

## ANNUAL REPORT

- **5.** 3-4 October 2024





This report presents a comprehensive summary of the Cyprus Forum 2024, 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.

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 2024 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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### ANNUAL REPORT

3 - 4 October 2024

♥ Old Nicosia Town Hall
♥ Ledra Palace

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## Nicosia Old Town Hall | Zeno

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# Urgent action and political will is needed to address major global challenges

#### Nikos Christodoulides, President of the Republic of Cyprus

In his welcoming address, President Nikos Christodoulides underscored the Republic of Cyprus's commitment to collaborating with United Nations members to ensure the full and equal enjoyment of human rights. "Our dedication remains strong for cooperation with all UN member states to secure human rights, which aligns with the broader goals of the 2030 Agenda", he stated.

He announced Cyprus's inaugural candidacy for the UN Human Rights Council for the term 2025-2027, with elections approaching shortly. Highlighting the forum's theme, "UN Agenda 2030 Goals - Goal 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions", the President stressed the necessity for collective action to achieve these objectives.

Quoting the UN Secretary-General's report on Sustainable Development Goals, he lamented, "By the end of 2022, there was over a 50% increase in civilian deaths during conflicts and the violent displacement of 108 million people worldwide". He added, "Unfortunately, these figures have already been surpassed and continue to rise", reflecting on the escalating global conflict landscape.

President Christodoulides pointed out that today, the world faces the largest number of conflicts since the Cold War, asserting the fragile nature of peace in the region, particularly after the recent escalation in the Middle East. He emphasised that there are no "frozen conflicts", warning of the serious risks posed by the current status quo, which he deemed neither sustainable nor static.

Reflecting on Cyprus's own experiences, he said, "We know well that the prevalence of peace and stability is a one-way street, as the status quo entails severe dangers". He reiterated Cyprus's proactive stance in humanitarian efforts, recalling the island's initiative for a humanitarian sea corridor from Cyprus to Gaza presented in October 2023 at a conference in Paris.

"Although initial reactions were somewhat dismissive, we activated the Amalthea initiative to provide humanitarian aid", he explained. President Christodoulides expressed pride in how international partners acknowledged Cyprus's humanitarian efforts, stating, "Everyone began our discussions thanking the Republic of Cyprus for our initiative and highlighting our role in addressing a humanitarian crisis".

He called for enhanced international collaboration, noting, "In this interconnected world, multilateralism and collectivity are essential, and we all have significant roles to play". In addressing migration, he noted the link to climate change impacts, asserting that political will is crucial to harmonise economic development with environmental protection. "This question is increasingly pertinent", he said.

The President also highlighted the challenges facing the international community in meeting the 2030 Agenda, expressing doubts about achieving these targets if current trends continue. He concluded with a warning: "If we continue at this pace without substantial political will and robust mechanisms to enforce the Goals, I have serious doubts about our ability to meet the 2030 targets".



# Cyprus must rebuild public trust and push for reunification

#### **Annita Demetriou, President of the House of Representatives**

"Our goal is nothing less than for Cyprus to serve as a pillar of security and stability in what is broadly an unstable region", stated Annita Demetriou, President of the House of Representatives, in her keynote address.

Ms Demetriou said that as the world is going through a period where democratic values and institutions are being challenged, we must respond by further strengthening our democratic legislative and institutional framework.

"The only solution is greater dedication to our beliefs and partnerships. Only through cooperation and unity can we address the significant crises that confront us", she noted.

"As the House of Representatives, we have consistently demonstrated our support for every effort to address and regulate institutional and social issues", she continued. She then added that bold and meaningful initiatives and legislative reforms are needed, such as the local government reform, to address chronic state weaknesses.

"In a democracy, there are never dead ends. It's in our hands to determine how, in collaboration with the executive branch, we can implement these crucial modifications to avoid fostering demagogic approaches that harm the legislative framework itself, damage democracy, and have a corrosive effect on citizens", she remarked.

"Our goal is nothing less than for Cyprus to become a pillar of security and stability in a broadly unstable region, to support every initiative to de-escalate the crisis in the Middle East, and every initiative that brings us one step closer to our goal of liberation and reunification of our country", she stressed.

She added that today's challenge is regaining citizens' trust in institutions and constitutional bodies, as there can be no democracy without society's confidence, especially when citizens' mistrust isn't expressed in political terms but rather as generalised contempt.

Referring to the Cyprus issue, she said that understanding the Turkish Cypriot community's expectations, concerns, and perspective on domestic and foreign developments is central to the Cyprus problem, particularly in the post-solution era, and to the prospects of creating conditions for genuine peace and unity in our country.

"Sixty-four years after the proclamation of the Republic of Cyprus, in an exceptionally difficult political period, with all the concerning developments we've witnessed in recent days, the only path forward is liberation and reunification", Ms Demetriou emphasised.

She added that establishing genuine will from the Greek Cypriot side would bring us one step closer to a bizonal, bicommunal federation with political equality, moving beyond the Guterres framework and its six parameters.

"Time works relentlessly against our goal of ensuring peace, stability, and security for Cyprus and all its lawful inhabitants. Together, we can serve justice and peace, modernise our institutions, recognise the gravity of the moment, and acknowledge our shared responsibility. We must build bridges through dialogue, reasoned argument, and knowledge itself. We always work and hope for the best, and I am certain that in the end, we shall succeed", she concluded.



# Strong institutions, justice, and peace are non-negotiable

#### Nicolas Kyriakides, Executive President of the Cyprus Forum

In his welcome address, Executive President of the Cyprus Forum, Nicolas Kyriakides, said the conference has now become an institution for public discussion, dialogue, and exchange of ideas aimed at progress and prosperity.

He noted that the forum creates fertile ground for addressing the challenges of our time, with an emphasis on promoting sustainable development, peace, and social justice.

Mr Kyriakides highlighted that in a world facing geopolitical tensions, social inequalities, and escalating uncertainty, the need for strong, fair, and transparent institutions has never been more urgent. He emphasised that these institutions form the foundation upon which societies that promote peace and prosperity for all can be built.

He also focused on the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 16, which he said "call on us to strengthen our structures, ensure equal access to justice, and work towards more peaceful societies".

Mr Kyriakides described the Cyprus Forum as an independent and safe space for dialogue and cooperation, dedicated to addressing these issues, among others. He added that through collaboration and collective action, "we can build a better world for the citizens of the island and the wider region".

"Injustice and war cannot be accepted, and their opposites - strong institutions, justice, and peace – are non-negotiable. We must not tolerate any more 'yes, but'. We cannot prosper with either corruption or war", he concluded.



The significance of the Cyprus Forum in fostering dialogue in a region marked by both tragedy and opportunity.

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

In his opening address, Yiannis Thomatos, Executive Vice President of the Delphi Economic Forum, highlighted the significance of the Cyprus Forum in fostering dialogue in a region marked by both tragedy and opportunity.

Mr Thomatos noted that this year's forum commenced with a focus on the island's historical context, addressing the dual anniversaries of the Turkish invasion and Cyprus's accession to the European Union.

"We are here because of the special weight of Cyprus for Greece and the wider region", he stated, underscoring the forum's mission to expand its influence beyond the region. He noted the presence of 250 speakers, with a guarter from abroad, asserting that this mix of voices enhances the forum's impact.

This year's discussions come at a poignant time, marking the 50th anniversary of the Turkish invasion, he said, which he described as a "tragic anniversary" that continues to wound the people of Cyprus. In contrast, he also pointed to the 20-year celebration of Cyprus's equal accession to the EU as a "diplomatic success" that remains a beacon of hope for a better future. Mr Thomatos elaborated on the irony of these concurrent anniversaries, saying, "This juxtaposition reveals the unique destiny of Cyprus—open wounds on one side and vast opportunities on the other". He expressed anticipation for thematic discussions that will explore the impact of these events on Cyprus's economic and social life.

The geopolitical landscape of the Eastern Mediterranean was also a focal point, with Mr Thomatos acknowledging the ongoing regional tensions. "In dark times like these, characterised by instability and uncertainty, we at the Forum continue to insist on dialogue, the creation of common ground, and the value of coexistence", he affirmed, encouraging attendees to embrace these themes.

Mr Thomatos set the tone for the discussions by highlighting the challenges posed by instability and uncertainty in the current times. He emphasised the forum's commitment to fostering dialogue, creating common ground, and valuing coexistence and mutual understanding, regardless of the difficulties faced.

He expressed confidence that the agenda reflects this dedication and concluded by wishing all participants an enjoyable and productive experience over the next two days.



# Cyprus Forum champions dialogue and critical thinking which are vital for democracy

### Sofronis Clerides, Professor, Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Management University of Cyprus

In his opening address, Sofronis Clerides, Professor and Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Management at the University of Cyprus, underscored the role of forums as platforms for citizens to freely express their views on pressing issues.

Dr Clerides noted that forums have historically served as spaces for discussion and reflection, stating, "They are the democratic spaces where participants can freely express themselves, aiming to highlight significant issues and foster dialogue around them". He emphasised the power of discussions, which not only allow for the exchange of opinions but also provide opportunities for learning and the generation of new ideas.

Expressing pride in the University of Cyprus's participation, Dr Clerides noted the institution's commitment to developing critical thinking. He further noted that universities aim to foster critical thinking and should act as beacons that stimulate and awaken society. This approach, he argued, is essential for academic institutions, as their influential role is realised when scholars engage beyond the confines of academia to share knowledge and spark conversations on critical societal matters.

Dr Clerides outlined the diverse topics on this year's agenda, including corruption, transparency, institutional strengths and limitations, and the political and economic challenges facing Cyprus and the European region. He posed a fundamental question about how organisations and individuals can consistently uphold the timeless values that support democracy while courageously proposing necessary changes for a secure future. "These questions, while seemingly commonplace, are vital for preserving social stability and fostering progressive action for tomorrow", he remarked.

He also addressed the contemporary issues of misinformation and superficiality, questioning how society can safeguard truth and the public interest. Dr Clerides referenced the forum's scientific approach, reiterating the importance of integrity in discussions. "The Cyprus Forum has established itself over the past five years as a significant platform for sincere and courageous conversations", he stated.



# Cooperation is key to address Cyprus issue and global challenges

Colin Stewart, UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Head of UNFICYP and Deputy Special Adviser on Cyprus

UN Special Representative for Cyprus, Colin Stewart urged Cypriots to rekindle a shared way of life if there is to be lasting peace on the divided island.

The UN Special Representative expressed cautious optimism regarding a potential breakthrough in the Cyprus negotiations after the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders had agreed to meet informally with UN Secretary-General António Guterres in New York. He called the development "an important first step" toward resuming substantive peace talks.

He went on to highlight the role of the UN in the conflict. He explained that the United Nations has maintained a peacekeeping presence on the island for 60 years, with over 150,000 troops from 44 countries having served and 187 peacekeepers sacrificing their lives. These efforts, he said, have preserved a relative peace for five decades. "Successive Secretaries-General have devoted their good offices to helping Cypriot leaders solve the Cyprus Issue", he said.

Mr Stewart acknowledged that after decades of deadlock, the situation remains delicate. "It feels very much like we are yet again at a crossroads, both globally and in Cyprus".

He linked Cyprus's peace process to broader challenges facing the world, emphasising that Cyprus must not become a casualty of declining international cooperation. He referenced the recent UN "Pact for the Future", a reaffirmation of multilateralism, as an example of global commitment to dialogue.

"We are facing unprecedented challenges and the only solution is to reinvigorate the international multilateral system", he stressed.

He also warned that Cyprus is especially vulnerable to global threats, with climate change posing a particular risk. More than half of the island is at risk of desertification, Stewart said, noting that the Cypriot population is acutely aware of these issues along with the ongoing global conflicts and deteriorating respect for international law.

Yet Stewart sees a window of opportunity. "Optimism is enshrined in the job description for my post, but at the same time I know it won't be easy", he commented, urging both sides to seize what may be any chance for progress. "We'd better make the best of the current possibility in case it is the last one", he added.

The UN has continued grassroots efforts to encourage inter-communal ties, aiming to foster the mutual understanding that is critical to any settlement. "Economic ties are the most effective ways to bring the island together, with economic integration paving the way for political unity", he noted.

However, he cautioned that "getting beyond 'us versus them" is key. Stewart emphasised that reconciliation will require both communities to recognise their shared suffering and to question aspects of their historical narratives. "There is always some truth to the other side's narrative", he stated. "But contrary to the two non-intersecting and conflicting public narratives, we find that there is actually a lot more common ground than we realise".



## 'Reunification offers Cypriots the best chance to live normal lives'

#### Giulia Bertezzolo, Head of Unit, European Commission

Giulia Bertezzolo, Head of Unit at the European Commission, outlined the EU's desire for a renewed momentum for the Cyprus negotiations, noting the Commission's dual-track approach of combining regulatory oversight with financial aid, to support reconciliation.

"Our goal", Ms Bertezzolo said, "is to facilitate the reunification of Cyprus, not only for legal reasons but because reunification offers both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots the best chance to overcome the past and to live normal lives". Ms Bertezzolo underlined that the European Commission sees a reunified Cyprus as vital not only for the island's stability but also for its economic potential within the European Union framework.

She went on to detail the main pillars of the Commission's involvement: the implementation of the Green Line Regulation, which oversees trade and movement across the buffer zone, and

the EU Aid Programme for the Turkish Cypriot community. This aid programme, she explained, aims to bolster economic integration by enhancing inter-communal contacts and promoting EU standards in areas such as animal health and food safety in the north.

She also highlighted a joint solar power initiative within the buffer zone, aimed at reducing the island's carbon footprint and fostering clean energy. "Animal diseases, CO2 emissions, pests, pollution—these don't stop at the Green Line", she said, emphasising that both communities stand to benefit from EU-backed projects addressing island-wide concerns.

The European Commission has established a significant presence in northern Cyprus, with an office staffed by a diverse team of EU personnel who work daily with both Greek and Turkish Cypriots to implement cooperative projects. Ms Bertezzolo noted that, although the Commission encounters persistent obstacles, there is a consistent drive to "overcome barriers and use creativity and determination" to enable services that are common elsewhere in the EU but difficult to access under Cyprus's divided status.

Despite political and social pressures, many Cypriots are committed to cooperation, she observed. "I would like to take this opportunity to give credit to the many Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots who, despite sometimes very strong political and social pressure, are engaged with us to find solutions", she said.

Ms Bertezzolo recalled a recent conversation with young Cypriots, who expressed a desire to transcend ethnic labels. "Several students told me, 'We are tired of being called Greek Cypriots or Turkish Cypriots. Our dream is to be called just Cypriots".

In closing, Bertezzolo referenced the appointment of a UN Special Envoy for Cyprus as an opportunity not to be missed. "With the appointment of the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy, we have the opportunity to solve the Cyprus issue", she said.



# Nicosia Mayor calls for city-level cooperation as path to Cyprus solution

#### **Charalambos Prountzos, Mayor of Nicosia**

The Mayor of Nicosia, Charalambos Prountzos noted the importance of bicommunal cooperation at the city level as a potential pathway to resolving the Cyprus issue during his address. In his speech, Mr Prountzos said that Nicosia is bearing the brunt of the unresolved Cyprus problem, "unable to fully realise its potential, gradually becoming more introverted and melancholic, much like its residents, whose entire generations have tried to plan, build and create using makeshift solutions to work around the territorial anomaly".

He reaffirmed his commitment to working with Mehmet Harmanci to achieve positive outcomes for the city and all its residents. His approach centres on reviewing and updating the master plan efforts for a joint sewage treatment plant in Mia Milia, which has been stalled since

2001, aligned with UN sustainable development goals and the EU's green and digital transition agenda.

He added that culture is another potential area for cooperation, noting Nicosia's bid to become European Capital of Culture in 2030.

"The easiest thing would be to start playing the blame game, one of the Cyprus issue's tired clichés. I refuse to go down that path. Instead, I stressed the need to create a city of peace and stability in a region that's ablaze. Hope and optimism are built through small success stories. I hope that in collaboration with Mehmet (the Mayor of Nicosia's Turkish Cypriot municipality), the United Nations, and the European Union, we'll have more of these soon", he concluded.



## The Cyprus issue intertwines with all issues

#### Mehmet Harmanci, Mayor of Nicosia's Turkish Cypriot Municipality

In his opening address, Mr Mehmet Harmanci, Turkish Cypriot Mayor of Nicosia said that the ongoing Cyprus issue isn't a secondary local matter but rather the fundamental issue for all Cypriots, which intersects with everything else.

"We cannot maximise this island's economic potential without a peaceful and sustainable solution, nor can we properly address environmental sustainability or build resilience against the looming threats of climate change. It also seems almost misleading to discuss regional security at a time when the two Cypriot communities can't even gather around a table to seriously discuss the Cyprus issue, and with increasing militarisation around the island", he emphasised.

He also asked attendees to consider the lost opportunities regarding economic, social and ex-

ternal cohesion, and what could have been achieved across the entire island in terms of development, sustainability, human rights and security had it managed to join the EU as a united Cyprus 20 years ago.

He expressed his satisfaction that his counterpart is coming to the table with new ideas for bi-communal cooperation that will benefit the city and all Nicosians.

"Cypriots have proven that they disregard artificial borders and embrace mutual social, commercial, educational and employment opportunities across the buffer zone. What we urgently need now is for decision-makers and leaders on both sides to have the courage to publicly acknowledge that a sustainable, secure and prosperous future for all Cypriots will remain a dream and illusion as long as we remain divided", he concluded.





# Government advances legal reforms, digital transformation plan

#### Fireside Discussion with the Deputy Minister to the President

- Irene Piki, Deputy Minister to the President
- Moderator Nicolas Kyriakides, Executive President & Founding Member, Cyprus Forum

Lobbying legislation, the bill concerning the powers of the Attorney General and Auditor General, digital transformation, and the code of conduct for Government members were among the topics discussed by Deputy Minister to the President Irene Piki during a panel discussion with Cyprus Forum Executive Chairman Nicolas Kyriakides.

Referring to a series of reforms, including those concerning the powers of the Attorney General and Auditor General, she emphasised the importance of restructuring and modernising the state.

When Mr Kyriakides raised the matter of recently implemented lobbying legislation and its significance to the Government, Ms Piki noted that lobbying is beneficial when conducted within a legislative framework that ensures transparency.

She noted that the Transparency Commissioner has already issued guidelines for all parties and suggested that more informational meetings should be held to improve lobbying practices. When questioned about the bill concerning the Attorney General and Auditor General's powers and the Government's position, Ms Piki said that state restructuring and modernisation were key priorities in the President's governance programme, noting that these reforms are part of the state's transformation. "These institutions have been operating since 1960, so it's natural they need re-evaluation", Ms Piki said, adding that the President had announced reforms to the Law and Audit Offices in January, and proposals for Central Bank reform were also being developed.

She explained that the Law Office reform involves separating the roles of Legal Counsel and Public Prosecutor, noting that the Ministry of Justice has prepared draft bills currently under initial discussion with stakeholders. Regarding the Audit Office, she stated that the proposal is to establish an Audit Council, following the model of many other EU member states.

Another topic discussed was the code of conduct for Government members, with Ms Piki describing it as an "ethical code for officials". She highlighted that a new dimension was added with the President's appointment of George Arestis as Special Ethics Advisor. "It's crucial to have someone officials can consult, as grey areas often arise", Ms Piki said, noting that Mr Arestis serves an advisory role for officials, and the President can also consult him if he believes an official may have breached the code of conduct.

Mr Kyriakides also raised the topic of the Government's website and broader government technology use. Ms Piki responded that digital transformation is a major government priority, explaining that e-governance promotes transparency and helps combat corruption. She referenced the diakivernisi.gov.cy website, which provides centralised access to all government decisions. She added that the website contains the current Government's entire governance programme, including statistics on implemented and ongoing actions.

She noted that the website is continuously being upgraded and will soon include a new "suggestions" feature allowing citizens to provide input on government work, as part of broader participatory democracy initiatives.



# **EPPO** seeks stronger cooperation in combating transnational crime

#### The Mission and Values of the EPPO

• Anne Pantazi-Lamprou, European Prosecutor, European Public Prosecutor's Office (keynote speech)

In a keynote address, Anne Pantazi-Lamprou, European Prosecutor at the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO), explained the agency's work in combating financial crime within the European Union and stressed the need for increased resources to enhance its operations.

The EPPO, established under EU Council Regulation 1939/2017, is tasked with investigating serious crimes, such as procurement and VAT fraud, bribery, and money laundering.

Since its operational launch on June 1, 2021, the EPPO has expanded its jurisdiction to encompass 22 EU member states, with Poland and Sweden currently set to join. Pantazi-Lamprou noted that the EPPO's mandate extends beyond national borders, allowing it to investigate offences committed by EU nationals or officials anywhere in the world. "Economic crime is not confined within national borders; it expands transnationally", she said.

The European Prosecutor pointed to a recent case dubbed the "Admiral investigation", which highlights the EPPO's capability to tackle transnational organised crime. This investigation, linked to a VAT fraud scheme involving a professional money laundering group, uncovered connections across several countries, including France, Portugal, Italy, and various nations in North Africa and the Middle East. The EPPO's analysis of seized data has led to multiple independent investigations and highlighted the interconnectedness of various types of crime, including drug trafficking and investment fraud.

Pantazi-Lamprou emphasised the importance of international collaboration, stating that the EPPO has established working arrangements with non-participating EU member states and international bodies, such as the United States Department of Justice. She explained that the operational cooperation with those countries was facilitated, allowing for the exchange of strategic information.

The statistics detailing the EPPO's achievements are striking: the value of frozen assets surged from €147 million in 2021 to €1.5 billion by the end of 2023, while court indictments rose from five to 139 in the same period. "What renders the EPPO attractive to the outside world is not only its operational progress but also the independence embedded in its structures", Pantazi-Lamprou added, stressing the importance of accountability and adherence to the rule of law.

Despite the progress, she called for enhanced resources, particularly in police investigations and digital analysis capabilities, to manage the growing complexity and volume of cases. "It is worth allocating further resources to this prosecutorial authority," she urged, pointing to the necessity for a robust response to the evolving landscape of financial crime. In conclusion, the European Prosecutor reaffirmed the EPPO's commitment to uphold the rule of law, emphasising that "every person will be investigated, regardless of status".



## The separation of powers of the Attorney General in focus



#### **Attorney General Powers**

- George L. Savvides, Attorney General of the Republic, Law Office of the Republic, (keynote speech)
- Hanna Suchocka, Honorary President of the Venice Commission
- Demetris Demetriou, MP, President of the Parliamentary Committee on Institutions, Merit and the Commissioner on Administration, DISY
- Christina Karakosta, Policy Officer, European Commission, DG Justice, Rule of Law Unit
- Moderator: Christophoros Christophi, Lawyer, Christophi & Associates LLC

Any reform of the Law Office must be approached with due gravity and undergo thorough and careful examination by prominent constitutional experts, Attorney General of the Republic, George Savvides argued.

The discussion included the Chairman of the House Committee on Institutions, Values and Administration Commissioner, Mr Demetris Demetriou, the Honorary President of the Venice Commission, Ms Hanna Suchocka, and the Policy Officer in the Directorate-General for Justice's Rule of Law Unit of the European Commission, Ms Christina Karakosta.

Regarding the Government's proposed Law Office reform, Mr Savvides said that the Ministry of Justice

presented a package of bills concerning proposed reforms. These relate to the separation of the Attorney General's powers, the creation of a new Director of Public Prosecutions position, and judicial oversight of the proper application of criteria for pursuing or suspending criminal prosecution.

Speaking about the separation of powers, Mr Savvides said this is an issue the Law Office has grappled with, having studied various common law systems regarding the status, powers, and appointment methods of the Attorney General and Director of Public Prosecutions (or equivalent) in countries such as Ireland, Malta, England, Australia, and Canada.

Mr Savvides noted that the Government's proposed reform, which requires amending crucial constitutional articles, is complex. Therefore, continued Mr Savvides, any reform of this magnitude must be approached with gravity and undergo careful study, not only by the relevant Ministry and the Law Office but also by other eminent constitutional experts as part of a broader think tank.

During the discussion, the Attorney General emphasised that the state's legal counsel must maintain complete independence and should under no circumstances be dependent on the Government.

Additionally, addressing the issue of checks and balances, Mr Savvides said that the Turkish Cypriots' withdrawal from the Government in 1963 did not affect the checks and balances concerning the Attorney General. He explained that examining the Constitution reveals that Turkish Cypriot cases were handled exclusively by the Deputy Attorney General, who was Turkish Cypriot, while Greek Cypriot cases were handled by the Greek Cypriot Attorney General.

Responding to comments about the constitutional power of each Attorney General to initiate or terminate criminal proceedings, and the view held by some that there should be judicial rather than hierarchical oversight of the Attorney General's decisions, Mr Savvides expressed his opinion that introducing hierarchical oversight "as we intended to do and as we have already conveyed to the European Commission, is a better practice than judicial review. Firstly, because there would be an expanded group of people involved in the oversight; secondly, it would be substantive oversight; and thirdly, we wouldn't need to amend the Constitution at all".

Mr Demeitriou said that he agrees in principle with the Government on the need to reform both the institution of the Attorney General and the separation of powers, as well as the need to reform the Auditor General's office, reminding that this was something most presidential candidates had pledged during their campaigns.

He added that the rule of law reports for 2023, and particularly the latest 2024 report, explicitly mention the necessity of separating powers and the need for judicial review of decisions made by either the Attorney General or the Public Prosecutor.

He further noted that while the law of necessity shouldn't be ignored or disregarded in a way that might put the Republic of Cyprus at risk if there is political will for Law Office reform, it should be done through legally sound methods. He expressed the view that public trust would be gained through greater transparency in all proceedings.

Ms Suchocka stated that the Venice Commission maintains its position that there isn't a single, uniform model for prosecutorial systems across different countries, but they should adhere to certain rules. She added that the Venice Commission emphasises the need for independence and autonomy of prosecutorial authorities.

She also noted that the Venice Commission, in its opinions, distinguishes between the independence of judges and the judiciary and that of the prosecution service, as they are not at the same level.

Ms Karakosta, referring to the rule of law report, explained that it is a preventive tool established by the European Commission to identify problems at an early stage concerning the rule of law. She added that what is being requested in the 2024 rule of law report for Cyprus from the European Commission is "effective remedy" and not just a review of rule of law aspects.



# There is rising interest in Spanish among Cypriot students



### Spanish, a Growing Global Language. Current Situation in Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean Region

- Pilar Tena, Director in Greece and Regional Area, Instituto Cervantes
- Andrea Coppola, Managing Director Italy & Southeast Europe, IE University
- Elena Marcoulli, Spanish Language Counselor, Ministry of Education, Sport and
  Youth
- Moderator: Susana Martinez Vellón, Coordinator of Aula Cervantes in Nicosia

Spanish language education is experiencing growing demand in Cyprus, participants at a panel supported by Instituto Cervantes and the Embassy of Spain in Nicosia, heard.

Representatives from the institute, the Ministry of Education in Cyprus, and IE University highlighted the appeal of the language among European students.

Ms Pilar Tena, Director for Greece and the region at Instituto Cervantes outlined the institute's role in promoting the Spanish language and culture globally. Instituto Cervantes has been instrumental in "spreading Spanish and Hispanic American culture abroad", she noted. With around 100 centres worldwide, including a hub at the University of Cyprus, the institution offers resources such as the DELE (Diplomas of Spanish as a Foreign Language) certification, widely recognised by educational systems and employers internationally.

Ms Tena also pointed to a surge in Spanish's popularity within Europe. "Spanish is the fourth language in terms of the number of native speakers", she noted, referring to data from the EU's statistical agency, Eurostat. A recent report showed that the number of secondary students studying Spanish rose from 12.6% in 2013 to 18.5% in 2020, as other languages, including French, saw a decline. If trends continue, "the study of Spanish will surpass that of German before the end of this decade", she added.

Ms Elena Marcoulli, Spanish Language Counsellor at Cyprus's Ministry of Education, Sports, and Youth, echoed this enthusiasm for Spanish, detailing its place within Cyprus's secondary and higher education. Initially introduced as a trial language in 2001, Spanish has since become a fixture in both public and private schools. "The total number of students learning Spanish in public secondary education schools has recorded a stable increase, reaching these last two years more than 1,200", Marcoulli stated.

Higher education is also expanding Spanish offerings, with the University of Cyprus planning to integrate Spanish into its European Studies Master's programme next year. Cyprus's Ministry of Education is in talks to make DELE certification available in public schools, a move that could give students an internationally recognised qualification before they finish secondary education, Marcoulli noted.

The popularity of Spanish has not only increased in school curricula but has also influenced career paths and international study choices among Cypriots. Mr Andrea Coppola, Managing Director for Italy and Southeast Europe at IE University observed a rise in Cypriot students choosing Spain as a study destination. "Enrolment from Cyprus has grown by 180% in the last year alone", he noted, attributing this interest to Spain's position as a "bridge" for students aiming for careers across Ibero-America and globally.

Mr Coppola also linked this demand to Brexit, which has led students to reconsider study destinations within the EU. "Spain, it's a bridge between different countries, different worlds, thanks to the Spanish language", he said.



# **Combating corruption within the existing framework in Cyprus**

Knowledge partner:



#### **Independent Authority Against Corruption Powers**

- Haris Boyiadjis, Transparency Commissioner Independent Authority Against Corruption
- Irene Loizidou-Nikolaidou, Commissioner for Personal Data Protection
- Yoojin Choi, Head of Training and Capacity Development Department,
   International Anti-Corruption Academy
- Anaïs Anouilh, International Relations Officer High Authority for Transparency in Public Life (online)
- Alexandra Attalides, Member of Parliament House of Representatives
- Georgios Chatzigiannakis, President, Transparency International Greece
- · Leto Cariolou, Lawyer
- Moderator: Maria Krambia Kapardis, Professor in Forensic Accounting, Cyprus University of Technology

Speakers debated the effectiveness of the newly established Independent Authority Against Corruption (IAAC), highlighting challenges such as limited resources, overlapping institutional roles, and lack of political will to combat corruption decisively.

Transparency Commissioner Mr Haris Boyiadjis outlined IAAC's progress since its establishment in 2022, including the receipt of 290 complaints, 75 of which were anonymous. "Society has shown confidence in the commission", he said, noting that 85 cases had already been investigated. However, he admitted structural limitations, such as the commission's inability to conduct criminal prosecutions independently, due to constitutional constraints.

MP Ms Alexandra Attalides criticised the lack of interrogation powers granted to the ICAC, emphasising that political will is vital to combating corruption. "In Cyprus, we have a culture of covering for 'our own", she said. MP Attalides also expressed frustration over delays in legislative reforms, saying, "I filed a proposal to empower the authority with interrogation powers. It's still sitting in committee".

The MP also pointed to structural inefficiencies, such as reliance on temporary staff, as indicative of a lack of genuine commitment. "If we mean business, the commission must have permanent personnel, sufficient funding, and true independence", she said.

Ms Anaïs Anouilh from France's High Authority for Transparency in Public Life explained how her country restored public trust after scandals by enforcing binding legislation on asset declarations. "Trust can improve if you put in place strict laws and ensure compliance", she said.

Ms Yoojin Choi of the International Anti-Corruption Academy highlighted Korea's success in leveraging civil society support and whistleblower protections. "Whistleblowers in Korea can even be employed by anti-corruption agencies, receiving both legal and psychological support", she said, suggesting Cyprus adopt similar measures.

Ms Irene Loizidou-Nikolaidou, Commissioner for Personal Data Protection, addressed misconceptions that privacy laws may hinder transparency in fighting corruption, saying that "accountability and transparency are core principles of GDPR, and we must balance the public's right to information with individual rights case-by-case". Ms Loizidou-Nikolaidou also noted that cooperation between institutions is vital for achieving this balance, citing her office's collaboration with IAAC as a model for effective governance.

Mr Georgios Chatzigiannakis, President of Transparency International Greece, underscored the need for stronger collaboration between civil society and public institutions. He highlighted Greece's National Transparency Authority (NTA) as a positive development but noted gaps. "Our relationship with NTA remains fragmented. While there's a need for deeper collaboration, cultural resistance in the public sector often limits civil society's role," he said.

Lawyer Ms Leto Cariolou called for legal reforms to strengthen IAAC's role. "The authority needs full investigative powers, including the ability to issue warrants and prosecute", she said, describing the current framework as insufficient. Ms Cariolou also highlighted concerns over inefficiency and resource waste due to overlapping jurisdictions. "Ongoing investigations must not be suspended simply because another authority intervenes. This creates unnecessary delays and undermines accountability", she argued.

The panel agreed that while the IAAC has made progress, significant hurdles remain. Mr Boyiadjis acknowledged that societal trust in institutions is fragile. "We must act quickly and decisively to restore confidence. Without results, trust will be lost completely", he warned.



## Cyprus and the EU unite on labour reforms, aim for job quality

#### **Fireside Discussion on Labour Issues**

- Yiannis Panayiotou, Minister of Labour and Social Insurance
- Mario Nava, Director-General DG EMPL, European Commission
- Moderator: Ioanna Christodoulou

In a fireside discussion, Yiannis Panayiotou, Cyprus's Minister of Labour and Social Insurance, joined Mario Nava, Director-General for Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion at the European Commission, to discuss the challenges posed by demographic shifts, economic sustainability, and the future of work.

Speaking on the European Commission's employment goals, Mr Nava outlined the EU's commitment to ensuring high standards in job quality, including fair wages, strong health and safety measures, and good working conditions. "What does it mean to have a quality job?" Mr Nava asked, explaining that it encompasses "a fair wage—enough for the four weeks of the month".

Mr Nava acknowledged the labour market's shift, with unemployment levels dropping significantly, including in Cyprus, where the unemployment rate has decreased from 20% to 5% in the past decade. He stressed that the EU's current employment targets build on the earlier Porto goals, but now incorporate quality standards for work. "Given the good numbers, I think it makes sense to look at quality", he added.

Minister Panayiotou echoed this sentiment, saying that EU policies have directly influenced Cyprus's approach to labour reform. He noted that Cyprus has prioritised measures to improve wages and working conditions, including recent increases to the minimum wage and new collective agreements in sectors like construction and hospitality. The Minister said that the government applies a "human-centred policy, the priorities of improving the wages towards an adequate level, supporting the middle class and the less privileged employees," explaining that these policies aim to enhance the quality of life for workers and build a stable foundation for future pensions.

Pension sustainability, however, remains a major concern across the EU due to an ageing population and a shrinking workforce. Mr Nava highlighted the demographic challenges facing Europe, describing the growing pressure on state pension systems. "Every year, we have one million fewer workers", he said, explaining that traditional reliance on state pensions may no longer be sufficient.

Cyprus's pension system has seen recent reforms aimed at long-term sustainability, said Minister Panayiotou, who highlighted a new policy to make the national insurance system more effective. The latest actuarial review, he said, showed that the system is viable for the next several decades if policy adjustments are made Minister Panayiotou detailed Cyprus's own national skills plan, launched last year, which includes training programmes in Greek and Turkish for inclusivity across all communities. The aim is "to have more than 100,000 people participate in these initiatives over the next few years", he said, noting that these efforts are intended to shift professional culture towards embracing green and digital priorities.

Both speakers agreed on the critical role of social dialogue and cooperation between the EU, national governments, and private sectors in addressing these challenges. "The European Union is the most ambitious project ever initiated on our continent", Minister Panayiotou remarked.



## **Transparency is key to resilient societies**



#### **Transparency Challenges and Solutions for Civil Society**

- Eleni Karaoli, Legal Consultant, Civil Society Advocates
- Josip Ivanovic, Information Integrity and Youth Specialist, UNDP
- Martin Hagstrom, Ambassador of Sweden
- Irene Vantaraki, AVADAR
- Transatlantic
- Aphrodite Kyriakou, Cyprus Integrity Forum
- Moderator: Maria Hambi, Editor in Chief, StockWatch

Transparency in governance and civil society is critical for building resilient and democratic societies, panellists said, citing global and local challenges in promoting accountability and combating corruption.

Mr Martin Hagström, the Swedish Ambassador to Cyprus, highlighted Sweden's approach to transparency as a cornerstone of its societal progress. "Transparency is highly prioritised in Sweden", he said. "It has helped foster a high-trust society, which has been instrumental in our development from a poor country on the northern fringe of Europe to where we are today". Ambassador Hagström detailed Sweden's Freedom of the Press Act, established in 1766, as a pioneering legal framework ensuring access to official documents and promoting accountability.

Mr Josip Ivanovic, Information Integrity and Youth Specialist at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) warned about rising disinformation and authoritarian tendencies globally. "Between 2016 and 2021, more countries shifted towards authoritarianism than democracy", he said, referencing a 2022 report by International IDEA. He emphasised the need for governments to legislate against false information and invest in fact-checking tools, adding, "At the end of the day, our goal is to involve large coalitions to show there is light at the end of the tunnel".

Legal consultant Ms Eleni Karaoli of Civil Society Advocates underscored the watchdog role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in demanding transparency and equal access to information. "Access to information is democracy", she said, calling for better consultation with civil society in policymaking. She criticised past actions in Cyprus, where insufficient consultation resulted in the deregistration of thousands of NGOs. "Transparent public criteria for funding are essential to ensure equality and accountability in the civil sector", Ms Karaoli added.

Education is a powerful tool for instilling transparency and combating corruption, Ms Aphrodite Kyriakou from the Cyprus Integrity Forum noted. "We've promoted stories in schools to cultivate an anti-corruption mindset", she said. "Education builds resilience and encourages ethical decision-making. It's about creating a systemic change for a stronger democracy".

The panellists agreed on the need for mechanisms to counter disinformation, support civil society, and educate future leaders. Ambassador Hagström noted the Swedish model of public consultations and hearings with civil society to enhance governance. "In Sweden, all legislative proposals are subject to public consultation", he said. "This ensures that all stakeholders, including civil society, have a voice".

"Transparency is not just a goal but a continuous process", stressed Mr Ivanovic. "It requires vigilance, collaboration, and commitment".



### Nicosia Old Town Hall | Cornaro

DAY 1: 03 OCT. 2024





# **Europe must maintain its own power in the backdrop of China's rise**



### Saviour, Ally, Competitor? Which Role for China in the Middle East and North Africa?

- Camille Lons, Deputy Head of the Paris office, Policy Fellow ECFR
- Yahia Zoubir, Professor; Nonresident Senior Fellow Middle East Council on Global Affairs, Doha
- Erato Kozakou-Marcoullis, Former Minister of Transport, Communications and Works and Former Minister of Foreign Affairs
- Dr Naser al-Tamimi, Senior Associate Research Fellow at the Institute for International Political Studies
- Moderator: Prof. Dr 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

Foreign policy experts discussed the role of China in international relations, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The panel highlighted challenges posed to traditional global powers by the growing economic and geopolitical power of China.

#### China's limited Gulf presence but economic strength

Dr Naser al-Tamimi, Senior Associate Research Fellow at the Institute for International Political Studies, outlined the constraints and opportunities of China's role in the Gulf. "China has economic ties but remains militarily limited, with only a small logistics base in Djibouti, compared to the U.S. presence of 25 bases and over 40,000 troops", he said. Dr Al-Tamimi suggested that while Gulf nations are diversifying partnerships, U.S. pressure may curtail deeper military or technological cooperation with China.

#### Historical ties with the Maghreb

Professor Yahia Zoubir of the Middle East Council on Global Affairs noted that China's relationship with the Maghreb predates its current global influence. "China was the first non-Arab country to recognise Algeria's provisional government in 1958, and this historical support remains deeply rooted in the psyche of Algerian rulers and the public", he said. Infrastructure and health diplomacy, particularly through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), have cemented China's influence in the region, he added.

#### **Cyprus-China relations: Strategic yet complex**

Former Cypriot Foreign Minister Erato Kozakou-Marcoulis detailed the strong but delicate relationship between Cyprus and China. "Cyprus and China share mutual respect, with both nations adhering to the One China and One Cyprus policies", she said. While trade between the two nations reached €1.36 billion in 2022, Cyprus must balance these ties with its commitments as an EU member state.

Dr Kozakou-Marcoulis also highlighted China's role in Cyprus's maritime and energy sectors. "Cyprus, with one of the largest fleets in the EU, sees significant investment opportunities with China, particularly in shipbuilding and port infrastructure", she noted. However, she acknowledged the challenges ahead, particularly in aligning with the EU's approach towards China.

#### **European concerns over China's influence**

Camille Lons, Deputy Head of the European Council on Foreign Relations in Paris, raised concerns about the broader implications of China's growing footprint in the region. "Europe sees China as a systemic rival challenging global governance systems and Western values", she said. Lons warned of potential risks in China's investments in critical infrastructure, such as ports and emerging technologies, which could have security implications.

#### China's role in Middle Eastern diplomacy

Panelists discussed China's expanding role as a mediator in Middle Eastern conflicts. Dr Al-Tamimi highlighted China's involvement in the Iran-Saudi rapprochement and Palestinian issues. "China's position as a broker is consistent with the majority of the world's stance, aiming for solutions via the UN rather than unilateral actions", he said.

Dr Kozakou-Markoulis praised China's efforts in promoting regional stability, citing its recent initiatives. "China's mediation between adversaries like Saudi Arabia and Iran demonstrates its understanding of the region's complexities and its commitment to peace and stability", she said.

#### **Balancing opportunities and challenges**

The panel concluded with a focus on balancing China's dual role as an economic partner and geopolitical competitor. Ms Lons noted that while Chinese investments are significant, they often fall short of expectations when compared to EU and U.S. economic footprints. "The real challenge for Europe is not to overestimate China's influence and to maintain its own bargaining power", she said.



# Cooperation on security and energy is essential for the Eastern Mediterranean

Knowledge partner:



The Interconnectedness of Euro-Atlantic Security and the Five Seas: The Strategic significance of the Eastern Mediterranean

- Julie Fisher, US Ambassador Irfan Siddiq, UK High
- Commissioner
- Angelina Eichhorst, EEAS
- George Kremlis, Honorary Director of the European
- Commission & Chairman of the UNECE Espoo Convention and SEA Protocol
- Dimitrios Cavouras, Associate Fellow, Academy. Chatham House
- Moderator: George Hadjipavli, SEESOX

Experts from Europe, the US, and the UK convened to explore how the Eastern Mediterranean region can bolster Euro-Atlantic security and tackle pressing global challenges, including Russia's invasion of Ukraine, conflicts in the Middle East, and the climate crisis.

The panel featured Julie Fisher, US Ambassador to Cyprus; Irfan Siddiq, UK High Commissioner to Cyprus; Angelina Eichhorst, Managing Director for the European External Action Service (EEAS), George Kremlis, honorary director of the European Commission; and Dimitrios Cavouras, Associate Fellow at Chatham House.

#### Geopolitical challenges and the rule of law

High Commissioner Irfan Siddiq highlighted the repercussions of Russia's war in Ukraine, warning that it undermines the rule of law. "Russia's flagrant disregard for state sovereignty and international norms risks normalising adventurism and destabilising smaller states like Cyprus", he said. High Commissioner Siddiq also tied the conflict's consequences to growing threats in the Middle East, including maritime security in the Red Sea and Houthi attacks on shipping.

Ambassador Fisher underscored the broader impact of autocratic states weaponising energy and economics. "This is a fierce competition to define the future of international affairs. The only way to counter this is by revitalising partnerships and ensuring countries can choose their own futures", she said, stressing the need for fair competition and respect for international law.

#### **Energy interconnectivity and regional cooperation**

The Eastern Mediterranean's untapped energy potential was a central point of dicussion. Mr Kremlis called for a "holistic view" of the region's energy projects, including the EuroAsia Interconnector linking Cyprus, Greece, and Israel. "These initiatives are vital for both energy security and the green transition, but they require stable geopolitical conditions to succeed", he said.

While the panel praised recent progress, Ambassador Fisher cautioned that further political courage was necessary to overcome barriers. "Now is the time to advance energy stability. Opportunities like this do not come back", she said.

Mr Dimitrios Cavouras warned of the dangers unresolved conflicts pose to major energy projects. "Geopolitical risk and the absence of peace make energy projects vulnerable. Without a concerted effort to stabilise the region, these initiatives remain at risk", he said.

#### Diplomacy and redefining peace

Ms Eichhorst emphasised the importance of empathy and trust in diplomacy. "We need the courage to think differently and work differently. As Nelson Mandela said, the only way to tell if you can trust someone is to trust them", she remarked, citing the EU's role in fostering regional cooperation.

Mr Cavouras argued for a more comprehensive approach to peacebuilding. "Is peace simply the absence of war, or is it something more sustainable? Energy cooperation can help, but we must address the root causes of conflicts like those in Cyprus and Palestine", he said.

#### **Green transition amid overlapping crises**

The panel linked energy security to the climate crisis, noting the dual challenge of addressing environmental goals while managing geopolitical instability. Mr Kremlis called for evaluating the laws governing armed conflict in light of climate impacts. "Wars destroy all progress on climate goals. We must adapt international law to reflect these realities", he said.



Common security framework and strategic enlargement are key for the EU's defence against growing threats



#### **EU** enlargement and security challenges

- Vasilis Palmas, Minister of Defence (keynote speech)
- Gijs De Vries, Senior Visiting Fellow, London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE)
- Evan Kalpadakis, Coordinator Alexis Tsipras Institute for Peace, Justice and Sustainable Growth
- Elena Rafti, Diplomatic Advisor to the Minister of Defence
- Moderator: Natasa Loizou, Research Consultant in Strategic Planning & International Security

The European Union's ability to manage its enlargement process is increasingly intertwined with global security challenges, speakers said at the panel discussion titled "EU Enlargement and Security Challenges".

Opening the session with a keynote speech, Cypriot Defence Minister Mr Vassilis Palmas emphasised the importance of a cohesive security framework in Europe. "Security is the foundation on which the structure of a united Europe can stand. Without stability, the vision of a peaceful and prosperous Europe is unattainable", he said. Minister Palmas outlined how EU initiatives, including the European Peace Facility, are being strengthened to meet rising defence needs, citing Ukraine as a key example.

Dr Gijs de Vries, Senior Visiting Fellow at the London School of Economics, noted that Europe faces simultaneous challenges from multiple global powers. "Russia is militarising at an unprecedented rate, and China has its eyes set on becoming the dominant global force", he warned. "We also cannot ignore the shifting focus of US foreign policy toward Asia, which raises questions about Europe's ability to defend itself".

Elena Rafti, Diplomatic Adviser to the Cypriot Ministry of Defence, described the Russian invasion of Ukraine as a turning point. "This aggression was a geopolitical wake-up call. The EU must learn to combine its normative values with strategic imperatives to avoid grey zones vulnerable to external influence", she said. Ms Rafti stressed the need for institutional reforms, adding, "A cohesive and credible defence strategy is essential to preserve EU integrity".

Mr Evan Kalpadakis, Coordinator at the Alexis Tsipras Institute for Peace, urged a complete rethink of the EU's enlargement process to adapt to new realities. "Enlargement today cannot be treated as it was in the 1970s or even the early 2000s. We are no longer operating in a unipolar world of Western dominance", he said. "We need a phased approach—economic integration first, followed by political and institutional reforms—to ensure stability".

Kalpadakis criticised the EU's lack of strategic vision in recent years. "We missed opportunities after the Prespa Agreement in 2018 and after the start of the war in Ukraine", he said. "Without innovative diplomacy and a bold strategy, enlargement will remain stalled. The region demands action, not recycled policies from the past".

He also highlighted the need for honesty about the EU's limitations. "We must acknowledge the mistakes of the past—both in the West and in Cyprus and Greece—and develop realistic goals", Kalpadakis said. "This includes being clear about what we can and cannot do in Ukraine. Strategic ambiguity only weakens us".

Panellists also acknowledged the importance of addressing hybrid threats and information warfare. "Resilient societies are our strongest weapon", said Rafti. "Investing in education to equip citizens with media literacy and critical thinking is essential for countering disinformation".

The session concluded with calls for bold political decisions to unlock the EU's potential. "We cannot afford to kick the can down the road", Kalpadakis said. "It is time for Europe to act with strategic clarity and courage, especially in its immediate neighbourhood".







# Europe is weak against threats without a unified security framework

Knowledge partner:



#### The European Security Architecture after the War in Ukraine

- Tinatin Akhvlediani, EU Enlargement and Neighborhood Policies
- Oleksiy Haran, Ukraine Analytica
- Mirko Giordani, Security Studies
- William Mallinson, History, Diplomacy
- Moderator: Andreas Theophanous, Economics and Public Policy

Experts debated the challenges facing European security architecture in the wake of the ongoing war in Ukraine, highlighting diverging views on the role of European Union (EU) enlargement, NATO expansion, and the prospects for peace. The panel featured Ms Tinatin Akhvlediani, an expert on EU enlargement, Dr William Mallinson, a historian specialising in diplomacy, and Mr Oleksiy Haran from Ukraine Analytica and Mr Mirko Giordani, a public affairs, political risk and strategic intelligence professional.

#### **EU** enlargement and security concerns

Ms Akhvlediani stressed that the latest push for EU enlargement is fundamentally driven by security concerns amid the war in Ukraine. "This enlargement is very much motivated by security concerns", she said, noting that the EU must address these concerns if the enlargement process is to move forward. She argued that the EU's traditional approach to the Eastern Partnership, which involved engaging with countries like Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova without offering a clear path to membership, was inadequate. "Russia brings a war at the border, so the EU finally wakes up and puts the membership perspective on the table", Ms Akhvlediani added, criticising the EU for being reactive rather than proactive.

Mr Haran, representing Ukraine Analytica, called for a "just peace" that ensures Ukraine's territorial integrity, rejecting any compromises that would allow Russia to maintain control over occupied territories. "We need a just peace, not just a ceasefire line where Russia keeps annexed territories", he said. Mr Haran criticised Western calls for compromise, emphasising that allowing Russia to keep occupied areas would not bring sustainable peace. He underscored Ukraine's desire to maintain its sovereignty, pointing out that appearement strategies historically fail when dealing with dictators. "Appeasement doesn't work. It didn't work before World War II, and it certainly doesn't work with Putin", he stated.

#### Historical context and NATO's role

Dr Mallinson provided a broader historical context, expressing concern over NATO's expansion and its impact on Russia's actions. He argued that NATO's growth had exacerbated tensions, pushing Russia into a defensive posture. "Russia broke international law by invading Ukraine, but let us not forget that NATO expansion and actions in places like Belgrade and Libya also contributed to the current tensions", Dr Mallinson said. He described Ukraine as "a victim of NATO's desires" and suggested that Western actions had, in part, provoked Russian aggression.

#### **Divergent views on European security cooperation**

The panellists expressed differing views on the prospects for European security cooperation. Ms Akhvlediani argued for a unified EU approach to security, highlighting the need for a stronger, common foreign and security policy to deal with emerging threats. "The European Union is weak when its member states can't agree on a common stance", she said, adding that divisions within the EU undermine its ability to respond effectively to conflicts.

In contrast, Dr Mallinson remained sceptical about the feasibility of a unified European security policy, citing the deep historical and geopolitical differences among EU member states. He suggested that Europe's security challenges are, in part, a result of its own foreign policy decisions over the past few decades.

Mr Haran concluded with a plea for continued support for Ukraine from the EU and NATO,

emphasising the importance of maintaining pressure on Russia. He argued that the ongoing support from European nations was crucial not just for Ukraine's survival but also for the stability of the broader European region. "If we don't stand firm now, we are only inviting future aggression", he warned.



### Nicosia Old Town Hall | Aphrodite

DAY 1: 03 OCT. 2024





# Cyprus's tax regime must keep up with EU standards and digital, green economy



#### **Cyprus Tax Reform**

- Charis Polykarpou, Head of Economic Policy Department, AKEL
- Harris Georgiades, MP, Chairman Clerides Institute, former Minister of Finance, Republic of Cyprus
- Navia Symeonidou, Ministry of Finance
- Nicos Chimarides, Partner PricewaterhouseCoopers Ltd Panayiotis Nicolaides,
   Director of Research EU Tax Observatory, Paris School of Economics (online)
- Moderator: Georgia Hanni, Senior Editor and Data Analyst StockWatch

In a discussion on Cyprus' tax reform, experts emphasised the urgency of aligning Cyprus's tax regime with both European standards and the changing needs of a digital, green economy.

Ms Nayia Symeonidou, head of the Tax Policy Unit at the Ministry of Finance, highlighted the challenges posed by an outdated tax system established two decades ago. "The existing tax framework, while successful in the past, has become overly complex and in need of simplification", she said. Symeonidou underscored the government's intent to reduce the administrative burden for businesses and ensure the tax system supports new economic activities, such as digital business and green initiatives, both essential to Cyprus's strategic development. "We aim for a fairer, simpler, and more productive system that reflects today's economy", she added.

MP Mr Harris Georgiades, former finance minister and chairman of the Clerides Institute, voiced support for a more continuous approach to tax reform, advocating for regular updates to adapt to rapid economic changes. "The economy doesn't wait 20 years to evolve, so neither should our tax system. Incremental reforms rather than sporadic overhauls would keep us on pace with global developments", he said. Mr Georgiades also endorsed the concept of a green tax reform, where revenues from carbon and energy taxes could offset reductions in taxes on labour. However, he cautioned that such measures should be "revenue-neutral" to avoid increasing the overall tax burden.

The discussion also turned to fairness in tax distribution, with Mr Charis Polykarpou, head of the Economic Policy Department at AKEL, emphasising the need to address income inequality through tax reform. He pointed to the fact that indirect taxes constitute a significant portion of Cyprus's tax revenue, which he argued disproportionately affects lower-income households. "Our system overly relies on indirect taxes, which burdens those least able to afford it. Shifting this balance could create a more just tax system", Mr Polykarpou stated. He advocated for a reevaluation of property tax to include luxury assets that enjoy favourable tax treatment, saying, "We are one of the few countries where significant real estate holdings receive such beneficial tax conditions".

From a corporate perspective, Mr Nicos Chimarides, a tax partner at PricewaterhouseCoopers Cyprus, stressed the importance of maintaining Cyprus's attractiveness for foreign investment while pursuing tax reform. He suggested the formation of an independent Tax Council to oversee Cyprus's national tax policy in line with international developments. "An independent body to monitor tax policy could help Cyprus respond swiftly to global tax changes and protect its competitive edge", Mr Chimarides said.

Mr Panayiotis Nicolaides, director of the EU Tax Observatory, joined the discussion virtually, offering insights into global tax developments that could influence Cyprus. He highlighted the OECD's global minimum tax rate agreement as a pivotal change that Cyprus must anticipate. "Cyprus must prepare to transition from being perceived as a low-tax haven to a credible jurisdiction aligned with global standards", he remarked. He also noted that a broader tax base, with fewer exemptions for high-income individuals, would help Cyprus better distribute the tax burden and close loopholes that lead to tax evasion.

Despite diverse perspectives, the speakers agreed that any reforms should uphold Cyprus's commitment to European standards and address public concerns over tax transparency and fairness.



# Financial literacy is essential in a high-inflation economy

#### Savvier European citizens, through enhanced financial literacy

- Nathalie Berger, Director for Support to Member States' Reforms, Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support, European Commission
- Fernando Coalho, Deputy Director, Banking Conduct Supervision Department, Bank of Portugal
- Charalambos Vrasidas, Executive Director of the Centre for the Advancement of Research & Development in Educational Technology (CARDET) and professor at the University of Nicosia
- Moderator: Penelope Papavassiliou

Experts discussed the importance of financial literacy in battling economic challenges. Ms Nathalie Berger, Director for Support to Member States' Reforms at the European Commission, highlighted the European Union's initiatives to improve financial knowledge across Member States. Joining her, Mr Fernando Coalho, Deputy Director of the Banking Conduct Supervision Department at the Bank of Portugal, shared Portugal's experience in implementing a national strategy for financial education. Dr Charalambos Vrasidas, Executive Director of CARDET and professor at the University of Nicosia discussed the role of civil society in reaching vulnerable groups.

Ms Berger underscored the significance of financial literacy for European citizens, particularly in light of inflation and economic challenges. "In today's society, people are solicited daily by ads, by influencers, by a lot of external information", she noted. Berger explained that financial literacy is essential not only for personal financial decision-making but also for broader societal impact, as Europe faces challenges such as ageing populations and pension gaps.

She further pointed to initiatives by the European Commission to improve financial literacy across Member States. The Commission, in collaboration with the OECD, launched the Financial Competence Framework for Adults in 2022 and followed up with a framework tailored for children and youth in 2023. These frameworks aim to equip citizens with skills to manage personal finances responsibly, from budgeting pocket money to making substantial investments later in life.

Adding to the discussion, Coalho provided insights from Portugal's long-standing financial literacy efforts. Financial literacy "has been a key priority since 2008, even before the international financial crisis", Coalho stated. He described Portugal's national plan for financial education, established in 2011, which aims to improve financial knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours among diverse groups, including children, youth, and elderly people.

Portugal's strategy involves close collaboration between the Bank of Portugal, the Securities Market Commission, and the insurance and pension funds authority, along with various civil society stakeholders. "They know their training needs, their priorities, the best deliver channels and moments for us to deliver financial literacy", Mr Coalho explained, noting the importance of cooperation to meet the distinct needs of each population group.

Dr Vrasidas discussed the role of civil society in financial literacy, particularly in supporting marginalised and vulnerable groups. "Civil society can come in and reach populations and marginalised groups and vulnerable groups that, unfortunately, formal schooling is failing to reach," Dr Vrasidas said, stressing the importance of a systemic approach to financial literacy that goes beyond teaching individuals to open bank accounts.

Dr Vrasidas also noted the importance of integrating financial literacy within public-private partnerships, which CARDET has implemented in Cyprus in collaboration with the Ministry of Education. "For financial well-being, you need financial literacy. It's important to have in mind that it's not simply about teaching youth how to open a bank account", he said.



## Without strategic intervention, inflation could deepen further

Knowledge partner:



#### Inflation: What it is, Causes, Costs and Cures

- Maria Heracleous, Executive Director and Member of the Board of Directors at Central Bank of Cyprus
- Marios Clerides, Economist
- Kyriakos Iordanou, General Manager ICPAC
- Ioannis Tirkides, Cyprus Economic Society
- Moderator: Andreas Charalambous

Experts discussed inflation drivers in a post-pandemic world, emphasising the role of supply-side disruptions, rising corporate power, and monetary policy responses. Dr Marios Clerides, an economist, Mr Ioannis Tirkides from the Cyprus Economic Society, Dr Maria Heracleous of the Central Bank of Cyprus, and Mr Kyriakos Iordanou from the Institute of Certified Public Accountants of Cyprus (ICPAC) contributed insights on how these factors have evolved and their impact on households and economies.

Mr Tirkides illustrated inflation's complexities, citing factors like supply disruptions from COVID-19 and geopolitical instability. "On the supply side, the war in Ukraine, and now the war in Gaza, is disruptive and causing inflation. Any war is causing shortages, and any shortage is always inflationary", he said. According to Mr Tirkides, inflation is not solely a result of monetary policy but also of structural shifts, with some companies wielding greater pricing power.

Dr Heracleous added a historical perspective, recounting how central banks' roles have shifted over decades, particularly since the 1970s oil crisis. "Today we think of central banks as the guardians of price stability. But this has not always been the case", she stated. She highlighted the difficulty central banks face in responding to such unpredictable inflationary episodes, adding, "Once it became clear that inflation surge was not transitory, that there was the risk of transitioning to a high inflation regime, central banks moved decisively, forcefully, and they gave a message, a signal to the markets that they were there". Inflation targeting and monetary expansion were explored, with Dr Heracleous noting how post-pandemic global demand shifts spurred inflation in unexpected ways.

Corporate pricing power was another focal point, with Mr Iordanou noting how companies capitalised on supply chain challenges to raise prices. He noted that "shrinkflation", where the quantity or quality of products is subtly reduced, has become a common method to mask price hikes, ultimately burdening the consumer. Addressing the impact on household budgets, Mr lordanou noted that inflation rates had outpaced GDP growth in recent years, eating into real incomes. "If you notice from 2022 onwards, the inflation rate is higher than GDP. So, what we produce has been taken over by inflation", he said.

Dr Clerides introduced a behavioural economic perspective, describing how businesses have adapted their strategies to retain consumers despite inflationary pressures. He discussed how shrinkflation manipulates consumer perception, as people often overlook the reduced amount in the same packaging. Dr Clerides highlighted the efforts of countries like France and Korea, which have mandated clearer product labelling to inform consumers of quantity changes, noting that in France they place a "display where they checked that the packaging contains less, or the tin of Coca-Cola shrunk".

The panel agreed that current inflation trends are likely to persist, influenced by a mix of supplyside constraints, corporate behaviour, and geopolitical uncertainty. These factors, compounded by rising costs in global supply chains and shifting market dynamics, suggest that inflationary pressures may be slow to ease.

The panellists warned that without strategic interventions, such as improved supply chain resilience and consumer protection measures, the impacts on household budgets and economic stability could deepen further.



## Respect for migrants is not just a moral imperative but a legal one



### Managing Irregular Migration in Cyprus: Policy, Law and Human Rights at Sea

- Dr Nicholas A. Ioannides, Deputy Minister for Immigration Migration (keynote speech)
- Maria Stylianou-Lottides, Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights (Ombudsman) (keynote speech)
- Maria Gavouneli, Director General, ELIAMEP; Professor of International Law, Faculty of Law, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, President of the Greek National Commission for Human Rights (online)
- Efthymios Papastavridis, Researcher and Visiting Lecturer, Faculty of Law,
   National and Kapodistrian University of Athens Aphrodite Papachristodoulou,
   Researcher and Lawyer
- Moderator: Nektaria Stamouli, Reporter, Politico, Kathimerini English Edition

Speakers explored human rights and migration while highlighting the difficulties faced by Cyprus as a frontline state in Europe.

Dr Nicholas Ioannides, the Republic of Cyprus's Deputy Minister of Migration and International Protection, highlighted the disproportionate pressures Cyprus faces, with asylum seekers now constituting approximately 6% of the population. "Managing migration in Cyprus has never been more challenging", he said, noting the dual issues of geographic proximity to the Middle East and the ongoing division of the island, which leaves the buffer zone open to exploitation by traffickers.

He described measures the government has implemented, including Green Line surveillance and cooperation with Lebanon, to curb irregular crossings. However, loannides called for more solidarity within the EU, warning that without support, "frontline states like Cyprus cannot manage these flows alone".

#### **Balancing sovereignty and human rights**

Ms Maria Stylianou-Lottides, Ombudsperson for Human Rights, underscored the imperative of upholding migrants' dignity, irrespective of legal status. "Irregular migrants are human beings deserving of dignity, respect, and protection. This is not just a moral imperative but a legal one", she said.

She raised concerns about the conditions faced by migrants in detention centres and warned against the practice of pushbacks, describing them as violations of international law. Stylianou-Lottides also stressed the importance of tackling the root causes of migration, such as conflicts and economic instability, to prevent dangerous journeys.

Dr Maria Gavouneli, Director General at ELIAMEP and President of the Greek National Commission for Human Rights, criticised recent EU trends, including enhanced controls at borders, which she argued undermine the spirit of the EU migration pact. "This is a move that threatens to blow away the pact on asylum and migration", she warned, emphasising that national and international obligations must align to protect migrants' rights.

Legal researcher Ms Aphrodite Papachristodoulou outlined recent allegations of pushbacks by Cyprus and Greece, warning that these actions could lead to legal ramifications. "There is mounting evidence that pushbacks are being practised", she said, adding that such practices could violate the European Convention on Human Rights.

#### Search and rescue under pressure

Dr Efthymios Papastavridis, a lecturer at the University of Athens, drew attention to the evolving challenges in maritime rescue operations. He noted that existing international conventions were designed for smaller-scale rescues and called for a rethink in light of mass migration flows. "We need to revisit the concept of distress at sea and adapt our legal frameworks to current realities", he said.

#### The path forward for Europe

The speakers agreed on the need for a unified European approach to migration. Dr Ioannides highlighted the ongoing negotiations on the EU Migration Pact, which he believes could offer a balanced solution. "There is a shift in the EU's policy toward a more comprehensive and effective approach", he said.

However, participants stressed the importance of pairing such policies with humanitarian measures. As Ms Stylianou-Lottides concluded, "Migration, human rights, and border protection are issues that demand our full attention and utmost compassion".



# Cyprus looks to Luxembourg for blueprint in cancer care reform

Knowledge partner:



Ερευνητικό Κέντρο Υπηρεσιών Υγείας Health Services Research Center

### National Cancer Institute: Experience from the National Cancer Institute of Luxembourg

- Keynote speech: Michael Damianos, Minister of Health, Ministry of Health
- Andreas Apostolou, Member of the Parliament
- Pavlos Drakos, President of the National Cancer Committee
- Antonis Tryphonos, Chief of Staff & Director of Patient Support Services
   (Pasykaf) Permanent Cancer Committee of the Cyprus Federation of Patients' Associations
- Nikolai Goncharenko, Institute National du Cancer Luxembourg
- Moderator: Yiola Marcou, Bank of Cyprus Oncology Centre

Cyprus is set to establish a National Cancer Institute (NCI) to enhance its oncology services, taking cues from Luxembourg's experience.

Mr Michael Damianos, Cyprus's Minister of Health, underscored the urgency of addressing rising cancer cases. "The National Cancer Institute will serve as a unified coordinating body to ensure equitable access to diagnosis, treatment, and recovery support", he stated. He added that the initiative aims to foster collaboration between public and private sectors.

Highlighting Luxembourg's efforts, Dr Nikolai Goncharenko, Director of the National Cancer Institute of Luxembourg, shared how the country's institute has evolved since its establishment in 2015. "We realised early on that better coordination was critical for cancer care, research, and education", Dr Goncharenko explained. "Our multidisciplinary approach, including tumourspecific boards, has significantly improved outcomes, particularly for rare cancers".

Luxembourg's approach to standardising oncology services through national guidelines and tumour boards was presented as a model. Dr Goncharenko detailed how the institute aligned its patient pathways with European best practices, ensuring a seamless integration of care.

Andreas Apostolou, MP, spoke of the significance of the initiative in Cyprus, commending the government's commitment. "Last year, we debated whether this institute was necessary. Today, we are discussing how it will be implemented", he said. Apostolou also stressed the importance of supporting cancer survivors, noting that they must be reintegrated into society with access to quality-of-life initiatives.

Mr Pavlos Drakos, President of Cyprus's National Cancer Committee, expressed optimism for the institute's potential. "Small nations like ours can benefit greatly by adopting proven strategies from other countries. It's crucial to address the needs of both cancer patients and survivors", he said.

Key challenges for Cyprus include addressing fragmented services and improving stakeholder engagement. Mr Antonis Tryphonos, Chief of Staff and Director of Patient Support Services pointed out that approximately 4,000 new cancer cases are diagnosed annually in Cyprus. "This isn't just a health issue; it's a societal one. Effective coordination and public awareness will be critical", he said.

The proposed institute will prioritise research partnerships and prevention. Luxembourg's emphasis on prevention was noted as a key takeaway for Cyprus. "Up to 40% of cancers can be prevented through lifestyle changes", said Dr Goncharenko, urging greater focus on education and awareness.

The discussion also touched on funding models and integrating international expertise. Cyprus aims to replicate Luxembourg's collaborative framework, which includes partnerships with academic institutions and European cancer initiatives.

Cyprus's NCI is expected to streamline oncological services and foster innovation. With implementation slated for 2025, officials are optimistic about its potential to transform cancer care in the country.

As Mr Damianos concluded, "This is not just a project—it's a commitment to our citizens. Together, we can make Cyprus a leader in cancer care".



# **Cyprus Quality of Life Index reveals gaps between data and daily realities**

Knowledge partner:



#### **Cyprus Quality of Life Index**

- Elena Hadjikakou, Director of Cyprus Pedagogical Institute, Ministry of Education, Sport, and Youth
- Marina Neophytou, Dean of the Engineering School, University of Cyprus
- Menelaos Menelaou, Head of Academic Affairs and Student Welfare Services,
   University of Cyprus
- Demetris Hadjisofocli, Managing Director, Center for Social Innovation (CSI)
- Moderator: Katerina Theodoridou, Centre for Social Innovation

The panel delved into the findings of the Cyprus Quality of Life Index, highlighting significant disparities between statistical indicators and lived experiences.

Presenting the Index, Ms Katerina Theodoridou, from the Centre for Social Innovation noted that Cyprus scored a high 0.933 in European quality of life indicators, but local surveys revealed that only 68% of Cypriots described themselves as happy. "If the index is high, why does the lived reality seem so different?", she questioned.

#### **Education and inclusivity**

Dr Elena Hadjikakou, representing the Ministry of Education, acknowledged challenges in the education sector, particularly equity gaps and student well-being. "Children from privileged socioeconomic backgrounds perform better, while others face widespread issues such as cyberbullying", she explained.

The Ministry is responding with curriculum reforms and initiatives to enhance inclusivity, such as compulsory pre-primary education from age four and extended all-day schools. Dr Hadjikakou also emphasised the need for lifelong learning, citing national strategies and EU-funded projects aimed at aligning skills development with market needs.

#### Youth and mental health

Mr Menelaos Menelaou, Head of Academic Affairs at the University of Cyprus, highlighted housing affordability and job opportunities as key stressors for students. "Financial strains delay independence and impact mental health. Students feel isolated and lack the chance to develop adult responsibilities", he said. He added that the university offers limited dormitories, financial aid, and mental health support but called for greater state intervention.

#### **Entrepreneurship and systemic delays**

Addressing the economic climate, Mr Demetris Hadjisofocli, Managing Director of CSI, called for a long-term, holistic approach to policy-making. "We need a national board to design policies based on scientific evidence and to manage change over 25-30 years", he proposed. However, he criticised systemic inertia, saying, "Timing is a big issue. The system doesn't allow for quick changes." Mr Hadjisofocli also argued for supporting high-value entrepreneurship, noting that Cyprus's educated workforce often faces a mismatch between qualifications and available opportunities.

#### **Environment and governance**

Dr Marina Neophytou, Dean of Engineering at the University of Cyprus, painted a stark picture of Cyprus's environmental policies. "We have laws on paper but lag in implementation", she said. She noted plans for a dedicated environmental engineering programme but stressed that "environmental citizenship" must be cultivated across society.



### Ledra Palace | Bi-communal

DAY 1: 03 OCT. 2024





## Cyprus still has potential to take a more active role inside the EU



#### Twenty years of Cyprus in the EU

- Androulla Vassileiou, former European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety (keynote speech)
- Martin Vokálek EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy (keynote speech)
- Stephanie Laulhe Shaelou, Professor of European Law and Reform, Head of School of Law and Director, Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence for the Rule of Law and European Values, UCLan Cyprus
- Niyazi Kızılyürek, University Professor, Former MEP
- Cleopatra Kitti, Mediterranean Growth Initiative
- Moderator: Harry Tzimitras, Director, PRIO Cyprus Centre Senior Fellow, Atlantic Council

Cyprus recently marked 20 years as a member of the European Union and the panel discussion reflected on its integration, achievements, and challenges. Speakers highlighted Cyprus's economic gains, enhanced research funding, and access to EU opportunities, while also addressing unresolved issues like the island's division and limited influence in EU policymaking. They also urged Cyprus to take a more proactive role within the bloc, particularly ahead of its EU presidency in 2026.

Mr Martin Vokálek, Executive Director of EUROPEUM, noted that the 2004 enlargement was transformative for Europe, symbolising "a definitive dissolution of the Iron Curtain". Reflecting on Cyprus, he added, "This anniversary is both a celebration and a call for reflection on the Big Bang enlargement's legacy and its lessons for future EU expansions".

Ms Androulla Vassiliou, former EU Commissioner, provided an overview of Cyprus's integration. She highlighted tangible benefits, such as access to EU funds and free movement, but also acknowledged the unmet hope that EU membership would resolve the island's division. "The EU was always willing to facilitate a solution, but the Cyprus problem remains unresolved, a significant disappointment for all parties involved", she said.

Professor Stephanie Laulhé Shaelou, an expert in European law, emphasised the unique nature of Cyprus's accession, particularly its focus on national security rather than economic concerns. "While security drove the bid, economic benefits materialised more quickly and substantially", she explained, adding that the division of the island continues to limit its full integration.

Ms Cleopatra Kitti, of the Mediterranean Growth Initiative, underscored the need for Cyprus to embrace a proactive European identity. "We remain reactive, taking policies from Brussels without adequately voicing our unique perspective as Europe's southeastern border", she said, urging greater collaboration to amplify Cyprus's role within the EU.

Former MEP Dr Niyazi Kızılyürek offered a frank critique of Cyprus's use of its EU membership in addressing internal reconciliation. "The EU accession was seen as a catalyst for peace, but we have failed to leverage this opportunity for internal unity. There is no EU policy or substantial effort within Cyprus to build reconciliation", he said.

The speakers also discussed Cyprus's future, with its second EU presidency in 2026 viewed as a crucial opportunity. Reflecting on this, Ms Kitti urged, "It's a chance to shape the European agenda and prove that Cyprus can contribute meaningfully to the bloc".



### International law is at stake in Gaza

#### The Human Rights Situation in Palestine and the States' Obligations

- Tahseen Elayyan, Al-Haq (online)
- Moderator: Afxentis Afxentiou, UoL

Mr Tahseen Elayyan, representing the Al-Haq human rights organisation, joined the Cyprus Forum online to note the humanitarian conditions in Gaza and the role of international obligations to protect civilians amid ongoing violence.

"Since the 7th of October 2023, at least 41,000 Palestinians have been killed, and about 100,000 have been injured. The killed people include about 17,000 children and women", Elayyan reported. He highlighted that the crisis has intensified with the Israeli government allegedly

enforcing strict blockades on food, fuel, and medical supplies, particularly in northern Gaza, leading to further civilian suffering and deaths due to starvation and lack of healthcare.

Describing the conditions in the Gaza Strip, Mr Elayyan stated that nearly 90% of Palestinians have been forcibly displaced into a concentrated area around Khan Younis. He further noted that essential infrastructure has been destroyed, including "houses, hospitals, bakeries, schools, universities, mosques, churches, water wells, electricity, and water contamination blocks".

The crisis has also left tens of thousands of Palestinians with life-altering injuries. "More than 25,000 people have sustained life-changing injuries. They will live with disabilities, and they require rehabilitation services now and later in their life. As a result of the killings of thousands of Palestinians, thousands of children have become orphaned and their future, the future of these orphaned children is blurred", Mr Elayyan said. He stressed that, beyond physical harm, there is a profound psychological toll on survivors, with conditions ripe for widespread trauma and mental health crises.

The talk moved to the international community's responsibilities under international law. Mr Elayyan cited obligations under the Genocide Convention and the Geneva Conventions, emphasising that these create binding commitments for all state parties to act against potential genocidal actions. "All the states parties to the Genocide Convention, have a common interest to ensure the prevention, suppression and punishment of genocide by committing themselves to fulfilling the obligations contained in the Convention", he noted.

Mr Elayyan also spoke on the legal mechanisms available, urging states to impose sanctions and an arms embargo on Israel and to support legal efforts within the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Reflecting on the broader implications of the situation for international law, Mr Elayyan warned that continued inaction could set a dangerous precedent for global human rights protections. He argued that "If the international community fails to act, it would be sending a message of "double standards", undermining the integrity of the international legal system.



# Cyprus has the potential to become a Euro-Atlantic digital services hub



### Cyprus as a service-based, digitalised economy in the 21st century

- Ali Tüzünkan, Turkish Cypriot Entrepreneur
- Michalis Strouthos, Greek Cypriot Entrepreneur
- Mustafa Besim, Professor of Economics
- Annely Madeleen Koudstaal, Programme Manager Southern Europe, World Bank
- Moderator: Kemal Baykallı, EU One Stop Shop for Green Line trade

Speakers examined how Cyprus could become a player in Euro-Atlantic digital security and economic integration through collaboration across the Five Seas region. They highlighted opportunities and challenges in advancing digitalisation, bridging divides, and fostering cross-community cooperation.

"Digitalisation is both an opportunity and a concern", said Ms Annely Madeleen Koudstaal, Southern Europe Programme Manager for the World Bank Group. Stressing that 75% of Cyprus' GDP stems from services, Ms Koudstaal introduced the World Bank's "four Ts framework" trade, technology, training, and targeting—as a model for sustainable digital development. She added, "Bridging the digital divide must be a priority to ensure inclusive growth".

Ms Koudstaal also noted the importance of infrastructure investments and harmonising regulations across the island. "An unequal business environment hampers competitiveness", she noted, advocating for integrated payment systems and digital literacy programs to level the playing field.

Professor Mustafa Besim, an economist from Eastern Mediterranean University, painted a mixed picture of digital adoption in northern Cyprus. "The private sector is leading in technology adaptation, but public administration lags significantly", he said, attributing this to inadequate infrastructure and the absence of a comprehensive digitalisation strategy. Dr Besim urged the creation of a "bi-communal agenda for digitalisation" as a confidence-building measure, proposing projects like a unified tourism platform to connect the island's divided communities.

Adding a practical perspective, entrepreneur Mr Michalis Strouthos noted Cyprus' recent leap in the EU's Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI), jumping from 54th to 40th place. "There are great strides in digitalisation, but the cost and mindset remain significant barriers", he observed. Mr Strouthos highlighted successful examples like Culture Connects, an app that provides a bilingual guide for Nicosia's northern and southern halves, demonstrating the potential for cooperative digital projects.

However, Mr Strouthos also pointed to unresolved issues, such as telecommunications. "Calling someone in the north still routes through Turkey, incurring international fees", he said, citing this as emblematic of the political rather than technological hurdles impeding progress.

For Turkish Cypriot entrepreneur Mr Ali Tüzünkan, the challenges are deeply rooted in socioeconomic structures. He lamented the lack of motivation for innovation among Turkish Cypriots, stating, "The workforce prioritises public-sector jobs for stability over private-sector opportunities requiring digital skills". Mr Tüzünkan called for reforms in education and skill development, lamenting the absence of basic digital literacy programs despite the region hosting over 100,000 university students.

The panellists agreed on the need for both communities to embrace cooperation and leverage international expertise. "If there's political will, we can overcome technological barriers", said Mr Strouthos.

As the discussion concluded, Professor Besim reiterated the urgency of finding common ground: "We can't wait for a political solution to address these divides. By focusing on mutually beneficial areas, like education and tourism, we can build trust and economic resilience across the island".

While the challenges are steep, the panellists left the audience with a sense of possibility. "There's a huge potential, but we're wasting time", said Mr Tüzünkan. "Once we align on a vision, anything is possible".



# United Youth of Cyprus call for peace, unity, and cross-community understanding



### **United Youth of Cyprus**

- Eylul Tuna
- Christos Andreou
- Maria Erotokritou
- Moderators: Maria Zeniou, Erbay Akansoy, Cyprus Dialogue Forum

A group of young peace advocates from the bi-communal group United Youth of Cyprus (UYC) shared their vision for a united Cyprus. The panel, comprising Eylul Tuna, Christos Andreou and Maria Erotokritou, explored challenges to reconciliation and called for greater youth involvement.

Ms Erotokritou spoke about her initial experience connecting with Turkish Cypriot peers during a virtual workshop, which left a lasting impact. The youth in each community "want the same thing, they want peace, they want unification, they want a better country for themselves", she stated. This shared vision, she added, was the starting point for the United Youth of Cyprus, which she co-founded to foster cross-community dialogue among Cypriot youth.

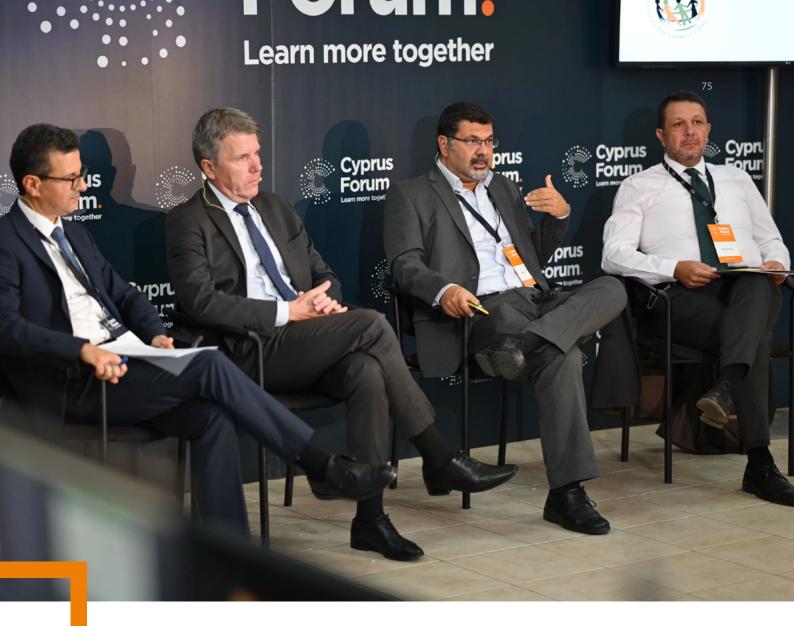
Ms Tuna, 16, described her motivation to join the peacebuilding movement, which began after she attended an international course through a scholarship. "We are committed to navigating these obstacles and believe that together we can create a brighter future for our youth in Cyprus", she said, noting that her Turkish heritage has sometimes made it difficult for her to travel to Republic of Cyprus-controlled areas. "I know there are many people like me and we all want to be the voice of this, of people who cannot attend these events like this and who cannot hear them", she said.

Mr Christos Andreou, 17, spoke about his experiences with bi-communal programmes aimed at bridging the island's political and cultural divide. "The Cyprus issue is often seen through the eyes of older generations", he explained. "Our goal is to create a platform where youth can engage in dialogue, to realise we are all people, and to see that we have nothing truly dividing us".

The United Youth of Cyprus initiative, though only two months old, has already brought together a committed group of young activists. They aim to organise workshops, community events, and outreach programmes. However, the group faces challenges, including divisions, cultural misunderstandings, and limited funding. Yet, the young activists are undeterred. "We know these are obstacles, but together we can create a brighter future for youth in Cyprus", said Ms Tuna.

Despite the progress made by initiatives like the United Youth of Cyprus, the education system and family influences remain significant barriers. Ms Erotokritou highlighted the role of schools in perpetuating divisions.

As they continue their work, members of the United Youth of Cyprus are committed to bringing their message of unity to all parts of Cyprus. The group's founders hope that youth from across the island will join their cause, contributing to a movement for peace that they believe is long overdue. "Let's not let these moments slip away", said Mr Andreou. "Together, we can build a future defined by peace and collaboration".



# "Green Line trade isn't just about economics; it's about building a shared future"



## **Bicommunal Business Cooperation Past, Present and Future**

- Stefan Simosas, DG Reform
- Mustafa Ergüven, Deputy Secretary General, Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce
- Andreas Andreou, Director-Industrial Development, Innovation and Environment, Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Moderator: Charis Psaltis, Professor of Social and Developmental Psychology,
   University of Cyprus

Panellists explored the evolution of bi-communal business cooperation, focusing on the role of the EU's Green Line Regulation and its implications for trade and reconciliation.

Moderating the discussion, Dr Charis Psaltis of the University of Cyprus highlighted the critical role of person-to-person contact in reducing prejudice. He noted a significant post-pandemic increase in crossings and trade between the communities, emphasising the psychological impact. "In Cyprus, contact works twice as well as in other parts of the world because of our unique history of division", he said.

Mr Andreas Andreou, Director of Industrial Development, Innovation, and Environment at the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry, reflected on personal and collective progress. "Initially, I had my own psychological barriers", he said, adding that years of collaboration with Turkish Cypriot colleagues transformed his perspective. "Now, I see them as friends, not just colleagues".

Meanwhile, Mr Mustafa Ergüven, Deputy Secretary General of the Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce, called attention to the limitations of the Green Line Regulation, which allows oneway trade from the north to the south. "This regulation is a missed opportunity to integrate Turkish Cypriot businesses fully with the European market", Ergüven lamented, advocating for the expansion of the trade scope, including animal products.

Representing the European Commission, Mr Stefan Simosas from the Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support highlighted the EU's role in fostering cooperation. "Green Line trade has seen steady growth, with €16 million recorded last year", Mr Simosas reported, though he acknowledged it constitutes less than 1% of total Cypriot imports. "We need sustained political and economic support to realise its full potential", he added.

The EU has invested in initiatives such as the "One-Stop Shop" and supported the production of halloumi (hellim), a shared heritage product. Mr Simosas confirmed plans for the first crosscommunity trade of PDO-compliant halloumi in early 2025. "This could be a game-changer for economic integration", he said.

Panelists also addressed the trust deficit in bicommunal trade. Ergüven recounted scepticism from Greek Cypriot producers regarding Turkish Cypriot compliance with EU standards. "The disbelief was both surprising and telling", he said, stressing the need for better communication and mutual recognition of progress.

"The chambers of commerce are uniquely positioned to bridge gaps and build trust", Mr Andreou added, underlining the importance of depoliticised interactions.

The discussion concluded with calls for greater digitalisation, streamlined regulations, and collaborative ventures to overcome bureaucratic and psychological barriers.

"Green Line trade isn't just about economics; it's about building a shared future", Professor Psaltis stressed.



## Cooperation is vital for energy security in the Eastern Mediterranean

Knowledge partner:



### **Energy Security and Eastern Mediterranean**

- Harry Tzimitras, Director, PRIO Cyprus Centre Senior Fellow, Atlantic Council
- Fikri Toros, Turkish Cypriot Politician
- Paris Fokaides, Frederick University
- Ioannis Begkos, European External Action Service
- Mitat Celikpala, Kadir Has University (online)
- Moderator: Asya Beyaz

Energy security in the Eastern Mediterranean must focus on collaboration over conflict, panellists urged. They highlighted the geopolitical and economic challenges facing the region while emphasising the opportunities for cooperation through energy development.

Dr Harry Tzimitras, Director of the PRIO Cyprus Centre, stressed the need for pragmatism, pointing to the volatile geopolitical climate. "There is no such thing as a frozen conflict", he said, referring to the interplay of tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean. He argued for bottom-up approaches to cooperation: "Energy could be a first step towards building linkages, enabling tangible progress in an otherwise conflict-ridden region".

Mr Ioannis Begkos, Acting Head for Turkey and Eastern Mediterranean at the European External Action Service highlighted the EU's commitment to sustainability. He outlined its threefold approach under the REPowerEU plan: diversifying energy sources, reducing fossil fuel dependence, and accelerating renewable energy adoption. "The clean energy transition remains at the core of Europe's economic model", he said. He also emphasised the Eastern Mediterranean's potential as a hub for energy connectivity and decarbonisation.

From the Turkish Cypriot perspective, Mr Fikri Toros, a politician, proposed leveraging energy projects as confidence-building measures. "Energy is a critical issue that can be positively utilised within the framework of integrated markets", he said, advocating for a "win-win" approach. He also called for external mediation, similar to the Israel-Lebanon maritime agreement, to address disputes between Cyprus and Turkey.

Dr Paris Fokaides, Associate Professor at Frederick University, focused on technical realities. He highlighted EU-supported projects like the EuroAsia Interconnector and EastMed gas pipeline but acknowledged the exclusion of Turkish Cypriots from planning. "We need to build trust and start integrating energy policies across the island", he said, urging the reunification of Cyprus' energy systems.

Professor Mitat Celikpala, Vice-Rector at Kadir Has University, outlined Turkey's energy strategy. He noted Ankara's ambition to become a regional energy hub and its shifting foreign policy. "Turkey's inclusion in regional frameworks is crucial", he argued, warning against exclusionary approaches like the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF).

Panelists agreed that energy cooperation could catalyse broader regional stability and called on stakeholders to pursue pragmatic, inclusive policies.









## Nicosia Old Town Hall | Zeno

DAY 2: 04 OCT. 2024





## Al reflect's society values



## **Empowering Digital Democracy through Al: Opportunities, Challenges, and Future Direction**

- Andreas Constantinou, Deputy Mayor of Aglantzia
- Constantinos Adamides, Associate Professor, University of Nicosia
- Haris Papageorgiou, Research Director, ATHENA Research & Innovation
   Centre
- Christina Dafni, Director Consulting & Software Department, Cosmos Business Systems SA
- George Domalis, Co-Founder NOVELCORE
- Moderator: Sotiris Paroutis, Journalist, OMEGA TV

Speakers debated how artificial intelligence (AI) can shape the future of digital democracy, addressing challenges like misinformation, public trust, and governance while exploring opportunities to strengthen democratic systems.

Dr Haris Papageorgiou, Research Director at ATHENA Research & Innovation Centre, said that Al can be often a double-edged sword. "Artificial intelligence is both a threat and an opportunity", he said. "While it helps combat misinformation, it can also amplify it. What we need is a robust regulatory framework to balance these forces".

Christina Dafni, Director of the Consulting and Software Department at Cosmos Business Systems SA, stressed Al's ability to streamline public services. "Automation can ensure faster responses to citizens, especially in bureaucratic systems. This isn't about replacing jobs but improving the quality of public sector services", she said.

From a civic perspective, Andreas Constantinou, Deputy Mayor of Aglantzia, highlighted the need for practical applications of AI at the local government level. "During my tenure, citizens would text me directly about daily issues like fallen trees. The goal is to now use AI tools to address these problems systematically while enhancing transparency", he noted.

George Domalis, co-founder of Novelcore, unveiled how Al-driven platforms like his own aim to connect policymakers with citizen concerns. "Al is a tool to democratise decision-making by aggregating and analysing public opinion," he explained. However, he also warned, "These same technologies can be weaponised, as we've seen in cases of mass misinformation".

Professor Constantinos Adamides from the University of Nicosia argued AI might exacerbate threats to democracy. "The manipulation of public opinion through fake news and echo chambers poses a significant danger. Regulation must be global and swift, or the harm could outweigh the benefits", he said.

The panellists agreed on the urgency of establishing ethical guidelines and international collaboration. They called for educational initiatives to enhance citizens' digital literacy and resilience against misinformation.

Dr Papageorgiou summed up: "Al reflects society's values. To harness its potential, we must improve our input—better policies, better education, and better use of these technologies".



## Weak, underfunded media leave democracy in a fragile state



### Threats to, and Challenges for, Media and Democracy

- Josie Christodoulou, Commissioner for Gender Equality
- Klimentini Diakomanoli, Disinformation expert, Author of the book "Fake News: What Does Europe Do?"
- Elli Kotzamani, Journalist, Chairperson, Cyprus Media Ethics Committee
- Kyriakos Pierides, Cyprus Investigative Reporting Network
- Moderator: Stelios Marathovouniotis, Journalist, Phileleftheros Media Group

Media representatives and stakeholders warned of mounting threats to media independence in Cyprus, citing financial strain, political pressures, and pervasive misinformation.

Ms Elli Kotzamani, a journalist, described the funding challenges facing Cypriot media as

a core issue affecting both quality and independence. "Without advertising, we do not have independent and free media", she stated, noting that reliance on government funding without proper distribution compromises journalistic autonomy. Ms Kotzamani advocated for state support that respects editorial independence, viewing media as "an institution of democracy".

Financial stability, however, is not the only hurdle. Mr Kyriacos Pierides, a founder of the investigative network CIREN, argued that the media's struggle lies not solely in economics but in using resources effectively to ensure quality journalism. "The problem is not the lack of financial resources, but the way they are consumed", Mr Pierides said, noting that inadequate investigative journalism limits accountability and encourages state corruption.

Addressing misinformation's impact, Ms Klimentini Diakomanoli, a European policy expert, urged the media to go beyond reporting facts and actively counter misinformation. "Misinformation includes campaigns and distorted truths", she explained. Citing OECD findings, she expressed concern that overconfidence in identifying fake news undermines informed democratic participation.

Ms Diakomanoli also emphasised the role of digital literacy, starting from early education, as a defence against misinformation. "We should teach young people that scrolling and passively consuming information doesn't help", she said, highlighting the need for citizens to critically engage with content.

As traditional media adapts to the digital age, the distinction between journalism and content creation remains contentious. Ms Kodjamani stressed the journalist's duty to maintain ethical standards, even on social media. "A journalist cannot stop being a journalist, even when writing on Facebook", she insisted, citing ethical obligations to provide accurate information.

The panel also addressed the challenge of achieving gender equality in media representation. The Republic of Cyprus's Commissioner for Gender Equality, Josie Christodoulou argued that entrenched stereotypes hinder women's voices. "Women are often excluded from discussions on finance and economy", she noted, calling for equitable representation in public debates and media panels. She further emphasised, "We cannot become what we do not see", underscoring the importance of visible female role models in media.

During the discussion, speakers repeatedly warned of the broader implications for democracy caused by weakening media. "If we don't defend independent journalism now, future generations may have no journalists left to advocate for them", Ms Kotzamani concluded.



# Cyprus Youth Board calls for active youth participation in shaping policies

Kicking off the Digital Democracy for Youth - the example of Ekfracy

• Maria Miltiadou, Cyprus Youth Board

Maria Miltiadou from the Cyprus Youth Board called for stronger youth engagement in shaping public policy, noting the role of digital platforms and participatory democracy in amplifying young voices.

Addressing the audience, she stressed the importance of ensuring young Cypriots feel heard and empowered to influence issues that directly impact them, from education to social policy.

"Our young people are the most vibrant, hopeful part of our society, yet too often, their voices go unheard", she remarked while opening her speech.

Highlighting the Youth Board's ongoing efforts to empower the youth, Ms Miltiadou introduced "Ekfracy," a digital platform designed to bridge the gap between young citizens and policymakers. Through Ekfracy, young Cypriots can express their views on key issues such as education, social policy, environmental concerns, and job market trends. "Imagine a world where every young person has a say in the policies shaping their lives. That world is not in the future; it is here, in our hands today", she said.

The Cyprus Youth Board has been advocating for reforms that include the reduction of the voting age to 17, she added. This, Ms Miltiadou suggested, would deepen youth involvement in democratic processes. She highlighted the importance of approaching any reform with an educational intent so that the younger generation understands the impact of key decisions.

Looking forward, Ms Miltiadou called for greater collaboration between government bodies, educational institutions, and youth organisations.

She ended on a note of optimism, urging young people to actively engage through platforms like Ekfracy and make the most of available opportunities for involvement.



## Artificial intelligence raises new geopolitical stakes for the EU



## **Geopolitical Developments Before the EU**

- Costas Mavrides, MEP
- Kalliopi Iosifidou Agapiou, Professor UCY
- Moderator: Anna Koukkides- Procopiou, Former Minister of Justice

Officials are urging the European Union to reinforce its security policies and establish more effective artificial intelligence (AI) regulations, stressing these as essential for the bloc's future role on the global stage. Speaking at a panel discussion, MEP Costas Mavrides and Kalliopi losifidou Agapiou of the University of Cyprus underscored the need for cohesive EU strategies in defence and digital governance.

Officials are urging the European Union to reinforce its security policies and establish more effective artificial intelligence (AI) regulations, stressing these as essential for the bloc's future role on the global stage. Speaking at a panel discussion, MEP Costas Mavrides and Kalliopi losifidou Agapiou of the University of Cyprus underscored the need for cohesive EU strategies in defence and digital governance.

Mr Mavrides, a long-serving member of the European Parliament and former chair of the Political Committee for the Mediterranean, highlighted the pressing need for a unified EU defence approach. Reflecting on the geopolitical shifts spurred by the Ukraine conflict, Mavrides stated, "We must be rational. We live in a world where conflicts, including hybrid ones from the cyber-space to fake news and the ruthless weaponisation of migration, are part of our reality".

Mr Mavrides argued that current challenges necessitate a shared defence and security policy within the EU. He cited his experiences in the European Parliament, noting how defence and security issues have gained prominence on the EU's agenda since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. "The geopolitical role of the EU as an issue, and above all the tools, political, diplomatic, mechanisms - all of this was a good policy. Today, I believe that it is not only a correct policy, but also a necessity for those who want the European Union to have a future and a role in the world", he said.

Mr Mavrides also noted recent steps toward enhanced EU security, such as the introduction of the Strategic Compass—a document outlining the EU's framework for defence. However, he cautioned that effective implementation would require a long-term commitment and the establishment of a dedicated EU military force. He expressed concern over EU member states' tendencies to prioritise national interests, often at the expense of a united European stance.

Dr Kalliopi Iosifidou Agapiou shifted the focus to the role of AI in international relations, pointing out the EU's leadership in establishing a legal framework for Al. However, she noted that Europe still trails the United States and China in the AI "race". Emphasising the necessity of ethical AI, Dr Iosifidou Agapiou remarked, that the EU "took the initiative to enact the first legislation that regulates artificial intelligence by setting the foundations, if you like, and the conditions so that we have a reliable system that works for society, for democracy and not vice versa".

The EU's AI regulations, according to Dr Iosifidou Agapiou, are based on a risk-based approach, with requirements that escalate depending on the level of risk posed by Al applications. She pointed to recent controversies, including the use of AI for electoral manipulation in the United States and the UK's Cambridge Analytica scandal, as examples of practices that are now banned within the EU. "Practices seen in the U.S. elections and Brexit, such as those involving Cambridge Analytica, are prohibited in the EU", she said.



## Democratic renewal requires crosssector cooperation





## Democracy in Crisis: Challenges and Solutions in the Modern Era

- Keynote speech: Panayiotis Palates, Commissioner For The Citizen
- Nikitas Hatzimihail, Professor of Private Law, Comparative Law and Legal History, Department of Law, Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Education and Social Sciences, University of Cyprus / Institute for the Study of Politics and Democracy
- Marcel Schepp, Advisor for International Party Dialogue Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung
- Maria Kola, Vice-President, Cyprus Greens-Citizens' Cooperation
- Valéria Silva, Senior Legal and Policy Advisor, Al Governance
- Moderator: George Isaia, Oxygen for Democracy

Scholars, policymakers, and civil society leaders discussed the growing threats to democracy, identifying fragmentation, disinformation, and disengagement as challenges to modern governance.

Mr Panayiotis Palates, Commissioner for the Citizen, described democracy as a concept under strain due to systemic rigidity. "The problem lies in its inability to evolve alongside society", he said, adding that rapid technological advances had created a mismatch between governance structures and social realities. Mr Palates urged the adoption of innovative tools to enable direct citizen participation, including public consultation platforms and legislative reforms.

Professor Nikitas Hatzimihail, Deputy Dean at the University of Cyprus, highlighted historical lessons to caution against superficial fixes. "Participation can sometimes undermine effective democracy", he warned, citing examples of populist overreach and the dangers of monocausal thinking. He also stressed the importance of strengthening institutions and fostering critical thinking through education and long-form journalism. "We must encourage people to read books and engage with in-depth analysis rather than instant information", he said.

Mr Marcel Schepp, an advisor at the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, emphasised declining interest in traditional political institutions as a pressing issue. "Very few people nowadays want to stand for office or join political parties", he observed, linking the trend to a broader societal disconnect. Mr Schepp argued for more inclusive party structures and outreach efforts. "Parties need to leave their closed spaces and engage directly with civil society", he said.

Ms Maria Kola, Vice President of the Cyprus Greens-Citizens' Cooperation, underscored the role of misinformation and corruption in undermining democratic trust. "Fake news and disinformation fuel populism and erode critical thinking", she said. Ms Kola advocated for greater youth involvement, stating that younger generations often feel excluded. "We need to make politics simpler and create spaces where young people feel heard", she added.

Joining in, Ms Valéria Silva, a senior advisor on Al governance, linked the rise of misinformation to algorithmic bias. "Social media platforms amplify harmful content for engagement, leading to a polluted information ecosystem", she said. Ms Silva welcomed the European Union's Digital Services Act and Al Act as steps to combat manipulation and improve transparency.

The panel closed by addressing audience concerns about combating disinformation in the short term. Both Ms Silva and Mr Schepp agreed on the need for education initiatives to develop media literacy but acknowledged the challenge of scaling such efforts for current voters.

Speakers also noted the importance of grassroots action. "Local democracy is key", Professor Hatzimihail concluded. "Engaging citizens at the neighbourhood level can rebuild trust and foster meaningful participation".



## Regulated lobbying is integral to democracy



### **Lobbying and Public Affairs in Cyprus**

- Elena Patera, Member of the Independent Authority Against Corruption (keynote speech)
- Raphael Kergueno, Senior Policy Officer, Transparency International EU
- Nicolas Kyriakides, Executive President, Cyprus Forum
- Moderator: Thomas Kazakos, Director General of the Cyprus Shipping Chamber

Speakers addressed lobbying and public affairs in Cyprus, highlighting the need for greater transparency and accountability.

## **Building a culture of transparency**

In a keynote speech, Ms Patera, a member of the Independent Authority Against Corruption, noted the recent legislative strides Cyprus has made, including the passage of the 2022 Law on Transparency in Public Decision-Making. "The law ensures transparency by requiring all lobbying activities to be disclosed and registered", she said, adding that the Independent Authority Against Corruption is tasked with monitoring compliance.

However, Ms Patera acknowledged the system's infancy, citing low registration numbers. "We have only 94 registered lobbyists so far, but this is just the beginning. It's essential for everyone, from state officials to private representatives, to cooperate in building a culture of transparency", she said.

## **EU** insights and global comparisons

Mr Raphael Kergueno, a Senior Policy Officer at Transparency International, shared insights from EU practices and praised Cyprus for adopting principles aligned with international standards. "Lobbying is an integral part of democracy", he said. "The issue arises when it is unregulated, leading to undue influence or conflicts of interest".

He noted that Cyprus has implemented a rigorous system, including mandatory declarations from lobbyists and decision-makers about their interactions. "This dual reporting mechanism, as seen in Lithuania, is rare but essential to ensuring accountability", he remarked.

Mr Kergueno also discussed the need for conditionality principles, such as requiring lobbyists to register before meeting high-level officials. "In Brussels, this rule doubled the number of registered entities, promoting integrity and transparency", he said.

#### From stigma to regulation

Reflecting on Cyprus's progress, Mr Nicolas Kyriakides, Executive President of the Cyprus Forum, credited a series of events, including international scrutiny, for pushing the country towards reform. "The Al Jazeera scandal and EU resilience funding requirements forced us to act", he said, acknowledging the role of coincidences in enacting change.

Advocating for a broader cultural shift, Mr Kyriakides said, "Lobbying should not be stigmatised. It's a legitimate activity that improves policymaking by bringing evidence-based insights to the table. What's critical is ensuring it's done transparently and fairly".

### **Challenges ahead**

Mr Thomas Kazakos, the moderator of the discussion, himself a registered lobbyist, emphasised the practical difficulties of compliance. He called for simplified processes, such as organisational rather than individual registrations. "Accountability can still be ensured by designating a responsible person for each entity. The current system is cumbersome and could deter participation", he argued.

Panelists also debated whether stricter enforcement could curb loopholes. While Mr Kergueno cited France's tough stance, including penalties for misleading lobbying, he cautioned against overly punitive measures that might stifle participation.

## Hope for the future

The session concluded with all speakers expressing hope for an improved perception of lobbying in Cyprus. Mr Kazakos summed up, "This is the Cyprus we want, a nation where lobbying is not seen as a dirty word but as a tool for strengthening democracy".



## Nicosia Old Town Hall | Cornaro

DAY 2: 04 OCT. 2024





## To achieve reunification, people first need to believe in it



## Turkish Cypriot Community's Views on Türkiye's Role and the Prospects of Peace

- Sinem Arslan, Visiting Research Fellow at Middlesex University Research Fellow at Civil War Paths Project at the University of York, Middlesex University
- Nina Caspersen, Professor/Associate Dean, University of York
- Ahmet Sozen, Professor of International Relations
- · Moderator: Nikolaos Stelgias

Academics discussed the findings of recent research into the community's perspectives on local and regional politics and the prospects for peace in Cyprus.

The study, conducted by researchers from the University of York, showed widespread

discontent among Turkish Cypriots regarding their political and economic situation, as well as a growing sense of frustration over Turkey's influence on domestic affairs. "There is a high level of dissatisfaction with the status quo, including a very high level of dissatisfaction with Turkish interference", said Dr Sinem Arslan, a visiting research fellow involved in the study.

The survey, conducted in September 2023, gathered responses from over 1,000 Turkish Cypriots. Results indicated that 87.7% of participants were unhappy with the economic dependence on Turkey, and 67.9% believed Turkey interfered in the 2020 elections in the north of Cyprus.

Dr Arslan explained that while Turkish Cypriots are frustrated with the influence of Ankara, there is still strong support for the presence of Turkish troops, reflecting security concerns. "When we asked about Turkish military presence, 77% of respondents said it did not constitute a problem", she noted.

Professor Nina Caspersen, Associate Dean at the University of York, emphasised that the complex relationship between the Turkish Cypriot community and Turkey presents both obstacles and opportunities for peace. "For peace to be possible, it has to be believed", she said. "People have to believe that it can be realised for it to happen".

The community's perception of potential peace solutions has also shifted. While the bi-zonal, bi-communal federation model remains on the table, it is no longer seen as a realistic outcome by many. "Only 15.5% of respondents think reunification through a federation is realistic, compared to 62% who now support the idea of an independent state", said Dr Arslan.

### **Challenges to Reunification**

Despite the community's disillusionment with the status quo in Cyprus, some speakers identified room for progress if regional dynamics were conducive. Professor Ahmet Sozen from Eastern Mediterranean University commented on the evolution of Turkey's policy, which has moved away from supporting a bi-zonal federation towards advocating a two-state solution. "Turkey's stance has shifted, and whether this change is permanent or a tactical move remains to be seen", Professor Sozen said.

He argued that the path to peace would require creativity and flexibility from all parties involved. "We need a rational business partnership to start", he said. "If that ever turns into a love affair, fine. If not, let's continue having a civilised relationship".

### **A Fleeting Opportunity**

The panellists highlighted that opportunities for peace may still exist, though they may be fleeting.

Professor Caspersen referred to recent efforts between local leaders as encouraging but emphasised that mistrust and a lack of a shared vision are significant barriers.

Reflecting on the broader geopolitical context, Professor Sozen suggested that regional shifts could also influence Cyprus's future. "How things develop in this region will determine what's going to happen in Cyprus", he said, pointing to Turkey's recent moves to normalise relations with neighbouring countries.

The discussion concluded with a consensus that while there is a desire for change among Turkish Cypriots, there is also widespread scepticism about whether meaningful negotiations will resume anytime soon. "The status quo is very sustainable", Professor Sozen remarked, highlighting the entrenched divisions on the island. "It has been going on for a very long time, but it is not static. Things are changing every day".



## Europe's aggregate industry is central to sustainable development



## Sustainable Foundations: Europe's Future through an Essential Aggregates Industry

- Antonia Theodosiou, Commissioner for the Environment, Office of the Commissioner for the Environment
- Theodoulos Mesimeris, Director of the Environment Department
- Antonis Antoniou Latouros, President, Aggregates Europe UEPG
- Wouter Vermin, Manager Treatment & Valorisation, BIOTERRA Group De Cloedt
- Klára Řehounková, Assistant Professor, University of South Bohemia
- Moderator: Andrea Ioannou, Media & Communications Specialist

Stakeholders in the European aggregates industry discussed sustainability in an industry that supplies the raw materials for essential infrastructure.

Mr Antonis Antoniou Latouros, President of Aggregates Europe (UEPG), emphasised the industry's scale and necessity. "Aggregates are the second most consumed material on Earth after water. Without them, there would be no homes, schools, or hospitals", he said, noting that Europe alone requires three billion tonnes of aggregates annually. He also stressed the environmental challenges, urging streamlined permitting processes and better recycling efforts.

Ms Antonia Theodosiou, Cyprus's Commissioner for the Environment, highlighted the importance of aligning aggregate extraction with sustainability goals. She pointed to the Critical Raw Materials Act as a framework for reducing environmental impacts and increasing material circularity. "The choice is clear: we either change by disaster or by design", she warned.

Dr Klára Řehounková, Assistant Professor at the University of South Bohemia, underscored the potential of quarries to enhance biodiversity. "Extraction sites can offer habitats for rare species, turning degraded landscapes into conservation opportunities", she explained, citing the use of quarries by rare birds like sand martins.

Belgium's success in recycling construction waste was spotlighted by Mr Wouter Vermin, Manager of Treatment & Valorisation at BIOTERRA. "Traceability and strict landfill policies have made recycling cheaper than disposal. Governments must lead by example by mandating recycled aggregates in public projects", he said.

The forum also addressed challenges unique to Cyprus. With local resources depleting, expanding quarry zones in regions like Paphos and Xylophagou is vital to avoid costly and polluting transport from other districts, Mr Latouros warned.

Concluding, the speakers agreed the aggregates industry must innovate to meet Europe's environmental goals. "Nature and aggregates must coexist for a sustainable future", Mr Latouros concluded.



# Enterprise Europe Network's pivotal role in SME support and innovation



### **Enterprise Europe Network**

- Stalo Demosthenous, Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Elpida Christou, European Office Cyprus
- Marinos Portokallides, Research and Innovation Foundation
- Christos Skouras, Policy Officer, DG GROW, European Commission
- Moderator: Sotiris Themistokleous, CSI

Panellists discussed Enterprise Europe Network's (EEN) mission to bolster small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) across Europe.

Mr Christos Skouras, Policy Officer at the European Commission's Directorate-General for

Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (DG GROW) highlighted the EEN's multifaceted support for SMEs. "The network aims to support SMEs in accessing new markets, navigating regulatory frameworks, and fostering innovation", he said.

Mr Skouras emphasised that networking events and collaboration opportunities form the backbone of EEN's strategy, helping businesses find new partners and gain market intelligence.

Ms Stalo Demosthenous, Senior Operating Officer at the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry, shed light on the unique challenges Cypriot SMEs face. "High interest rates, limited access to venture capital, and systemic delays in regulatory approvals are major hurdles", she stated.

Despite these issues, Ms Demosthenous noted the EEN's role in mitigating these obstacles, particularly in helping businesses improve competitiveness and manage costs. Energy efficiency was mentioned as a standout initiative. "We helped 19 Cypriot businesses secure €188,500 in funding to improve energy efficiency", Ms Demosthenous added.

## **Maximising EU opportunities**

Ms Elpida Christou, Director of Operations at the European Office Cyprus, elaborated on how the network aids businesses in capitalising on EU funding. "We conduct needs analyses and develop tailored action plans to guide companies through funding applications", she explained.

Ms Christou stressed the importance of setting realistic expectations about EU programmes, which often focus on broader benefits like digital or green transitions rather than direct operational costs.

## **Driving innovation and collaboration**

Dr Marinos Portokallides from the Research and Innovation Foundation highlighted EEN's role in fostering innovation and internationalisation. "Our seminars focus on skills like business modelling and product development, while events abroad help Cypriot start-ups connect with global investors", he remarked.

The discussion concluded with insights into the EEN's future. Mr Skouras stressed the need to simplify regulatory frameworks for SMEs, saying, "The network's value lies in translating complex EU legislation into practical support for businesses".



"We are witnessing a rollback in the protection of the right to seek asylum"





Ionad na hÉireann do Chearta an Duine Irish Centre for Human Rights

## Ensuring Safety and Dignity in Migration - A Human Rights Approach

- Siobhán Mullally, UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children. Director of the Irish Centre for Human Rights
- Anke Schlimm, German Ambassador
- Nasia Hadjigeorgiou, Deputy Head of School of Law, Assistant Professor in Transitional Justice and Human Rights, UCLan Cyprus
- Mine Yucel, Director Prologue Consulting Ltd
- Irene Che, Trafficking survivor
- Moderator: Katerina Stephanou, Step Up Stop Slavery

Panellists addressed the challenges of migration and human trafficking, focusing on a human rights-centred approach. The discussion emphasised the plight of vulnerable migrant populations, particularly women and children.

#### Global context

Professor Siobhán Mullally, UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, noted the record-high displacement figures globally, driven by climate change, conflict, and persecution. "We are witnessing a rollback in the protection of the right to seek asylum and against forced returns", she said. Mullally highlighted the intersection of trafficking and refugee protection, urging states to ensure sustainable solutions and tackle vulnerabilities linked to migration policies.

She pointed out that exploitation frequently arises in workplaces dependent on migrant labour. "States must ensure labour inspectorates are properly resourced to monitor industries such as hospitality, domestic work, and agriculture, where migrant workers are particularly at risk", Professor Mullally added.

### Cyprus's migration policies

German Ambassador Anke Schlimm offered insights into migration management in Germany, contrasting it with Cyprus. She revealed that Germany has shifted from its welcoming stance, marked by former Chancellor Angela Merkel's declaration, "Wir schaffen das" (English: we can handle this), to a more restrained approach. "Managing migration more effectively now means increased returns, stronger deterrence, and potentially less focus on integration policies", Schlimm said.

Turning to Cyprus, Ambassador Schlimm commended efforts to expedite asylum procedures but highlighted challenges, particularly in handling irregular migration across the Green Line. She called for distinguishing between legal and irregular migration to balance humanitarian needs and economic priorities.

### Human rights violations in the buffer zone

Dr Nasia Hadjigeorgiou, Deputy Head of the School of Law at UCLan Cyprus, detailed legal complexities within the buffer zone, emphasising the Republic of Cyprus' obligations under international law. "The buffer zone is not a no-man's land but part of the Republic, which bears the same responsibility to protect human rights there as elsewhere", she explained. "Legally speaking, the buffer zone is no different from downtown Limassol", she noted.

Dr Hadjigeorgiou criticised practices that physically prevent asylum seekers from accessing asylum application points, describing them as "pushbacks on land".

## Human trafficking in the north

Ms Mine Yucel, director of Prologue Consulting, highlighted trends in human trafficking within the northern part of Cyprus. "State-sanctioned systems effectively turn sex work into trafficking by controlling women's movements, taking their passports, and keeping them in exploitative conditions", Yucel said. She also exposed labour trafficking in sectors like agriculture and construction, where migrant workers face debt bondage and poor living conditions.

Ms Yucel described the exploitation of international students as a growing concern, noting that agents often lure them with false promises of scholarships and job opportunities. "Many end up trapped in forced labour or sexual exploitation", she said.

### **Survivors' perspective**

Ms Irene Che, chair of the Cyprus Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Council, drew attention to the harsh realities faced by migrants. She identified economic pressures, false promises, and undocumented status as factors rendering migrants vulnerable to exploitation. "We are desperate to send money back home, and that desperation makes us easy targets for traffickers and exploiters", she said. "When employers know we have no legal status, they take advantage, offering low wages and harsh conditions".

Ms Che also highlighted the discrimination faced by asylum seekers in Cyprus, particularly in housing. "Agents and landlords often refuse to rent to us, or they inflate rents simply because we are asylum seekers", she said.

She advocated for survivor involvement in policymaking, stressing the value of lived experience. "We are the ones who have gone through the trauma and challenges. Our insights can help prevent others from falling into the same traps", Ms Che explained. "Survivors can identify practical solutions, and using our voices also helps us heal".

Ms Che called for systemic changes to protect migrants and victims of trafficking. "We need the government to offer free legal representation to asylum seekers, particularly trafficking victims", she said. "It's critical that workers in asylum services and social welfare are trained to identify trafficking risks".

Ms Che also addressed the psychological toll of migration and exploitation. "Most of us arrive traumatised, and the exploitation we face here only deepens that trauma", she said. "Mental health support is essential, especially for women and children who have been through trafficking. NGOs are doing the work, but where is the government's support"?

In closing, Ms Che emphasised the importance of dignity and opportunity for migrants. "We are skilled workers, teachers, nurses, and doctors. With the right support, we can contribute meaningfully to Cypriot society", she said.



# The work of technical committees matters but is hampered by political interference





#### **Technical committees**

- Dr Michael I. Loizides, Technical Committee on the Environment
- Jale Refik Rogers, Technical Committee on Health
- Professor Andreas Kapardis, Technical Committee on Crime and Criminal Matters
- Suleyman Gelener, Technical Committee on Education
- Moderators: Hüseyin Silman, Dr Nasia Hadjigeorgiou

Panellists representing bicommunal technical committees outlined their achievements while outlining obstacles to greater collaboration, particularly political interference.

Dr Nasia Hadjigeorgiou, one of the moderators, opened the discussion by stressing the committees' dual mandate: to resolve daily issues and build trust between the communities. However, she questioned the committees' insulation from political influence.

"Every six months, the UN Secretary-General reports that technical committees must be shielded from politics, but this is easier said than done", she noted.

Mr Suleyman Gelener, a member of the Technical Committee on Education, underscored the committees' technical focus. "We're like technicians—our role is to solve issues non-politically and as experts", he said. Mr Gelener praised the committees as "one of the few functioning mechanisms of cooperation", though he admitted progress could be slow due to narrow mandates and bureaucratic hurdles.

Highlighting environmental challenges, Dr Michael Loizides, co-chair of the Technical Committee on the Environment, recounted how the committee addressed a recent oil spill threat. "We dispatched a drone to investigate, avoiding panic and misinformation", he said. He emphasised that environmental crises often demand immediate, unified action.

He also cited successful projects like combating invasive species. "When a moth with no natural predators arrived, we collaborated island-wide to find a biological solution", he said. But Mr Loizides criticised political delays, adding, "If left alone, we would accomplish so much more".

Dr Jale Refik Rogers, a member of the Technical Committee on Health, detailed how the group facilitated ambulance crossings and coordinated pandemic responses. "During COVID-19, we shared epidemiological data, influencing checkpoint policies", she said. Yet, bureaucratic inertia often hampers progress.

Professor Andreas Kapardis, co-chair of the Technical Committee on Crime and Criminal Matters, highlighted the committee's efficiency, driven by its non-political approach. "We've processed over 1,000 cases since 2009, including fugitive exchanges and intelligence sharing", he said. Professor Kapardis attributed their success to a professional ethos and close collaboration. "We meet, we work, and we produce results. Publicity isn't needed—it's all about effectiveness", he asserted.

### Visibility and future potential

The panellists debated the committees' low public profile. Professor Kapardis defended discretion, saying it avoids gossip and political meddling. In contrast, Dr Rogers advocated for greater visibility to foster public trust. "People need to see the tangible benefits", she said, suggesting youth engagement via social media.

The panel also addressed the fragility of certain initiatives. Mr Gelener reflected on the IMAGINE programme, which brought students from both communities together but was later discontinued. "Publicity didn't kill it; the lack of institutional support did", he argued, calling for a more formal structure to protect successful projects.

Despite differing views on visibility and structure, all panellists agreed on the committees'

importance in fostering cooperation. "The small victories—whether it's cross-border mobile use or fire drills—matter", said Mr Gelener.



### Nicosia Old Town Hall | Aphrodite

DAY 2: 04 OCT. 2024





# High rent prices and external factors are affecting the development of the ICT sector in Cyprus

Knowledge partner:



### Solidifying the Tech Island: Developing a Competitive Digital Economy for Cyprus

- Nicodemos Damianou, Deputy Minister of Research, Innovation and Digital Policy
- Elena Grigorian, CEO, MY.Games
- Elena Prochaskova, Director, JETBRAINS LIMITED
- Christophoros Anayiotos, Head of Deal Advisory KPMG
- Aristos Damianou, MP, AKEL
- Moderator: Ugne Buraciene, Group CEO, payabl.

Rents for office spaces in Cyprus and especially in Limassol affect big tech companies operating on the island, as the issue of office spaces seems to be one of the obstacles in the expansion of the ICT sector, speakers said.

Speaking during the discussion, Nicodemos Damianou, Deputy Minister of Research, Innovation and Digital Policy, said the goal of converting Cyprus into a tech hub "is becoming a reality".

"This is not a distant unapproachable goal. It is becoming a reality", he noted.

He added that ICT "has been the sector with the highest growth over the past decade in Cyprus with an average growth of around 10%", contributing to the diversification of Cyprus' economic model. "Now we should focus on how to leverage to ensure that we maintain the momentum", the Deputy Minister added.

According to Damianou, the key elements to further boost the sector are the digital infrastructure, fast robust high-speed connectivity, data centres, a digitally enabled skilled workforce, a digitally enabled business environment, and an environment that is conducive to the start-up ecosystem, as well as a legal and regulatory network that would support and safeguard this growth.

"All these elements can collectively create an environment in which businesses can thrive, can innovate not only nationally but globally", the Deputy Minister went on to say.

#### ICT contribution at €5.6 billion

On his part, Christoforos Anayiotos, head of DEAL, an advisory firm of KPMG, said the firm has carried out a study over the sector's impact on the economy, stating that on gross value added (GVA) basis, the ICT sector's contribution amounted to €3.3 billion, or 12% of the GVA output.

Taking into account the indirect spillovers, the sector's contribution rises to €5.6 billion, Anayiotos added, pointing out that this measure was prudent as it excluded fintech companies which are included in the financial services sector.

Anayiotos pointed out that according to official statistics, 60% of the sector employees are Cypriots, contrary to the belief that the sector's employees are mostly foreigners.

AKEL MP Aristos Damianouacknowledged the sector's progress, but said the "question remains whether we do enough to facilitate the growth of the industry".

In this context, he highlighted the need for the state to monitor the implementation of laws enacted by the legislature and the need to cut red tape.

He called the rent prices both for housing spaces and accommodation as "outrageous", adding that it is shocking "to put professionals, entrepreneurs in a position of having to run around to create schools for their children, for example in Limassol because the state or the economy itself does not create the infrastructure for such opportunities".

Elena Prochaskova, Director of JetBrains, highlighted the need to connect tech companies with the Universities.

"The demand for innovation continues to escalate requiring more and more new skills and

evolving skills, collaboration with universities is a bridge with the industry", she said.

On her part, Elena Grigorian, CEO of My Games, a company that maintains one of its hubs in Cyprus, referred to the progress of the sector, as well as Cyprus' comparative advantages. She also noted that the updating of the Intellectual Property framework, (IP box) "could evolve the second wave of IT giants moving here".

Grigorian at the same time highlighted the problem of having schools for children who come to live on the island, noting that although she is located in Cyprus her ten-year-old daughter has no option for being educated in Cyprus.

She also raised the issue of office space scarcity which inhibits the expansion of her company. "We are trying to increase it every year and it is not so easy to find new spaces", she added.

Ugne Buraciene, CEO of Payabl and discussion moderator, said "We are struggling to expand because the cost of the offices is higher than what I pay in London and the Netherlands in some cases"



# **Cyprus still lags behind in infrastructure for EV adoption**

Knowledge partner:



#### **EV Charging stations**

- Dinos Lefkaritis, CEO Petrolina
- George Petrou, OEB
- Marianna Nathanail, European Investment Bank
- Christos Gkartzonikas, MaaSLab
- Alexis Anninos, Cyprus Import Corporation
- Moderator: Nestor Fylaktos, Research Scientist, The Cyprus Institute

Cyprus has significant ground to cover in adopting electric vehicles (EVs) and establishing robust charging infrastructure, panellists said. They addressed challenges around Cyprus' lag in EV adoption, noting how subsidies, cultural attitudes, and charging availability are affecting uptake rates.

Mr Alexis Anninos, managing director of Cyprus Import Corporation, pointed out that the EV adoption rate for 2024 stands at just 6% in Cyprus, compared with 14% across the EU. "We are far behind the EU", Anninos said, attributing this gap to a lack of incentives and initial difficulties with the subsidy process. While acknowledging the need for subsidies to bridge the cost difference between EVs and conventional vehicles, he warned that Cyprus must make drastic changes to encourage further adoption.

Mr George Petrou of the Cyprus Employers and Industrialists Federation (OEB) echoed this view, stressing the need for expanded public charging infrastructure, particularly at accessible locations like petrol stations. He highlighted that Cyprus's 330 gas stations could serve as a valuable EV charging network if regulations are adjusted to permit installations. "It is crucial to accelerate the installation of chargers. If we allow to install chargers with certain conditions, then that will facilitate recharging of vehicles much easier", he noted.

Dinos Lefkaritis, CEO of Petrolina, detailed the steps his company has already taken, saying Petrolina has installed about 100 chargers at strategic locations across Cyprus, including its motorway stations. "We want to be first in everything", Mr Lefkaritis said, adding that Petrolina's initial charging stations have been installed at petrol stations to give customers the option between fueling up with petrol or charging an EV. He also acknowledged the cost barrier, noting that a single 150-kW charger costs approximately €180,000. "At the moment, as a company and as a department, we are losing money", he said.

On financing, Ms Marianna Nathanail from the European Investment Bank (EIB) outlined the EIB's commitment to green investments and support for Cyprus' EV infrastructure. "Cyprus is one of the countries that benefit most from the financing tools of the European Investment Bank", she stated, adding that the bank has invested heavily in promoting sustainable transport and urban mobility.

Dr Christos Gkartzonikas, a transport researcher from the University of Cyprus' MaaSLab, questioned whether simply replacing conventional cars with EVs is the best solution. He argued that EVs cannot be the sole answer, suggesting that cities should simultaneously reduce car dependency and promote shared transportation options. He cited ongoing projects in Limassol aimed at developing on-demand electric minibus services and reducing private vehicle use, which could "combine electromobility with shared mobility services" for a more sustainable urban transport model.

Panellists also discussed consumer scepticism toward EVs, with some expressing concern about potential high replacement costs for EV batteries and the practical challenges of charging. Mr Petrou noted that many Cypriots still prefer hybrids, perceiving them as a safer middle ground. He argued that consumers have to feel confident they will not be stranded without charging their vehicles, adding that improving convenience at public chargers is crucial for consumer acceptance.



# Conflicts in the Middle East and Cyprus's energy cooperation with Israel

#### Fireside Discussion with the Ambassador of Israel

- Oren Anolik, Ambassador of Israel
- Nicolas Kyriakides, Executive President & Founding Member, Cyprus Forum

Israel's Ambassador to Cyprus, Oren Anolik, and Cyprus Forum Executive President Nicolas Kyriakides discussed Israel-Cyprus relations and regional security threats.

Opening the dialogue, Ambassador Anolik spoke of Israel's challenges in managing conflicts on multiple fronts, most notably in Gaza and Lebanon, while highlighting the role of Iran as

a central force behind them. "Gaza and Lebanon, Hamas and Hezbollah, are just two of the tentacles of the octopus, which is Iran", Ambassador Anolik said.

He attributed the simultaneous pressure Israel faces from Hamas and Hezbollah to Iran's strategic influence, stating that Iran's support extends to groups across the region, including the Houthis in Yemen and various Shiite militias in Syria and Iraq, creating what he described as a "ring of fire" around Israel.

The conversation moved to the humanitarian toll of the current conflicts; a topic Mr Kyriakides pressed with a question on Israel's approach to protecting civilian lives. Ambassador Anolik noted the distinction Israel makes between combatants and civilians in Gaza while acknowledging the complexity of conducting military operations where militants embed themselves within civilian populations.

The Ambassador stated that Israel is "not in any way indifferent" to the impact on civilians, arguing that Israel allows humanitarian aid into Gaza and has warned civilians to avoid conflict zones. He acknowledged the challenge of reaching all those in need, stating, "There are some difficulties with distribution inside Gaza, which is not so much in our hands", he said.

When Mr Kyriakides raised questions about self-criticism, Ambassador Anolik was quick to affirm Israel's openness to internal critique. "There is plenty of self-criticism happening in Israel as we speak", he said, noting Israel is a democracy where citizens freely voice their views. He admitted that Israel may not be without fault in its historical policies, adding that while mistakes have been made, he believes underlying tensions with Palestinians are rooted in longstanding ideological conflicts rather than specific policies alone.

The Ambassador also expressed hopes for Israel's future cooperation with Cyprus, particularly in the energy sector. With Cyprus and Greece as close regional partners, he spoke about the ongoing discussions around the Cyprus-Greece-Israel interconnector project, which would link the countries' electricity grids. "We think that this is the right strategic choice to make", Ambassador Anolik said, reflecting on the project's benefits, which he argued go beyond financial gains to include redundancy in power supply and enhanced energy security. He expressed hopes for concluding negotiations on the Israel-Cyprus segment of the project, though he admitted the timeline for its completion is uncertain.

The dialogue also briefly touched on Israel's perspective on relations with Turkey. Ambassador Anolik noted that while Turkey had previously made efforts to improve ties with Israel, recent criticism from Turkish leaders following the October 7 attacks has halted any positive momentum. He expressed hope that economic and commercial relations could eventually return to a stable footing, but he cautioned that a full diplomatic rapprochement seemed unlikely in the near future.



# A rebranding is necessary to position Cyprus as a leader in innovation



### Cyprus Innovation Profile: Attracting foreign investments and selling services and products

- Eleftheria Ioannou, Senior Commerce and Industry Officer
- Yoshio Yamawaki, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan to the Republic of Cyprus, Embassy of Japan in the Republic of Cyprus
- Kyriakos Attouni, Invest Cyprus
- Evagoras Xydas, Assistant Professor of Mechanical Engineering and CEO/
   Founder of IREROBOT LTD, Frederick University
- Moderator: Styliani Petroudi, EIT Cyprus/CYENS

Cyprus is positioning itself as a hub for innovation and investment, aiming to enhance its profile internationally by leveraging technology, entrepreneurship, and strategic partnerships. The panel explored how Cyprus can attract foreign investments and expand its service and product exports.

Japanese Ambassador to Cyprus, Yoshio Yamawaki noted the importance of fostering bilateral understanding and showcasing Cyprus's strengths to attract Japanese companies. He highlighted the country's strategic location, high quality of life, and emerging startup ecosystem as key advantages.

The Ambassador also noted recent initiatives, including bilateral missions and Memoranda of Understanding, designed to strengthen ties between Cyprus and Japan in innovation and technology.

Ms Eleftheria Ioannou, Senior Commerce and Industry Officer at the Ministry of Commerce, spoke about the government's efforts to promote Cypriot businesses abroad. "The ICT sector has grown rapidly and is driving GDP growth", she said. Ioannou outlined initiatives such as national pavilions at global exhibitions and export support programmes aimed at facilitating B2B opportunities.

She called for "export champions" to mentor startups and help overcome challenges associated with exporting from a small island.

Dr Evagoras Xydas, Assistant Professor and CEO of IREROBOT, shared his experiences as a startup founder navigating the Cypriot ecosystem. He credited government grants and academic collaboration for his company's success in developing robotics technology. However, he stressed the need for Cyprus to attract venture capital. "We must create connections to Central Europe and other VC hubs. Cyprus does not yet have the critical mass to sustain a strong local venture capital system", Dr Xydas said.

Mr Kyriakos Attouni of Invest Cyprus underscored the importance of a robust digital economy to attract investments. "We need to position Cyprus as a regional digital hub", he said, referencing the government's ongoing collaboration with international stakeholders. Mr Attouni highlighted reforms such as the Cyprus startup visa and the establishment of a digital business centre to support innovation-focused companies.

Panelists agreed that a focused rebranding effort is necessary to position Cyprus as a leader in innovation. "We need to highlight success stories like MUFG's presence and demonstrate Cyprus' unique advantages clearly and comparatively", Mr Attouni added.



# Community-driven social innovation for coexistence and growth is vital

Knowledge partner:



### Communal Social Innovation Coexistence, Collaboration, and Development

- Charalambos Prountzos, Mayor of Nicosia
- Andreas Efstathiou, Rector EUC
- Daina Nicolaou-Anastasiou, UCY
- Elena P. Antonacopoulou, AUB
- Demetris Hadjisofocli, CSI
- Moderator: Sotiris Themistokleous, Director of Strategic Development, Center for Social Innovation - CSI

Social innovation at the local level can drive global impact, speakers said during a discussion which touched on the collaboration among local authorities, academia, and private entities.

The Mayor of Nicosia, Mr Charalambos Prountzos, highlighted the city's multicultural character and its commitment to leveraging this heritage for social innovation. "Nicosia is doing a lot to alleviate challenges like migration through initiatives such as the Multipurpose Centre, which supports social cohesion by helping migrants integrate into the economic life of the city", he said.

Dr Daina Nicolaou from the University of Cyprus spoke about the value of partnerships between universities, municipalities, and industries. "By bringing stakeholders together, we generate results that benefit not just the city but Cyprus as a whole", she said. She also called for greater resource sharing among academic institutions to amplify their collective impact, saying, "Cyprus is so small that we gain more by collaborating than competing".

Professor Andreas Efstathiou, Rector of the European University of Cyprus, reflected on the role of international programmes in bridging local initiatives with global innovation. "Through Erasmus and Horizon Europe, our universities connect with scientists worldwide, positioning our local community to benefit significantly", he explained.

Professor Elena Antonacopoulou of the American University of Beirut emphasised the need to embed the co-creation of knowledge into social and business strategies. "We must not just produce knowledge but partner for impact, addressing grand challenges and promoting the common good", she stated. Antonacopoulou cited examples of companies successfully balancing profitability and social responsibility, calling on Cypriot institutions to lead by example.

Mr Demetris Hadjisofocli, CEO of the Center for Social Innovation (CSI), advocated for better synergy among stakeholders. "We're like a car factory where the parts don't talk to each other. Without integration, progress remains fragmented", he said.

#### Addressing systemic gaps

Panelists identified obstacles hindering progress, including limited government investment in research and cultural resistance to collaboration.

Mayor Prountzos announced the establishment of a Business Council to connect academia, industry, and public entities, aiming to "create synergetic relationships" and transform Nicosia into a knowledge hub.

The session concluded with a call to overcome comfort zones and prioritise measurable impacts. "Impact is about changing lives", said Mr Hadjisofocli.



## **Europe's green and digital makeover needs all hands on deck**



### Influencing European Training Policies for the Twin Transition

- Jai Mexis, CEO & Founder, Odyssea
- Daniel Spichtinger, Independent Expert/Consultant
- Folco Ciulli, Executive Director, European Chemical Regions Network
- Monika Banka, Policy and Network Coordinator, European Chemical Regions
   Network
- Vlatka Katusic, Senior Research Fellow, Project Manager and Circular Economy Specialist Circular Economy Research Center (CERC) and Circular Economy Alliance (CEA)
- Moderator: Christina Achilleos, Founder/Director InnoEUsphere Limited

Europe is gearing up to tackle the dual challenge of green and digital transformations, with regional partnerships and targeted skills programmes seen as crucial to bridging gaps in labour markets and ensuring competitiveness. Speakers highlighted local initiatives aimed at influencing European training policies to meet these demands.

Ms Monika Banka, Policy and Network Coordinator at the European Chemical Regions (ECRN) the chemical encompassing everything from Network stressed that sector, pharmaceuticals petrochemicals, is one of Europe's largest industries. to good training and access to knowledge is essential to further develop our economy", she said. ECRN's regional partnership for skills, established in February 2023, aims to address specific skill gaps within the sector, which is heavily affected by both the green and digital transitions.

discussions also covered the need for cooperation between public entities to improve workforce readiness. "Without cooperation between the public and private sector, we cannot think about delivering valuable training", Ms Banka added, stressing the need to integrate practical training through internships as part of skill development initiatives.

Mr Folco Ciulli, Executive Director of ECRN, explained how the Lombardy region has been at the forefront of the European skills agenda. "The only way for the European economy to stay competitive in a changing world where we lack raw materials and have higher labour costs is to rely on the capacity of the workforce", he said. Lombardy's approach has involved developing skills partnerships from the grassroots level, focusing initially on key industrial sectors such as chemicals, automotive, and textiles.

Dr Vlatka Katusic, Senior Research Fellow at the Circular Economy Alliance, focused on the role of the circular economy in the twin transitions, pointing out the importance of embedding circular principles in education. "We need to foster collaboration between educational institutions, governments, and businesses to encourage upskilling and reskilling", Dr Katusic said. She emphasised that the use of digital tools like data analytics can enhance resource monitoring and identify areas for improvement, making the green transition more efficient.

Mr Jai Mexis, CEO of Odyssea, highlighted efforts to upskill vulnerable groups, particularly young Greeks and refugees, to prepare them for the changing labour landscape. "With the rapid change of Al technology and automation, even people who are not from a vulnerable background could suddenly find themselves with outdated skills", said Mr Mexis. Odyssea is addressing this by creating tailor-made training programmes that directly respond to industry needs, with a 50% success rate of immediate job placements.

The European Commission's ambition to build a "Union of Skills" was also highlighted during the discussion.

Daniel Spichtinger Independent consultant Mr referenced the Draghi report, which links development to productivity. "The report underscores the importance in boosting Europe's productivity and competitiveness, while also ensuring social cohesion", Mr Spichtinger said.

He further added, "We need to ensure that skills initiatives are inclusive and accessible to all so that no one is left behind in this transition".



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## The Cyprus status quo is evolving for the worse

Knowledge partner:



#### **Scenarios on Cyprus Futures**

- Dr Christos Clerides, Lawyer
- Xenia Constantinou, Politician
- Andromachi Sophocleous, Politician, Political Analyst
- Dr Huri Yontucu, Media Scholar
- Meral Birinci-Sonan, Lawyer
- Professor Canan Zeki
- Moderator: Dr Michelle Parlevliet, Independent Peacebuilding Practitioner,
   Process Facilitator, System coach

Speakers explored four scenarios for the island's future, reflecting on the path ahead while grappling with the entrenched divisions that define Cyprus. The session centred on scenarios framed as "No Way", "My Way", "Peace Under Pressure", and "Our Way", representing possible trajectories for Cyprus by 2035.

Moderator Dr Michelle Parlevliet opened by emphasising the scenarios' purpose: "They are not predictions or recommendations. They are tools for strategic thinking, describing multiple pathways into the future".

Dr Christos Clerides, a senior lawyer, dismissed the scenario of resilient peace as "like a Netflix sci-fi movie". He argued that Turkey's influence over Cyprus remains the primary obstacle to resolution. "Unless Turkey changes its culture and policy on Cyprus, there will never be a solution", he asserted.

Ms Meral Birinci-Sonan, a barrister and activist, lamented the lack of meaningful dialogue between the island's communities. "The only thing that hasn't been tried is 'Our Way,' but people say it's a dream", she said, describing how entrenched propaganda shapes perceptions on both sides. She urged for grassroots engagement: "We as citizens must talk about it at breakfast tables, in schools, everywhere".

Dr Huri Yontucu, a media scholar, highlighted the role of the media in perpetuating division: "Media deepens biases and solidifies stereotypes. We need peace journalism principles to highlight cooperation and reconciliation". Reflecting on personal challenges, she shared her struggle with identity: "When I go to the South, I'm not Cypriot. In the North, some don't see me as Turkish Cypriot. Who am I?".

Former MP Ms Xenia Constantinou rejected the stagnation scenario as unfeasible, citing increasing regional tensions. She advocated for tangible initiatives, such as a bicommunal, bilingual school in the buffer zone: "We need projects that demonstrate collaboration and build trust".

Education expert Dr Canan Zeki pointed to the role of curriculum reform in addressing biases. "We removed inflammatory content and used peace language to focus on cultural aspects", she said.

Activist and political analyst Ms Andromachi Sophocleous urged a shift from reactive to proactive efforts. "We need to redefine the Cyprus problem through a lens of cooperation. Peace is not a magical solution—it's hard work," she said, calling for collective agency in shaping the island's future.

Despite divergent perspectives, the speakers shared a common concern: the status quo's unsustainability. "The situation is not static; it's evolving, often for the worse. Let's engage with what the future can bring and what we can do to change it", Dr Parlevliet summed up.



# The public should own the Cyprus negotiations



#### **Architecture of Negotiations: Follow-up**

- Menelaos Menelaou, Greek Cypriot Negotiator
- Andreas Mavroyiannis, Ambassador (ad hon.), Member of the International Law Commission of the United Nations.
- Ozdil Nami, Former Turkish Cypriot Negotiator
- Ipek Borman, International Relations Expert and Academic
- Moderator: Rally Papageorgiou, Journalist, CNA

The trilateral meeting of the UNSG Antonio Guterres, Cyprus President Christodoulides and Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar that took place in New York on October 15, 2024, the Cyprus negotiations' acquis and what happened during the latest round of talks in Crans-Montana in 2017 as well as the expectations for the way forward, were discussed during this panel.

Speakers included Greek Cypriot negotiator Mr Menelaos Menelaou, former negotiator Ambassador Andreas Mavroyiannis, Mr Ozdil Nami former negotiator of the Turkish Cypriot side, and Dr Ipek Borman, an international relations expert and academic.

Mr Menelaou said that the Greek Cypriot side wants the resumption of the talks and the effort should not lead to a blame game but to the substance. He recalled that the government set the goal of resuming the talks since it assumed office and that the efforts led to the appointment of the SG's Personal Envoy Maria Angela Holguin Cuellar. "We need to remain persistent", he added.

"My view is that we need to uphold the fundamental and the historic compromise and to establish a unified Cyprus based on a bizonal bicommunal federation", he said, noting that anything deviating from that cannot contribute positively to the process.

Ambassador Mavroyiannis said that in Crans-Montana we were all involved constructively "but unfortunately, we could not cover the distance". He also noted that the two sides cannot spend years talking about what happened but they need to negotiate again in trust and confidence.

According to Mr Mavroyiannis, the fundamentals of the Cyprus problem never change no matter what is happening in the region. He added that the international community and the EU are always there and ready to support something that needs to start here and cannot be the 'ex machina'.

Mr Ozdil Nami hoped that the leaders would take the fresh opportunity seriously. Speaking about Crans-Montana he said that there was extremely good teamwork and felt like they were working as a Cypriot team and that spirit led to convergences.

He said the fact that everyone agrees the status quo is not sustainable, is a good starting point, but they also need to agree on the basic guidelines and parameters to end the status quo in a reasonable time frame.

He added that the Turkish Cypriot community needs a new leadership with a firm vision on the bizonal, bicommunal federation.

Dr Ipek Borman, an international relations expert and academic, shared her perspective on the urgency of a solution. She stated, "The status quo is not static; it is ever-changing, but at the same time, we feel the urgency of a solution because our daily lives are affected by this non-settlement. We see the effects in our education, cultural lives, social lives, economic lives, and political lives".

Dr Borman also recalled the disappointment felt when the negotiations in Crans-Montana fell through, emphasising, "When the leaders, together with the negotiators, started to come out of the room and we saw their faces, we felt devastated. I remember one delegate member saying, 'Okay, let's go back to business as usual'. At that instance, I thought, we have nowhere to go. Everyone else could go somewhere—the Greek Cypriots to their internationally recognised state, the Brits to their state, and the UN to their next mission—but we had nothing else to do".

She highlighted the disconnect between the negotiations and the respective societies, adding, "The established structure of the negotiations, this high-level, leader-led, track-one-level negotiations, cannot be continued. We need to find ways to engage civil society and the wider

public. It's about their lives. Most Cypriots today have no idea about the emerging federation that we came close to finalising in Crans-Montana. We need mechanisms to involve the public, to make them realise that this is something they should be owning."



New creative narratives may bridge Cyprus communities and foster peace

#### Messages of Peace across the Cypriot media

- Kostas Pliakos, Journalist, CNN Greece
- Sophia Papamichalopoulos, Activist, Winds of Change (online)
- Meltem Burak, Lecturer, Maastricht School of European Studies
- Moderator: Nicolas Kyriakides, Executive President & Found Member

The panel discussed the role of media and narratives in fostering peace in Cyprus.

CNN Greece's Kostas Pliakos shared insights on his recent documentary marking the 50th anniversary of Cyprus's 1974 division, focusing on the peace process rather than historical grievances. "In Greece, the Cyprus issue is a very sensitive issue, which is approached by a nationalistic tint", Mr Pliakos said, noting the challenge of creating a balanced narrative. By weaving in voices from both communities and showcasing previously unseen images from the island's buffer zone, he aimed to captivate audiences beyond the traditional Greek perspective.

Ms Sophia Papamichalopoulos, a Cypriot doctor and sportswoman, recounted the journey of "Winds of Change", an intercommunal sailing project that saw a mixed crew of Greek and Turkish Cypriots circumnavigate the island for the first time in nearly 50 years. "The mission of Winds of Change is to challenge, empower, and inspire together", she said. Despite a successful journey, local media coverage was minimal, she added.

For Dr Meltem Burak, who hosts the podcast SESTA, peacebuilding in Cyprus requires rethinking entrenched narratives, especially those dominated by older, male voices. Dr Burak explained that she grew tired of hearing the same people proclaiming peace, while it became increasingly apparent to her that they were there to promote themselves and "use this as branding". SESTA, she noted, seeks to amplify diverse perspectives, highlighting voices often overlooked in the mainstream.

Through her podcast, Dr Burak explores how arts and culture contribute to peacebuilding, featuring Cypriot poets, authors, and artists. She considers SESTA a platform for those working on the periphery to reshape the dialogue. She noted that she views her role as someone "giving people who are not in the centre a chance to speak, a chance to talk about their genuine projects", adding that her work aims to engage listeners without being confined to typical audience metrics.

Panellists expressed frustration with how traditional media frequently overlook peace-focused initiatives, noting that nationalistic content tends to garner more attention. "It's easier for nationalistic messages to go viral", the moderator of the discussion Mr Nicolas Kyriakides, observed. However, he argued that creativity and persistence can still yield impact, even if the results are slower.



# **Greek-Turkish relations show signs of thaw but key obstacles remain**





#### The State of Greek-Turkish Relations: Looking to the Future

- Paulina Lampsa, International Relations Expert
- Dimitrios Triantafyllou, Professor of International Politics; Director of Programs, Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, Athens: Institute of International Relations (IDIS), Athens
- Gülden Ayman, Istanbul University
- Nigar Goksel, International Crisis Group Turkey & Cyprus director
- Moderator: Mustafa Aydin, Coordinator, Global Academy

Greek-Turkish relations have entered a cautious phase of reconciliation after years of tensions, but significant challenges remain, experts said in a panel discussion on the future of bilateral ties.

Dr Paulina Lampsa, a Greek coordinator for the Greek-Turkish Forum, pointed to the 2022 tension as a stark contrast to the current situation, which she described as "more stable". She noted, "Today, we have seen a significant decrease in military activity over the Aegean, which has led to concrete economic benefits".

However, Dr Lampsa emphasised that the recent progress must be made "resilient" to achieve long-term stability. "We need the right mechanisms for problem-solving and following up on decisions to ensure implementation", she said, noting that challenges remain in aligning different bureaucratic systems and political environments between the two countries.

Professor Gülden Ayman of Istanbul University discussed the complexities of territorial issues that have long plagued Greek-Turkish relations. "The disputes over the Aegean are fundamentally territorial conflicts, and territorial issues are among the most likely to escalate into crises or wars", she warned.

Dr Ayman highlighted the role of power dynamics, both within the region and from external actors, as factors complicating the resolution of disputes. Despite these challenges, she acknowledged that "several mechanisms have been established to avoid crises, and today we are enjoying a more positive environment".

Professor Dimitrios Triantafyllou, an expert in international politics from Panteion University said that the recent developments are part of a strategic shift. While acknowledging that trust between the two countries remains fragile, Dr Triantafyllou stressed the importance of avoiding dehumanisation and maintaining dialogue even during difficult times. "One of the things we have managed is not to dehumanise each other, as many others do in this part of the world. Even in challenging moments, we have kept talking", he said.

Nigar Goksel, Turkey and Cyprus director for the International Crisis Group offered a view on the impact of domestic and international dynamics on Greek-Turkish relations. She pointed out that both domestic politics and Turkey's relations with the West significantly influence when and how disputes between Greece and Turkey flare up.

"The sovereignty disputes are there for decades, but when a calm phase happens, it often depends on domestic politics and Turkey-West relations", she said.

While the panel recognised the value of recent diplomatic efforts, including discussions about migration, economic cooperation, and reducing military tensions, the question of whether these efforts would lead to lasting change remained open.



# **Turkey can be vital for European security**



### Türkiye's Evolving Foreign Policy: An Emerging Middle Power in a changing World

- James Kerr Lindsay, European Institute, London School of Economics
- Nilgün Arısan Eralp, Director, Centre for the European Union Studies
- Sinem Adar, Center for Applied Turkey Studies, German Institute for International and Security Affairs
- Pinar Dost, Nonresident Fellow, Atlantic Council Turkey Programs & Associated Researcher, Institut Français d' Etudes Anatoliennes
- Moderator: Amanda Paul, Deputy Head of the Europe in the World Programme, European Policy Centre (EPC)

Experts on Turkey's foreign policy debated the country's evolving role in global affairs, highlighting that Turkish foreign policy has shifted over the last two decades, with an increased focus on self-reliance and regional leadership.

Dr James Kerr Lindsay, a senior fellow at the London School of Economics, noted how Turkish foreign policy has changed. "Turkey was once a staunch ally of the West", he said. "Today, it is far more independent, unpredictable, and determined to follow its interests, which often puts it at odds with both the West and its neighbours". Dr Kerr Lindsay described Turkey's current diplomatic positioning as bewildering, saying that the country has tried to balance between the West and its other regional interests, often leading to mistrust from all sides.

Dr Pinar Dost, a non-resident fellow at the Atlantic Council, suggested that Turkey had been capitalising on the current geopolitical uncertainty to position itself as a more autonomous middle power. "Turkey is pursuing an autonomous foreign policy, refusing to align itself with any one party, and instead benefiting from playing different powers off each other", Dr Dost said, emphasising the balancing act Ankara has adopted, particularly regarding Russia and the West. She also highlighted the expanded military footprint of Turkey, with bases and partnerships across the Middle East, Africa, and Central Asia.

While Turkey has sought to cultivate a role as a regional leader, often leveraging its membership in NATO and candidacy for EU membership, the ongoing friction with its Western allies was a recurring theme during the panel discussion.

Ms Nilgün Arısan Eralp, director at the Centre for European Union Studies, expressed scepticism about Turkey's capacity to become an influential middle power. She argued that domestic politics significantly influences its foreign policy, often to the detriment of its long-term strategic goals. "Turkey's unpredictability and heavy reliance on domestic drivers make it difficult for Ankara to build consistent partnerships", she said.

Dr Sinem Adar, from the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, provided a broader perspective on Turkey's foreign policy, describing the zigzagging nature of its decisions. "Turkey's foreign policy aspirations are shaped by its post-Cold War ambitions, economic opportunities in the 2000s, and a desire to position itself as a counter-hegemonic actor", Dr Adar said. She added that while Turkey has tried to foster relationships in the region, such as with the Gulf countries, the results have been mixed due to its shifting stances and ideological leanings.

The discussion also touched on Turkey's interest in joining BRICS. Dr Adar suggested that Ankara's pursuit of BRICS membership could be driven by a desire to not fall behind other nations seeking alternatives to Western alliances. However, she argued that "there seems to be a lack of coherence in Turkey's approach", noting that the Turkish leadership might be divided over the importance of joining BRICS.

The panellists agreed that the country's strategic importance, particularly to Europe and NATO, remains undeniable. The moderator of the discussion, Ms Amanda Paul, deputy head of the Europe in the World Programme at the European Policy Centre, summarised the challenge: "There's no European security without Turkey, just as there's no security without Ukraine". She noted that while Turkey's relationship with the EU has been predictably challenging, there is still potential for pragmatic cooperation in areas like defence and security.

However, Ms Eralp warned that achieving deeper cooperation would require overcoming significant hurdles, primarily the deep-seated mistrust on both sides. "Turkey and the EU lack mutual trust, and until that changes, a structured cooperation in foreign and security policy is unlikely", she concluded.







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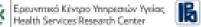


























































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