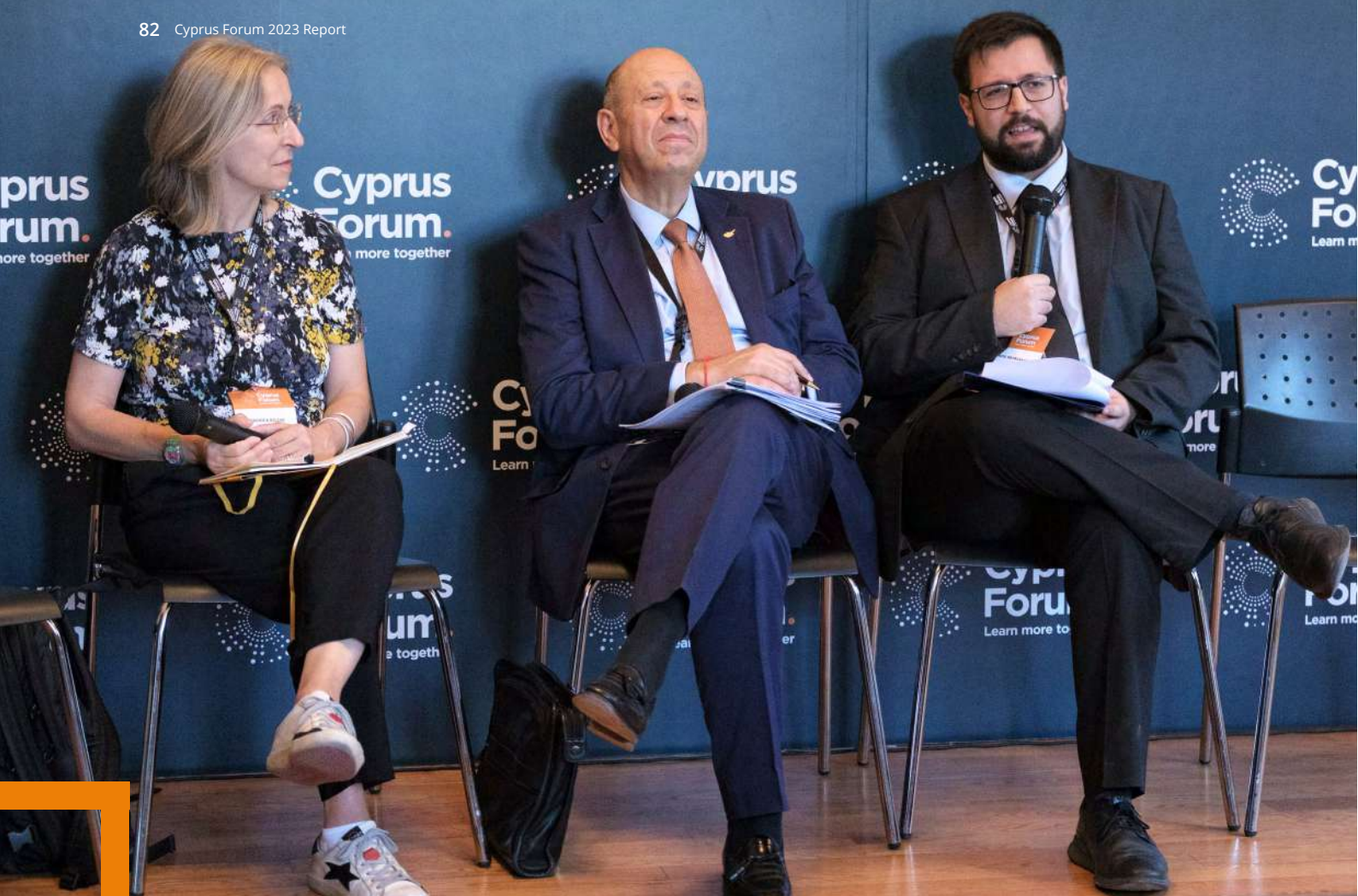
“Africa’s redemption from exploitative local elites, as well as exploitative foreign partners, is simply decried by the citizens, especially young people,” Itodo noted.

Itodo urged stakeholders to align their agendas with the aspirations of African citizens and avoid parasitic relationships that only benefited one side.

“As you think about how to engage Africa, it is important to put Africa’s interest on the agenda, it’s important to put the people, the citizens of Africa, into context,” he urged.

In conclusion, despite the challenges, Itodo acknowledged positive stories emerging from Africa, particularly in countries like Botswana, Rwanda, and parts of Ghana, where leaders were actively working towards development. He noted the need for partnerships that prioritised African development at their core.

“In Africa, there are interesting and good stories, positive stories of impact coming out of Africa,” he remarked. “The kind of partnership that Africa requires is the one that keeps Africa’s development at its central stage.”



Diplomats will not be replaced by robots, but evolution is key

Knowledge partner:



FIRESIDE DISCUSSION ON DIGITAL DIPLOMACY

- Euripides Evriviades, Ambassador (a.h.)
- Federica Bicchi, Associate Professor in the Department of International Relations at the London School of Economics (LSE)
- Corneliu Bjola, Associate Professor of Diplomatic Studies, University of Oxford
- Petros Petrikkos, Researcher, University of Nicosia

Asked about the role of digital diplomacy and the major developments on the topic, Dr Federica Bicchi, Associate Professor in the Department of International Relations at the London School of Economics (LSE) offered a definition of diplomacy and went on to describe what digital diplomacy adds to the field of diplomacy.

She said that we are entering “a post-human diplomacy world” where the relevance of technology is such that it’s transforming the way diplomacy is performed. “We are now talking about the seamless integration of human and technological interventions, where WhatsApp messages

and emails between a diplomat and the person they are to meet as well as information found on the web are an integral part of the process of contemporary diplomacy. She also added that the “digitalisation of diplomacy is happening in a context that is heavily polarised in terms of geopolitics, which brings us back to the material aspect of geopolitics.”

Asked whether digital diplomacy has a fundamental impact on diplomacy, Dr Corneliu Bjola, Associate Professor of Diplomatic Studies at the University of Oxford said that this was not the case seven years ago. However, in recent years, the development of technologies and their increased use by diplomats have brought about a fundamental change. “Social media was the first stage back in 2012, which worked until we got to the dark side, where disinformation started to create problems. And then we had teleconference tools during the pandemic, which continue to be used to this day. These technologies have accelerated the speed at which we need to react but also increased the risk that diplomats take. The defining feature of these instruments is speed and not opportunity.”

Mr Euripides Evriviades, Ambassador (a.h.) argued that “diplomats will not survive as a species if they do not adapt to the times by adopting digital technologies.” He also talked about his own experience with social media and the fact that he got in trouble for not posting serious subjects at times. He argued that it’s important to take this online presence and translate it into offline effectiveness. He also went on to say that the biggest challenge we will be soon faced with is AI, which is a beast that needs to be understood, graphed, tamed and contained. He added that we need to think hard about how AI (and deepfakes) will affect democracy, human rights, the rule of law and diplomacy itself while trying to look ahead of the curve.

Responding to the other speakers, Dr Bicchi said that online spaces are becoming absolutely central to politics. Life online, what has been called “on life”, is taking on a political significance of itself. “The paradox that has come to be is that unless something is online, it’s not real. So, the challenge here is how to make these online spaces, democratic and transparent. She also argued that we need to engage with technology in order to make sure that it’s in accordance with our democratic values.”

Dr Bjola added that in the public sphere of social media, diplomats are doing what they have always done, promote the interests of their country. However, in these online spaces, they are not alone. They have their peers and members of the public. There is pressure to react fast to certain events. “There is a lot of uncertainty with regard to what we’re seeing online, and AI could be a way to deal with this uncertainty. However, this creates an escalation and a new reality of post-humanist diplomacy where AI is battling AI online.”

Ambassador Evriviades went on to say that we must not divorce diplomacy from its human elements, arguing that as a diplomat he has always appreciated face-to-face interactions. He argued that we are going through an era of hybrid diplomacy. At the same time, however, he warned of the dangers of speed and immediate decisions, arguing that we should be the ones governing technology and not the other way around.



Home for Cooperation

DAY 1: 29 SEPT. 2023





Empowering youth voices is key to advancing peace and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals

Knowledge partner:



REALIZING MEANINGFUL YOUTH PARTICIPATION & ACHIEVING SDGS

- Asya Beyaz, College of Europe graduate / Office of MEP Niyazi Kızılyürek, European Parliament / Co-founder, European Union Cypriot Students (EUCS)
- Paris Zingis, Uppsala University graduate - International Relations, Master Student UCY -Peace and Conflict Studies
- Berk Tansel, Parliamentary Associate of MEP Niyazi KIZILYÜREK, European Parliament
- Evgenia Chamilou, Lawyer, Law Office of the Republic of Cyprus
- Awa Dabo, Director and Deputy Head, PBSO/DPPA, Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, United Nations
- Arnaud Amouroux, UN Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary General on Cyprus

In a panel focusing on youth participation, peacebuilding, and ways to advance the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), youth leaders shared their insights, underlining the critical role of young people in shaping a more inclusive and peaceful future.

Panel moderator, Arnaud Amouroux of the UN Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Cyprus said that meaningful youth participation encompasses engagement, empowerment, agency, leadership, and influence. He stressed the need not only to listen to the youth's perspectives but also to amplify their voices, valuing, acknowledging, and incorporating their contributions into decision-making processes.

Highlighting the UN's mandate on youth, peace, and security matters, Amouroux referenced the latest Security Council resolution urging leaders to support civil society engagement, especially focusing on women's organisations and youth, in the peace process.

Taking the floor, Awa Dabo, Director and Deputy Head of the Peacebuilding Support Office at the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs of the United Nations, commenced her input with a focus on the UN's Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda. She detailed how the UN's Resolution 2250, unanimously adopted in 2015, has been a cornerstone in recognising the crucial role of young people in maintaining international peace and security. Dabo highlighted, "The resolution clearly states that achieving peace and security is not possible if youth, who are largely affected by conflict and crisis, are left out of the conversation." Her speech also brought to light the importance of integrating youth in all facets of peacekeeping and conflict prevention, highlighting the need for sustainable and inclusive policies that resonate with young populations worldwide.

Asya Beyaz a College of Europe graduate who now works at the office of MEP Niyazi Kızılyürek and is a co-founder of the European Union Cypriot Students (EUCS), shifted the focus to the European landscape. Reflecting on her recent educational journey and experiences across Europe and Northern Africa, Beyaz expressed her excitement about the growing emphasis on youth engagement in both the UN and the European Union. Speaking on the lack of young people participating in political processes she said: "We can solve this with the European Year of Youth, for example, or with the citizens panels, requirements of 30% of youth to join. So, these are amazing steps forward." Moreover, she pointed out the significance of providing young entrepreneurs and innovators with opportunities to contribute to peace through economic collaboration and dialogue.

Berk Tansel, a parliamentary associate of MEP Kızılyürek, disclosed his activist roots and participation in trade unionism. He said that from his early childhood to his current involvement in policymaking, his journey has been one marked by participation. His belief in the power of youth to effect change was palpable as he said, "Youth or anybody shouldn't sit down and delegate their active citizenship to someone."

Evgenia Chamilou, a lawyer at the Law Office of The Republic of Cyprus focused on the intersection of climate action and peacebuilding. She discussed her involvement in the Local Conference of Youth on Climate Change (ELCO) and its impact. Chamilou stressed the importance of meaningful youth participation saying, "It's not just about taking pictures with young people inviting young people to events, we need platforms and the technical committee on youth suggestions, as well as ELCO's suggestion of having more young people involved within existing structures should be the way forward." She added that transparency, meaningful participation, and securing a seat at the negotiation table for youth underlined the broader priorities of young people.

Throughout the meeting, other themes emerged, including the need for cross-cultural understanding, the role of education in fostering civic engagement among young people, and the importance of intergenerational dialogue for comprehensive policy development.

The speakers collectively underscored the importance of creating inclusive policies and platforms where young voices are not only heard but are integral to decision-making processes.



Innovative solutions needed to promote cooperation between countries of the region on energy

Knowledge partner:



REGIONAL INCLUSIVITY AND COOPERATION IN THE EAST MED

- Yannis Bassias, Offshore Projects Advisor, Independent Energy Consulting
- Ipek Borman, International relations expert and academic, Freelance
- Jonathan Cohen, Ambassador (retired), Non-resident Senior Fellow, Atlantic Council
- Charles Ellinas, CEO of EC Cyprus Natural Hydrocarbons Company Ltd (eCNHC), nonresident senior fellow with the Atlantic Council's Global Energy Center
- Michael Harari, Ambassador (ret), Michael Harari Consulting
- Mehmet Ögütçü, Chairman, Global Resources Partnership; Chairman, London Energy Club
- Harry Tzimitras, Director, Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) Cyprus Centre Senior Fellow, Global Energy Center, Atlantic Council
- F. Defne Arslan, Senior Director, Atlantic Council IN TURKEY & Turkey Programs Center

The speakers on the panel titled “Regional Inclusivity and Cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean” called for cooperation between countries of the area, underscoring the complexity and interconnectedness of energy, economic, and geopolitical dynamics.

Starting off, Dr Charles Ellinas highlighted the critical juncture the region finds itself in, particularly concerning hydrocarbon development and the urgency of clean energy.

Ellinas also touched on the budding rapprochement between Greece and Turkey, considering it a turning point if materialised. “For me, the most positive development will be Greece and Turkey working together to resolve their differences,” he stated, adding that reactivation of Greece-Turkey agreements on immigration could foster a positive atmosphere. However, he cautioned about the overshadowing Cyprus issue, indicating a lack of progress in UN discussions.

As for the Aphrodite gas field, Ellinas speculated on its potential problems, particularly the reaction of Turkish Cypriots and Turkey. “Hydrocarbons are still central to short and medium-term developments,” he said, warning that climate change might render these resources obsolete if not harnessed soon.

Economic Transition and Energy Mix

Mr Yannis Bassias provided an economic perspective, arguing that the focus should be broader than just hydrocarbons. “We are looking at the tree and not the forest,” he said, explaining that the energy transition is fundamentally economic, influenced by geopolitical and technological shifts.

Political Dynamics and the Cyprus Issue

Dr Ipek Borman offered a political lens, particularly on the Cyprus issue and regional cooperation. She lamented the transformation of the Eastern Mediterranean from a potential zone of peace into an area of securitised competition. “One thing remains intact, though. And that is the need for cooperation and collaboration in the region,” Borman stated.

She underscored the discrepancy between words and deeds in Cypriot politics, stressing the need for sincere political will and structured dialogue. Borman also pointed to external dynamics, such as regional actors and global changes in energy and economy, as potential catalysts for a new process in Cyprus.

Geopolitical Shifts and Energy Diversification

Mr Mehmet Ögütçü spoke on the geopolitical shifts impacting the region. He highlighted the creation of new trade routes and the evolution of energy discussions beyond natural gas to encompass climate change, renewables, and energy efficiency. Ögütçü criticised the East Med Natural Gas Forum for not being sufficiently inclusive, particularly regarding Turkey’s absence.

“Therefore, I believe that there is a need to create an all-inclusive regional organisation,” he argued, proposing a comprehensive grouping to cover a broader range of issues. Ögütçü also expressed concerns about the geopolitical tensions overshadowing commercial realities in energy projects.

Israel's Perspective

Former Ambassador Michael Harari, addressing the discussion remotely from Israel, spoke about the efforts to strengthen Israel-Turkey relations and the importance of trust and patience in this process.

Discussing Israel's energy export options, Harari said, "Israel has decided that it needs one more export route for its natural gas." He elaborated on the potential routes, including FLNG, pipeline to Cyprus, and pipeline to Turkey, indicating that Israel is exploring these options in the context of regional dynamics. He advocated for a broader regional dialogue, possibly under a new umbrella, to include all relevant actors for constructive discussions.

The Need for a Comprehensive U.S. Strategy

In written remarks sent out to the Forum, Ambassador Jonathan Cohen, stressed the importance of a distinct U.S. strategy for the region. "The US needs an East Med strategy to focus on the region as a distinct entity for cooperation and integration," Cohen wrote.

He suggested leveraging recent developments like the apparent Greek-Turkish warming relations and the Israeli-Lebanese maritime demarcation to build stronger regional partnerships. Cohen also proposed innovative confidence-building measures for Cyprus, including a joint gas and renewables venture and NATO-led exercises involving Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, Israel, and Egypt.



A new methodology for the Cyprus issue negotiations is necessary

Knowledge partner:

oxygen.
for Democracy

THE NEGOTIATION PROCESS DESIGN

- Menelaos Menelaou, Greek Cypriot Negotiator
- Özdil Nami, Retired politician
- Ahmet Sözen, Professor of International Relations
- Erato Kozakou - Markoulis, Former Diplomat
- Sergio Jaramillo Caro, Former High Commissioner for Peace in Colombia
- Kjartan Björnsson, Deputy Director and Head of Unit, European Commission - Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support
- Marie-Joëlle Zahar, Professor, Department of Political Science
- Aristoteles Constantinides, Associate Professor of International Law and Human Rights

Speakers in “The negotiation process design” panel discussion highlighted steps that could be taken for a Cyprus settlement to have chances to be successful.

Presenting the benefits a Cyprus settlement would have

Among others, they stressed the importance of showing citizens the potential benefits a solution would have, and more specifically those for the Turkish Cypriot community with its full EU membership.

“In our view, Cypriots must very specifically experience the benefits of reunification and therefore full membership for Turkish Cypriots across the island,” said Kjartan Bjornsson, Head of the Unit for Cyprus Settlement Support at the European Commission Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support. “One of the most effective measures would specifically be to offer to Turkish Cypriots some specific benefits now that would come with a solution,” he added. Bjornsson noted that this has actually been done in the case of halloumi cheese where “we have de facto lifted the acquis suspension regarding this famous cheese so that Turkish Cypriots can benefit from its registration and be able to sell it in the EU market through the Green Line provided that they comply with the same standards as others.”

More women, civil society in negotiations

Former Foreign Minister, Erato Kozakou-Markoullis, who has served as a member of the Greek Cypriot negotiating team, said that the processes, so far, have failed for several reasons: She noted that the negotiations have been conducted solely between the leaders, all of whom have been men, as well as their negotiators. “These leaders and negotiators were assisted by an elite group of experts mostly men,” she explained. Ms Kozakou-Markoullis said that especially during the first 40 years of the negotiations, women were totally absent from the negotiating process and in most recent years there has been some limited participation of women in the negotiations.

Moreover, she noted that there has been a lack of political will or limited political will by leaders who participated in the negotiations, while civil society has been totally absent throughout the process and there has been no mechanism to include civil society in them.

She furthermore noted that the negotiating process has not been transparent and that people must be informed about the federal system and how it works.

She also expressed the belief that “we have to move forward based on the Guterres Framework in order to agree on a strategic agreement within a set timeline.” Ms Kozakou-Markoullis said that if deadlines are set out, “we have to be very careful, we have to put safeguards and we have to have a methodology in place which will use sticks and carrots, sticks for those who are not behaving well and carrots for those who are cooperating and want a solution.”

Lack of political will is a persistent issue

Ozdil Nami, who served for several years as the negotiator of the Turkish Cypriot community, said that the biggest challenge with the Cyprus issue is that “every aspect of the problem touches upon another aspect.”

Speaking of the breakdown in negotiations during the Crans-Montana talks (2017), Mr Nami expressed the view that during the final phase, there was “a sudden disappearance of political will.”

On his part, Professor of International Relations, Ahmet Sozen stressed that “the formula (for the Cyprus problem) is to balance internal dynamics with the external dynamics, creating a synergy to solve the problem.”

He also highlighted the need for the two leaders to have a genuine desire to solve the issue, along with a mutually agreed vision. Mr Sozen furthermore noted that the civil society must be engaged in the negotiating process, which must be fed by research-based information.

Former High Commissioner for Peace in Colombia Mr Sergio Jaramillo Caro and Political Science Professor at Montreal University Dr Marie-Joelle Zahar also made interventions during the discussion, via video call, providing international perspectives on how negotiating processes can succeed in reuniting divided societies.



Cyprus Forum.

Learn more together



“Transparency is not a self-sufficient concept; it should serve a specific goal, particularly the promotion of democracy and the rule of law”

Knowledge partner:

**FRIEDRICH
EBERT
STIFTUNG**

THE ROLE OF TRANSPARENCY IN COMBATING POLITICAL CORRUPTION ON BOTH SIDES OF THE DIVIDE

- Christophoros Christophorou, Media & political analyst, Freelancer
- Sertac Sonan, Assoc. Prof. Dr.
- Flora Cresswell, Regional Coordinator, Western Europe – Transparency International, Secretariat
- Hubert Faustmann, Professor for History and Political Science, Director of the Office of the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation in Cyprus, University of Nicosia/ Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation

During a panel discussion on ways to combat corruption on both sides of the Cyprus divide, experts exchanged opinions on the challenges and opportunities present.

Opening the session, Hubert Faustmann, Director of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Cyprus highlighted the organisation's role, noting the need for a comprehensive approach that includes both communities.

"Five years ago, we set up a Transparency International-style report in the North because there was a gap in addressing corruption issues. This initiative aimed to foster dialogue and transparency across the divide, comparing corruption on both sides. We invited experts like Sertac Sonan, an associate professor with expertise in elections, political parties, and corruption, to contribute to these discussions," he said.

Dr Sertac Sonan delved into the intricate dynamics of transparency and its relationship with corruption. He noted the need to move beyond mere transparency, stating, "Transparency is not a self-sufficient concept; it should serve a specific goal, particularly the promotion of democracy and the rule of law. The key question is what transparency entails and how it contributes to the broader goals of good governance."

Providing a comprehensive overview of the situation in the northern part of Cyprus, Sonan expressed concerns about the decline in transparency and the rise in corruption perception scores. He attributed this deterioration to democratic backsliding, citing a shift in power dynamics and an alliance between right-wing parties.

"The situation is likely to worsen in the coming years. The current government, supported by Ankara, lacks the incentive to address corruption. Moreover, attacks on the judiciary and freedom of the press pose additional threats to good governance," he said.

Flora Cresswell, Regional Coordinator for Western Europe at Transparency International, provided a global perspective on the fight against corruption. She stressed the importance of transparency as a precondition rather than an endgame, advocating for strong legislation, ethics frameworks, and independent oversight.

"Transparency, while crucial, must be complemented by accountability. Strong legislation, ethics frameworks, and independent oversight bodies are necessary to ensure effective transparency. Additionally, civil society and independent media play a vital role in holding politicians accountable, making transparency a meaningful tool in the fight against corruption," she remarked.







The Classic Hotel

DAY 2: 30 SEPT. 2023





Safeguarding the Rule of Law in Times of Uncertainty

Knowledge partner:



FIRESIDE DISCUSSION ON MEASURING THE RULE OF LAW AND VALUES IN CYPRUS AND EUROPE

- Prof. Stéphanie Laulhé Shaelou, Professor of European Law and Reform Director, Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence for the Rule of Law and European Values (CRoLEV) Head of the School of Law at UCLan Cyprus
- Orla Drummond, Senior Research Analyst/Human Rights Lawyer

Dr Stephanie Shaelou, Professor of European Law and Reform Director at the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence for the Rule of Law and European Values (CRoLEV), and Head of the School of Law at UCLan Cyprus discussed with Dr Orla Drummond, a Senior Research Analyst and human rights lawyer on challenges related to the rule of law in times of crisis.

Dr Shaelou noted the limitations of current monitoring and protection mechanisms for the rule of law, emphasising the need to make precise ontological and epistemological choices when measuring complex concepts like the rule of law. She elaborated on CRoLEV's mission, which is to provide insights into the state of the rule of law and European values. Their approach

involves revisiting the fundamental assumptions about the rule of law and European values and then developing unique indicators and methodologies tailored to specific contexts, such as Cyprus.

“Our ultimate aim would be to contribute to the development of a comprehensive rule of law and European values measurement system, based on an agreed balance of objective and subjective criteria and unique methodology,” Dr Shaelou explained.

She also highlighted the importance of combining qualitative and quantitative research methods to provide a comprehensive assessment of the rule of law and European values. Dr Shaelou concluded her remarks by emphasising the need for transparency in a democracy. She noted that transparency is a fundamental prerequisite for meaningful citizen engagement and participation in decision-making processes.

On her part, Dr Drummond provided insights from her work on the Prepared project, which focuses on research ethics and integrity during global crises, including pandemics.

Dr Drummond discussed the erosion of trust and the proliferation of disinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic. She emphasised that transparent, clear, and proportionate emergency legislation is crucial, however, such legislation should be subject to tight scrutiny, with rules widely disseminated to the public to foster understanding and trust.

To maintain the rule of law during crises, Dr Drummond suggested several principles: proportionality, time-bound emergency legislation, distance from ordinary legislation, and equal application of the law to all, including political elites.

Dr Drummond acknowledged that COVID-19 served as a stress test for the rule of law, putting governments and systems under severe pressure. “COVID itself gifted authoritarian governance the possibility to rule by decree in certain states,” she said.



More transparency and improved mechanisms needed to increase political participation

Knowledge partner:



PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY: TOOLS FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE POLICYMAKING PROCESS

- Christina Kokkalou
- Managing Director at Insights Market Research (IMR)
- Dr. Kyriakos Hadjiyiannis, Member of the House of Representatives of Cyprus Vice President of the OSCE PA
- Despo Michaelidou, Commissioner for Children's Rights
- Andreas Apostolou, Member of the House of Representatives of Cyprus
- George Isaia, Operations Executive, Nomoplatform

Members of the House of Representatives, Andreas Apostolou and Dr Kyriakos Hadjiyiannis as well as Christina Kokkalou, Managing Director at Insights Market Research (IMR) exchanged views on how to strengthen the participation of citizens in decision-making.

Through their positions, they agreed that political institutions such as the House of Representatives must formulate mechanisms to ensure that citizen groups, NGOs and scientists, as well as other stakeholders are able to participate efficiently in policy-making processes.

They argued that although the House of Representatives does have some provisions in place to consult citizen groups and NGOs, in reality, these are inefficient.

“But the question is not whether we listen to civil society. The question is how we listen to civil society; how we take civil society into account and how we use civil society. Here is the big problem. There is no standard approach to how civil society should participate in decision-making mechanisms.” Dr Hadjiyannis said.

He added that often politicians mislead the public or their colleagues by saying that a bill or a policy was drafted following consultation with citizens, however, the key is “how did you consult with them, there lies the question.”

In conclusion, Dr Hadjiyannis expressed the opinion that as many civil society organisations receive funding from the state, this creates a relationship of dependence between them, therefore reducing the independence of NGOs.

Agreeing with his colleague, Mr Andreas Apostolou added that it is not enough for citizens just to elect their representatives every four or five years, but they must demand from MPs to inform them of their work and consult with them before formulating policies.

“I want to tell you that our parliament is one of the few parliaments in the European Union which holds discussions in parliamentary committees behind closed doors. We are one of the very few parliaments where the debates in parliamentary committees are not broadcast live or online, as in other countries. So when we close the doors of information to citizens, how do we want to open the doors to citizen participation?” he asked and argued that the state must harness technological tools to strengthen political participation, mentioning the “Diavgeia” programme of the Greek Ministry of Digital Governance as a good practice.

“My position is that apart from the Plenary sessions, which are broadcast live every Thursday, debates of the parliamentary committees must be live and open to the public,” he added.

Drawing on Dr Hadjiyiannis’ comments regarding the inefficiency of existing participatory democracy processes in Cyprus, Mr Apostolou noted that public consultations in the country leave more to be desired. “For example, I cannot call citizens who are interested in an issue and say that on this particular day, at this particular time, in this particular place, come to discuss. It is our obligation to give them the right tools so that they can tell us what they think,” he said.

On her part, Ms Christina Kokkalou argued that one of the reasons participation in Cyprus is lagging behind, is the distrust citizens show towards political institutions.

“A society without active citizenship cannot go very far,” she said, arguing that for things to change transparency and justice are paramount. “Citizens are confronted daily with various scandals, with corruption, lack of transparency and impunity. That’s why they react,” Ms Kokkalou added noting that the live broadcast of parliamentary committee discussions would be a good first step towards enhancing transparency.

Concluding, the panellists also argued for lowering the voting age to 17 as a measure to enhance participation, along with a holistic education reform, which will include the reintroduction of civic education in schools.

“We should incorporate in our laws that every legislation which is enacted, every political decision taken must be in the interests of the next generation,” Dr Hadjiyiannis stressed.



Charting the Path to Constitutional Reform in Cyprus

FIRESIDE DISCUSSION ON THE RULE OF LAW

- George Pamboridis, Lawyer, Pamboridis LLC
- Fiona Mullen, Director, Sapienta Economics Ltd

In a discussion on the current state of Cyprus's constitutional framework, Ms Fiona Mullen, Director of Sapienta Economics and George Pamboridis, a lawyer and former Health Minister, offered insights into the historical context and contemporary challenges of the Cyprus Constitution, stressing the urgent need for reform.

The central focus of the conversation revolved around the constitutional setup of Cyprus, which has faced ongoing issues since the withdrawal of Turkish Cypriots from the government in 1963. George Pamboridis stressed the flaws in this framework, emphasising the absence of fundamental checks and balances, "a deficit that has led to systemic corruption," as he said.

The 1960 constitution, despite its progressive intent at the time of its drafting, was rendered

largely ineffective due to the withdrawal of Turkish Cypriots from state offices, he noted. Key provisions that had been designed to maintain a balance between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities became inoperative. Pamboridis articulated the constitutional conundrum: "Any constitution without the basic checks and balances can only serve as a source of corruption. And this is what we are witnessing today. The failure of the state to inspire the rule of law stems from the very fact that our constitution lacks the basic safety net for checks and balances."

The discussion evolved into a dialogue about the need for constitutional modernisation. Pamboridis argued that Cyprus should acknowledge the constitution's current inactivity, especially in light of its status as a modern European member state. He further proposed the idea of creating a new legal framework, which he referred to as a "new Magna Carta," to prioritise the well-being of the society and introduce much-needed checks and balances.

On her part, Fiona Mullen emphasised the need to engage both domestic and international stakeholders in this process. She acknowledged that "the existing constitution is outdated" and suggested that Cyprus "should consider adopting a temporary framework" that aligns with modern European democracies until a federal solution can be achieved.

In closing, Pamboridis expressed his belief in the importance of fostering a healthy debate on the constitution, dismantling preconceptions, and addressing the urgent needs of Cypriot society. "A constitution is like a Swiss knife, which you can either give to a surgeon or a bad guy, so you need to make sure that it's fit for the bad guy," he stated.

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A call for change to tackle corruption in education

Tatiana Zachariadou, Member of the Cyprus Independent Authority against Corruption

Ms Tatiana Zachariadou, a member of the Cyprus Independent Authority against Corruption, shed light on the pervasive issue of corruption in education and the pressing need for reform. She noted that corruption not only erodes trust in society but also has far-reaching consequences, including exacerbating social inequalities and compromising the quality of education.

Zachariadou began her speech by defining corruption as the “exploitation of power or position for personal gain” and highlighted that corruption extends to various aspects of education. She stressed that corruption often goes unnoticed, with only a small fraction of corrupt acts coming to light. “Many corrupt practices have become ingrained in our culture, making education a critical tool for addressing this issue,” she said.

Ms Zachariadou delved into the impact of corruption on education, emphasising that it “threatens the entire society.” It erodes trust in citizens, widens social inequalities, and exposes children

to unethical behaviours that may become normalised, she argued. Moreover, corruption in education contributes to poor learning outcomes, with the best teachers often bypassed in favour of those with connections.

One of the key points Ms Zachariadou made was that corruption in education has dire consequences for a country's development. Furthermore, corruption has a human cost as it can lead to compromised safety and well-being, as seen in recent natural disasters like the floods in Thessaly, Greece, she said.

To combat corruption, she proposed three strategies: Increased oversight at all levels; a comprehensive approach to prevention; and stricter punishment for those involved in corrupt practices. She highlighted that "impunity often fosters corruption" and must be addressed effectively.

The speaker also pointed out that Cyprus has recently passed three laws related to corruption: one for the establishment and operation of an anti-corruption authority, another for regulating lobbying activities, and a third for protecting whistleblowers.

Ms Zachariadou stressed the importance of transforming educational culture. To combat corruption, "society must redefine what is considered normal and what is not," she said, while citing nepotism as a contributing factor to lower education quality, as it often results in the appointment of less qualified individuals in teaching positions.

The speech also highlighted specific examples of corruption in education, ranging from exam leaks to bribery, favouritism in teacher appointments, and the misuse of school premises for personal gain. Zachariadou underscored the need for accountability and transparency in the education system to curb these practices.

However, there is hope for change. Zachariadou noted that the issue of corruption is now part of the training curriculum for teachers in Cyprus. Through European programmes, many educators have been trained to understand and combat corruption, contributing to a shift in the education system's culture.

In conclusion, Ms Zachariadou said that addressing corruption in education is a complex task, but with commitment, awareness, and reform, change is possible. It is now up to policymakers, educators, and society as a whole, she said, to work together to create a more transparent and equitable education system, "one where corruption finds no place".



Navigating the digital transformation of politics

Knowledge partner:



DEMOCRACY 2.0: AUTOMATION AND DECENTRALISATION DEPLOYED FOR TRANSPARENCY

- Carl Miller, Founder, Centre for the Analysis of Social Media, and CASM Technology
- Jean-François De Hertogh, Executive Director, Open Collective Europe
- Fotis Fitsilis, Head of Department for Scientific Documentation and Supervision, Hellenic Parliament
- Maria Miltiadou, Acting Director of Youth Board of Cyprus
- Marc Papinutti, Chair, National Commission for Public Debate
- Panayiotis Zafiris, Rector, Cyprus University of Technology
- Panayiotis Georgiou, Co-Founder of APLA
- Stefanos Kyprianou, Co-Founder, APLA

Digital Democracy's Rise and Challenges

Mr Carl Miller, Founder of the Centre for the Analysis of Social Media, and CASM Technology opened the discussion by noting the surge in digital political participation over the past two decades. He observed that social media platforms have lowered barriers to political engagement, enabling various groups to mobilise support. However, he said, "Online political debate is reasonably angry," leading to fragmentation and polarisation.

In his concluding remarks, Miller challenged the notion of digital democracy as a peripheral concept. He argued that true empowerment involves integrating digital democracy into legislative and executive actions. "Governments very rarely cede power in a decision-making process," he noted, stressing the need for digital citizens to engage directly in politics to effectuate change.

The Impact of AI on Policymaking

Mr Fotis Fitsilis, Head of the Department for Scientific Documentation and Supervision of the Hellenic Parliament discussed the profound influence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on policymaking. He clarified, "AI is at the moment...not really intelligent, but its applications in transforming speech to text and processing large data sets are invaluable in policy formulation." Fitsilis emphasised the necessity of AI in managing inputs from various stakeholders in policymaking, yet he also pointed out the lack of tangible results from extensive public research in this area.

Echoing Miller, Fitsilis spoke about AI's potential in governance, noting the need for a framework for its ethical use. He raised concerns about AI's black-box nature and the difficulty in explaining decision-making processes based on AI algorithms, particularly in sensitive areas like hate speech filtration.

Community Empowerment through Technology

Jean-François De Hertogh, Executive Director of Open Collective Europe focused on how technology can empower communities to address local challenges, bypassing the slower mechanisms of democratic institutions. He highlighted Open Collective's role in supporting community-led initiatives during crises, including COVID-19 and the Ukraine conflict.

The Evolution and Success of AI

Dr Panayiotis Zafiris, Rector of the Cyprus University of Technology provided a detailed analysis of AI's evolution, contrasting its current success with its failures in the 1990s. He attributed the success to the abundant data now available, user control over AI systems, and AI's focus on real-world problems. "The control of the system remains on the user side," he said while stressing that AI's success is due to its ability to fit into real problems needing solutions.

Beyond Voting

Ms Maria Miltiadou, Acting Director of the Youth Board of Cyprus, highlighted the broader aspects of democracy, that go beyond just voting. She addressed challenges such as disinformation and radicalisation, advocating for the elimination of participation barriers and the creation of accessible spaces for citizen involvement. Miltiadou underscored the need for collaborative efforts among governments, NGOs, and the private sector to leverage technology to empower

citizens, especially young people, women, and minorities.

“We need to collaborate; we need to collaborate as a government with other stakeholders. To put forward all these practices through technology that will eliminate the obstacles and the difficulties for citizens to participate and get the knowledge they need,” she stated.

Inclusive Participation in Decision-Making

In concluding remarks, Mr Marc Papinutti Chair of the French National Commission for Public Debate stressed the importance of inclusive participation in decision-making processes. He advocated for a blend of digital and traditional methods to engage all segments of society, stressing the need to ensure that everyone, including those without access to digital tools, is informed and can participate in decision-making processes.



Democracy is at risk as media face multilayered challenges

Knowledge partner:



THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN A DEMOCRACY

- Hervé Godechot, Member of Arcom
- Dr Antigoni Themistokleous, Radiotelevision Officer, Cyprus Radio Television Authority
- Elli Kodjamani, News Director, ANT1 TV
- Marianna Karageorgis, Head of the Liaison Officers Section, Press and Information Office
- Evie Mitsidou Phillips, Assistant Editor in Chief, Cyprus News Agency
- Christophoros Christophi, Lawyer, host of the LegalMatters Podcast, CHRISTOPHI & ASSOCIATES LLC, Cyprus
- Nicholas Nicoli, Associate Professor, Department of Communications, University of Nicosia

In a discussion moderated by Nicholas Nicoli, Associate Professor at the University of Nicosia's Department of Communications, a diverse group of media experts met to analyse the relationship between media and democracy.

"Media is the heartbeat of democracy, pulsating with the principles of freedom, speech, and assembly," Nicoli said setting the stage for the conversation.

Regulating Media in the Digital Age

Herve Godechot, a member of France's regulatory authority for audiovisual and digital communication (Arcom), offered a comprehensive overview of media regulation. Godechot emphasised Arcom's commitment to adaptation, stating, "Arcom's role is not just regulation; it's a commitment to adapt, ensuring freedom thrives in the dynamic digital age." He shed light on Arcom's extended responsibilities, including the regulation of online platforms and social networks, showcasing the need for regulatory frameworks to evolve alongside technological advancements.

Godechot outlined Arcom's criteria for allocating radio frequencies, with a focus on promoting media pluralism and the contribution of original content. Moreover, he touched upon the regulatory body's proactive stance against online hate speech and misinformation, aligning with broader European initiatives.

Media Literacy as a Collaborative Effort

Dr Antigoni Themistokleous, representing the Cyprus Radio Television Authority, challenged the misconception that media regulation is solely restrictive. Themistokleous stressed the approach her organisation adopts, asserting, "Media regulation is not about restrictions; it's a collaborative effort. Media literacy is our tool for an informed citizenry." She detailed initiatives, including workshops, aimed at enhancing media literacy among students, fostering critical thinking, and promoting responsible media consumption.

Transparency and Media Ownership

Christophoros Christophi, a lawyer and podcast host, addressed media ownership issues in Cyprus. Christophi pointed out the absence of truly independent media outlets in the country and expressed concern about recent amendments allowing majority shareholding in key media organisations. "Transparency is the antidote to concentration. The absence of it risks compromising the delicate balance of media ownership," he said. Christophi's remarks highlighted the delicate balance required to prevent the concentration of media power and the importance of transparency in maintaining a healthy democratic media environment.

Challenges Faced by Journalists in the Digital Era

Evie Mitsidou Phillips, a representative from the Cyprus News Agency, provided insights into the challenges faced by journalists amid the evolving media landscape. Acknowledging the decline in interest in traditional print media, Phillips noted the rise of social media as an alternative source of information. She said, "In the digital age, social media is reshaping how we consume news. Fact-checking is paramount in this era of information abundance." Phillips shed light on the increasing need for journalists to adapt their practices to the changing dynamics of news consumption.

The Safety of Journalists as a Pillar of Democracy

Mariana Karageorgis, from the Press and Information Office, introduced a critical perspective, linking the safety of journalists to the preservation of democracy. Citing alarming statistics on attacks against journalists globally, she emphasised the urgency of campaigns such as "Journalists Matter." Karageorgis stressed, "Protecting journalists is safeguarding democracy. Attacks on journalists undermine the very essence of a functioning democratic society." Her remarks also highlighted the indispensable role journalists play as watchdogs, holding those in power accountable.

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Navigating the Future of Knowledge with Transparency

Knowledge partner:



AI, WIKIPEDIA, AND THE FUTURE OF KNOWLEDGE: NURTURING TRANSPARENCY, COLLABORATION, AND ACCESSIBILITY

- Marios Magioladitis, President of Wikimedia Community Greece
- Anna Prodromou, Communications & DEI Consultant

Ms Anna Prodromou, a Communications & DEI Consultant, and Mr Marios Magioladitis, the President of Wikimedia Community Greece, discussed the intersection of AI, Wikipedia, and the future of knowledge. The conversation centred on how these elements can promote transparency, collaboration, and accountability in a rapidly digitising world.

Opening the discussion, Ms Prodromou introduced the focus of the conversation, which revolved around the principles underpinning Wikipedia and its role as a global source of knowledge.

Mr Magioladitis began by elucidating the fundamental principles of Wikipedia. He emphasised that Wikipedia, the “encyclopaedia anyone can edit,” is not just a static repository of information

but a dynamic, open, and collaborative project. With over 100,000 participants worldwide contributing to over 200 languages, Wikipedia stands as a testament to global cooperation, reflecting societal changes and serving as a critical knowledge resource, he noted.

He stressed “that Wikipedia’s evolution over the past two decades has been remarkable, adapting to accommodate new technologies like AI” and incorporating diverse perspectives from contributors across the globe. Wikipedia’s strength lies in its self-determined community that collectively shapes its rules and content.

Ms Prodromou then shifted the conversation toward the challenges of maintaining accuracy while fostering collaboration in a community-driven platform. Administrators and bureaucrats are community-appointed roles entrusted with specific responsibilities, but content remains a communal effort, she stressed.

Surprisingly, Wikipedia’s collaborative model has proven resilient against misinformation, with more contributors dedicated to preserving accuracy than those seeking to subvert it. The sheer number of vigilant editors ensures that blatant errors are swiftly corrected.

However, challenges arise in areas where information is complex or politically sensitive. Mr Magioladitis acknowledged that Wikipedia can become a battleground for conflicting views, especially on topics like the Russian-Ukrainian conflict or contentious political issues like the recognition of North Macedonia’s name. To address these challenges, Wikipedia employs mechanisms such as the neutral point of view (NPOV) and conflict-of-interest guidelines, he explained. These guidelines help maintain a balanced perspective by discouraging biased edits and favouring well-sourced, neutrally presented content.

Ms Prodromou also raised concerns about the digital divide and accessibility to information in an increasingly digitised world. Magioladitis acknowledged these disparities and highlighted Wikipedia’s commitment to inclusivity. Efforts include initiatives to bridge gender gaps, eradicate racist content, and ensure the representation of smaller languages.

In closing, Mr Magioladitis expressed optimism, stressing that humanity can harness technology to overcome its challenges. Wikipedia’s enduring success lies in its ability to adapt to new technologies and evolving societal values while upholding the principles of transparency, collaboration, and accountability, he said.



Increasing political participation: Best practices from Reykjavík

Sigurlaug Anna Johannsdottir, Democracy advisor, The city of Reykjavík

Ms Sigurlaug Anna Johannsdottir, democracy advisor for the city of Reykjavík, Iceland, shared insights into the city's unique approach to fostering democracy.

Ms Johannsdottir began her talk by highlighting the distinct challenges that Nordic countries like Iceland face when it comes to democracy. She noted that despite the region's reputation for democracy, equality, and happiness, recent measurements indicate a decline in trust in city councils and parliaments. Additionally, issues such as hate speech, populism, and challenges in democratic discourse have surfaced.

"These concerns highlight the need for proactive measures to reinvigorate democracy in the region," she said. Despite these challenges, Ms Johannsdottir noted that Reykjavík's democracy initiatives are "well-supported by politicians, and the city has a clear mandate to promote democracy."

Ms Johannsdottir discussed Reykjavík's groundbreaking democracy policy, which was ratified two years ago. The primary objective of this policy is to boost citizen participation in the democratic process. The policy is structured around three core areas: residents, politics, and administration. It promotes effective collaboration between these entities to enhance the overall democratic experience in the city. The policy is supported by an action plan consisting of 21 new actions and 22 measurable goals. A working group oversees the policy's implementation, with Johannsdottir at the helm of this process. She also mentioned that by 2024, they plan to develop a new action plan based on their achievements and aspirations.

One of the most renowned democracy initiatives in Reykjavík is the Participatory Budgeting Project (PPP), known locally as "My Neighbourhood." PPP operates within the city administration, with minimal political interference. "It has successfully executed nearly 900 ideas over the course of eleven years," Ms Johannsdottir said. While the project has seen participation rates fluctuate over the years, reaching a high of 16.4% two years ago, the most recent cycle concluded with a participation rate of 12.2%, she noted.

Reykjavík's democracy initiatives extend beyond the PPP, including residents' councils, consultation portals, and consultative committees. The city of Reykjavík continues to strive for enhanced democracy through a comprehensive three-year action plan. Key features of this plan include creating a "democracy compass," providing educational materials for youth and non-Icelandic speakers, releasing educational videos, and launching citizen assemblies, residents' panels, surveys, and open financial reporting, among others, Ms Johannsdottir explained.



More youth participation is the only way to improve the European political system

Knowledge partner:

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EU PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS FIRESIDE CHAT

- Christos Parmakkis, Young politician, public figure, active citizen
- Georgios Kyrtos, Member of European Parliament, European Parliament
- Kornelia Kitazou, Head of Public Relations of EYP Cyprus, Political Science Student, European Youth Parliament Cyprus

In a panel focusing on the upcoming European Parliament Elections scheduled for early June 2024, Georgios Kyrtos, leveraging his nine-year tenure as MEP, began the discussion by presenting nine key issues that he believes will dominate the electoral process.

Covering economic and energy challenges, the green transition, fiscal policies, the need for more Europe, migration concerns, the war in Ukraine, the rule of law, and the imperative of increasing youth participation, Kyrtos provided a comprehensive overview of the multifaceted

challenges facing the European Union.

In a poignant reflection on the current political dynamics, Kyrtzos stated, “The present dynamics lead to a shift to the right and the extreme right and in favour of Euroskeptic and anti-European political forces, which means things will be more difficult to handle during the next five years.” Taking the floor, Mr Christos Parmakkis, a young politician, underscored the importance of the EU setting an example in protecting rights and values. He highlighted the need to address institutional problems and ensure equal opportunities across member states.

“The European Union should encourage young people to participate in the decision-making process, protecting their rights and values for which it was established,” he stressed as the conversation evolved to explore mechanisms for meaningful citizen participation in policymaking. Parmakkis advocated for lowering the voting age and the age for individuals to be elected, along with the implementation of robust youth policies at both national and European levels.

Parmakkis asserted, “The country and the union are ours. We should build the union in which we want to live in now. Not in the future, not in 20 years, now.”

Acknowledging the generation gap, Kyrtzos stressed the significance of sending positive messages to the younger generation. Sharing his personal journey into politics during a challenging economic period, he highlighted the financial motives that might influence politicians from less developed countries.

Kyrtzos concluded, “Your participation is the only way to improve [the political system].”

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Education exchanges are a catalyst for openness and cross-cultural collaboration

Knowledge partner:



THE POTENTIAL OF EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGES IN FOSTERING OPENNESS AND COOPERATION

- Penelope Papavassiliou, Secretary of the Council of Ministers, Presidency, Republic of Cyprus
- Rita Dias, President of the Erasmus Student Network
- Michael Johnson, Chair UWC Cyprus, UWC (United World Colleges)
- Ioannis Hadjiyiannis, Head of Unit "Horizontal Policies" / Head of Athens Office, DG REFORM, European Commission

In collaboration with the European Commission's Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support, the Cyprus Forum delved into the potential of education exchanges to foster openness and cooperation.

Ms Penelope Papavassiliou, the Secretary of the Council of Ministers of Cyprus, spoke drawing from her experience as a seconded national expert and emphasised the scheme's role in fostering cooperation between Member States and the European Commission. She highlighted the exchange of good practices and the valuable insights gained by civil servants working across different countries. Ms Papavassiliou also noted the importance of bringing various perspectives from member states into the Commission's work. "Shared experiences and understanding contribute to effective collaboration," she said stressing the importance of creating networks and friendships across Europe.

Following this, the floor was handed over to Rita Dias, President of the Erasmus Student Network, who commenced by delving into the significance of the Erasmus programme, highlighting its evolution since its inception in 1987. Dias discussed the programme's priorities, including inclusion, digitalisation, sustainability, and participation. She shared insights from a survey conducted by the Erasmus Student Network, revealing the positive impact of the programme on participants' sense of European citizenship. "We can actually understand this very thing because the last panel on this forum is about the European elections," she highlighted.

Dias presented statistics indicating an increase in participants' identification as European citizens after mobility experiences. She highlighted the programme's role in not only providing educational opportunities but also fostering participation.

She drew attention to the impact of Erasmus on European citizenship, noting that 35% of respondents felt like EU citizens before participating, which increased to 47% after experiencing mobility. Moreover, the survey revealed increased enthusiasm for participating in European elections, with over 40% expressing a heightened willingness to vote.

While acknowledging the programme's successes, Ms Dias pointed out three key challenges highlighted by the survey: lack of accommodation, insufficient funding, and university credit recognition issues.

Addressing accommodation challenges, she proposed the sharing of best practices among countries to improve support for students. Notably, some countries, like Spain, were cited for their national funding opportunities, offering additional grants beyond Erasmus, enhancing accessibility.

Regarding credit recognition challenges, Ms Dias highlighted discrepancies in administrative practices among universities and urged for a more standardised approach. She emphasised the need for cooperation between member states and universities to streamline the credit recognition process. "We believe that by cooperating with each other, we can reach better achievements," she said.

Moving forward, Mr Michael Johnson, Chair of United World Colleges (UWC) Cyprus shared insights into the movement, founded in 1962 by German educator Kurt Hahn, to bring together international students to study and learn from each other. Johnson said that UWC encourages students to bring their own culture and identity, recognising that fostering a shared global identity does not require abandoning one's roots. He described how the exchange programme encourages students "to challenge the status quo and build lifelong bonds," enabling them to understand and appreciate diverse perspectives.



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With proper implementation, regulatory sandboxes can give solutions to pressing problems

Knowledge partner:



FLEXIBILITY AS A DRIVER FOR INNOVATION: THE CASE OF REGULATORY SANDBOXES

- Maria Panayiotou, Environment Commissioner, Republic of Cyprus
- Eleftherios Eleftheriou, Coordination Officer - Directorate General Growth, Cyprus government MOF
- Chrysses Nicolaidis, Strategy consultant & advisor for cities, Member EU Mission Board for Climate Neutral & Smart Cities, CNE Business Development
- Bob D'Haeseleer, Climate Neutral City Advisor, ICLE
- Penelope Vasquez Hadjilyra, Architect-General Coordinator EU Mission: NZ Limassol 2030, Limassol Municipality
- Alexander Apostolides, Senior Researcher, European University Cyprus, Cambridge Centre for Alternative Finance
- Konstantinos Kleovoulou, Assistant Vice President of Strategy and Development, The Cyprus Institute (Cyl)

Despite their name, the reality of regulatory sandboxes is anything but child's play, says Dr Alexander Apostolides, a Senior Researcher at the European University of Cyprus and the Cambridge Centre for Alternative Finance.

Regulatory sandboxes are frameworks set up by a financial sector regulator to allow for the small-scale, live testing of innovations by private firms in a controlled environment.

Apostolides highlighted the pivotal role they can play in providing a controlled testing ground for new initiatives, transcending finance into areas like energy communities, but cautioned that they cannot be a substitute for policy. "Regulatory sandboxes are not substitutes but complementary tools in the regulatory toolkit," he said.

Ms Maria Panayiotou, Environment Commissioner of the Republic of Cyprus, initiated the conversation by shedding light on the creation of regulatory sandboxes. "Regulatory sandboxes have evolved from their roots in the financial sector to address global issues tied to the Sustainable Development Goals."

Drawing parallels with historical instances of tools finding unexpected applications, the discussion touched on the expanding role of regulatory sandboxes.

Mr Chrysses Nicolaidis, Strategy consultant and Member of the EU Mission Board for Climate Neutral & Smart Cities noted the interdisciplinary nature of innovation tools. "Regulatory sandboxes, initially designed for finance, have found application in diverse fields due to their interdisciplinary nature," he stated.

Alexander Apostolides offered more insights into recent findings on the field, stressing the importance of clear objectives, ample resources, and flexibility in frameworks for the success of regulatory sandboxes. The discussion also shed light on the agility and flexibility that these tools bring to policy-making, crucial in addressing accelerating challenges like those posed by climate-related issues.

Mr Bob D'Haeseleer, a Climate Neutral City Advisor at ICLE, drawing from his experience as a deputy mayor of the city of Eeklo, Belgium, stressed the need for resilience and flexibility at the local level. D'Haeseleer said that regulatory sandboxes can help advance climate initiatives. He argued for an evolution in the elements of good policy, traditionally marked by diligence, equality, and sustainability, to incorporate the flexibility and agility needed to combat modern challenges.

"Innovation plays a vital role in addressing both global and local issues, and regulatory sandboxes offer a novel approach in Cyprus," acknowledged Mr Eleftherios Eleftheriou, Coordination Officer at the Directorate General Growth of the Ministry of Finance.

As the conversation touched on inherent risks tied to regulatory flexibility, especially concerning artificial intelligence, the panellists underscored the importance of close monitoring, transparent guidelines, and collaboration between regulators and innovators to strike a balance between fostering innovation and addressing concerns.

Ms Penelope Vasquez Hadjilyra, architect and General Coordinator of the EU Mission: NZ Limassol 2030, stressed the importance of showcasing positive examples and transparent governance, in order to build trust in regulatory sandboxes. "Success stories are essential to building trust in regulatory sandboxes despite scepticism," she said.



A Cyprus Quality of Life Index can be used to inform policy

Knowledge partner:



CYPRUS QUALITY OF LIFE INDEX

- Loizos Symeou, Professor of Sociology of Education, European University Cyprus
- Marios Constantinou, Professor of Psychology, University of Nicosia
- Demetris Hadjisofocli, Co-Founder and Managing Director, Center for Social Innovation (CSI)
- Elena Hadjidakou, Acting Director, Cyprus Pedagogical Institute; Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth
- Skevi Koukouma, General Secretary, Progressive Women's Movement POGO
- Katerina Theodoridou, Director of R&D and Project Management, Center for Social Innovation (CSI)

A quality-of-life index can assist decision-makers in formulating policy, as it sheds light on specific areas of the lives of citizens highlighting where improvement is needed, heard panellists during a discussion on the "Cyprus Quality of Life Index."

Moderator Katerina Theodoridou, Director of R&D at the Centre for Social Innovation (CSI) explained that “the quality-of-life index is a comprehensive measure that quantifies various factors to examine the well-being of a specific nation.”

Ms Theodoridou stressed that currently there is no quality-of-life Index for Cyprus and that CSI has teamed up with Oxygono to develop one for the country, starting last year, with the use of a survey involving 1,000 participants.

Passing the floor to the panellists, Theodoridou noted the different aspects that such an index encapsulates and invited them to share perspectives from their fields.

Elena Hadjidakou, Acting Director of the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute stated the need to apply an index measuring the quality of education and educational outcomes. “Often well-being is related to quality in education,” she said and stressed that educational outcomes are indicators of health and happiness as they affect mental and physical well-being as well as emotional safety while advancing the feelings of belonging and purpose.

Referencing good practices from European directives and educational policy frameworks, Ms Hadjidakou highlighted the urgency of creating “a more equitable and inclusive school system” to develop fair and prosperous societies.

“Innovative interventions and policies must consider local community needs for an inclusive education system,” advocated Dr Loizos Symeou Professor of Sociology of Education, offering a perspective from educational research.

Dr Symeou also analysed how education outcomes can affect people’s lives as adults, such as their ability to access the labour market, become gender-sensitive, develop digital literacy, feel autonomous and independent, as well as become able to adapt to a rapidly changing environment. “Education contributes majorly to how citizens develop and cope in their daily lives thus impacting their sense of satisfaction,” he added.

“Quality of life in psychology has been a huge aspect,” Dr Marios Constantinou Professor of Psychology at the University of Nicosia acknowledged. He added that “metrics like happiness and social well-being are crucial in assessing the impact of education.”

Dr Constantinou explained how education can help a person integrate into a community, therefore enhancing their feelings of belonging and safeguarding their well-being.

In a nod to decision-makers, the professor stressed how similar indexes are being used abroad to inform policymaking. “It actually helps the citizens and policymakers understand what’s going on so they can take action,” he said.

Introducing a gendered viewpoint, Ms Skevi Koukouma, General Secretary of the Progressive Women’s Movement (POGO) said “Understanding diverse perspectives on happiness is crucial in addressing gender disparities.” Moving on Ms Koukoum advocated for systemic changes and policy recommendations, addressing issues in income, employment, healthcare, and education.

Offering a view from the field of business and social enterprises, Mr Demetris Hadjisofocli, co-founder and managing director of the Centre for Social Innovation (CSI), highlighted the importance of collaboration to foster economic growth and improve quality of life. “A holistic

approach involving knowledge, culture, and infrastructure is essential for economic growth," he said.

Noting that "how you perceive happiness is different depending on where you are geographically, socially and culturally," he advocated that measurements such as a quality of life index can aid advancements in education, academia and the economy.



EU Digital Services Act ushers in a new era of platform accountability in the digital world

Nikos Isaris, Deputy Head of the European Commission Representation in Cyprus

Mr Nikos Isaris, Deputy Head of the European Commission Representation in Cyprus delivered a keynote speech at the Cyprus Forum, addressing the EU's Digital Services Act, a landmark piece of legislation set to redefine online interactions and platform accountability.

Starting off, Isaris acknowledged the changes digital technology brought on various aspects of daily life and noted the economic, political and social influence of large online platforms like Facebook, TikTok, Google, Apple, and YouTube.

He posed critical questions about navigating the digital reality, safeguarding fundamental human rights, and stressing the need for legislation.

“The Digital Services Act is a new world-leading regulatory framework,” he said. The act aims to empower online users with rights, procedures, opt-outs, and protections for a safe and fair online presence. Simultaneously, it holds large online platforms accountable for assessing systemic risks to fundamental rights and ensuring transparency in their practices.

The act addresses a range of challenges, from misinformation and deep fake videos to targeted ads and algorithm-driven content, he explained. Noting that it sets “a global precedent” the act seeks to create a level playing field, prioritising users’ fundamental rights over profit considerations, Isaris stressed.

“This is a genuine concrete and big change in the business model because we are ensuring that the users’ fundamental rights come first, with profit considerations coming second,” he added. The act introduces clear and transparent complaint procedures, ensuring users have avenues to contest decisions and protect freedom of speech.

To counter the risks of echo chambers, misinformation, and consumer choices, the act provides users with tools to identify and modify algorithms, promoting transparency, Mr Isaris explained.

In conclusion, Mr Isaris stated that the Digital Services Act establishes a framework for empowering users, holding platforms accountable, and ensuring shared responsibility in protecting fundamental rights in the digital world.



Misinformation hampers transparency and the functioning of organisations and governments

Knowledge partner:



NETWORKS, NETIZENS, INFORMATION TRANSPARENCY: A SOCIAL INNOVATION APPROACH

- Charis Kourtelli, Senior Manager, Consulting, PwC Cyprus
- Charalambos Papatryfonos, Advisor DMRID on Green Transition and Innovation, Deputy Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digital Policy
- Constantinos Adamides, Associate Prof. of International Relations and Director of the Diplomatic Academy, University of Nicosia
- Martin Hagström, Ambassador of Sweden in Cyprus
- Sotiris Themistokleous, Director of Strategic Development, Center for Social Innovation - CSI

The impact of misinformation on transparency lays bare the challenges organisations face in navigating a landscape muddled by conflicting information, according to Dr Constantinos Adamides, Associate Professor of International Relations and Director of the Diplomatic Academy at the University of Nicosia.

Speaking during a panel discussion on the importance of offline and online networks, as well as information transparency and its impact on organisations, Dr Adamides analysed the far-reaching consequences of misinformation. He said, “Misinformation creates confusion and conflicts, making it difficult to discern the truth, ultimately leading to a lack of transparency. The erosion of trust in institutions, media, and established facts follows, hindering transparency further.”

The subsequent damage to information sharing and collaboration paints a grim picture of the potential consequences of unchecked misinformation, he explained. “Misinformation could lead to misinformed decision-making, damaging information sharing, reduced collaboration, inefficient resource allocation, and heightened security risks,” he said.

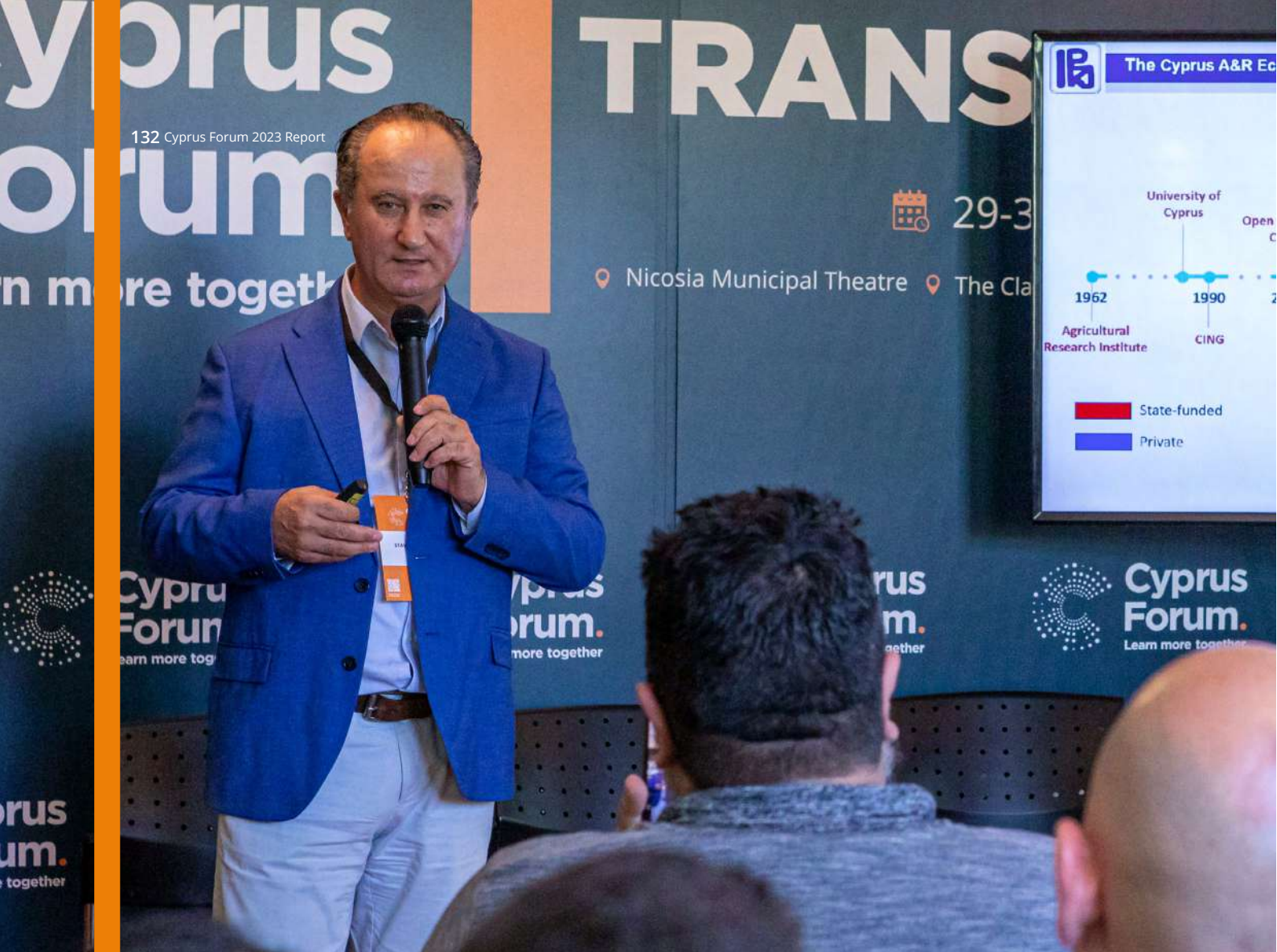
Moreover, Dr Adamides highlighted the dangers of echo chambers, where individuals are exposed only to information aligned with their interests, reinforcing pre-existing beliefs.

Mr Charalambos Papatryfonos, Advisor on Green Transition and Innovation at the Deputy Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digital Policy, discussed the political perspective on information transparency, highlighting the need for a cultural shift and efficient resource allocation. He expressed concerns about the fragmentation of ecosystems and the overlap of information, calling for improved communication and the creation of platforms for stakeholders. Martin Hagström, Ambassador of Sweden in Cyprus, provided insights into the role of government in creating a conducive environment for transparency and social innovation. Hagström talked about Sweden’s commitment to transparency through its Access to Public Information Act and emphasised the importance of independent media in countering disinformation.

He urged governments to facilitate networking by creating infrastructure, clusters, and supportive conditions for innovation “Governments can be instrumental in creating an atmosphere where trust can grow, starting with their own transparency,” he said.

Ms Charis Kourtelli, representing the Network of Social Enterprise, Entrepreneurs, and Innovators (NESEI), focused on the value chain connecting transparency, trust, innovation, competitiveness, and growth. She noted, “Transparency essentially leads you to trust, trust leads you to innovation, innovation leads you to competitiveness, and competitiveness leads you to growth.” Kourtelli stressed the importance of clear communication and information transparency in building trust among stakeholders, as well as the role of networks in fostering collaboration and innovation.

In addressing challenges faced by social enterprises, Charis Kourtelli outlined the importance of partnerships in navigating dual identity challenges, and securing diverse funding sources.



Unveiling the Innovation Path: A Vision for Cyprus's Tech Future

Stavros Malas, President of The Cyprus Institute

Dr Stavros Malas, President of the Cyprus Institute provided an overview of Cyprus's innovation journey, noting the strides made in its research and technology landscape.

In a keynote speech, Dr Malas reflected on the evolution from a country without a university during his student days to one now boasting 12 universities and multiple research institutes. "Cyprus has undergone a transformative journey in the realm of innovation, evolving from a nation without a university to a hub with a burgeoning research and education ecosystem," he said.

His speech illuminated the current status of Cyprus's innovation ecosystem, highlighting its youthfulness in the research and education sectors. Dr Malas emphasised the need to align this evolving sector with the capability to generate not just knowledge but innovation, anticipating a potential contribution of 10% to the GDP.

Offering a note of caution, Dr Malas voiced concerns about the increase in the number of universities, particularly in a country with less than a million inhabitants. He stressed the importance of an outward-facing educational approach to prepare students for diverse economies and mitigate the risks associated with establishing nonviable private universities.

“While having numerous universities can be an asset, we need to be cautious, especially in a smaller country. The focus should be on training students for broader economies and avoiding mismatches with market needs,” he said.

Spotlighting the achievements of the Cyprus Institute, Dr Malas underlined its role in generating over 100 million euros in research grants, numerous publications, and innovations through patents and spin-offs. “The Cyprus Institute stands as a testament to the country’s commitment to technology-oriented research and its potential to drive innovation and economic growth,” remarked Dr Malas.

Addressing the need for closer collaboration between academia and industry, Dr Malas said: “Our focus should be on creating an ecosystem where research infrastructures act as bridges between academia and industry, fostering collaboration and driving innovation.”



Cyprus' Innovation Aspirations Unveiled

FIRESIDE DISCUSSION

- Victor Trokoudes, CEO and co-founder, Plum
- Kyriacos Nicolaou, Business Editor, Cyprus Mail

Victor Trokoudes, CEO and co-founder of Plum, and Kyriacos Nicolaou from the Cyprus Mail engaged in a candid conversation about Cyprus's evolving innovation and startup ecosystem. The discussion delved into various aspects, from the country's recent progress to the challenges it faces in attracting top-tier talent and fostering a thriving innovation environment.

Trokoudes, a former trader at Morgan Stanley and a key figure in the establishment of TransferWise (now Wise) shared his insights into the dynamics of innovation, drawing on his experiences in the UK. Plum, his current venture, specialises in helping individuals save money through innovative fintech tools.

Reflecting on his decision to open an office in Cyprus, Trokoudes emphasised the importance of attracting top talent to drive innovation. He expressed a desire to entice individuals who, like

himself, had experiences abroad and were keen to set ambitious goals.

“I live in London. I built a company there, TransferWise. I wanted to open an office in Cyprus to hire great people here, many of whom have had experiences abroad, which is very key in terms of where they set their ambitions,” he stated.

Discussing best practices on innovation from other countries, Trokoudes highlighted the unique approach taken by successful countries like Israel and Estonia. He suggested that Cyprus should focus on targeted initiatives, such as those seen in Israel, where American VCs were invited to invest with the assurance of support in identifying high-potential candidates.

“I’d like Cyprus to have a programme where they actually bring what I consider top-quality companies—500 people, high-innovation, high-impact individuals,” advocated Trokoudes.

The conversation touched on the challenges of convincing individuals to relocate to Cyprus, focusing on the importance of incentives that not only attract professionals but also cater to their families. Housing and schooling emerged as critical factors in this regard.

When asked about the competitive aspects of choosing Cyprus over other European locations, Trokoudes stressed the need for a highly targeted approach. He envisioned bringing in companies with around 100 people, offering incentives to bring 50 individuals who are passionate, hungry, and eager to contribute to early-stage ventures.

As the conversation shifted to bureaucratic challenges, Trokoudes discussed the varying speeds of interaction with regulators in Cyprus. While characterising Cyprus as commercially inclined, he acknowledged the slow and bureaucratic nature of dealings with the central bank, particularly for businesses in the financial sector.

Kyriacos Nicolaou touched on the issue of resources, questioning whether Cyprus has the capacity to support an innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem. Trokoudes acknowledged the challenges but stressed the importance of a talent-centric approach, focusing on attracting a select group of high-impact individuals rather than sheer numbers.

The discussion concluded with an exploration of the broader components of an innovation ecosystem, including the need for a supportive regulatory environment, collaboration between universities and industries, and the importance of nurturing talent.

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TRANS

29-30

Nicosia Municipal Theatre The Class



An effective gender recognition law would be beneficial for the whole community

Knowledge partner:



GENDER RECOGNITION AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

- Alexander Davidian, Copywriter & Editor, Freelancer
- Stephanos Stavros Evangelides, Lawyer / Advocate
- Laris Vrahimis, Advocate, Eleni Vrahimi & Co LLC
- Julie Bindel, Journalist, Author, and Feminist campaigner
- Eleni Ploutarchou, Diversity Charter Cyprus Representative, Center For Social Innovation

“The absence of legal recognition poses a threat to the safety and dignity of trans individuals,” said Armand Davidian representing Accept - LGBTI Cyprus during a panel discussion on gender recognition legislation.

“Having an identity card that doesn’t align with one’s gender identity can lead to a constant outing

in daily life, affecting routine activities like opening bank accounts or securing employment," added Mr Davidian.

Noting that stereotypes still persist strongly in 2023, Stephanos Evangelides, Secretary of Accept - LGBTI Cyprus stressed that "gender expression means how I express myself and the gender that it is perceived by that expression."

Moving on, Evangelides detailed Accept's activist efforts, saying that the organisation has been lobbying the parliament for the right to change one's gender in official documents since 2014. "A legal recognition law that is not just going to be a law in paper, but to the benefit of the community, always protecting the trans community and the community as a whole," he said.

Lawyer Laris Vrahimis delved into the existing legal framework for gender recognition in Cyprus, pointing out that "this process is limited to documents under the Ministry of Interior, excluding items like driver's licenses issued by other authorities."

Expressing his disagreement with the proposed legislative changes, Mr Vrahimis spoke of "extreme gender ideologies" being adopted. "Such adoption can harm the acceptance of gay and lesbian rights. Organisations need to reassess their positions," he said.

Taking the floor from Mr Vrahimis, Mr Evangelides responded by saying that Accept "hears the fears" and that it is an organisation that is open to dialogue. "We are going to be on the same table," Evangelides stressed, "with people with opposing views."

Accept's Secretary noted that the concerns expressed by Mr Vrahimis are voiced throughout the world and that the NGO is trying to speak with society, not only with allies, in order to achieve the right framework to promote equality both in terms of legislation, as well as education.

Journalist, author and feminist campaigner, Julie Bindel brought attention to the concerns related to self-identification and its positive impact on women's rights, stating, "Legal changes allowing self-identification can lead to challenges in tracking sex offenders and ensuring the safety of women in spaces like prisons and domestic violence shelters."

Concluding, Armand Davidian underscored the importance of understanding, stating, "Dialogue is crucial to dispel fears and myths surrounding transgender individuals." He urged society to approach the issue with compassion and respect, noting, "Recognising the vulnerability of the trans community is essential."



Socially conscious development of AI, along with education and oversight will safeguard its use

Knowledge partner:



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: FRIEND OR FOE?

- Jahna Otterbacher, Associate Professor (OUC), Team Leader (CYENS CoE), Open University of Cyprus, CYENS CoE
- Loizos Michael, Professor of Computational Cognition, Open University of Cyprus & CYENS Center of Excellence
- Constantine Dovrolis, Professor and Director of CaStoRC, The Cyprus Institute
- Niki Agrotou, Policy Officer, Oxygono

Is AI a revolution poised to transform our lives, or does it harbour potential risks? A panel of technology experts convened to share their insights on the matter.

Dr Jahna Otterbacher, an associate professor at the Open University of Cyprus, kicked off the conversation by delving into her work which focuses on the social and ethical implications of AI.

“AI has the potential to shape our future, but we must ensure it does so ethically. My work at the Cyprus Centre for Algorithmic Transparency aims to illuminate the social impact of AI,” she said. “The key to advancing AI lies in merging computational cognition with social competence. We’re striving to create AI that not only learns and reasons but also understands and assists humans in a socially adept manner,” added Dr Loizos Michael, a Professor of Computational Cognition at the Open University of Cyprus and the CYENS Centre of Excellence.

Dr Constantine Dovrolis, a professor at the Cyprus Institute, shared his background in machine learning and AI, with a specific interest in neuroscience. “Neuro-inspired AI opens a window into understanding the complexities of the human mind. By exploring these intersections, we gain valuable insights that can guide the responsible development of artificial intelligence,” he said.

AI: Language and Uncertainty

The panel shifted to discussing the uniqueness of AI compared to previous technological innovations. Dr Dovrolis pointed out the groundbreaking aspect of AI’s ability to understand and produce language. “AI’s proficiency in language is groundbreaking; it’s a gateway to unparalleled possibilities. Yet, its pervasive integration into our lives demands awareness and understanding from the public,” said Dr Dovrolis.

Dr Otterbacher added that AI’s integration into everyday life often goes unnoticed by the public, emphasising the need for public awareness.

Dr Michael raised concerns about AI’s unpredictability and stressed the need for a balance between trusting the technology and maintaining human oversight to ensure responsible use. “While AI excites us with possibilities, its unpredictability, especially in autonomous systems, demands a delicate balance,” he said.

The Impact on Employment

The impact of AI on the labour market was the next topic of discussion. Dr Dovrolis highlighted that AI could enhance productivity by creating new roles even as some jobs might change or disappear.

“Job displacement is a concern, but AI also offers the opportunity for transformation. Lifelong learning is our tool to navigate this transformation and ensure continued relevance in the workforce,” Dr Michael added.

Combating Bias and Misinformation

The panel addressed concerns about bias and misinformation stemming from input data. Dr Otterbacher acknowledged the challenge of eliminating bias entirely from AI but mentioned ongoing research into fair machine learning to mitigate bias.

“Bias is inherent in machine learning, but our challenge is to ensure fairness. Harmful biases must be mitigated, and this requires a nuanced approach in the development of AI systems,” agreed Dr Dovrolis.

Regulating AI: Balancing Innovation and Safety

The discussion then turned toward the role of regulation in AI development. The panel acknowledged the importance of regulation but expressed concerns about overregulation stifling innovation. Dr Michael proposed a multi-pronged approach involving interdisciplinary collaboration between technologists, lawyers, sociologists, and policymakers.

“A dynamic approach to regulation is essential, involving collaboration across disciplines. Our regulations must evolve alongside the dynamic landscape of AI to ensure responsible development,” he said.

A Call for Educational Reform

In response to concerns about AI regulation and public understanding, the panel advocated for a shift in education. Dr Otterbacher argued for a change in the curriculum to foster critical thinking, adaptability, and an understanding of AI from a young age.

“Education should equip individuals to be smart consumers and critical thinkers in the age of AI. It’s not just about understanding AI; it’s about navigating its implications wisely,” Dr Dovrolis added.



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Rising inequalities and global conflicts are painting a stark image of the future

Knowledge partner:



THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM IN A PERIOD OF REALIGNMENT

- Stavri Kalopsidiotou, International Law expert (PhD); Cyprus Problem Bureau of AKEL
- Sotiroulla Charalambous, General Secretary, Pancyprian Federation of Labour PEO
- Kostas Gouliamos, Deputy President of the Prometheus Research Institute and frm. Rector of European University Cyprus
- Maria Danezi Pelekanou, Member of the Board of Directors of the Research Institute Promitheas

The realignment of the balance of power in the international system has already had a major impact on both the external relations of Cyprus as well as its domestic landscape, agreed Dr Stavri Kalopsidiotou, an International Law expert, Sotiroulla Charalambous Secretary-General of the PEO trade union and Kostas Gouliamos, Deputy President of the Promitheas Research Institute and former Rector of European University Cyprus, during a discussion moderated by Maria Pelekanou, a Board Member of the Promitheas Research Institute.

“Today, we are witnessing a period of profound global restructuring. Democratic systems are undergoing necessary changes to enhance transparency, uphold the rule of law, and promote participatory democracy. However, the rise of inequalities, extreme poverty, and global conflicts leading to mass migration are stark realities that demand our attention,” stated Ms Pelekanou setting the stage for the conversation.

The first speaker, Dr Stavri Kalopsidiotou, highlighted that a reevaluation of the direction the world is taking is imminent. “In the face of conflicts like the offensive of Azerbaijan against the Armenians and the ongoing war in Ukraine, we see devastating humanitarian consequences. The international community needs a comprehensive approach addressing not just the consequences but also the root causes of crises,” she said.

Delving into the connection between democratic processes, international conflicts, and the pressing issues faced by nations like Cyprus, she noted the need for a nuanced understanding of these dynamics was crucial for formulating effective responses to the challenges at hand.

Moving on, Professor Kostas Gouliamos, presented an in-depth analysis drawing on Lenin’s theory of imperialism. He underscored the importance of a principled approach to international relations and called for a functioning international system that addresses the challenges posed by aggressor states.

“A principles-based and truly functioning international system is crucial to address the challenges we face, such as the aggression of hegemonic states like Turkey and Israel,” Professor Gouliamos stated. He delved into the implications of the ongoing war in Ukraine and the role of major powers in shaping the global environment.

The professor also brought attention to the Cyprus problem, highlighting the lack of progress and the shift towards “a new Cold War” environment. He argued that these factors could have detrimental effects on stability and security in the region. The need for the United Nations to take a more responsive stance against violations of international law was a key aspect of his analysis.

Following the geopolitical analysis, Sotiroula Charalambous, shed light on how labour relations in Cyprus are impacted by global restructuring and crises. She emphasised the consequences of neoliberalism on labour markets, portraying it as a force leading to the commodification of labour.

“Neoliberalism has led to the depreciation of labour, treating it as a commodity. The informalisation of labour markets, supported by policies of privatisation and the dismantling of the social welfare state, has resulted in a continuous degradation of workers’ living standards,” Charalambous argued.

She brought attention to the significant decrease in the coverage of workers by collective

agreements in Cyprus, attributing it to the increase in informal sectors and violations of existing agreements by employers. The Secretary-General of PEO also underscored the challenges faced by trade unions in this changing landscape, emphasising the need for collective bargaining to protect workers' rights.

Ms Charalambous stressed the importance of political interventions and legislative measures to rebalance power between labour and capital.

Furthermore, she addressed the pressing issue of rising living costs, asserting that workers are grappling with the erosion of their income and a decline in their standard of living. To combat this, the state must take fair redistribution measures, she noted.



Advocating for Truth and Reconciliation: The Path to Healing and Understanding

Knowledge partner:



FOLLOW UP ON THE PROPOSAL FOR A TRUTH COMMISSION

- Achilleas Demetriades, Advocate/Founding Member, NGO "Truth Now"
- Niyazi Kizilyurek, Member of the European Parliament, GUE/NGL

In a moving discussion, Dr Niyazi Kizilyurek and Mr Achilleas Demetriades highlighted the benefits that a Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Cyprus could achieve for the country, by addressing the historical grievances between Turkish and Greek Cypriots.

Dr Kizilyurek, in his address, stressed the importance of acknowledging and condemning crimes committed during the conflicts. He stated, "We are responsible for the guilt which has been taking place on behalf of our own communities. So if guilt is not acknowledged... it's pending,

waiting for you to come to acknowledge and condemn, only then can you start the process of reconciliation.” He highlighted that the path to reconciliation is inseparable from the pursuit of the truth about crimes committed, a truth that demands acknowledgement and knowledge production.

Mr. Demetriades, echoing the sentiments, pointed out the foundational role of truth in achieving reconciliation. He elaborated, “The reason I call this a truth commission, is because I think the truth is the foundation of reconciliation. So we really have to get our act going.” He underscored the multidimensional nature of truth commissions, highlighting their potential to stimulate personal reflection and societal dialogue on truth.

“There are at least 40 Truth Commissions all over the world. It’s a healing mechanism for societies that have experienced conflict and want to rebuild. So why not Cyprus?” Mr Demetriades asked.

Dr Kizilyurek further stressed the importance of empathy in the healing process. “Healing can only be achieved if you have empathy towards the stories of others,” he remarked, pointing out the failure of ethnocentric narratives in promoting understanding between communities.

The discussion then turned to the challenges of implementing such a commission. Mr. Demetriades highlighted the resistance from certain quarters, “A number of people who are against a Truth and Reconciliation Commission are in fact, the ones who were involved in the atrocity themselves.” He argued that despite these obstacles, it’s crucial to pursue the path of acknowledgement and healing.

Dr Kizilyurek concluded by underscoring the challenges of overcoming selective ethnocentric historical narratives. “We have to replace this by exchanging old memories and creating a new policy of remembrance,” he said.



From Apology to Action: Australia's Reconciliation Journey and its Global Resonance

Fiona McKergow, Australian High Commissioner in Cyprus

Ms Fiona McKergow, the Australian High Commissioner in Cyprus, turned her focus to Australia's ongoing reconciliation journey with its Indigenous communities. McKergow drew parallels between Australia's reconciliation process and the challenges faced by communities dealing with displacement and dispossession, resonating with the experiences of many in Cyprus.

High Commissioner McKergow began her speech by emphasising the importance of truth-telling in reconciliation efforts, particularly in an era marked by divisive misinformation and disinformation campaigns. She stated, "Much of this journey is about the concept of truth-telling, it's at a time when the truth is being challenged – the truth of our own history, the truth about the impacts of that history, and the current efforts to address those past wrongs and current challenges."

Australia's reconciliation journey has its roots in the acknowledgement of past wrongs, including the policy of forcibly removing Aboriginal children from their families, which occurred from the 1930s to the 1970s. The High Commissioner highlighted the significance of recognising these historical wrongs and taking responsibility. She remarked, "We're talking about wrongs that occurred in the 1930s, right through to the 1970s. So, they're historical wrongs; they're not the current generation, but you've got a current generation wanting to apologise and then decide what we do about that."

The speech delved into Australia's process of reconciliation, which has been marked by significant milestones. In 2008, Australia's government officially issued a national apology for past wrongs against Indigenous communities, particularly the Stolen Generations. McKergow described this as a pivotal moment, stating, "That sorry was a national apology, and most high commissions and ambassador's residences have that formally displayed." However, the apology was only the beginning. It came with recommendations and initiatives aimed at addressing the inequalities and disadvantages faced by Indigenous communities. These efforts aimed to "close the gap" in areas such as education, healthcare, and incarceration rates.

McKergow also highlighted the Uluru Statement from the Heart, a landmark document produced by Indigenous community leaders in 2017. This statement expressed the Indigenous communities' desire for genuine consultation and input into policies that affect them. She explained, "That really was a point in time, and they said, 'We want to be consulted, we want to be heard, we want to have input to the policies and help manage and take responsibility for ourselves.'"

"The consequences are the same, as we've seen in Cyprus, from the displacement of dispossession, intergenerational trauma associated with that dispossession and displacement," the High Commissioner stated.



Gender budgeting ensures fundamental human rights

Knowledge partner:



DISCUSSION ON GENDER BUDGETING

- Ulrike Marx, Lecturer in Accounting, Queen Mary University of London
- Mary Pyrgos, Co-Ordinator of Cyprus Platform of Gender Budgeting
- Christina Loizou, Officer A, Health Insurance Organisation
- Melina Pyrgou, Managing Director, Pyrgou Vakis LLC

In a panel discussion moderated by Melina Pyrgou, Managing Director of Pyrgou Vakis LLC, experts from academia, the health sector and civil society discussed the concept of gender budgeting and advocated the need to start implementing it in Cyprus.

Dr Ulrike Marx, from Queen Mary University of London, commenced the dialogue by highlighting that “gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world.” Dr Marx noted the slow pace of progress in gender equality, emphasising the role that accounting can play in combating social inequalities. “Women in the European Union on average earn 16% less than men. Gender budgeting is aimed

at addressing these issues, focusing on transparency, accountability, and representation," she explained.

Expounding on the concept of gender budgeting, Dr Marx noted, "Budgets are the quantification of political goals...if we want to achieve equality and social progress, the budget is at the heart of political commitments." She stressed the importance of transparency, accountability, and representation in budgeting processes. "Budgeting processes are highly institutionalised practices, often happening behind closed doors," she added, arguing for the inclusion of diverse interest groups in these processes.

Addressing the need for a localised approach Dr Marx added "Every country has its own approach to gender budgeting, and key features and principles are highly dependent on the local and political context."

Focusing on the European experience, Dr Marx shared, "Gender budgeting is done in more than 18 countries around the world." She elaborated on the variability of approaches, saying, "One thing to understand is that every country has their own approach. It needs to be translated with the help of NGOs and civil societies and academics to make it work in a specific context."

Concluding her opening remarks, she also touched upon Austria's example of integrating gender budgeting into its constitution and budgetary law.

Mary Pyrgos, representing Cyprus Platform of Gender Budgeting, provided insights into the Cypriot context. She stressed the urgency of implementing gender budgeting, underscoring the complex nature of this task: "By postponing it, we're not just delaying; we're allowing the gap to widen."

She highlighted the limited funds available for civil society programmes and the need for a shift in how resources are allocated. Moving forward, Pyrgos provided an overview of the Research Foundation FEMA's work in promoting gender budgeting within Cyprus, detailing the journey from research to active lobbying.

She also described the Cypriot government's commitments to gender budgeting through international conventions and the slow but steady progress towards its implementation. "The government assures us that they are ready to proceed with gender law and budgeting, but they do not have the knowledge yet," Ms Pyrgos said.

"Gender budgeting is taking into consideration the needs of all the citizens independent of age, gender, and place of residence," she explained.

Christina Loizou, from the Health Insurance Organisation, spoke about the organisation's receptiveness to gender budgeting. "Its mission is the implementation of the GHS health system, and its vision is for every single citizen to enjoy lifelong equal and unhindered access to high-quality health care services," she explained. Loizou also spoke about a proposed pilot programme focusing on the pharmaceutical sector and the organisation's readiness to learn and incorporate gender budgeting principles.



Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy: Navigating Global Relations Through Academic Chairs

UNIVERSITY CHAIRS AND THEIR IMPORTANCE IN SOFT POWER DIPLOMACY

- María Luisa Calero Martínez De Irujo, Head of the A.G. Leventis- Anáhuac, Chair on Cyprus Studies
- George Hadjipavlis, Phd student, University of Oxford

Ms María Luisa Calero Martínez De Irujo, Head of the A.G Leventis - Anahuac Chair in Cyprus Studies, and Mr George Hadjipavlis, a PhD student at the University of Oxford, explored the vital role of cultural diplomacy and academic chairs in international relations. Their dialogue highlighted the significance of these instruments in shaping global perceptions, promoting mutual cooperation, and enhancing a nation's soft power.

Ms Martínez De Irujo initiated the discussion by emphasising the growing interconnectedness of the world and the pivotal role of exchanging ideas, culture, and knowledge in shaping global relationships. She stated, "In an increasingly interconnected world, exchanging ideas,

exchanging culture and knowledge is pivotal in shaping global perceptions and relationships among nations.” Cultural diplomacy, she asserted, has become a prominent instrument of state policy. It seeks to facilitate understanding between individuals from different countries, promoting ideals and institutions. The objective is to build broad support for social, economic, and political goals, fostering mutual cooperation on a global scale. Ms Martínez De Irujo explained that cultural diplomacy projects abroad serve to highlight the positive image of a country and enhance its soft power.

Soft power, a concept introduced by political scientist Joseph Nye, became a focal point in the conversation. Ms Martínez De Irujo described it as “the ability to attract others to want what you want,” representing the capacity to influence others through attraction rather than coercion. She emphasised that soft power extends beyond the seductive cultural values created by cinema, fashion, or media. It encompasses a nation’s political ideas and policies. When a country’s policies are viewed as legitimate by others, its soft power is amplified.

The interplay between cultural diplomacy and international relations is undeniable, according to Ms Martínez De Irujo. She underscored the instrumental role of academic chairs in achieving these diplomatic objectives. These chairs serve as platforms for exchanging ideas, values, and traditions, thereby strengthening relationships and promoting national interests. Academic chairs bridge gaps in cultural understanding and individual identities, fostering dialogue and advancing global consciousness.

Ms Martínez De Irujo shared her experience as the holder of the A.G. Leventis Chair of Cyprus Studies in Mexico. She highlighted the complexities of fostering communication between two vastly different cultures – Cyprus and Mexico. With no physical embassy of Cyprus in Mexico, establishing connections became challenging. The academic chair, however, proved to be a critical tool in educating Mexican diplomats about Cyprus’s geopolitical situation and promoting Cypriot culture and traditions. It prepared students to become agents of change, fostering social cohesion and resilience.

Mr Hadjipavlis expanded on the importance of soft power, particularly for countries like Cyprus that lack the capability to compete in terms of hard power. He noted that Cyprus’s strength lies in its culture and its wealth of scientific talent. Mr Hadjipavlis introduced a proposed programme at Oxford that aims to enhance Cyprus’s soft power by placing it in a regional context. The programme seeks to promote prosperity, collaboration, and stability in the Mediterranean, reflecting Cyprus’s commitment to these values.

Highlighting the importance of educating future leaders from an early age about the significance of soft power, Mr Hadjipavlis stressed the need to cultivate ties with countries like Mexico proactively, rather than reactively. Waiting until circumstances dictate engagement can hinder diplomatic efforts, he said.



Cyprus could emerge as an energy hub but regional collaboration is needed

Knowledge partner:



ENERGY SECURITY AND DECARBONISATION IN EAST MED: IS IT AN "EITHER/OR" SCENARIO?

- Cleopatra Kitti, ELIAMEP Senior Policy Advisor & Founder, The Mediterranean Growth Initiative
- Theodoros Arvanitopoulos, Research Officer, London School of Economics, Hellenic Observatory
- Gabriel Haritos, Lecturer (Adj.) Hellenic-Israeli Relations, Ben Gurion University of the Negev and ELIAMEP Research Fellow (Mediterranean Programme), ELIAMEP
- Erhan Erçin, Head of Brussels Office, Project Associates

In a discussion focused on the interplay of energy security and decarbonisation in the Middle East, Ms Cleopatra Kitti, Senior Policy Advisor at ELIAMEP and Founder of The Mediterranean Growth Initiative, Mr Theodoros Arvanitopoulos, Research Officer at the London School of Economics, Hellenic Observatory, and Mr Gabriel Haritos, Lecturer at Ben Gurion University of the Negev and ELIAMEP Research Fellow, offered a multifaceted analysis on the mesh of geopolitics, energy dynamics, and environmental imperatives shaping the region.

Gabriel Haritos opened the discussion with an overview of the current regional landscape in energy politics. He underscored the challenges arising from natural gas reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean and their implications for regional geopolitics. “The gas question is a new element in the region and has complicated the interconnectivity of regional players,” Haritos said. He elaborated on the legitimisation issues faced by countries like Israel, Lebanon, and Cyprus, emphasising the historical and ongoing struggles for recognition and rights in the realm of energy resources. He stressed the importance of solving legitimacy and security issues between rival countries such as Israel and Lebanon, to achieve regional interconnectivity. “Only by resolving the questions of legitimacy and rights can we hope to unlock the potential of energy resources in the region,” he remarked.

Haritos also highlighted the evolving diplomatic relations, including the potential normalisation of ties between Israel and Saudi Arabia, and the growing influence of India in the region.

Ms Cleopatra Kitti shifted the focus towards the potential of regional collaboration in tackling climate change and advancing sustainable energy solutions. She argued for a regional approach, considering the transboundary nature of environmental challenges. “Collaboration is key; the heavy carbon footprint of the region can only be alleviated through joint efforts,” Kitti asserted. She highlighted the interconnectedness of environmental issues across national borders, demonstrating the necessity for a cooperative regional strategy.

Kitti critiqued the current state of the European neighbourhood policy, advocating for its realignment to better suit the EU’s green and digital priorities. “We need a redesign that offers governance frameworks, financing frameworks, and policies that promote scalable, interconnected solutions,” she argued, calling for transformative approaches in energy and environmental policy.

Mr Theodoros Arvanitopoulos provided a detailed analysis focusing on Cyprus as a case study. He discussed the challenges of decarbonisation and energy security in Cyprus, given its heavy dependence on petrochemicals and limited energy diversification. “A major barrier to transitioning to renewables in Cyprus is the lack of appropriate infrastructure,” he noted, highlighting the necessity for significant investment in this area.

Drawing on his experiences in the UK, Arvanitopoulos underscored the potential for localised energy projects to initiate broader changes. He suggested Cyprus could serve as a strategic hub for regional energy cooperation, leveraging experiences from other countries and its own unique position.

The discussion concluded with a consensus on the need for comprehensive, multi-faceted strategies that incorporate geopolitical, economic, and environmental considerations.



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Cyprus Futures: Bottom-up approach to Cyprus problem could ensure a resilient solution

Knowledge partner:



CYPRUS FUTURES: THE CYPRUS TRANSFORMATIVE SCENARIOS PROCESS

- Ipek Borman, International relations expert and academic
- Petros Aristodemou, Retinal Surgeon, VRMCy
- Marcos Zambartas, Owner, Zambartas Winery

In a thought-provoking session on the “Cyprus Futures” initiative, members of the project’s team Dr Ipek Borman, Marcos Zambartas and Petros Aristodemou – engaged in a comprehensive exploration of four plausible scenarios for the future of the island. Facilitated by Reos Partners, a social impact company, the transformative scenario approach sought to involve a diverse group of 36 Cypriots in envisioning the potential trajectories of their nation.

Funded by the Governments of the Netherlands, Norway, and Finland, the Cyprus Futures

initiative resulted in four scenarios that explore two potential futures to the Cyprus problem with an agreed solution and two without, by 2035.

As the speakers unveiled these scenarios, they highlighted the importance of shifting from historical top-down peace talks to a more inclusive process that considers the perspectives of ordinary citizens.

Reimagining the Peace Process

Marcos Zambartas, owner of Zambartas Winery, opened the discussion by highlighting the need for a fresh perspective on the peace process. “Up to now it’s a consensus that all the peace talks regarding the Cyprus problem has been a top-down approach, where you had high-level politicians and high-level technocrats discussing, and the public opinion was really not part of the process” he explained. This shift in approach aims to break away from the traditional narrative, where high-level politicians and technocrats dominated discussions, leaving public opinion on the periphery.

The scenarios, carefully developed over months in 2022, do not intend to predict the future but rather offer a range of possibilities. Zambartas clarified, “With these scenarios, you give people, normal people, the compass, the idea to spark thinking on how the future could be based on our decisions today”.

Divergent Paths Unveiled

Zambartas provided a concise overview of the four scenarios. The “No Way” scenario paints a picture of failed negotiations leading to deeper divisions, economic dependence on Turkey, and a worsening Cyprus problem. The “My Way” scenario envisions the Turkish Cypriot leadership seeking international recognition as an independent state, escalating tensions and militarization. Meanwhile, the two scenarios with an agreed solution are framed around a Federation: “Their Way” and “Our Way.” The former represents a top-down approach, “peace under pressure,” where societal unpreparedness for a solution, including not involving citizens in the peace process leads to a weak federal state. In contrast, the latter, “Our Way,” depicts resilient peace with civil society engagement, trust-building, and reconciliation.

Governance and Transparency: Key Drivers of the Future

Petros Aristodemou, a retinal surgeon, delved into the relationship between governance, transparency, and the outlined scenarios. He emphasised the importance of learning from the island’s history, stating, “ We should affirm our values, we should honour our ancestors. We should learn to ask for forgiveness. We need to let go; we need to move on.” Aristodemou underlined the critical role that governance plays in shaping the future of the island, with transparency acting as a linchpin.

Dr Ipek Borman, an academic and international relations expert, added depth to the discussion by highlighting the value of scenarios in anticipating future challenges and opportunities. “ By looking forward, by looking at the future, we are able to reflect on actual possibilities and choices to identify upcoming threats and risks, and to be able to develop shared visions to mobilise for collective action” she explained. Drawing a parallel between governance and the scenarios, Aristodemou pointed out potential risks in the “No Way scenario,” such as increased executive powers, less transparency, and heightened nepotism.

Stakeholder Choices in Shaping the Future

Borman emphasised the agency of stakeholders in shaping Cyprus' future. "Scenarios become realities through the choices, actions, and reactions of civic and political stakeholders," she asserted. By contrasting the choices different stakeholders might make on the path toward "My Way" versus "Other Way," the speakers illustrated how the decisions of leaders, the UN, the European Union, civil society, and diasporic communities can significantly influence the island's trajectory.

Aristodemou concluded by reflecting on the implications for governance, transparency, and accountability. "Checks and balances work in a future where people participate in the evolution of a resilient federal state, where politicians feel accountable to the people. In scenarios with an agreed solution but little trust, there's a shift towards nationalism and populism, distracting from governance issues" he noted.

Charting a Path Toward a Resilient Peace

In their final remarks, the speakers issued a collective call for reflection on the choices made today. As Cyprus stands at a crossroads, these scenarios offer a framework for envisioning a more inclusive and bottom-up approach to peace.



Voices Unheard: Palestinian Absence in Israel's Future Dialogue

Ilan Pappé, Professor, University of Exeter

In a virtual address, Professor Ilan Pappé of the University of Exeter provided a critical analysis of the current state of affairs in Israel, shedding light on significant developments and their potential implications for the future of the region.

Dr Pappé began by encouraging the audience to consider the absence of Palestinian voices in discussions concerning the future of Israel and Palestine. The core of Pappé's message centred on the idea that the present debate about Israel's future is, in reality, a debate about the future of "apartheid Israel," as he stated.

He highlighted the absence of Palestinians from this discourse, lamenting that they are not only excluded from the discussion but are also notably absent from the very panel discussing their future. Pappé pointed to international organisations, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, which have labelled Israel as an apartheid state. He contended that the

current conversation in Israel isn't about its future but rather the future of a state that continues to marginalise and oppress Palestinians.

Within Israel's political landscape, Dr Pappé identified two distinct camps. The first, which he referred to as the "state of Judea," originated in illegal settlements in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. This camp is characterised by its adherence to messianic Zionism, Jewish fundamentalism, and a disturbing trend of racism towards Arabs, Muslims, and Palestinians. "For many years contained within the West Bank, this extremist ideology has now spread into Israel itself, aiming to impose its vision on the entire nation," he said.

In contrast, Dr Pappé described the "older Israel," which encompasses historical Palestine, including Israel proper, the West Bank, and potentially the Gaza Strip. While this older Israel was also marred by apartheid-like policies towards Palestinians, it offered a comparatively more democratic, pluralistic, and secular space.

Dr Pappé underscored the electoral success of the camp aligned with the "state of Judea," which is represented in Prime Minister's Benjamin Netanyahu's government. However, he noted that this vision of Israel is met with fierce opposition from secular, liberal Jews who view it as disastrous.

From a Palestinian perspective, Dr Pappé noted that regardless of which camp prevails, the oppression, colonisation, and dispossession of Palestinians will continue unabated. He cautioned against making precise predictions but expressed his conviction that Israel's trajectory in the next decade would be marked by even less democracy, greater brutality towards Palestinians, and an increased religious and theocratic influence in the public domain. Dr Pappé clarified that such a trajectory doesn't necessarily preclude Israel from normalising relations with neighbouring Arab states, given recent geopolitical shifts. However, he suggested that the international community, particularly Arab and Muslim societies, may increasingly view Israel as even less acceptable and legitimate than before. Paradoxically, this unfavourable international perception might offer an opportunity for Palestinians to gain greater international legitimacy for their struggle for liberation and independence, Dr Pappé stated.

Nevertheless, Dr Pappé cautioned that seizing this opportunity depends on Palestinian unity, effective representation, and political preparedness—a challenge that remains uncertain.





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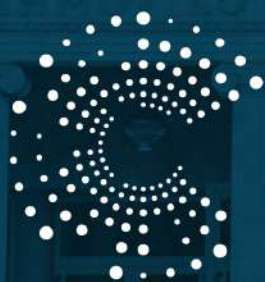


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