Third Civil Resistance Forum in Cyprus Highlights the Importance of Sustained Solidarity, Democratic Resilience and Support for Ukraine

The third Civil Resistance Forum brought together representatives of diplomatic missions, public institutions, civil society, academia, journalism, and the Lithuanian and Ukrainian communities in Cyprus for a day of discussion on civil resistance, the defence of freedom, and the importance of sustaining international solidarity in times of war.

Organised by the Lithuanian and Ukrainian communities in Cyprus and hosted at the University of Cyprus, the Forum continued a dialogue initiated in 2024. This year's theme, "The Long Fight," focused on the challenges that emerge long after a crisis begins, when international attention fades and the commitment to supporting those affected by war and occupation must be sustained.

Opening remarks: Shared values, resilience and the responsibility to act

The Forum opened with remarks from representatives of local government, the Lithuanian and Ukrainian diplomatic missions, and the Lithuanian community in Cyprus. Their contributions highlighted the links between civil resistance, democratic values, historical memory and international solidarity, while emphasising the importance of sustained engagement in defending freedom and supporting societies affected by war and occupation.

Constantinos Yiorkadjis, Chairman of the Nicosia District Local Government Organisation, reflected on how the consequences of division continue to shape people's lives and aspirations in Cyprus. He connected the island's experience with the broader principles of sovereignty, independence and peace, arguing that every country should be entitled to make its own decisions. He also stressed that democratic values and international principles must be applied consistently rather than selectively, warning that double standards weaken the credibility of those who claim to defend them.

Mr Yiorkadjis described civil resistance as a way to safeguard truth, preserve historical memory and protect European values. Beyond opposing injustice, he noted, it also involves safeguarding identity, defending human dignity and building bridges between communities. He underlined the importance of dialogue and peaceful coexistence, explaining why forums such as this one offer valuable opportunities to reflect on past experiences and strengthen a shared commitment to freedom, democracy and human rights.

> *"We cannot uphold a different set of values depending on the case," he said, calling for principles to be reflected consistently in actions. He added that values lose their meaning if they are not upheld for everyone.*

Mindaugas Vyskupaitis, Counsellor of the Embassy of the Republic of Lithuania to Greece, Cyprus and Albania, focused on the increasingly interconnected nature of contemporary crises, from war and geopolitical tensions to information attacks and deliberate attempts to divide societies. He emphasised that resilience cannot be left solely to public institutions or the armed forces; it begins with individuals and the choices they make in their daily lives.

Mr Vyskupaitis described resilience as the ability to distinguish facts from manipulation, resist fear and misinformation, support others and take responsibility for one's community. He highlighted the cooperation between the Lithuanian and Ukrainian communities in Cyprus as a practical demonstration of solidarity, built through mutual trust and a shared willingness to act. Ukraine's experience, he noted, shows that a society's strength depends not only on institutions and material resources, but also on the determination of its people and their readiness to defend what matters to them.

Marko Skral, Deputy Head of Mission of the Embassy of Ukraine in Cyprus, welcomed the continued cooperation behind the Forum, noting that its third edition demonstrated an enduring commitment to civil resistance and support for Ukraine. He stressed that civil resistance is not an abstract concept for Ukrainians, but a fundamental part of the country's struggle for national survival and freedom.

Mr Skral highlighted the contributions of ordinary citizens and professionals who responded to Russia's full-scale invasion, including volunteers providing assistance, communities organising logistical support across borders, journalists exposing falsehoods, and people working to protect historical memory. He also referred to the collective efforts of civil servants, civil society organisations, lawyers, academics and journalists in advancing Ukraine's European integration, emphasising the role of coordinated action in difficult circumstances.

He urged participants and the Ukrainian community in Cyprus to remain engaged, vocal and active, arguing that passive acceptance cannot protect democratic principles. The experience of Nicosia, a city deeply familiar with division and the significance of international law, made Cyprus a particularly relevant setting for these discussions.

> *"For Ukraine, civil resistance forms the foundation of our national survival and freedom," he stated. He called for continued collective action to strengthen partnerships and uphold international law, sovereignty and human dignity.*

Ruta Peckyte, Chairwoman of the Lithuanian Community in Cyprus, welcomed participants on behalf of the community and thanked the University of Cyprus, organisers, volunteers, partners, sponsors and speakers for making the Forum possible. Reflecting on the previous editions, held in 2024 and 2025, she returned to the questions at the heart of the initiative: what civil resistance means and what people in different countries can learn from one another.

Ms Peckyte drew a connection between Lithuania's restoration of independence and the mass mobilisation of ordinary people, including the 1989 Baltic human chain, and Ukraine's present-day resistance. She highlighted how language, songs, books and collective memory helped preserve Lithuanian identity, while Ukrainians have demonstrated the power of community action through volunteers, neighbours, doctors, teachers and people supporting displaced families. She also acknowledged Cyprus's own experience of unresolved conflict and division, describing Nicosia as a meaningful place for a conversation about resistance and the pursuit of freedom.

Introducing this year's theme, "The Long Fight," Ms Peckyte explained that the challenge changes as a crisis continues: initial public attention and offers of help may gradually fade, while those affected still need support. Sustaining solidarity therefore requires repeated, everyday decisions by ordinary people over many years. She raised questions about the limits of diplomacy, the conditions under which wars end, and the importance of protecting culture and memory during periods of insecurity.

> *"The hard part comes much later. Attention moves on, people get tired, and support becomes harder to sustain," she said. She encouraged participants to take part in discussions, ask questions and connect with people they had not met before, stressing that the Forum was a place to listen, exchange perspectives and learn—even where agreement was not always possible. Her closing message was that long-term resistance should not be carried alone: communities can become stronger when they share*

experiences, build relationships and prepare to continue their efforts together.

Keynote: How Wars End

In his keynote address, “How Wars End,” Professor Marios Efthymiopoulos, Associate Professor of International Security and Strategy and Research Professor at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, Lithuania, examined the ongoing war in Ukraine and the political, military, economic and societal factors that will shape its eventual outcome.

Focusing on Ukraine’s experience, Professor Efthymiopoulos highlighted that the war extends far beyond the battlefield, affecting the country’s people, economy and future security while presenting wider challenges for Europe. He discussed the difficult conditions required for meaningful negotiations and stressed the importance of political leadership and sustained international engagement in determining how the conflict might end.

The keynote also addressed the challenge of maintaining European unity and continued support for Ukraine as the war continues. Professor Efthymiopoulos warned that domestic pressures and political divisions could make it increasingly difficult for European societies to sustain their commitment over time. He emphasised that the consequences of the war reach beyond Ukraine itself, with its outcome carrying significant implications for European security and stability.

Reflecting on the human and financial toll of prolonged conflict, he stated: “The cost is big. The financial cost is big, and mostly the human cost is big.” His address reinforced the central message of the forum’s theme, The Long Fight: that bringing a war to an end involves not only developments on the battlefield, but also difficult political decisions, sustained international solidarity and a long-term commitment to a secure and lasting peace for Ukraine.

Special Address: The Long Fight Beyond the Front Line — Mobilizing Societies, Resources and Networks for Civil Resistance

Jonas Ohman, co-founder of Blue/Yellow, the Lithuanian non-governmental organisation supporting Ukraine’s defenders, delivered a special address on the role of organised civil society in sustaining Ukraine’s resistance and turning international solidarity into practical, long-term support. Drawing on his experience working to support Ukraine, Ohman demonstrated how individuals, community organisations and networks across national borders can contribute to a collective response to war.

Using Lithuania as an example, Ohman highlighted how a country with a population of approximately three million can mobilise substantial public support for Ukraine through accessible fundraising initiatives, regular donations and coordinated efforts. He described how even small, recurring contributions can become part of a much larger collective effort, enabling organisations to raise significant resources for Ukraine’s defenders. His message illustrated that a society’s ability to contribute is not determined by its size alone, but by its willingness to organise, participate and sustain its efforts. Through Blue/Yellow’s work, he showed how public engagement can be translated into tangible assistance rather than remaining an expression of sympathy.

A central theme of the address was the need to sustain solidarity beyond the initial response to war. As international attention shifts and the conflict continues, maintaining public involvement becomes an increasingly important challenge. Ohman called for a renewed commitment to collective action, emphasising that support for Ukraine requires persistence, cooperation and a willingness to remain engaged over time. He also highlighted the importance of European solidarity, arguing that support for Ukraine is a shared responsibility that extends beyond national borders.

Addressing the role of civil society in Cyprus, Ohman acknowledged that every country has its own political context, public attitudes and capacity for engagement. He encouraged local organisations to identify forms of assistance that are meaningful and practical within their communities,

particularly humanitarian support for people affected by the war. His advice was direct: “Go humanitarian.” He pointed to the many ways individuals and organisations can help, demonstrating that meaningful solidarity can take different forms, from organised assistance to responding to everyday humanitarian needs.

Ohman also connected the question of support for Ukraine with the wider responsibility of European societies and their leaders to remain engaged in seeking a way forward. He emphasised the importance of solidarity, communication and leadership, while recognising that resolving a prolonged conflict takes time and sustained effort.

The address offered a practical perspective on the meaning of The Long Fight: civil resistance is not limited to those directly experiencing war or those on the front line. It is also shaped by the people who organise, donate, volunteer, build networks and continue helping when public attention fades. Ohman’s central message was that sustained collective action can turn solidarity into a lasting source of support for Ukraine—and that every society can find a meaningful way to contribute.

Panel Discussion: Occupied and Ongoing — Law, Diplomacy and the Fight for Resolution

The panel discussion, “Occupied and Ongoing: Law, Diplomacy and the Fight for Resolution,” brought together diplomatic, security and legal perspectives on the challenges of upholding international law, addressing occupation and protecting the rights and dignity of people affected by conflict. Moderated by Alkas Paltarokas, Director of the Lithuanian NGO Strategic Initiative Center and an expert in hybrid warfare, disinformation and security, the discussion examined how diplomacy, societal resilience and legal mechanisms can contribute to addressing ongoing conflicts.

Marek Szczepanowski, Ambassador of Poland to Cyprus, stressed the urgent need to restore respect for the international order based on law. Reflecting on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, he argued that international declarations condemning aggression must be followed by meaningful action. He also warned that divisions within democratic societies can undermine responses to security threats, highlighting the importance of European unity, preparedness and continued support for Ukraine.

Professor Marios Efthymiopoulos contributed a broader strategic and security perspective, connecting the war in Ukraine with wider regional security challenges and the need to recognise warning signs before conflicts escalate. Drawing on his experience of developments in Ukraine since 2014, his remarks underlined that the war cannot be understood as an isolated event, but must be considered within a wider pattern of security threats and geopolitical developments.

From a civil resistance and preparedness perspective, Gary, whose expertise includes the defence industry and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), reflected on the importance of societal resilience and the choices communities may face in a crisis. Referring to Cyprus’s own experience of occupation since 1974, he connected the situation in Ukraine with the importance of public awareness and preparedness, encouraging people to consider their role in responding to threats rather than assuming that responsibility rests solely with governments or armed forces.

A particularly important dimension was the human impact of occupation. Viktoriia Polishchuk, a Ukrainian attorney-at-law, CEDR-accredited mediator and Council of Europe expert, emphasised that occupation affects far more than territory or military control: it directly affects people’s dignity, freedom and ability to make choices about their own lives. She outlined the legal and practical difficulties faced by people in occupied Ukrainian territories, including challenges relating to identity documents, temporary protection, recognition of qualifications, education and employment. Her contribution highlighted the need for legal and administrative mechanisms that help protect the rights of people whose circumstances have been profoundly affected by occupation.

Across these perspectives, the panel explored the connections between international law, diplomacy, security preparedness and human dignity. It highlighted that addressing occupation

requires not only diplomatic efforts towards resolution, but also practical attention to the people living with its consequences and the long-term challenges they face.

The discussion reinforced the forum's wider message: a lasting resolution requires sustained diplomatic engagement, respect for sovereignty, resilient societies and meaningful protection for people affected by conflict.

Valeriia Tarasenko — "What It's Like to Be an Artist in Ukraine Right Now"

Ukrainian artist Valeriia Tarasenko shared the reality of creating art in Kyiv amid constant explosions, air-raid alerts and exhaustion. Having spent several years abroad, she returned to Ukraine because she wanted to build her life at home. She also highlighted how difficult it is to separate art from war, arguing that culture is deeply connected to people's lived experiences.

Olena Kulish — "From Visibility to Common Ground: Building Lasting Partnerships for Ukraine Through Art and Culture"

Ukrainian visual artist Olena Kulish, based in Warsaw, highlighted the need to move beyond temporary international attention and build lasting partnerships between Ukrainian and European artists and cultural organisations. Drawing on her participation in the Apostaxis residency in Larnaca, she explored shared experiences of displacement, identity, loss and the search for home among Ukrainians and Cypriots. She emphasised that art can foster meaningful dialogue and mutual understanding through both sharing experiences and listening to others, helping displaced people feel less isolated and strengthening connections between communities.

Boris Demash — "Addressing Russian Narratives in Public Outreach"

Investigative journalist and founder of Cyprus Daily News, Boris Demash explored the challenges of addressing Russian narratives and information influence in the public sphere. His address focused on how narratives can spread through media, cultural activities, educational settings and community networks, highlighting the complexity of distinguishing information, persuasion and influence.

Demash emphasised the importance of public awareness and the need to understand how information shapes perceptions and attitudes. His contribution raised broader questions about the role of journalism, education and public communication in helping societies recognise disinformation and respond critically to competing narratives.

The address formed part of the forum's wider discussion on civil resistance, societal resilience and the challenges democracies face in an increasingly complex information environment.

Closing remarks — H.E. Andrius Kalindra, Ambassador of Lithuania to Greece, Cyprus and Albania

In his closing remarks, Ambassador Andrius Kalindra reflected on the shared aspiration of nations to live in freedom, peace and security. Drawing inspiration from Martin Luther King Jr.'s words, "I have a dream," he expressed his hope for a Ukraine free from aggression and living within its internationally recognised borders, and for a reunited Cyprus where sovereignty and territorial integrity are respected and all communities can live together peacefully.

The Ambassador thanked the Lithuanian and Ukrainian communities, speakers, partners and everyone who contributed their time and resources to the forum. He highlighted a central message of the day: the greatest challenge of resistance is not simply to begin the struggle for freedom, but to sustain it when international attention fades. Reflecting on Lithuania's own history of occupation and Ukraine's ongoing fight, he reaffirmed the principle that no country has the right to determine another nation's future by force.

He concluded with a reminder that the passage of time does not legitimise occupation and that silence cannot deliver justice, expressing his hope to welcome participants again the following year.

Conclusion

The Third Civil Resistance Forum reaffirmed the importance of sustained solidarity, collective action and the defence of democratic values in the face of war, occupation and disinformation. Bringing together diplomatic representatives, academics, civil society, journalists and artists, the Forum explored how resistance extends beyond the battlefield through diplomacy, humanitarian assistance, cultural preservation, public awareness and the determination of ordinary people to stand up for freedom.

The experiences shared by Lithuanian, Ukrainian and Cypriot participants highlighted both the different realities faced by their societies and their common commitment to sovereignty, human dignity and the right of nations to determine their own future. The discussions also underlined that international solidarity cannot depend solely on moments of heightened attention; it requires lasting partnerships, continued engagement and a willingness to act even when the struggle becomes less visible.

Under this year’s theme, The Long Fight, the Forum closed with a reminder that resilience is built through the everyday choices of individuals and communities who refuse to remain indifferent. By strengthening cooperation and carrying these conversations beyond the event, participants reaffirmed a shared commitment to freedom, peace and a future in which no nation has to fight for these principles alone.