

Cyprus Forum Brussels 2025 Report



**Shaping the future and the role of Cyprus:
Twenty years since the accession**

***Wednesday, January 29th, 2025, 15:00-16:30,
European Parliament, Room A3E-2***

Loucas Fourlas, Member of the European Parliament.....	3
Nicolas Kyriakides, Executive President of the Cyprus Forum.....	4
Costa Kadis, Commissioner for Fisheries and Oceans.....	5
Christina Rafti, Permanent Representative of Cyprus in the EU.....	6
Ioannis Vrailas, Permanent Representative of Greece to the EU.....	8
"Cyprus is a key security partner at Europe's southeastern flank.".....	9
"Economic cooperation is the bridge to lasting peace.".....	11
"Cyprus must lead with vision, bridging regional partnerships and EU priorities.".....	13

Loucas Furlas, Member of the European Parliament

In his welcoming remarks, Furlas emphasised on the significance of Cyprus's 20-year journey as a member of the European Union. He expressed his eagerness to hear reflections on the country's progress over the past two decades, acknowledging the milestones achieved and the challenges faced. His speech underlined the evolving role of Cyprus within the EU and its commitment to upholding European values and policies.

A central point of his address was the upcoming Cypriot Presidency of the EU Council. Furlas conveyed his expectation that discussions at the event would focus on the ways in which Cyprus's presidency could positively influence the European Union. He underscored the importance of strategic planning and policy formulation in ensuring that Cyprus's leadership leaves a lasting impact.

Furthermore, Furlas acknowledged the presence of Erhan Ersin, a representative of the Turkish Cypriot community, at the event. He welcomed the opportunity to engage in dialogue and expressed his anticipation of hearing perspectives from different communities on Cyprus's role in the EU. His recognition of diverse viewpoints reflected a commitment to inclusive governance and cooperative policymaking.

The speech concluded with a reaffirmation of Cyprus's dedication to its responsibilities within the European Union. Furlas reiterated the importance of dialogue, collaboration, and progressive policymaking in strengthening Cyprus's position within the EU framework. His remarks set the stage for further discussions on the country's evolving role, fostering an atmosphere of engagement and forward-thinking policy development.

Nicolas Kyriakides, Executive President of the Cyprus Forum

In his welcoming address, Kyriakides highlighted that the primary purpose of the event is to serve as one of Cyprus's many voices in EU decision-making. He articulated that the forum is not merely a symbolic gathering but a platform for presenting key challenges, opportunities, and innovative ideas that can enhance policymaking in Cyprus. Through this initiative, he underscored the necessity of fostering meaningful discussions that inspire new political approaches.

A crucial element of his speech was the emphasis on collaboration with EU institutions. Kyriakides pointed out that open dialogues on critical issues are essential for ensuring that Cyprus remains actively involved in shaping EU policies. He highlighted key areas where Cyprus can make significant contributions to the European Union, particularly in geopolitics, security, and green energy. These sectors, he argued, are vital for both national and regional stability, and Cyprus's insights and expertise can be invaluable in these discussions.

Additionally, Kyriakides stressed that this event is not intended as a one-time initiative but as the foundation for a long-term engagement. He expressed his ambition to establish this as an annual event in Brussels, ensuring that Cyprus continues to have a strong and consistent platform for discussion and cooperation within the EU. This initiative aligns with broader efforts to reinforce Cyprus's role in European policymaking and strategic decision-making.

Costas Kadis, Commissioner for Fisheries and Oceans

Commissioner Kadis articulated the significance of managing his portfolio, describing it as both an honour and a challenge. The assignment of this portfolio was framed as a testament to Cyprus' credibility and expertise in maritime affairs. The speaker outlined key policy initiatives, including the establishment of a new Ocean Pact, a framework designed to enhance sustainability and governance across marine-related sectors. This initiative is expected to guide EU policies affecting oceans and align them with contemporary environmental and economic goals.

Another key point was the need for reforms in the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), with an ongoing consultation process aimed at refining and strengthening existing regulations. The goal is to balance sustainability with economic growth, ensuring the resilience of the European fishing industry. Furthermore, Kadis stressed the importance of supporting aquaculture and coastal communities, recognizing the challenges faced by small-scale fishers and proposing measures to enhance their economic stability.

Stakeholder engagement was another priority outlined in the speech. The European Commission has initiated consultations with member states, industry experts, and young professionals to shape future maritime policies. A notable proposal put forth by Kadis was to host a youth-focused discussion on the blue economy and ocean sustainability in Cyprus, aligning this initiative with the country's upcoming EU Presidency.

Reflecting on the broader responsibilities of the EU Presidency, Kadis expressed confidence in Cyprus' ability to navigate this role successfully. Despite being a nation with a compact geographical footprint, Cyprus boasts a highly skilled workforce that will be instrumental in ensuring the success of its Presidency. He emphasised the value of collaboration between Cyprus' government, European institutions, and international partners in achieving meaningful policy outcomes.

The speech concluded with a reaffirmation of commitment to EU principles and policies. Kadis acknowledged the role of Cypriot Members of the European Parliament, NGOs, and civil society organizations in shaping discussions and advancing key policy priorities. His remarks ended on a note of optimism, highlighting the potential for Cyprus to leave a lasting impact on European governance through its upcoming Presidency.

Christina Rafti, Permanent Representative of Cyprus in the EU

As Cyprus prepares to assume the EU Council Presidency in eleven months, Rafti acknowledged the challenging global landscape. She highlighted key crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's aggression against Ukraine, and conflicts in the EU's southern neighbourhood. These issues, along with rising migration pressures, have tested the EU's resilience and unity. She stressed the need for renewed commitment to international law, cooperation, and safeguarding information integrity in an era of technological manipulation.

Turning to the upcoming EU Council Presidency, Rafti reaffirmed Cyprus's commitment to ensuring a seamless transition and effective governance during its term. She stressed that no member state operates in isolation and that Cyprus will work closely with EU institutions and fellow member states to achieve shared objectives. The country will strive to implement the goals of the EU's strategic agenda and align its presidency with the political priorities set forth by the European Commission and other leadership bodies. These priorities, she explained, have already been reflected in the Trio Programme agreed upon with Poland and Denmark and presented in Brussels the previous month.

Rafti emphasised that a stronger, more stable, and secure Europe remains the overarching priority. She reiterated Cyprus's unwavering support for Ukraine, underscoring that enlargement remains a key geopolitical investment for the EU. Cyprus will continue to advocate for a merit-based approach in accession talks while reinforcing ongoing efforts to enhance the EU's competitiveness. She highlighted that boosting competitiveness requires a comprehensive approach, integrating economic policy with sustainability and digital transformation to ensure long-term growth across the Union.

In discussing economic resilience, Rafti stressed that a competitive EU not only benefits individual economies and citizens but also strengthens the Union's global influence. Cyprus will prioritise strategic autonomy, reducing critical dependencies, and fostering partnerships beyond Europe. She pointed to efforts in deepening ties with the EU's southern and eastern neighbours, transatlantic partners, and regional organizations such as the Gulf Cooperation Council, all of which play a pivotal role in Europe's external policy landscape.

A key deliverable of Cyprus's presidency will be progress in negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) beyond 2027. Rafti underscored the importance of securing a fair and adequate distribution of resources across EU priorities, including the Common Agricultural Policy, cohesion policies, and political initiatives that benefit all member states equitably. Migration policy will remain a significant focus, with efforts

aimed at finalising the implementation of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum. The Cypriot presidency will also prioritise the external dimension of migration, enhancing border security, countering smuggling networks, and addressing the instrumentalization of migration for political purposes.

She acknowledged that every EU presidency has its unique priorities shaped by national perspectives and experiences. For Cyprus, key focus areas will include security and stability in the EU's southern neighbourhood, reinforcing strategic partnerships in the Mediterranean and the Gulf, and enhancing maritime security. She emphasised that maritime security is an essential component of Europe's economic resilience, energy security, and supply chain stability. Other areas of importance will include social policies, energy transition, and the EU's response to climate change, with a particular focus on climate adaptation and resilience in the Mediterranean's primary sectors.

Ioannis Vrailas, Permanent Representative of Greece to the EU

Vrailas recalled key milestones in Cyprus's journey within the EU, particularly its accession 20 years ago. He described this event as a historic moment for Hellenism and a major step toward strengthening European unity. He underscored how Cyprus has grown institutionally and economically, using EU mechanisms to enhance governance and development. Additionally, he noted that Cyprus's EU membership has reinforced the case for a just and sustainable resolution to the Cyprus issue, aligning it with both UN decisions and EU law.

Discussing Cyprus's geopolitical significance, Vrailas stressed its role as a bridge between Europe, Asia, and Africa. He pointed out Cyprus's increasing influence in regional stability, particularly considering current crises in Syria and the wider Middle East. Furthermore, he emphasised Cyprus's role as an emerging energy hub, contributing to the diversification of energy sources for the EU.

Looking ahead to Cyprus's upcoming EU Council Presidency, Vrailas expressed confidence in its ability to shape European policies and leave a lasting impact. He highlighted that Cyprus is well-positioned to promote Mediterranean cooperation, regional stability, and economic prosperity. Key areas of focus for the presidency will include resilience, green transition, and migration policy. He also stressed the importance of addressing irregular migration flows by establishing legal migration pathways.

Vrailas underlined that Cyprus will champion policies ensuring sustainability and economic cohesion, particularly for small states and island nations facing climate challenges. He also noted Cyprus's role in fostering EU convergence across North and South, East and West. Furthermore, he highlighted the significance of enhancing EU security and defence, reinforcing transatlantic ties, and countering hybrid threats such as disinformation campaigns.

EU Security and Defence: The Role of Cyprus

Cyprus is a key security partner at Europe's southeastern flank.

Speakers:

- Constantinos Constantinou, Colonel, Military Representative to the EU Military Committee, Republic of Cyprus
- Loukas Tsarmaklis, Vice Admiral, Military Representative of Greece to the EU Military Committee
- Constantinos Hadjisavvas, Director of Digital Resilience and Defence, DIGITALEUROPE, Member of the Cyprus Defence Industrial Council
- **Moderator:** Amanda Paul, European Policy Centre

Amanda Paul opened the discussion by emphasizing the significance of EU security and defence, particularly Cyprus's evolving role within the broader European strategic framework. She highlighted Cyprus's contributions to regional stability and its potential to further integrate into EU defence mechanisms. Paul underscored the necessity of continued dialogue and cooperation among EU member states to strengthen collective security efforts.

Colonel Constantinos Constantinou emphasised Cyprus's unique geographic position as a gateway to the Eastern Mediterranean, reinforcing its status as a critical player in regional security. He highlighted Cyprus's active participation in EU defence initiatives, including crisis management, maritime security, and humanitarian operations. Cyprus has provided logistical support in EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions, such as humanitarian evacuations and peacekeeping efforts. Additionally, Cyprus has developed key partnerships with the United States, United Kingdom, Israel, Egypt, and Jordan, enhancing its regional security role.

Vice Admiral Loukas Tsarmaklis discussed Cyprus's crucial role in maritime security, ensuring stability in the Mediterranean. He highlighted Cyprus's involvement in Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) projects and its contributions to joint defence capabilities, cybersecurity, and maritime surveillance. Cyprus has played an active role in EU naval operations such as Operation IRINI, enforcing arms embargoes in Libya, and EUNAVFOR MED, tackling illegal migration and maritime threats. The Admiral also emphasised Cyprus's participation in trilateral and multilateral collaborations with Greece, Israel, and Egypt, which serve as stabilizing mechanisms in an increasingly volatile region.

Constantinos Hadjisavvas focused on digital security and defence technologies, stressing that while the EU has made progress in artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and

electronic warfare, there is still work to be done in integrating dual-use technologies into defence strategies. Cyprus has actively contributed to European Defence Fund (EDF) projects, advancing research and development in cybersecurity and autonomous systems. He emphasised that Cyprus must leverage its growing defence industry and digital ecosystem to further contribute to EU technological advancements, particularly in cybersecurity and autonomous systems. The recently established Cyprus Defence Industrial Council is designed to incentivise and institutionalise these efforts.

Resolving Conflict and Economic Prospects: Lessons from Cyprus and Beyond

Economic cooperation is the bridge to lasting peace.”

Speakers:

- Giulia Bertezzolo, Head of Unit Cyprus Settlement, European Commission
- Annely Koudstaal, Program Manager Southern Europe, World Bank
- Evan Kalpadakis, Coordinator, Tsipras Institute for Peace, Justice and Sustainable Growth
- Erhan Erçin, Former Special Representative to the Turkish Cypriot leader
- Loucas Fourlas, Member of the European Parliament
- **Moderator:** Harry Tzimitras, PRIO Cyprus

Harry Tzimitras opened the discussion by emphasising the urgency of addressing ongoing conflicts, stating that there is no such thing as a frozen conflict. He reflected on Cyprus’s 20 years in the EU, the failure of the Annan Plan, and the long-standing UN presence on the island. Tzimitras highlighted the need for realism, innovative thinking, and economic initiatives to break the cycle of stagnation and create opportunities for cooperation and integration.

MEP Loucas Fourlas stressed that economic interdependence could pave the way for reconciliation in Cyprus. Drawing on global examples such as Germany’s reunification and the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland, he highlighted how economic growth, and integration can foster political stability. He envisioned a unified Cyprus as a thriving economic hub in the Mediterranean, benefiting trade, maritime activity, and regional cooperation.

Giulia Bertezzolo outlined the EU’s ongoing efforts to support the Cyprus Settlement process. She pointed to the economic benefits of reunification, estimating that a solution could boost Cyprus’s GDP significantly. She also emphasised the EU’s role in facilitating trade across the Green Line and supporting economic initiatives that bring both communities together. She noted that reunification would enhance Cyprus’s strategic position within the EU and strengthen its role in regional stability.

Annely Koudstaal presented the World Bank’s engagement in Cyprus, particularly in the Turkish Cypriot community. She highlighted key economic challenges, including the lack of robust socio-economic data, and called for better alignment between the two communities in data collection and economic planning. Koudstaal argued that a unified Cyprus would benefit from economies of scale, increased investment, and enhanced regional cooperation, ultimately leading to sustainable economic growth.

Erhan Erçin highlighted the need for a regional approach to conflict resolution, highlighting how Cyprus's unresolved issue has historically impacted Greece-Turkey relations. He called for greater utilization of EU financial instruments, such as the Green Line Regulation, to facilitate economic collaboration. Erçin suggested that Cyprus should actively contribute to regional stability by fostering dialogue and enhancing trade relations with neighbouring states.

Evan Kalpadakis reflected on lessons from international peace agreements, particularly the Prespa Agreement between Greece and North Macedonia. He stressed the importance of local ownership in peace processes and the role of international actors in providing political and economic incentives. Kalpadakis argued that Cyprus must proactively engage in negotiations while ensuring that any settlement is supported by economic and political incentives for all stakeholders.

Cyprus: One Year Before the EU Presidency

Cyprus must lead with vision, bridging regional partnerships and EU priorities.

Speakers:

- Eva Yiasemidou, Presidency Coordinator, Permanent Representation of Cyprus
- Zsolt Darvas, Bruegel
- Eleni Zika, Head of Scientific Impact and Feedback to Policy, ERCEA
- **Moderator:** Yiorgos Kakouris, Brussels Correspondent, Cyprus News Agency, Alpha, Kathimerini

Yiorgos Kakouris introduced the discussion, highlighting that Cyprus is a year away from assuming the EU Council Presidency. The panel aimed to examine the priorities of the upcoming presidency within the broader framework of the EU's strategic goals, particularly concerning security, prosperity, and democracy. He stressed the importance of fostering innovation, competitiveness, and Cyprus's role as a facilitator of regional partnerships.

Eva Yiasemidou outlined Cyprus's approach to the presidency, emphasizing its commitment to acting as an honest broker in advancing the European agenda. She noted that while the presidency will primarily focus on inherited EU priorities, Cyprus will have the opportunity to emphasise its own regional strengths. Yiasemidou underscored the importance of reinforcing Cyprus's role as a reliable EU partner, leveraging its unique geographic position to strengthen EU relations with the Eastern Mediterranean and the Gulf. She also highlighted Cyprus's commitment to fostering economic growth, stability, and a cohesive policy approach within the Trio presidency alongside Poland and Denmark.

Zsolt Darvas examined how smaller member states like Cyprus contribute to the EU's economic competitiveness. He highlighted that services, particularly financial and digital sectors, are key drivers of economic growth. He pointed to the example of Estonia as a digital leader and suggested that Cyprus could similarly position itself as a hub for fintech and IT innovation. Darvas also emphasised the need for Cyprus to leverage artificial intelligence and digital transformation to enhance its economic impact within the EU.

Eleni Zika addressed Cyprus's potential to lead in scientific research and innovation. While acknowledging that Cyprus's R&D expenditure remains relatively low, she stressed that the country has demonstrated strong performance in securing European research grants. Zika highlighted the importance of investing in research infrastructure, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, and attracting international talent. She cited successful Cypriot researchers who have developed cutting-edge advancements in biotech and

digital innovation, reinforcing the country's capacity to compete in high-impact scientific fields.