

Cyprus media coverage of the war in Ukraine

What it reveals about Cyprus and its media

Nicholas Karides



**FRIEDRICH NAUMANN
FOUNDATION** For Freedom.

Greece and Cyprus



Ινστιτούτο Μέσων
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Institute for Mass Media

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Cyprus Library Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Nicholas Karides, How the Cyprus media covered the war in Ukraine: what the coverage reveals about Cyprus and the media / Nicholas Karides.
Nicosia: Institute for Mass Media, 2023. p. cm.

ISBN 978-9963-711-94-4 (pbk.)

1. Journalism-Cyprus.
2. Ukraine Conflict 2022- .
3. War correspondence-Ukraine.
4. War news-Ukraine. Institute for Mass Media (IMME).

Designed by Adds On Design Ltd
Front cover photo: Hakan Gider, Shutterstock
Printed at Lithofit Printers Ltd, Nicosia, Cyprus

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The Institute for Mass Media was established in 1999 as an independent non profit research organisation dedicated to the study of the media. It seeks to promote quality journalism in the public interest and where possible to affect the changes sweeping through journalism and the media sector. In an environment where media freedom and media pluralism are under threat IMME stands as an autonomous think tank supporting the efforts of like-minded European and international organisations in promoting a sustainable future for public-interest journalism, good media practices and policies, and media literacy. Since January 2022 it is part of the group of knowledge-creating institutions operating under the Nicosia-based Universitas Foundation.
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Acknowledgements

During the course of this study, I spoke with numerous reporters, editors, columnists, political analysts, academics and diplomats. I would like to thank them all for their time, for sharing their thoughts and offering their valuable insight. Particular thanks to John Ioannou founder of Geopolitical Cyprus and journalist at Kathimerini for taking the time to read the draft and offer his comments. My thanks also to Andreas Cosma, Andreas Riris and Maria Christina Doulami for their assistance during the early stages of the research.

I am also indebted to Alona Tatarova, Eleni Siapikoudi and Christophoros Christophorou for their guidance and to the chairman and members of the Board of the Institute for Mass Media for their sustained support. NK

Introduction

On 24 February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, marking the start of the biggest war in Europe since the Second World War. In the summer of 2023, the Institute for Mass Media undertook a project supported by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation to examine how the media in the areas under the control of the Republic of Cyprus, covered the early stages of the war which, at the time the study went to print, was still raging.

The purpose was to attempt to capture the main elements of the coverage, how their content and tone were particular to Cyprus' broader political and economic context and to better understand how the public perceived and responded to the developments. Ultimately it was also an attempt to comprehend what the coverage revealed about the state of the country's media eco-system.

The study scans selected media from the online, print and audio-visual sectors and offers an overview of the coverage highlighting the key aspects of the reporting to which the Cypriot public was exposed. It attempts to discern whether this exposure reflected and reinforced a particular way of seeing and reporting resulting from factors and circumstances that came together when the invasion took place in February 2022. It then tries to explain what this reveals about its information space and the overall state of the media landscape.

It must be made clear that this is not an academic paper; the study did not engage in a process of analyzing data nor was it based on any prevailing theoretical premise. But while it may not be comprehensive, it is an in-depth qualitative assessment based on examining the context and background of the Cypriot media landscape through reviewing the literature and media output and, more tellingly, through extensive conversations with journalists, both senior and junior, academics, diplomats and experts.

The conversations explored editorial decision-making processes or their absence as well as the adequacy of historical and journalistic knowledge of the relevant situation. The study identified the choices and focus of the reporting, explored any sense of self-censorship or even self-criticism, and considered the sources of information and centres of influence and their effect.

Exposure to media coverage affects the public's collective mind, a society's world view and its response to the world. This happens through exposure to the media's choice of focus, choice of headlines, its use of emotive phrases, the slant of the reports and editorials over sustained periods of time especially during conflicts, the positioning of related reports whether on the front-page or their placement in the inside pages, or their complete omission.

The absence of impartial quality journalism and of media plurality result in inadequate, incomplete and unchallenged news outputs and undermines the critical information needs of societies and the debates that they must have.

It also lulls the public into accepting news content without examining or disputing the sources and their motives. Over time groups and communities internalize that exposure and develop a commitment to their resulting assumptions. Individual citizens operating in this context are then called to make specific political choices. The state of politics in much of the world today is to a large degree a result of this malfunction.

The Media Scene

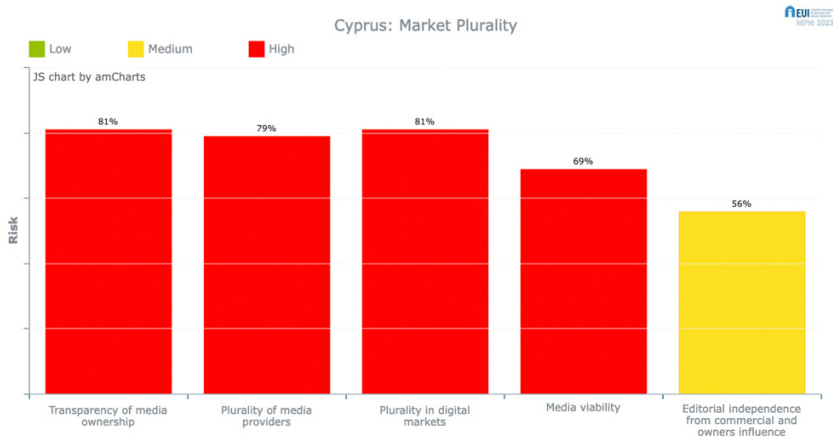
The Republic of Cyprus is a member of the European Union and has a population of 918,100 (census 2021). The Union's *acquis communautaire* is suspended in the part of the island which is not under the effective control of the government of the Republic, that is the area north of the 1974 UN ceasefire line. The total number of foreign nationals in 2021 was 193,300 and corresponded to 21.1% of the total population. In 2021 EU and non-EU citizens represented 10.9% and 11.04% of the employed labour, respectively. The Russian speaking community in Cyprus resides mainly in the southwestern port city of Limassol and is estimated at 60-80,000.

Freedom of expression and the right of access to information are legally and formally protected in the Republic's constitution. Legislation expressly ensures protection of journalistic sources, fosters media pluralism in the radio and television sector, enshrines the formal independence of the media regulator and details the right of access to public sector information.

The regulatory framework relating to transparency of media ownership in the audio-visual media is adequate but there is a total absence of regulation for digital media and therefore no ownership transparency obligations in the booming online sector. This obscurity also extends to the print media which is governed by an antiquated law which is expected to be revisited in 2024. Another key problem is the absence of legislation and transparency in the field of state advertising as well as the absence of transparency on taxes reportedly owed to the state by media organisations. All of these discrepancies hover as potential threats on editorial freedom and the independence of the media.

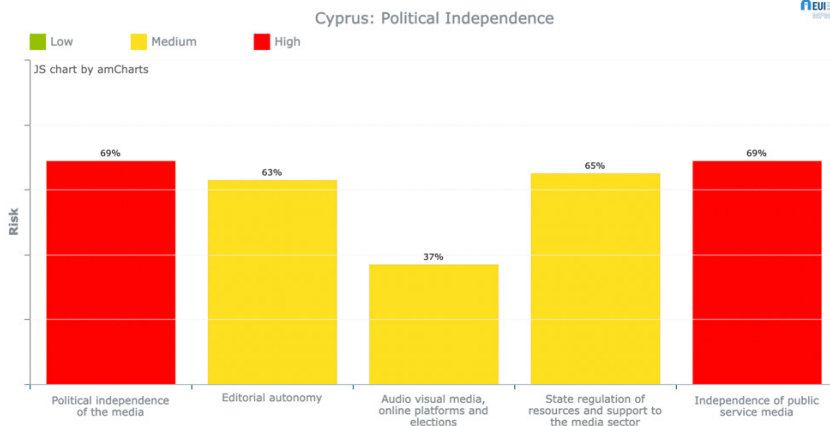
The public service media, the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation (CYBC/PIK) is governed by a separate law - also expected to be updated in 2024 - and though independent on paper, it is not in practice. This is because of the selection criteria for the appointment of members of its Board by the Government and the near total dependency on the government and the political parties in parliament for the approval of its budget. The dependency is made worse by the fact that the budget is approved on an annual basis rather than a longer-term period that would free the broadcaster. As things stand CYBC is susceptible to a constant and direct influence from the political establishment.

More generally in terms of media pluralism, the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom’s annual report on Cyprus¹, released in June 2023, found that the area of Market Plurality has four key indicators in the high-risk zone. The scores for Transparency of media ownership, Plurality of media providers and Plurality in digital markets and Media Viability (the prospect of economic sustainability of the media which would make them less dependent on state or commercial support) were all found to be at high risk. Editorial independence from commercial and owner influence recorded a medium level risk (below).



The areas of Political Independence and of Independence of public service media were also found to be at high risk. State regulation of resources and support to the media sector, Editorial autonomy and Audiovisual media, online platforms and elections were found to be at medium risk though the first two rather too close to the high risk levels.

1. EUI, RSC, Research Project Report, Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF), Country Report, 2023.

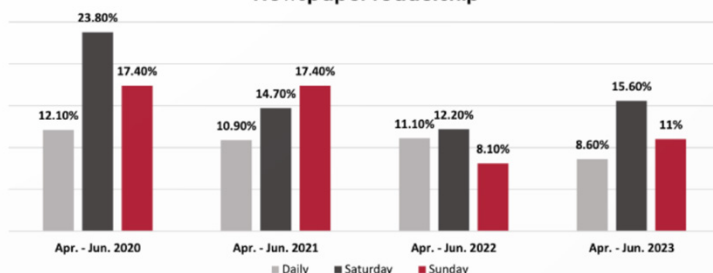


The reality on the ground is that the Cyprus media market has been in decline for years, exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic which expedited an already considerable shift to an expanding and unregulated online media scene.

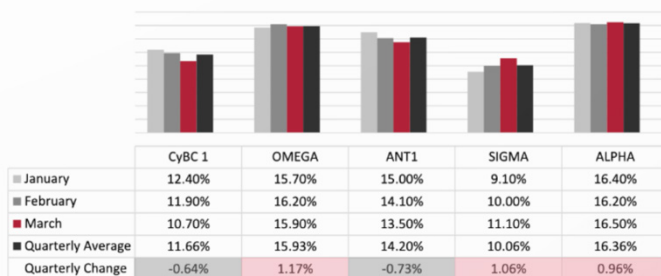
Overall media viability remains precarious, with media organisations - including online media - struggling to survive. Comprehensive, reliable and audited figures by online publishers are not available nor are there audited data regarding newspaper circulation. The absence of reliable metrics masks the seriousness of the situation. The data that is available (next page) indicates that newspaper readership² in the second quarter of 2022 (third column set) was in relative decline while for television³, where the data is more reliable, all main evening news bulletins hovered in the range of 9 to 16 percentage points.

2. MediaGNOSIS, Gnora Media Consultants, August 2023.
 3. MediaGNOSIS, Gnora Media Consultants, September 2022.

Newspaper readership



Main News Ratings January - March 2022



Interestingly, a survey by the Cyprus Union of Journalists⁴ conducted in the summer of 2023 showed that most Cypriots sought to be informed through television (**72%**; it was 74% in 2022), social media (**60%**; was 68% in 2022), online portals (**42%**; was 44% in 2022), radio (**41%**; was 46% in 2022), newspapers (print versions; **9%**; was 11% in 2022). Significantly US and UK media sources accounted for **22%** of preference (a considerable increase from 12% in 2022) while Greek media sources drew **13%** (down from 15% in 2022).

Crucially the same survey showed that **42%** of those surveyed trust the Cypriot media (the figure was 46% in 2022) while **48%** trust Cypriot journalists (51% in 2022) and a considerable **60%** claim to identify disinformation on social media.

Though it is misleading to compare different surveys it can be said that in general, over the years, the Cypriot public's trust in the media has hovered close to the EU27 average.

4. Union of Cyprus Journalists, CMRC Cypronetwork, September 2023.

While studies and assessments of a country's media landscape and surveys of public engagement to the media like the ones quoted above contribute to our understanding, they are only capable of providing panoramic views and group snapshots, rarely any deep insight.

Equally, a country's media regulatory framework, its constitutional safeguards on freedom of speech and the configuration and operation of its media sector are crucial in understanding how a society structures its relationship to news and information. But the speed and pervasiveness of tech-platform dominance - where traditional media have also been forced to migrate to - and the depressing fact that regulators have been unable to keep up with tech advances and the revolution in media models, have created new risks in terms of a society's consumption of news and information.

In the new noisy, messy and increasingly toxic tech-platform environment, it is hard to get a true sense of the relationships that individuals - confused and disillusioned as they have become - maintain with their news information sources.

In this uncertain and somewhat indecipherable juncture, one is forced to fall back on fundamentals, i.e., to understand the political and socio-economic dynamics that shape the context in which media operate and the public perceives and consumes their output.

The Context

1. The overall state of the Fourth Estate

The paramount element and peculiarity of Cyprus is that the media have rarely fully served their role as the Fourth Estate. The previous section captured the state of affairs in the media in 2022, but throughout the country's modern history, since independence in 1960, Cypriot media in their majority have tended to be too cozy with the three core estates to be able to fulfill their role as their strict watchdog. With some exceptions, they have only shone their lights onto the depths of the core estates when it has served their owner's ideological, political or commercial interests and rarely because shining that light would serve the public interest. The caveat here is that within this system there have always been - and still are - competent, ethical and independently-minded journalists that have often, even when working within non-independent media, sought to produce independent journalism-led work in the public interest.

Crucially, it is impossible to ignore the new social media dynamic that has transformed the way conventional, mainstream media now operate everywhere - including Cyprus. Mainstream media have adjusted somewhat to the fast-changing new realities in the last decade-and-a-half embracing its strengths and succumbing to its huge weaknesses and persistent traps. But they have yet to find a sustainable modus operandi that might address their own commitment to the purpose of journalism given the social media ecosystem's total disregard for that commitment.

This transition has been slower in Cyprus, with less considered contemplation of what it means. The prevailing media business model is malfunctioning in terms of its capacity to deliver good journalism. Still, with all their weaknesses and faults, media in Cyprus had served as the buffer and the filter of information between developments, politics and the public. This has now changed significantly. The vast section of the public has no time for that mediation. On social media it receives its information raw and slanted, unwilling or unable to process its veracity. Undermined by this new reality and thwarted by misinformation actors it has often turned against the media and has begun expressing its mistrust.

The new online media - it must be stressed that there is no regulatory framework governing the digital media - have become servants of social media, reporting

on and responding to posts. Inevitably, this has often allowed social media to infiltrate and in some cases drive the news agenda altogether.

2. The state of the former Communist party

The Russophile sentiment that has existed within parts of Cypriot society for decades is primarily a result of the strong former communist party AKEL's hold on the working class and its place as a significant pillar of the political landscape of the country⁵. But equally, if not rather incongruously, it is also a result of bonds that developed often among sections of society which were adamantly anti-communist, but who were the prime beneficiaries of the flow of plutocrat money leaving Russia in the last two decades.

On the question of the war in Ukraine this Russophile sentiment among the old left triggered strong notions of Whataboutism - 'What about NATO doing the same in Yugoslavia in the 1990s? What about NATO's relentless expansion to the East after 1991? What about NATO allowing the same to happen in Cyprus in the 1970s etc.?' Among the professional classes and the traditional centre-right who came to benefit from Russian money it resulted in a degree of disinterest, cynicism and often outright hypocrisy.

At its heyday AKEL consistently commanded over 30 percent of the vote in parliamentary elections and at its peak, even after the collapse of Communism, it was able in 2008 to elect its Secretary General as president of the country. For a six-month period in 2012 he presided over the European Council when Cyprus held the rotating EU Presidency.

The party's historical bonds with the Soviet Union had meant that over the years a considerable number of people were educated in the Soviet Union or in former Eastern bloc countries and had strong bonds with their political and cultural class. Importantly, AKEL, initially at the instigation of the Soviet Union was able to establish a critical misperception which became well entrenched in the psyche of the populace: That unlike the US and the UK, the Soviet Union and by extension Russia had maintained what became known as a "principled stance" on the Cyprus problem and that as a member of the UN Security Council had supported Cyprus when the West had seemingly 'conspired' against it and in favour of Turkey. Research has established that while this narrative had maintained that as a NATO ally Turkey was consistently being supported by the US and the UK, it was also true that precisely because Turkey under Erdogan had become a reluctant member of NATO, Russia had sought to use it to scupper the unity of NATO by supporting it often *against* the interests of Cyprus.

5. AKEL, the Progressive Party of Working People though recently rebranded and modernized, has not officially abandoned its commitment to Communism. It is an observer to the Party of the European Left at the European Parliament: <https://akel.org.cy/communist-party-of-cyprus-akel-93-years-of-struggles-for-cyprus-and-its-people/?lang=en> (AKEL, Press Office, 15 August 2019)

3. The collapse of the economy and the new affluent class

Challenging Russia's 'principled stance' was rarely contemplated primarily because AKEL dared not to and because the political centre-right standing on the other side of the political spectrum as well as the powers driving the Cypriot economy - from accountants, lawyers, property developers - had become closely linked and dependent on Russia. The flow of Russian money pouring into Cyprus after the collapse of the global economy in 2008 until the collapse of the Cypriot economy in 2013 was unprecedented.

That economy imploded in March 2013 just when the Communist-party-backed presidency was defeated and the right-wing presidency of Nicos Anastasiades took over. Within days Cyprus' second largest bank Laiki defaulted, its debts were absorbed by the largest bank, the Bank of Cyprus (not to be confused with the Central Bank of Cyprus) and the country required a bail-out. After much dithering Cyprus agreed to the European Commission's proposed harsh bail-out, a €10bn rescue package by the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Under the terms of the deal, many of the bank's wealthy Russian deposit holders lost their cash and became shareholders in the Bank of Cyprus. An economy fueled by money pouring from Russia and other former CIS states found itself surrendering its main private financial institution to wealthy Russians whose investments had suffered a 'hair-cut' on their deposits. The president of the Cyprus Investors Association had told the New York Times at the time that he did not see any serious risk in having Russians in control of the country's biggest, albeit gravely ill, bank; "We are not in the Cold War anymore," he said. Russian investors may have lost billions but by September 2013, the largest of those investors had secured seats on the Bank of Cyprus board. In some European quarters this sounded the alarm as it meant that Russia, for the first time, had effective control of a Euro-system bank.

Even the president of Cyprus in a June 2023 interview was quoted as saying in frustration: "They [the EU] wanted to throw out the Russians but, in the end, they delivered our main bank to the Russians." Ten years earlier, in August 2013, Andrew Higgins reporting for the New York Times⁶ wrote tellingly about these unintended consequences:

"The March bailout hammered bank creditors and depositors in an early test of what has since become the official European Union policy of "bailing-in" banks. The policy is intended to force creditors and depositors to pay for a bank's mistakes and to spare taxpayers from picking up the entire

6. Cyprus Bank's Bailout Hands Ownership to Russian Plutocrats, New York Times, 21 August 2013.

bill. The strategy, however, has generated unintended consequences in the case of Cyprus. The exercise was meant to banish what Germany and other Northern European nations viewed as dirty Russian money from Cyprus's bloated banks. Instead, it has pulled Russia even deeper into Europe's financial system by giving its plutocrats majority ownership, at least on paper, of the Bank of Cyprus, the country's oldest, biggest and most important financial institution. "Whoever controls the Bank of Cyprus controls the island," said Andreas Marangos, a Limassol lawyer whose clients include many Russians. Moscow, though furious over the billions lost by Russians in Cypriot banks, still sees Cyprus as a prize worth courting".

4. Crimea

The caveat here is that until the Maidan movement protests in Ukraine in November 2013, the EU and Russia had been building a strategic partnership, covering, among other issues, trade, the economy and energy. When annexation of Crimea by Russia took place in March 2014 and evidence emerged that Russia supported rebel fighters in eastern Ukraine, the Western mood shifted and restrictive measures against Russia were progressively imposed. These signalled the beginning of a major review of EU policy towards Russia. Cyprus was too distracted by its economic calamity and too dependent on Russian money pouring in to be able to conduct its own reassessment. That the media were dependent on financial services that were feeding from Russian hands did not facilitate a critical view of what was unfolding. So, Cyprus, broken by - and pre-occupied with - its economic woes, came late to the debate.

Its political leadership ignored the debate entirely. After Crimea's annexation, President Anastasiades was the only EU leader to accept an invitation from President Putin to attend a parade in Red Square; three party leaders visited Crimea after its annexation at the invitation of Moscow; the Cyprus legislature passed a resolution calling on the government to work for the lifting of EU sanctions on Russia over Crimea; two Cypriot party leaders publicly demanded that Russia be given a military base and in Brussels Cyprus often argued against the imposition of sanctions.

5. Former communists and the new affluent class come together

According to a recent investigation by the Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project⁷ a short while after the Crimea related EU sanctions, a secretive Moscow group began to cultivate ties with Cypriot politicians and in 2016 was able to successfully push through a motion in Cyprus's House of Representatives calling for an end to EU sanctions against Russia. A Russian-Cypriot businessman, who developed residential projects on the island but also

7. <https://www.occrp.org/en/investigations/how-a-russian-influence-group-infiltrated-cypriot-party-politics>

links with top politicians and even set up a political party in Cyprus, played a key role in these machinations. The investigation found that the Russian businessman who had obtained a Cypriot passport under a scheme later shut down for corruption, connected Russian propagandists with sympathetic Cypriot politicians to make the resolution happen. Most importantly, with the apparent blessing of the Russian Foreign minister Sergey Lavrov, he was able to help set up a Cypriot political party (registered in 2017, suspended in 2021) intended to promote and protect Russian interests. The party was called ‘Εγώ ο Πολίτης’, “I, the Citizen” and was referred to as “The Russian Party”. Transparency International spoke of the “economic capture of [Cyprus] by Russian interests.”

In 2016 a draft text titled Resolution of the House of Representatives of Cyprus ‘On lifting sectoral economic sanctions against Russia’ was tabled by AKEL and was co-sponsored by the party of a former minister of foreign affairs who supported it, he said, to thank Russia for the long-term support. The motion was meant to start a debate in the Cypriot parliament on the sanctions against Russia being “fundamentally contrary to the norms of international law,” and to drum up media coverage that would highlight the economic damage done to Cyprus itself by the loss of business with Russia.

According to OCCRP’s investigation, beyond the former communist party’s support the plan aimed to secure votes for the resolution by the ruling Democratic Rally, of the then president. On July 7, 2016, a resolution was passed in the Cypriot parliament with just a few minor changes, with 33 votes in favor and with the ruling party abstaining.

6. The Trump effect

Irrelevant as it might seem to the issue at hand it is important to recall that Trump’s secretary of commerce between 2017 and 2021 was Wilbur Ross, who had served as the vice-chairman and leading investor in the Bank of Cyprus in 2014 - then, and still to date, the country’s largest bank - at a time when Russian oligarchs were transferring assets to the Bank to avoid Crimea related sanctions. While Ross resigned his board post when he took office in January 2017, he did not relinquish his investments⁸. Other major investors in the Bank of Cyprus were Vladimir Strzhalkovsky who was referred to in Russian media as a former KGB official and Putin ally and Viktor Velkselberg, an acknowledged ally of Russia’s president.

While Ross was instrumental in forcing all six Russian members off the bank’s board when he first arrived, he also oversaw a deal that transferred the bank’s Russia operations to Artem Avetisyan, an ally of president Vladimir Putin. Another

8. Has Wilbur Ross fully divested from the Bank of Cyprus? Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, 27 December 2017.

of Ross's first big decisions at the bank in 2014 was the appointment of former Deutsche Bank chief executive Josef Ackermann as chairman, whose ties to Russia were reportedly strong.⁹

Gradually the Bank of Cyprus began offloading Russian businesses as part of a restructuring plan. John Koenig, a former US ambassador to Cyprus, told the Guardian he did not believe Ross had ever gone out of his way to favour Russian investors or the Kremlin. At the time, he recalled, officials were actively seeking investments from big US and European banks but nobody was interested until Ross came along. "There is no reason to look for a sinister narrative," Koenig said. "This was a high-risk environment and there were not a lot of external investors interested. It's the kind of situation he [Ross] specialises in, isn't it?"¹⁰

"Wilbur Ross was kind of a savior," said Andreas Neocleous¹¹, the founder and chairman of the biggest law firm in Cyprus (and later owner of many Cypriot media outlets) with many Russian clients. They included Dmitri Rybolovlev, a Russian billionaire, who at some point held a 10% stake in the Bank of Cyprus and who paid \$95 million in 2008 to buy a Florida property from Donald Trump.

It is worth noting that the Bank of Cyprus was an important point of interest in Special Counsel Mueller's investigation of Russia's involvement in the 2016 US election. In early November of that year, Bloomberg had reported that government officials in Cyprus gave Mueller's team several banking records relating to accounts held by former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort. The documents revealed that Manafort and his partner Rick Gates had at least 15 accounts with the Bank of Cyprus and a subsidiary bank that they used to hide millions of dollars. Mueller charged the two men with money-laundering as well as failing to disclose foreign accounts and lobbying contacts with foreign officials - in this case in Russia and Ukraine. The indictment of the two men described in detail how money flowed into their Bank of Cyprus accounts but it did not reveal the source of the funds. Manafort whose US political consultancy had offices in Kyiv and had advised former Ukrainian president Victor Yanukovich was sentenced to 81 months in prison in 2019.¹²

9. Davos-man Ackermann lured to Cyprus bank by billionaires, Kathimerini, 11 Nov 2014.

10. Trump's commerce secretary oversaw Russia deal while at Bank of Cyprus, The Guardian, 23 March 2017.

11. In 2019 the law firm of Andreas Neocleous, who passed away in 2021, purchased the Cyprus Mail newspaper, one of the few remaining independent media on the island. Established in 1945 and traditionally politically independent, the Cyprus Mail then began to delete some of its stories relating to Russian clients of the firm that had purchased it. Yet, strangely, as it will become clear in the coverage and public opinion sections of this study, the Mail's actual reporting on the war in Ukraine was fair and impartial and the commentaries it hosted were varied and never sensationalistic.

12. Breakdown of indictments and cases in Mueller's probe, ABC News, 15 November 2019.

Cyprus exited the painful EU adjustment program in 2016 and the economy gradually recovered not least by the introduction of a dubious investor citizenship programme that became known as the ‘golden passport’ scheme. By 2020, the stock of incoming foreign direct investment (FDI), representing money that entered Cyprus, reached €389bn of which €102bn came from Russia. At the same time, the stock of outgoing FDI reached €399bn, of which €134bn went to Russia. As far as banks were concerned, the contraction of international clients had resulted in a significant reduction of direct exposure to Russian clients. In December 2022 Sapienta Economics (see table), a reliable local economics consultancy, estimated that Russian business in Cyprus was worth 4.8% of GDP in “pre-war” 2022. It had been significantly higher at 6.3% of GDP almost a decade earlier in 2013.

Table SR1

Sapienta Economics estimated contribution of Russian business to GDP, updated March 2022							
€ million unless otherwise stated							
	Russia share*	2007	2013	2019	2020	2021	2022**
Accommodation & food services	19.6	75	269	234	27	181	222
Financial services excluding operations of RCB Cyprus	5.8	185	218	133	129	139	145
Professional services (tax, legal) turnover	35.0	366	514	622	603	652	681
Administrative services (compliance)	20.0	48	49	98	88	88	92
Construction	10.0	181	78	126	94	79	83
Gross value-added of Russian business	-	855	1,128	1,213	942	1,139	1,222
% of GDP	-	4.9	6.3	5.3	4.4	4.9	4.8

* In pre-pandemic 2019. ** “Other things being equal” scenario (no war in Ukraine).

Sources: Sapienta estimates based on data from Cystat, Central Bank of Cyprus and Land Registry.

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7. Relations with Russia

Beyond the deep political ties cultivated over the years by the existence of a prominent communist party and the more recent misperception about Russia’s constructive role on Cyprus, there was one significant and unexpected political development which came just months before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. In October 2021 in Moscow the minister of foreign affairs of Cyprus (now president of the Republic) signed two agreements with the Russian Federation on ‘Cooperation during Humanitarian Operations Performed in Case of Crisis Management Situations’ and a ‘Strategic Framework of Cooperation’ which offered Cyprus ports for the docking of Russian warships and airports “for landing military aircraft.”

The agreements which would have allowed Russian ships to dock in the port of Limassol risked ruining the Republic’s long sought efforts of lifting the US arms embargo on Cyprus and contravened specific commitments it had vis a vis the European Union. Though they were seen as controversial and to some as a surprise, they were not thoroughly debated in the media. In the end they were not ratified. Foreign minister Christodoulides resigned to pursue his presidential

candidacy and his replacement, the veteran politician Ioannis Kasoulides, an avid pro-European and not burdened with the close personal relations between the Russian Foreign minister Sergei Lavrov and Messrs Anastasiades and Christodoulides, sought to nullify the agreements. The invasion of Ukraine offered the opportunity. A decision was taken on 1 March 2022 and the EU decision to ban Russian ships came in April of that year.

The agreements were described much later as a sad reflection of the Anastasiades government's policy of keeping Moscow happy. They were in fact signed while Russia was amassing its troops on the border with Ukraine and while serious concerns were being expressed in the West about the possibility of an invasion. And while one might assume that the Anastasiades government had been - as the Cyprus Mail newspaper would later describe it - "beholden to Moscow" and that it ignored the brewing international crisis between Russia and the West, the problem was also that the media at the time did not question this stance in any substantive manner.

8. Relations with Ukraine

On 19 February 2022, just days before the Russian invasion Ukraine's ambassador to Cyprus Ruslan Nimchynskyi wrote an opinion piece in the Cyprus Mail to mark 30 years of the signing of a protocol in New York establishing diplomatic relations between Ukraine and the Republic of Cyprus. The signing had come just two months after the Republic of Cyprus recognised Ukraine's independence on December 27, 1991. In his text the Ukrainian ambassador said ties between the two peoples had existed long before the collapse of the USSR in 1991 and how belonging to the same Orthodox community, the two countries shared common European democratic values and practice tolerance and compassion while defending freedom, traditions, distinctiveness and independence. Cyprus, he said, had remained steadfast in its unwavering and strong support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-recognition of the temporary occupation of Crimea in 2014 as well as his country's European aspirations while in return he reiterated Ukraine's strong commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Cyprus.

9. The Church

For a country which until 1977 elected an Archbishop as its head of state and government, Cyprus managed very quickly to establish its secular credentials. The Church, however, continues to play a significant role in the social, political, economic and education spheres. It is impossible to ignore that the affiliation between the Orthodox churches of Cyprus and Russia may have imbued the church-going Cypriot's psyche with a superficial perhaps even deceptive sense of brotherhood and may have strengthened the general Russophile sentiment in the country.

Here's an excerpt from a preface to a Cypriot Journal of Social Sciences, published in 2019, signed by two participating guest academics from the School of Governance and Politics of the Moscow State University of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MGIMO University): "For Russians, through many generations, Cyprus has always been spiritually close and without exaggeration, a sister country. This is due to the fact that Christianity, in its Eastern Orthodox version, was embraced in our country from the Byzantine Empire in the tenth century A.D. and had become the spiritual and cultural backbone of our great nation. The historical destinies of our people have always developed in parallel, and our relations have never been blemished for many centuries".¹³

A significant moment which confirmed the spirit captured above and came to compliment the growth of the local Russian community and the proliferation of Russian language schools, was the construction in 2017 of a Russian Orthodox church on the outskirts of the capital Nicosia. The St. Andrew and All Russian Saints church¹⁴ with a capacity of 400 people was funded by the owner of a construction company listed on the Moscow Stock Exchange.

More recently the tensions within the Cypriot Church with regard to which side it would support in the debacle between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church - the latter declared its full independence and autonomy from the former in May 2022¹⁵ - may have also complicated the public's reading of the political developments. A senior Cypriot cleric with studies in both Russia and the United States, the Bishop of Tamassos, publicly stated that the attack on Ukraine should not have happened but that Russians should "not be demonised" for the invasion. The Bishop welcomed Ukrainians who had arrived in Cyprus organising common prayer groups with the island's Russian population.

10. Russian media

The growing Russian community on the island had also led to the emergence of a small but influential publishing firm called Vestnik Kypra¹⁶. Established as far back as 1995 it became more prominent and visible from 2007 onwards covering 80,000 Russian speakers living permanently in Cyprus (its own claim). Its key marker on the local information space came with the publication of what would become its flagship quarterly glossy magazine titled Successful Business (in the Russian language with an English section)¹⁷ sold on the press stands but also distributed free to key venues and hotels.

13. Professor Robert Yengibaryan and Associate Professor Genri Sardaryan, The Cyprus Review, 2019.

14. <https://orthochristian.com/100879.html>

15. Moscow-led Ukrainian Orthodox Church breaks ties with Russia, Reuters, 28 May 2022.

16. www.vkcyprus.com

17. www.sb-cyprus.com

The magazine paraded local politicians and dignitaries on its cover and for a while established itself as the influential conduit between the Russian business community and the local political and corporate elite (below a series of covers of ministers and heads of regulatory bodies).



Interestingly in 2016, the newspaper Vestnik Kipra received a Certificate of Honour from the Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev “for its great contribution to the preservation of the Russian language and culture, as well as to the consolidation of compatriots abroad.”

Besides Vestnik Kypra, there are other Russian-language online news outlets in Cyprus, the more prominent ones being Evropa Kipr and Cyprus Butterfly but their ultimate beneficial ownership, any potential affiliation with the Russian state and its embassy in Cyprus, or indeed their ultimate reach and influence remain unclear. On the entertainment scene there’s also TNT Cyprus, a television station which began broadcasting in 2019 through the Cypriot registered digital terrestrial network Velister with what was then seen as an attempt by the channel to enter markets beyond Cyprus. TNT Cyprus belonged to the Russian conglomerate Gazprom Media. In addition, and though their scope and capacity remained unclear, the Russian Media Group RMG, considered as a propaganda arm of the Russian state, attempted through small publications to exploit the growing Russian market in Cyprus but, despite its promotion through bodies such as the Russian-Cyprus Business Association (established under the auspices of the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Russian Embassy in Nicosia)¹⁸ it was unable to infiltrate the local media scene.

18. www.cyprus-russian.org.cy

It is within this political, diplomatic, economic and social context that news about Russia and the war in Ukraine was generated and put out. The resulting news flows framed the space in which public opinion was shaped. But the media - as observers and watchdogs of developments and as purveyors of news and commentary - had themselves been shaped by this shifting context.

Most of them ended up serving -whether unwittingly or by choice- purposes that ran contrary to their public interest role. Some were true to purpose, challenging unfolding developments and narratives, others were opaque and calculative. More alarmingly for the journalism of Cyprus many were indifferent, unquestioning and hurried. They were, however, rarely irrelevant.

The Coverage

The manner in which the media in Cyprus assimilate and then report international tensions and conflicts is for the most part refracted through the dense lens of the country's political problem resulting from the Turkish occupation of its northern part and the country's de facto division.

The half-century old Cyprus problem, its complex history and, at any given moment, the perceived alliances which need to be nurtured or at least not be upset vis a vis the prospects of its potential resolution, are silent factors in the collective mind, in the mind of some journalists and by consequence in editorial processes. The country's collective experience and notions of invader/occupier and displaced/occupied, are challenged by similar situations, in this case of Russia and Ukraine, and more recently, again, in the case of Israel and Palestine.

That is not to say that events are not factually reported or adequately addressed but in the case of the issue at hand, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it has meant that Russia's overt aggression and violation of the territorial integrity of another independent country was, in some quarters, initially met with a degree of awkwardness and caution. It was apparent that the reflexes of some of the media and some of the journalists individually were much slower than usual in unequivocally presenting Russia as the brutal aggressor that it actually was.

As explained in the previous chapter this was because Russia as a permanent member of the UN Security Council had been perceived over time to be the counterweight to perceived western machinations - mainly of the US and UK - on the efforts to resolve the political problem. It was also because the strong presence of Russian economic interests in Cyprus and their deep-rooted connections with the political and economic establishment made it far more difficult for the media to respond with clarity and without equivocation - or at least without hesitation.

Their key concern was potentially repelling a convenient and sizeable economic lifeline at a time when their financial situation was rapidly deteriorating. Any imbalances in the coverage, however, were quickly readdressed as the evidence of what was happening on the ground became clear. As time passed the initial shock receded and other dimensions of the war - economic and geopolitical - emerged to dominate the news agenda and obscure its overall ferocity and the perceptions of aggressor/victim.

The few images in the following pages are mostly from front-pages of newspapers despite the fact that circulation figures in Cyprus, like everywhere else in the world, have been in decline.

The *Front-page* continues to be the best reflection of a media's own understanding of what it considers an important story and the way it proceeds to cover and prioritise it. Online versions of newspapers in Cyprus have yet to capture that feel of the digital front-page particularly as they have become inevitable victims of the perpetually shifting agenda and their online versions rarely remain 'still' for more than a few hours.

The Ukraine 'crisis'

The Cypriot media begin to focus on what they describe as **'the Ukraine crisis'** and the diplomatic efforts for de-escalation from mid-February 2022 reflecting mainly on how the United States and the European Union were preparing to respond to Russia's intentions to 'destabilise' Ukraine. Most media coverage reflected the sense that the West itself was unable to predict what Russia had planned to do. At this time the public broadcaster CYBC's Moscow correspondent reported that the "Russian administration of Donetsk stated that it was clear that the *Ukrainian* army was preparing for an attack... with Russian-speaking residents fearing that the (Ukrainian) air-force could be used against them as in 2014..."

On **17 February** he quoted Russian media reporting that the Ukrainian army was responsible for violating a local ceasefire and quoted Dmitri Peskov, press secretary of the president of the Russian Federation, accusing Kyiv of 'provocative actions.' At the same time, he did report on NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg expressing concern that Russia would try to stage an excuse to invade Ukraine. In his private social media posts the correspondent mocked western media suggestions that Russia was about to invade.

On **18 February** along with reference to international agency reports about the global concern, a local dimension emerged with reports on the arrival of RAF Typhoon fighter jets at the UK Sovereign Base in Akrotiri in south-west Cyprus. These were reported to be part of the UK's contribution to NATO patrols in Eastern Europe along with UK navy patrols in the eastern Mediterranean jointly with Canada, Italy, Spain and Turkey.

Haravgi, the left-wing main opposition party's media, under the title "Cyprus becomes a NATO bridgehead" described the arrival of the jets as a provocation against Cyprus and called on the government to send a clear message to the UK that it does not consent to the use of Cypriot territory for NATO's aggressive purposes. It said the people of Cyprus "do not want the country involved in the dangerous tension in eastern Europe and the warmongering designs of NATO to surround Russia."

Προγεφύρωμα του NATO η Κύπρος

Τέσσερα μαχητικά Typhoon αφήχθηκαν τη Δευτέρα στο Ακρωτήριο

Σε προγεφύρωμα του NATO μετατρέπεται ξανά η Κύπρος, αφού μαχητικά αεροσκάφη προσηύχθηκαν στο Ακρωτήριο με αφορμή την κρίση στη Ουκρανία, γεγονός που προκάλεσε ήδη την άμεση αντίδραση του Παγκόσμιου Συμβουλίου Ειρήνης (ΠΣΕ). Το Συμβούλιο θα μόνο καταδικάσει την άφιξη των βρετανικών μαχητικών αεροσκαφών Typhoon στο Ακρωτήριο, αλλά και ζητά «έως ότου λήξουν τα βρετανικά μαχητικά αεροσκάφη, να φύγουν ΤΥΡΗ! Η Κύπρος δεν είναι ούτε ορμητήριο του NATO, ούτε των Βρετανών. Οι Βρετανικές Βάσεις αποτελούν καρδιά στα έδαφη της χώρας μας θέτοντας σε διαρκή κίνδυνο τους λαούς της περιοχής. Οι κυπριακοί λαοί σημειώσαμε ώστε ο τόπος μας να καταστεί γέφυρα ειρήνης και συνεργασίας των λαών», αναφέρει το ΠΣΕ. Επανελαμβάνει επίσης την απαίτηση «η χώρα μας να μην εμπλακεί με οποιοδήποτε τρόπο στην κλιμάκωση της έντασης και να μη συναινέσει στη χρησιμοποίηση της χώρας μας από τη βρετανική και άλλες NATOικές στρατιωτικές δυνάμεις».

Το γεγονός έγινε γνωστό με tweet των βρετανικών βάσεων στην Κύπρο και στη συνέχεια με ανακοίνωση του βρετανικού Υπουργείου Άμυνας ότι με τέσσερα μαχητικά αεροσκάφη τύπου Typhoon ενισχύθηκαν οι βάσεις Ακρωτηρίου και οπότε αρχίζουν παρεμβάσεις στην ασταθή κατάσταση λόγω της ουκρανικής κρίσης.

Τα τέσσερα Typhoon έφτασαν στην Κύπρο το βράδυ της Δευτέρας, ενισχύοντας μια υπάρχουσα παρουσία του NATO στην ασταθή κατάσταση, ενώ απεστάλη βόμβα από την άφιξη τους στο νησί δώθηκε λέξη στα



δημοσιογράφοι. «Θερμό καλωσόρισμα στα 4 Typhoon της RAF στα πλαίσια της υποστήριξης της Βρετανίας προς το NATO στην ασταθή κατάσταση και στην αρνητική ρόλο που κατά τη διάρκεια αυτής της περιόδου της αυξανόμενης έντασης στα σύνορα της Ουκρανίας», αναφέρει το tweet.

Ο βρετανός ΥΠΑΜ, Ben Wallace βρέθηκε στις Βρυξέλλες και θα συζητήσει σήμερα με τους αξιωματικούς του NATO τις θέσεις της χώρας του για την ουκρανική κρίση. Όπως δήλωσε ο βρετανός ΥΠΑΜ, «μια βήμα με τους αξιωματικούς του NATO αντιμετωπίσαμε στρατηγικά και εξοπλιστικά σε στρατό, θάλασσα και αέρα για να υποστηρίξουμε την ευρωπαϊκή άμυνα, ως αντίβροχο στην εντάχωση των ρωσικών στρατιωτικών δυνάμεων στα σύνορα της Ουκρανίας».

Νίκος Κουζάρου

Επιν υπηρέσει του NATO οι βάσεις

Τα βρετανικά βάσεις επηρέασαν την έκδοση ο Σαρ Αλίνα Χάα και εγγυήθηκε από τον Διοικητή των Βάσεων, Υπουργό του Νότιου Ακρωτηρίου. Ο Σαρ Αλίνα Χάα σε ανάρτηση του επίσης στο Twitter, είχε την ευκαιρία να μιλήσει με μέλη της ΡΑΦ Ακρωτηρίου του Σαρ Αλίνα Χάα και συζητήσε τον συντονισμό του Γραφείου. Ο Σαρ Αλίνα Χάα, σε ανάρτηση που είχε την ίδια με τη βρετανική Εταιρεία Επισκεπτικών, είχε υποστηρίξει ότι «ο ρόλος τους είναι σημαντικό για το άσφαρξο της ειρήνης, για το NATO και τον ΟΗΕ». >> Επισκεπόμενος τις διεθνείς γεωπολιτικές προκλήσεις «όπως η αυξανόμενη επίθεση της Ρωσίας» ο Σαρ Αλίνα Χάα εξέφρασε την ελπίδα πως η ειρήνη θα επικρατήσει, ταυτόχρονα τονίζοντας πως οποιαδήποτε ενέργεια κλιμακώσει δεν μπορεί να γίνει συνάντηση.



ΑΚΕΛ: Πρόκληση η παρουσία των βρετανικών μαχητικών στο νησί

Πρόκληση από μέρους της Βρετανίας σε βάρος της Κύπρου και του λαού της ακρωτηρίου το ΑΚΕΛ την παρουσία των βρετανικών μαχητικών αεροσκαφών στο Ακρωτήριο. «Μόνο κίνδυνο για την ασφάλεια της πατρίδας μας δημιουργούνται από τέτοιες ενέργειες», αναφέρει το ΑΚΕΛ σε κλειστή ανακοίνωσή του και καλεί την κυβέρνηση να σταθεί σαφώς μπροστά στη βρετανική κυβέρνηση ότι δεν συναινεί στη χρήση κυπριακού εδάφους για τους επιθετικούς σκοπούς του NATO.

«Ο κυπριακός λαός δεν θέλει εμπλοκή της χώρας με οποιοδήποτε τρόπο στην επανέκδοση έντασης στην ασταθή κατάσταση στα πολυκατάλληλα σχέδια του NATO για παρακώλυση της Ρωσίας, όπως ακριβώς δεν θέλει η όλη βρετανία σε έδαφος του νησιού μας», αναφέρει. Η ανακοίνωση ότι οι βρετανικές βάσεις παρηγορούνται με ανεπιθύμη και βίαια στα Μόσχα Κομμουνιστική Δικτατορία, για την άφιξη στο Ακρωτήριο τεσσάρων μαχητικών αεροσκαφών της βρετανικής αεροπορίας, τίποτα Typhoon, τα οποία εντάσσονται στους NATOικούς σχεδιασμούς για την εν. Ευρώπη και την Ουκρανία. Όλα αυτά καθώς το NATO συντηρεί την ένταση και ο Ακρωτηρίου ΥΠΕΕ Α. Μιλάνου σταμάτησε να απειληθεί στο Συμβούλιο Ασφαλείας σχετικά με την απειλή της Ρωσίας για την ειρήνη και την ασφάλεια.

In the ensuing days the state-owned Cyprus News Agency (CNA) - upon whose reports most Cypriot media outlets, especially the online, heavily depend on - quoted the Russian news agencies Interfax and TASS on reports of pro-Russia militants accusing Ukrainian forces of bombing a village in eastern Ukraine. At the same time, it also carried reports from its own (CNA's) correspondent in London which quoted UK sources as identifying the mortar attacks as 'a false flag' operation by Russia, aiming to justify a potential invasion.

On **20 February** the conservative (but liberally titled Philelefteros which means The Liberal) featured an interview with Sergey Markedonov, a leading researcher at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations who noted that Russia wanted to stop NATO's expansion to the east. In the weekly Kathimerini (Cyprus edition) regular columnist John Ioannou, a well-versed journalist on defense and security affairs, explained how an escalation of the crisis in Ukraine could have an impact on Cyprus, noting that additional sanctions against Russia could have a spiral effect on Cyprus' economy, already under pressure from COVID and high inflation. However, citing the recent shift in Cyprus' foreign policy, Ioannou didn't expect that Nicosia would play the "veto card" [i.e. to block the EU's efforts to impose sanctions] as had happened during the crisis over Belarus in 2020 when Cyprus blocked the Council's plan citing the lack of EU action against Turkey.

By **21 February** CyBC's correspondent in Russia, reported from Rostov on dozens of people, mostly women and children, fleeing from eastern Ukraine into Russia. At the same time the public broadcaster's correspondent in the United States reported on how Washington maintained Moscow was orchestrating the whole operation to accuse Ukraine of being aggressive, instrumentalising pro-Russia militants in Luhansk and Donetsk. On the same day Haravgi led with the front-page headline (below) "Cyprus is not an operation base for NATO or the British."

The image shows the front page of the newspaper 'HARAVGI'. At the top, the title 'HARAVGI' is written in large, bold, serif letters. Below it, there is a small orange and yellow logo. Underneath the title, there is a line of text: 'ΤΟΥΤΗ Η ΔΕΡΑ ΔΕΝ ΣΒΗΝΕΙ, ΤΟΥΤΗ Η ΜΑΧΗ ΔΕΝ ΠΑΥΕΙ, ΧΙΛΙΑ ΧΡΟΝΙΑ ΑΝ ΠΕΡΑΣΟΥΝ, ΔΕΝ ΠΕΡΙΒΑΙΝΟΥΜΕ ΣΚΑΡΟΙ'. Below this, there are three small lines of text: 'ΑΡ. ΦΥΛΛΟΥ 22853 - ΤΙΜΗ €1,20', 'www.haravgi.com.cy', and 'ΔΕΥΤΕΡΑ 21 ΦΕΒΡΟΥΑΡΙΟΥ 2022'. The main headline is in large, bold, black letters: 'Η Κύπρος δεν είναι ούτε ορμητήριο του NATO ούτε των Βρετανών'. Below the headline, there is a sub-headline: 'Εκδόλωση του ΠΣΕ για μη εμπλοκή της Κύπρου στην ουκρανική κρίση μέσω Βάσεων'. There are three columns of text below the sub-headline, each starting with a small orange square. The first column says: 'Οι Βάσεις Ακρωτηρίου επιβεβαιώνουν ότι τα Τυρόσοι θα συμμετέχουν στις αμυντικές προσπάθειες του NATO για την Ουκρανία'. The second column says: 'Τα βρετανικά μαχητικά στο Ακρωτήριο αποτελούν πρόκληση σε βάρος του κυπριακού λαού και δεν είναι αποδεκτή η παρουσία τους'. The third column says: 'Το ΠΣΕ θεωρεί ότι η ύπαρξη των αγγλικών Βάσεων στην Κύπρο δεν αποτέλεσε ποτέ παράγοντα ασφάλειας ούτε για την περιοχή'. There are also two small images of men's faces in the top left and right corners of the main headline area.

On **22 February** president Putin's decision to recognise Luhansk and Donetsk as independent states became top story. Headlines were worded in ways that portrayed Putin as adding fuel to the fire, noting that the Russian president's decision affected the prospect of a meeting with his US counterpart Joe Biden.

Cyprus Foreign minister Ioannis Kasoulides expressed Nicosia's support to Ukraine's territorial integrity during the EU Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels and pointed out the need to use all diplomatic means to defuse the crisis and welcomed the efforts by France and Germany and the initiatives by OSCE.

The effect of the crisis on the economy begins to dominate with liberal daily Politis (which means Citizen) making the impact on Cyprus its leading story. Citing concerns from businesspeople in the tourism industry, it suggests that there are already cancellations of reservations from Ukraine and Russia at a time when Cyprus' tourism industry was hoping to bounce back from Covid. The Hoteliers Association noted that Russian visitors were the ones who had "saved the year" in 2021 while Phileleftheros pointed to the broader consequences on energy prices and inflation in Europe.

All media also reported on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs statement condemning the unilateral recognition of independence for the breakaway regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, reiterating Cyprus' support to Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, within its internationally recognised borders.

It is important to note, however, that nowhere in the statements of the 22nd or of the 24th of February [below], was there any reference to Russia.

22/2/22: Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the recognition of the unilateral declaration of independence of the separatist regions of Donetsk and Luhansk in Ukraine

In light of developments in Ukraine, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus reiterates its support to the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. Any actions that undermine the territorial integrity of Ukraine are contrary to the fundamental principles of International Law and violate the Minsk Agreements, which constitute the only way to resolve the crisis. We are against any secession, recognition or support of secession and any form of annexation.

24/2/22: Written statement by the Foreign minister regarding recent developments in Ukraine

The recent developments are contrary to International Legality. These are military operations within Europe, something we had avoided since the end of the Second World War. We condemn the military invasion against the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of a state. The President of the Republic of Cyprus will be participating in Brussels this evening in an extraordinary European Council, in order to send a joint and unified response to the developing situation. It is clear that the EU will not respond militarily but through the adoption of sanctions. We have to be prepared because these sanctions could have consequences on all member states including Cyprus. I reiterate that the decisions will be taken in a spirit of unity, which is the strongest weapon we possess. We call, even at this moment, for a ceasefire to avoid casualties among non-combatants and return to the diplomatic path to find a solution on the issue. Regarding Cypriots in Ukraine, the Crisis Management Center of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been activated and is at the disposal of those citizens directly affected, for consular assistance and the possible implementation of evacuation plans.

Media coverage of events in Cyprus invariably and very prominently include, sometimes to the expense of the coverage of the events themselves, the political party reactions to those events. In this sense, political parties manage to shape the public debate and media have become dependent on this narrative context and flow of information by consistently anticipating and seeking the response of the political establishment to accompany and sometimes even lead their reports.

On **23 February** the media carried the reactions of political parties to the built-up in the region with ruling centre right DISY (progressive right) confirming that Cyprus would side with the EU but needs to assess the impact any decisions will have on the Cyprus settlement process, any sanctions against Russia will have on the economy and the possibility of any reactions from Russia. A few days later its leadership's stance would become more determined stating that "Cyprus, a victim of invasion and continued occupation, has no right to remain silent. We fully support the Ukrainian people" which was carried in most media.

Main opposition leftist AKEL stated international law and territorial integrity of states must be respected, adding that the Minsk Agreements provided a platform for a peaceful resolution of the crisis. It said the government should assess the situation and prepare for any impact the Ukrainian crisis may have on Cyprus. Opposition DIKO (centre-right) said the people of Cyprus respected Ukraine's territorial integrity and cannot accept violations of international law. The marginal socialist party EDEK complained that while the EU rushed to sanction Russia, it didn't show the same sensitivity on Turkey when it came to Cyprus. The Greens explicitly condemned Russia's recognition of the autonomous regions of Luhansk and Donetsk and called for Moscow to reconsider.

24 February - Launch of the invasion

The 24th of February marks the day when Russian president Vladimir Putin made a statement declaring the commencement of 'special military operations' in Ukraine, the beginning of the invasion. Morning bulletins of the 24th led with president Putin's televised address and the EU's call for an extraordinary summit.

Most media picked up a curious twist which had Russian Foreign minister Lavrov citing the UN Cyprus settlement talks to justify Moscow's demand for negotiations between Ukraine and pro-Russia separatists in Donetsk and Luhansk: "Look at Cyprus. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus has unilaterally declared independence in the north. It refuses to comply with UNSC resolutions but nobody denies to representatives of northern Cyprus the right to participate in a dialogue". Citing diplomatic sources, Politis reported that as an expert on

the Cyprus issue, Lavrov should have known that settlement talks are between the island's two communities, adding that the Russian Foreign minister's words could not be attributed to ignorance or be described as a slip of the tongue.

After reports that President Anastasiades wouldn't attend the emergency European Council in Brussels - not particularly picked up by the media (but all-over social media) the president did fly to Brussels to join the meeting. Anastasiades was intensely criticised when it appeared that he would have appointed the Greek Prime Minister as his representative at the crucial summit.

In a commentary, Politis reported that Anastasiades "did not want to find himself in the difficult position of agreeing to tough measures against Russia and the oligarchs, as some of them are his friends and prominent clients of his former law office". It said Anastasiades "was having difficulty naming Russia as responsible for the invasion in Ukraine", while it noted that "he may be the only EU leader who faced this difficulty".

By **24 February** media reported on president Anastasiades' unequivocal tweet (below):



On **25 February** headlines captured the measure of the unfolding events ['Ghost of War returns to Europe' in Politis and 'Putin gulping up all of Ukraine' in Phileleftheros] but there was also considerable attention on President Anastasiades' participation at the EU Summit where sanctions were agreed against Russia.

Failure to ban Russia from the international SWIFT banking system generated criticism against Cyprus, as it had reportedly opposed the measure along with other EU member states, including Germany, Italy and Hungary.



Left wing AKEL's mouthpiece Haravgi (above) opted to lead with 'Devastating consequences of the armed conflict in Ukraine' and used a photograph on its front page with the caption 'Dramatic moments for the Ukrainian people' but was overall and certainly over the following weeks subdued in its coverage of the war rarely making it a front-page story opting instead to focus on local stories (below, middle).

On 26 February Politis led with 'Russian troops strangling Kyiv', while Haravgi opted to headline 'Pressure and Prices rises without support for poor families' approaching the issue from the economic consequences of the war. Alithia (meaning Truth, centre-right) opted for 'Putin out of control'.





On **27 February**, Cypriot ministers refuted reports that Nicosia was amongst member states that had rejected the exclusion of Russia from SWIFT. Finance minister Constantinos Petrides tweeted that Cyprus had not objected to any EU sanctions against Russia including cutting Russia off SWIFT. Foreign minister Kasoulides told reporters that Cyprus said the issue had never been raised officially.



Before the EU sanctions were announced, in one of the key moments with a direct impact on Cyprus, Russian state-owned VTB Bank transferred all its shares (a 46.29% stake) in the Cyprus registered Russian Commercial Bank (RCB) to Cypriot shareholders, making RCB a 100% Cypriot-owned bank. [A few weeks later following a decision on 21 March by the European Central Bank's (ECB) Single Supervisory Mechanism RCB was shut down in a way that guaranteed that it would have the liquidity to cover all its obligations to depositors]. The media covered the technicalities factually in what was seen as a fast but smooth

closure made possible by the bank's cooperation with the banking supervisory authorities both in Cyprus and the EU. Much of RCB's business depended on the Russian market but the escalation of the war and broadening of sanctions had brought uncertainty about its future. There was speculation that turning the bank into an asset management company would entail up to 370 redundancies with only 50 employees likely to be retained.

Οι κυρώσεις άλλαξαν τη μετοχική δομή της RCB Bank



At this time the first reports began to emerge that Ukrainian businesses were looking to transfer their headquarters in Cyprus. Around one hundred Ukrainian nationals living in Cyprus protested outside the Russian consulate in Limassol while the Pancyprian Peace Council protested against the Bases' involvement in the Ukrainian crisis.

The House of Representatives adopted a unanimous resolution, condemning Russia's invasion and called for an immediate ceasefire urging Russian troops to leave Ukrainian territory. The Cypriot parliament said it supported the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders, as a matter of international law and principle.

The Russian ambassador in Cyprus, Stanislav Osadchiy in remarks to the Cyprus News Agency - which were picked up by all media - said that Russia was not looking to take over Ukrainian territory but to defend civilians in Luhansk and Donetsk. "Russia is doing everything it can to secure peace in the Donbas region for the last 8 years, within the framework of the Minsk Agreements. We are seeing though that those who took power in Kyiv in 2014 have officially abandoned this peaceful framework."

Coverage of Russia's invasion became increasingly critical of Moscow and President Putin with all media reporting on the EU's response with the sanctions

which Foreign minister Kasoulides described as unprecedented and depictive of the bloc's unity on the matter.

Yet, again, with one eye on the Cyprus problem Phileleftheros and Simerini suggested EU sanctions against Russia opened the way for similar action against Turkey. Simerini also made a first foray into how the cancellation of Nord Stream 2, could reopen discussions on the construction of the East-Med pipeline to the benefit of Cyprus. The moderate Kathimerini said on its front page that a key lesson from the tragedy was that the people and leadership of Cyprus should not waver as to 'who are, who should be and who can be our allies' and that Cyprus belonged in the West because that is "where we find expression of the democratic and universal values of the free world".

All media reported on Cyprus agreeing to close its airspace to Russian planes, following a relevant EU decision. The Foreign minister did note that Cyprus had some reservations over the decision, fearing that in case Turkey doesn't close its FIR to Russian aircraft, there might be flights from Russia into the north of Cyprus. The closure was also seen as another blow to prospects of a recovery in the tourism industry.

The weekend of 27-28 February saw two demonstrations which received widespread TV coverage one by the Ukrainian community outside the presidential palace against Russia, and one organised by the Pancyprian Peace Council against the US and NATO. Much attention was paid to president Anastasiades' expression of sadness for the loss of life of 10 Greek nationals in Mariupol while the mayor of Pafos was reported as saying that his municipality was ready and willing to host Greek refugees from Mariupol and Odessa.

Most of the coverage on what was happening in Brussels came from international agencies as few Cypriot media maintain correspondents, most prominently Ant1 TV, Alpha TV and CyBC all of whom are also reporters and columnists in Cypriot newspapers.

Ant1 TV's Brussels correspondent reported on the EU Secretary General of the European External Action Service summoning the ambassador of the Russian Federation to the EU to convey the "EU's strongest condemnation of the unprovoked, unjustified Russian invasion of Ukraine" and to warn of a hard-hitting package of restrictive measures. The correspondent said that the demarche became a fiasco of "two monologues", as the Russian ambassador reiterated Russia's justifications for the attack and warned of its own strong counter-measures.

The House of Representatives unanimously approved a Resolution condemning the Russian invasion and called for an immediate ceasefire and withdrawal of Russian troops. Most media reported that president Anastasiades had given

instructions for opening a bank account within the Central Bank of Cyprus for the public to donate to the people of Ukraine. In addition collection points were to be set up islandwide for donations of dry foods, coordinated by the foreign ministry and the government of Ukraine.

Meanwhile it was widely reported that Russian ambassador to Cyprus Stanislav Osadchiy again said in a statement to the Cyprus News Agency that Russia's plans did not include the occupation of Ukrainian territories, but the protection of civilians and Russian citizens in Donetsk and Lugansk. With regard to the possible impact of the sanctions against Russia on Cyprus, he estimated that the volatility of the rouble in the foreign exchange market, provoked by the new package of sanctions, would significantly increase the cost of tourist packages denominated in euros, which may negatively affect the tourist traffic from Russia.

As the EU convened to discuss humanitarian support to Ukraine, media reported on Cyprus getting ready to receive Ukrainian refugees with its Interior minister confirming activation of the national mechanism on the principle of obligatory resettlement to demonstrate genuine solidarity. At this time media reported 150 refugees linked to companies of Ukrainian interest based on the island expressing interest for repatriation as soon as conditions allowed.

Key moment: The Russian ambassador's Interview

One of the key moments of the coverage which was also crucial for Cyprus' bilateral relations with Russia came when its ambassador in Nicosia Stanislav Osadchiy - who was granted frequent and disproportionate access to Cypriot media - sat for an interview with Sigma TV's Chrysanthos Tsouroulis. In it he claimed Cyprus **had shot itself in the foot** by agreeing to ban Russian aircraft from the EU's airspace.

Osadchiy warned that after this decision Russian tourists would opt to travel to Turkey and the unrecognized Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus proclaiming: "Is that what you want? For them to go spend their money over there?" But he clarified that Moscow was not looking to upgrade the status of the Turkish Cypriot breakaway state. He added that the Europeans were also shooting themselves in the foot and asked "where will they procure their natural gas, oil, wheat?"

Osadchiy repeated Moscow's position that Russia didn't wish to take over Ukrainian territory but to protect Russian populations in Ukraine, claiming there was an ongoing genocide for eight years in the Donbas region. He accused Western countries of covering up these events, protecting the Ukrainian regime and turning a blind eye to these crimes. "We are not seeking to install a pro-Russia government in Ukraine. Ukrainians have the right to elect their leader. We want people in Donbas to live in peace."

The ambassador's interview generated considerable debate locally with some analysts and social media commentators feeling insulted by his words while others criticising SigmaTV for "offering a platform to the aggressor". The interview revealed a more arrogant and irritable dimension of the ambassador's demeanor who had for years enjoyed a free ride on Cypriot media.



Η αποκλειστική συνέντευξη του Ρώσου Πρέσβη στο ΣΙΓΜΑ

In retaliation to the EU ban on Russian flights, it was reported widely that Russia closed its airspace to airlines from 36 countries, including Cyprus and the 26 other members of the EU. With the EU ban effective immediately, three flights from Moscow to Larnaca airport were cancelled on Monday 28 February, while Paphos airport saw two Russia-linked flights cancelled.

On **1 March** most papers carried the news that the European Parliament had adopted a resolution condemning Russia's invasion in Ukraine. Five Cypriot MEPs voted in favour of the resolution; Left wing AKEL's MEP (GUE/NGL) George Georgiou abstained expressing concerns and explained that he had agreed with the condemnation of Russia's military operations but that the resolution should have included references to the persecutions of pro-Russia populations in Donbas and pointed to NATO's eastward expansion.

Meanwhile, several Ukraine-based companies were reported to have expressed interest in headquartering their business in Cyprus according to the Employers and Industrialists Federation. Most of these businesses belonged to Ukrainian interests, he said, while others are Belarusian, and some Russian. They are interested in either "a partial or whole relocation to Cyprus."

On the other hand, liberal Kathimerini reported that at least five individuals included in the EU's sanctions' list held bank accounts in Cyprus. Sources from the banking sector noted that exposure to Russia was limited after the closure of thousands of accounts over the past seven years and that many applications by Russians to open accounts in Cypriot banks had been rejected.

The media were also keeping an eye on how events were being perceived and covered in the northern part of the island where Turkish Cypriot leader Tatar condemned the Greek Cypriots for trying to include the "TRNC" airspace in maps sent to the media. He reminded that Greek Cypriots had decided to close their airspace to all Russian aircraft and that in an attempt to show north Cyprus as a part of their Flight Information Region, they included 'Turkish Cypriot airspace' in the published maps. Tatar pointed out that decisions of the 'Greek Cypriot administration' don't bind the Turkish Cypriots. Turkish Foreign minister Cavusoglu's statement that Turkey would not be sanctioning Russia also made headlines, in relation to the closure of Cyprus' airspace and the Russian ambassador's warning that the move will lead Russian tourists to Turkey instead of Cyprus. There was also coverage of Turkey's efforts to acquire a mediating role, as plans for a meeting between Foreign ministers of Russia and Ukraine emerged.

On **2 March** media reported on a demonstration held outside the Russian Embassy in Nicosia organised by the Ukrainian community on the island and attended by a few hundred protesters, including Cypriot MPs. The ministry of foreign affairs announced that 42 civilians of Cypriot, Greek or EU origin and Ukrainians with families in Cyprus had been safely evacuated from Ukraine. The left wing Haravgi continued to dwell on concerns over rising prices, with warnings that fuel and basic goods could see further hikes while there were reports of difficulties for Cypriots living or studying in Russia, who couldn't receive or send money.

On **3 March** the fall of Kherson to Russian troops became the top story combined with particular attention to the humanitarian evacuation convoy that departed from Mariupol led by the Greek ambassador in Ukraine.

Following the fall-out of its interview of the Russian ambassador, Sigma TV interviewed Ukraine's ambassador in Cyprus, Ruslan Nimchynsky, who expressed gratitude for all efforts and aid received from friends and allies in the West, including the EU and Cyprus, the US, and the UK. He described the Russian invasion as the worst form of aggression Europe had seen since World War II and the possibility of Ukraine falling as the equivalent of an invasion in the EU and the Western world. He pointed to 2014 and how Russia had been testing the West's ability to react against provocative operations and reminded of the war

against Georgia. Inevitably, the ambassador was asked about Turkey's reaction to the war and why he thought there had not been any immediate reaction when Turkey invaded Cyprus in 1974. "What we see today, is a completely different approach from the civilised world. This opens a window of hope and I look forward to stronger reactions from the West."

Much attention was given to the Cypriot Foreign minister's statement that Cyprus' consent on the closure of its airspace to Russian aircraft had been given "with the reservation of our right to re-examine and/or reconsider the implementation of this decision, in the event that Turkey refuses to proceed to the closing of its airspace and proceeds with the instrumentalisation of this European decision, with the aim of attracting and transporting of Russian citizens to the occupied territory."

The economy took centre-stage with Cyprus looking to recover the loss of the Russian and Ukrainian markets from other destinations with higher numbers of bookings from the UK and Israel expected though unlikely to cover the number of visitors from Russia and Ukraine combined. The Cypriot Finance minister confirmed that economic sanctions imposed against Russia were not affecting Cyprus to a large extent as the island's banking system had no exposure to Russia.

By 4 March the failure of the second attempt to initiate a peace process combined with fears of a nuclear accident, after the fire at the Zaporizhzhya nuclear plant, prompted local media analysts to note that the conflict had entered a stage of no return, and that Putin was now seeking to take over the whole of Ukraine.

The National Council in Cyprus discussed developments in Ukraine with the government spokesman typically remarking that the session took place in a spirit of unity. The Russian Embassy posted on its Facebook page that Russians living in Cyprus had received threats and insults and had been told to leave the island: "We ask all Russians not to get involved in provocations and immediately report such incidents to the police and the Russian Embassy. We shouldn't let a witch hunt happen," the Embassy said. Some online outlets reported incidents of harassment which were, however, not corroborated but were never retracted or corrected. The Cyprus Police said that the force had not received any complaints.

On the same day it was reported that the Employers and Industrialists Federation was looking to utilise the potential arrival of Ukrainians and Russians fleeing warzones to cover gaps in the local labour market. The Federation would ask the Interior ministry for the fast-track evaluation of work permit applications for people arriving from Ukraine and Russia. Relevantly, Politis reported that the Russian owner of Pafos Football Club was looking to transfer more of his businesses to Cyprus, in a bid to avoid international sanctions.

Haravgi reported that the European Journalists Federation (EFJ) expressed its disagreement with the EU's broadcast ban on Russian media in Europe,

referring to it as censorship that harmed media pluralism. The paper carried the remarks of the EFJ's Secretary-General who had expressed surprise at the ban on state-supported Russia Today and Sputnik arguing that the EU had no jurisdiction adding that "the closing down of media does not appear to be the best way to combat disinformation or propaganda, underlining that this censorship act may have completely counter-productive impact on the citizens who follow the banned media".

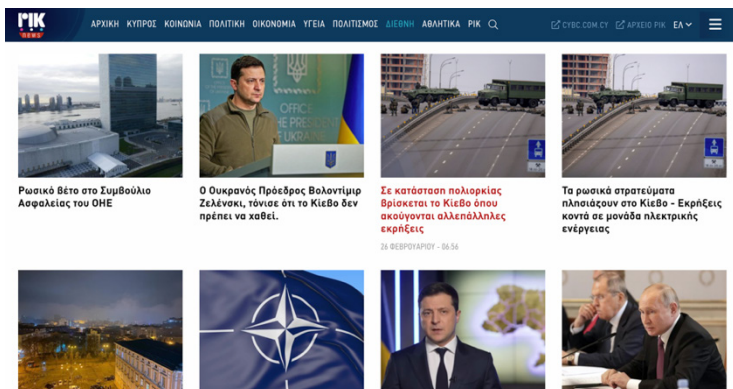
Television news bulletins focused on efforts to evacuate 50 Cypriot citizens still in Ukraine as well as 10 Ukrainian nationals who had a permit for residence in Cyprus. The foreign ministry spokesperson said that among the 42 people who had been evacuated there were Cypriot and Greek citizens, as well as EU citizens, who asked for consular assistance from the Republic of Cyprus. The first €100,000 from the Cypriot government to the UN Humanitarian Aid Fund for Ukraine was granted and Cyprus offered tents, blankets, camp beds, bottled water and other essential supplies through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism.

Key moment: The Public Broadcaster's dispatches

The news website of the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation's (CYBC/PIK) maintained a consistently updated flow of news regarding the developments surrounding the war, with short, factual and impartial accounts drawn from a variety of news agencies. But when it came to its flagship main evening news bulletins the situation appeared more complicated. While bulletins relayed footage and reports from international news agencies which were curated and translated by its local foreign affairs team, their content often came in sharp contrast to the dispatches from its own Moscow correspondent which appeared to peddle the Kremlin narrative. This was not a deliberate 'both-sides-journalism' approach - which would have been a poor policy choice in itself - but, we were told, an unchecked habit of certain key members of its newsroom who sought to juxtapose 'western' media reporting with their own instinctive 'anti-westernism'.

Our research did not find any evidence of scheming or direct influence by any external or local Russian political actors directed at the public broadcaster. Instead, we were told by several close observers, that on occasion, reports had certain obvious slants which, for example, appeared to offer excuses for the invasion, downplayed Ukrainian resistance or placed greater emphasis on the errors by the Ukrainian military, or alluded to incidents of corruption in the Ukrainian administration.¹⁹

19. Interestingly, CyBC's second TV channel RIK2 was among several international broadcasters that relayed the International Charity Concert-Marathon 'Save Ukraine – #StopWar' on 27 March 2022.



The incongruity of the situation came to a head a few weeks into the war though perhaps not before these reports had likely affected public perception. On occasion the public broadcaster’s Moscow correspondent adopted Kremlin terminology when referring to advances of the Russian army or the alleged ideological leanings of sections of the Ukrainian army. This generated some reaction publicly but more friction internally. So much so, that a member of the board of the public broadcaster publicly slammed the correspondent for ‘propagandistic’ reporting and ‘baseless justifications of the invasion’ while a Cypriot diplomat described the reporting as “unacceptably biased.” Fully aware that it would be wrong to intervene in the broadcaster’s work, they did, however, feel obliged to approach key people within the organisation on a personal basis and unofficially “simply to voice our concern.”

The correspondent was subsequently demoted to stringer status on a piece-by-piece dispatch arrangement whenever the broadcaster demanded. Similarly, a Cypriot parliamentarian publicly derided the coverage reminding that Russia had invaded Ukraine, just as Turkey had done in Cyprus and that Putin and Erdogan were dictators and that the truth should not be “beautified”. The public broadcaster’s Moscow correspondent responded that the MP was trying to censor him.

In time (but fairly late, in June 2022) the affair was settled and the reporting was re-calibrated when the CYBC engaged a Kyiv based correspondent with a deeper knowledge of the country and more immediate access to unfolding events than its correspondent in Moscow.

The problem raised broader issues of how media but more specifically public broadcasters with correspondents based in Moscow could operate freely when it was widely acknowledged that most of them worked under conditions which obliged them to tow Kremlin’s guidelines or risk being expelled.

Questioned during a podcast (Lifo, Greece) on 13 October 2022 CYBC's correspondent played down any sense of pressure on foreign correspondents from the Russian authorities and said any punitive measures, including imprisonment, against those who were critical of the army in times of war, concerned only Russian citizens *not* foreign correspondents. He added that if foreign correspondents 'anywhere' were to fall foul with any state authorities, access to sources and events would become more difficult and accreditation may be removed. When pressed on the credibility of his reporting given that he had consistently reported that Russia would not invade Ukraine he said that he had not himself believed that Russia would engage in this "war operation".

On **8 March** the media described Moscow's demands for an agreement with Kyiv as "outrageous" while reporting that humanitarian corridors were laid with mines by Russian forces. Mariupol, where thousands of diaspora Greeks lived, continued to attract attention.

Most crucially media focused on the Cypriot government's decision to scrap its agreement with Moscow allowing Russian warships to dock in Cypriot ports. Phileleftheros reported that at least five Russian ships including frigates and support vessels had been denied access to Limassol port. The newspaper said it had confirmed with sources that Nicosia denied access citing the ongoing war in Ukraine. Various media pointed to the pressure that the Republic had come under by the US and the UK to proceed with the annulment of the related 2021 agreement with Russia.

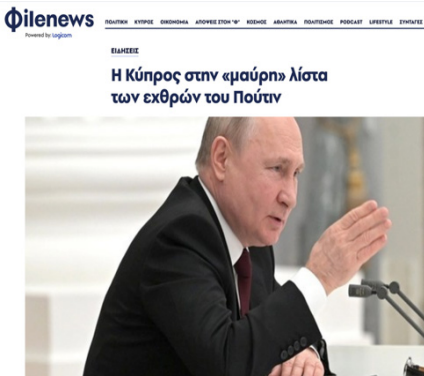
In an interview with Phileleftheros, Foreign minister Kasoulides returned to the issue of Cyprus' reservation on the closure of the EU (and Cypriot) airspace to Russian aircraft. He indicated that if Turkey instrumentalised the closure of the airspace, Cyprus could re-examine its decision. "Ankara cannot be walking on an irrational path, harming the interests of the EU and its member states and ignoring its commitments against NATO."

Politis published an opinion-poll noting that Cypriots agree with the government's decision to adopt EU sanctions against Russia (59%). Moreover, 79% responded that Russia 'invaded' Ukraine, while only 6% adopted Moscow's narrative of a "peace operation". Additionally, 84% said the Russian invasion in Ukraine is similar to Turkey's invasion in Cyprus in 1974. [Greek] Cypriots remain divided over the prospect of their country joining NATO (42% in favour, 45% against). [The figures are rather high when compared to the EC and EP surveys outlined in the following pages here. But the poll result cannot be disputed even though one of the key problems with polls featured in the media in Cyprus is that they rarely reveal the entity that paid for them. It is widely acknowledged that media themselves are not financially capable of supporting large surveys].

Politis also featured an interview with ambassador Andreas Mavroyiannis - whom AKEL would later support in the 2023 presidential elections - who indicated that

Russia's international image has been humiliated and that the country now appears to be an international "pariah": "Putin's Russia underestimated the peoples' will for freedom and self-determination and disrespected the Ukrainians' dignity and national conscience," Mavroyiannis stressed.

Russia's announcement that all its business agreements with companies and persons from countries it deemed "unfriendly" would require the approval of a government committee, dominated media. Most reported the list of "unfriendly countries" that followed the EU's sanctions against Russia and included Cyprus as an EU member state as well as Australia, Canada, Iceland, Japan, Monaco, Montenegro, New Zealand, Norway, Taiwan, San Marino, Singapore, South Korea, Switzerland, Ukraine, UK and the US.



At the same time there was concern about Moscow's impending response regarding Cyprus' position on the Ukraine question and all media pointed to a Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson's provocative post against Greece which had irritated Athens. The reports quickly pointed to the caution that was required given Russia's status as a permanent member of the UN Security Council.

On **9 March** the media focused on growing concerns over the Cypriot economy pointing to a 1.5% to 2% loss of GDP because of fewer tourists in 2022 which had been estimated at 800,000 from both Russia and Ukraine. The departure of the "Big 4" global accounting firms from Russia also caused concern in terms of a domino effect to the financial services sector in Cyprus. Beyond the Big 4's own operations in Cyprus, legal and auditing firms with Russian clientele feared they would have no way to collect debts from their customers.

And, finally, there were reports of the European Parliament's discussion on "golden passports/visas" granted to Russian citizens with the European Commission telling the European Parliament that procedures of granting passports/visas to third country nationals would have to be reviewed. At this time Cyprus was seen

as having breached EU law through its citizenship for investment programme. Politis reported that the Cyprus Investment Programme was officially over and that out of 722 pending applications, 85% had already been rejected.

On **10 March** the shelling of a children's hospital in Mariupol by Russian forces was given extensive coverage reflecting growing criticism against Moscow globally and appeared to change the mood of the reporting. On the same day the Interior ministry announced that since the start of the war, Cyprus had received 2,935 Ukrainians.

On **11 March**, fifteen days into the invasion the media, reporting on the informal EU Council in Versailles, pointed to president Anastasiades criticising Turkey's refusal to align with sanctions against Russia stressing that this severely affected the effectiveness of the measures. He stated that the Republic of Cyprus, as a country under occupation for almost 48 years fully acknowledged what was occurring in Ukraine, and expressed its steady support for the diplomatic efforts to end the war. Ant1 TV's Brussels correspondent noted that the US was calling on the EU to ban imports on oil and natural gas from Russia regardless of consequences and costs. The correspondent added that the EU agreed that it must limit its dependency on Russia, but was divided as to the time required for this, with Germany in particular noting that the EU had no other choice but disengaging would take time.

Haravgi noted that the European Council in Versailles concluded without specific decisions on how to help member states manage the rapid increases of energy prices. By this time Turkey's attempt to appear as a "peacemaker" emerges, which is seen suspiciously in the media, given Turkey's track record not just in Cyprus but also in other countries in the region.

On **12 March** the possibility of sanctioned Russian oligarchs being Cypriot passport holders made headlines the day after the UK's decision to sanction Roman Abramovich and Oleg Deripaska. Citing sources from the banking sector, Phileleftheros reported that thorough checks were being carried out to identify individuals sanctioned by the EU and the US. Meanwhile the European Parliament accused Cyprus, Malta and Bulgaria of demonstrating opportunistic behaviour on the question of rescinding passports offered to Russian oligarchs. Legal and accounting associations called for meetings with competent ministries to discuss the matter, expressing concern over the impact EU decisions would have on their businesses.

By **14 March** and even though Russian aggression continued on the ground most media led with hopes that a diplomatic breakthrough might be achieved after some positive messaging during bilateral negotiations. Media noted, however, that president Putin had so far been "unwilling to terminate military operations in Ukraine, where the humanitarian crisis is growing."

Key moment: Mission to Ukraine

In the second week of March a reporter and a photojournalist from Politis (Costas Constantinou and Katerina Papadopoulou) crossed into Ukraine through Poland. They did so at their own initiative and in what one of them described as “fundamental journalistic curiosity” but were supported by their newspaper. They managed to reach Odessa and sent daily dispatches for a week which got front-page coverage in the newspaper.



The two journalists would revisit Ukraine in April, travelling through Moldavia and would reach Kyiv in the aftermath of the recapturing of northern suburbs by the Ukrainian army sending daily dispatches to Politis.

It is rare for Cypriot media outlets to send a mission to a war zone; it is mostly a problem of capacity and financing. We understand that three other Cypriot journalists attempted to enter Ukraine but were only able to reach the border with Moldova. In the rare occasion when Cypriot journalists find themselves in front-line-witness-situations it has traditionally been the case that on their return other media outlets (usually TV or radio) defying any competitive spirit would invite them to recount their experience. In the case of the two journalists who travelled to Ukraine - twice - this curiously did not occur except on one occasion when one TV channel, Alpha TV, hosted them on a lunch-time news show.

On **15 March** local reports remained critical against Russian aggression in Ukraine, with the focus on Mariupol and Odessa. Politis featured reporting from the humanitarian crisis in Lyiv, while Phileleftheros posted statements of the head of the Ukrainian community in Cyprus describing the difficulties of people who had arrived on island. There was also some coverage of Russian TV journalist Maria Ovsyannikova's walk-out in front of studio cameras during an evening news broadcast on Russian state television with a placard that read “Stop the war” and “They're lying to you”.

Αγνοείται η δημοσιογράφος που εισέβαλε στη ρωσική τηλεόραση

Ειδήσεις > Διεθνή > Αγνοείται η δημοσιογράφος που...

Offsite Team - 15.03.2022



Haravgi in a short report under the title “The war spreads death everywhere” pointed to the propaganda battle with US and European countries putting across only the Ukrainian position and publicizing only the deaths resulting from Russian bombing raids as they attempt to shock and turn public opinion against Russia. It accompanied the text with a photograph which it said showed the death scene from a Ukrainian attack which killed 25 civilians in Donetsk (above).

On **16 March** Phileleftheros featured a double interview with the ambassadors of Russia and Ukraine in Cyprus. Ignoring international outcry after three weeks of atrocities, Russian ambassador Stanislav Osadchiy defended Moscow’s operations claiming that the West had ignored Moscow’s concerns and red lines. He dismissed any analogy between the Turkish invasion in 1974 and Russian operations in Ukraine and described NATO’s approach to the Russian borders as a threat to Moscow. Osadchiy said Cyprus’ support for EU measures against Russia was ‘an unfriendly action’. The ambassador warned that Moscow “was taking notes” of each country’s behaviour, indicating that this will have an impact on future bilateral relationships.

The same edition of Phileleftheros carried an interview with Ukraine’s ambassador in Cyprus, Ruslan Nitsminsky, who stressed Ukraine’s determination to win the war despite ongoing shelling from Russian forces against many cities. He also expressed his gratitude to Cyprus for its help and support describing ties between the two countries as strong.

On **17 March** and even though Russian forces continued to shell Ukrainian cities, media headlines focused on efforts for a diplomatic breakthrough specifically

that Russian Foreign minister Lavrov had left a window for compromise, though stressing that negotiations were difficult. President Putin's address, alleging that the world was paying the price for Western ambitions, was widely picked up, as was Ukrainian president Zelenskyy's address to the US Congress, during which he called Washington to do more for his country. Phileleftheros reported that dozens of Ukrainian tourists who were already visiting Cyprus before the invasion were now stranded. Many of them were staying in Larnaca and, as they were running out of money, they counted on the Municipality and volunteers to provide them with the basics.

On **21 March** Ukrainian president Zelenskyy's warning that unless Russia stops the invasion, a third world war could be on the cards made the headlines. Phileleftheros and Kathimerini featured articles on Turkey's effort to capitalise on its role as a mediator in the war. On **22 March** US president Biden's warning that Russia may use chemical weapons dominated the headlines. Phileleftheros reported that Russian forces were destroying Kyiv, Mariupol and Kharkov, while shelling had also started in Odessa. Politis led with the military support the West was offering to Ukraine in the form of anti-aircraft equipment.

In terms of the local effect a total of 8,000 Ukrainians were reported to have arrived in Cyprus since 25 February. More than 30 hotels in the Famagusta district had declared interest to host Ukrainian refugees. A number of Ukrainian refugees from Mariupol found refuge in Pafos. The Mayor said they were welcome to stay. At the same time Phileleftheros reported on a meeting held by the Limassol Mayor about the impact of the war on the city. With 3,500 Ukrainian refugees the city was said to be facing pressure in meeting basic needs.

On **23 March** the growing humanitarian crisis and increased number of civilian casualties in Ukraine, especially in Mariupol, dominated headlines. Reports noted the Greek Foreign minister's plans to lead a humanitarian mission to the area. On the military front, reports indicated that Russian soldiers were having a hard time as Ukrainian forces were reportedly regaining the control of areas in the south. Local reports also picked up Kyiv's statement that Russian forces were facing problems in their supply chains.

On **24 March** the Foreign affairs and Finance ministries assured that Cyprus was taking all required steps to implement sanctions against Russian oligarchs. Haravgi in its inside pages ran a report under the headline "Moscow clarifies the significance of Mariupol" (below, left) which reported on Moscow's strategic intention to securely link up Crimea with the Russian-speaking provinces of Donetsk and Lugansk making little reference to the bombings and atrocities committed referring only to the 100,000 trapped under inhuman conditions in the city. It also added that Vladimir Putin had "check-mated" hostile countries by announcing that Russia would be accepting payments for natural gas from them only in rubles.



100.000 διαβίματα περιόρισαν στην οδό

Εκκενθέρωσε τη σημασία της Μαριούπολης η Μόσχα

Η Μόσχα ανακοίνωσε ότι η σημασία της Μαριούπολης έχει αυξηθεί σημαντικά λόγω της εκκενθέρωσης των 100.000 διαβίματων στην οδό. Η ρωσική κυβέρνηση ανακοίνωσε ότι η Μαριούπολη είναι η τελευταία πόλη της Ουκρανίας που βρίσκεται στην ακτή του Αζοφικού Κόλπου και ότι η εκκενθέρωση της σημαίνει ότι η πόλη έχει πέσει στα χέρια των ρωσικών δυνάμεων.

Απορροφεί η ενίσχυση της ανατολικής πτέρυγας του ΝΑΤΟ

Η ενίσχυση της ανατολικής πτέρυγας του ΝΑΤΟ μπορεί να απορροφήσει την πίεση που ασκείται στην Ελλάδα λόγω της κρίσης στην Ουκρανία. Η Ελλάδα είναι μέλος της ανατολικής πτέρυγας του ΝΑΤΟ και η ενίσχυση της μπορεί να βοηθήσει στην προστασία της χώρας.

Ποικίλες «θόρες» οι ανάγκες πόρους σταμάτησαν στην Ελλάδα

Η Ελλάδα αντιμετωπίζει ποικίλες «θόρες» στις ανάγκες πόρους σταμάτησαν στην Ελλάδα. Η κυβέρνηση ανακοίνωσε ότι οι ανάγκες πόρους θα καλυφθούν με την υιοθέτηση νέων μέτρων.

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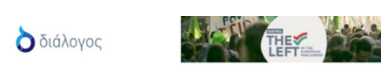
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ΚΥΠΡΟΣ - ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΗ - ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΑ - ΡΕΠΟΡΤΑΖ - ΔΙΕΘΝΗ

Το τίμημα το πληρώνει η ΕΕ, αλλά οι ΗΠΑ θησαυρίζουν

March 26, 2022 - 9:51 am

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On 25 March the media led with the EU Summit’s conclusions, as the EU27 expressed preparedness for additional sanctions against Russia and the creation of a Ukraine Solidarity Fund. Ahead of the Summit, president Anastasiades said Cyprus must find its place in a renewed architecture for the protection of the security and values of Europe. He also underlined that Cyprus could contribute to the EU’s energy independence through the creation of energy corridors for the export of natural gas and cleaner energy to EU markets.

By this point there were several dimensions to the war coverage which were not directly about the war itself. These fall-out issues permitted any media that chose not to focus on the substance or the atrocities or were cautious about addressing the political and security aspects surrounding it, to become preoccupied with other issues. For example, the energy crisis and the effects on prices, Turkey’s newfound role and its president’s machinations, the EU’s pursuit of independence from Russian gas and Cyprus’ potential role in that prospect and the refugee crisis.

Overall, however, the reporting was comprehensive in terms of the persistency and urgency of the new “breaking news minute-by-minute” cycle where online manifestations of news outlets were trying to outdo each other with their clickbait update and urgency. On occasion headlines used hinged on the hyperbole or slanted a story

in a way that predictably predisposed the reader in the direction of the paper's own editorial perspective. There were repeated instances when minute-by-minute developments were just relayed as they were posted on Greek news sites and were copy-pasted without thought or double checking.

It was on occasion also a matter of the stories selected and the slant given to them. For example, when online portal Dialogos (affiliated to Haravgi, AKEL) reported on the EU's deal with the United States to supply an additional 15 billion cubic metres of liquified natural gas as a step towards reducing Europe's energy dependency on Russia, it did so under the headline (above, right). "The EU pays the price but the US makes a fortune."

On **29 March** the headlines related to Cyprus supporting the implementation of measures with regard to the revocation of passports given to Russian nationals on the EU sanctions list. Headlines also pointed to Cyprus' support for the creation of an EU-level registration platform for all refugees from Ukraine. On **30 March** the peace talks in Istanbul received widespread coverage including Russian promises to scale back military operations, plus Kyiv's offer of neutral status without foreign troops in return for security guarantees.

Phileleftheros, published an article stating that from the first day of the Ukrainian crisis, Turkey had been trying to win international and European support, presenting itself as an honest mediator and how Cyprus was moving in a parallel direction, trying to brief, first and foremost, its partners within the European Union. But there was frustration among media commentators as Cyprus' efforts appear ineffective with Europe, which instead of looking to their own Member State had begun to look at Turkey with a more positive eye, with Turkish president Erdogan basking as a peacemaker.

On **31 March** there was widespread factual coverage across media on the temporary ceasefire in Mariupol announced by the Russian Defence ministry for the evacuation of civilians from the besieged city but with media pointing to the erosion of trust in Moscow's statements. In this context, there was also wide coverage of the role of, and praise given by the representative of the Ukrainian delegation to, Turkey's President Erdogan's role in the Ukraine-Russia talks held in Istanbul.

The Cyprus News Agency reported on the statement made by president Anastasiades - picked up by all media - that Cyprus did not have anything against the people of Russia, but was obliged, as a country that had itself been invaded, to observe the position it maintained. He reiterated that "we are following a single, united policy which is set by the EU" but then separately said "We

believe that Russia has supported positions of principle on the Cyprus problem throughout the years” adding “The latest actions however, unfortunately violate international law”, and that as a result “we are obligated as a matter of principle and as a country which has been invaded, where there has been a violation of international law, to have the position which we have been following.”

On **1 April** Russia’s demand for payments of natural gas purchases to be made in rubles dominated headlines, seen by most media as a blackmail directed at the EU which was, however, rejected by Germany and France. On **4 April** the mass killing of civilians in Bucha by Russian forces became the focus as the EU contemplated the adoption of a fifth round of sanctions against Moscow. Media suggested Cyprus would not raise any objections against new sanctions, while the foreign ministry called for caution around false information portraying Cyprus as pro-Russia.

Key moment: Arms Talk

In a story that directly related to Cyprus the Sunday Kathimerini reported on 3 April that the United States had called on the Cypriot National Guard to offer its Russian weapons to the Ukrainian Army. The National Guard’s Russian arsenal included T80 & BMP3 tanks, TORM1 & BUK-M1-2 missiles and MI35 helicopters. The paper’s report claimed that Cyprus’ initial response was positive as the US had reportedly offered to replace the items with American-made systems. This was seen as potentially ending the US embargo on arms sales to Cyprus. The report claimed that the deal could put Cyprus on a path of closer collaboration with NATO. The issue stirred political debate between ruling DISY and main opposition AKEL the former expressing support provided that sustainable alternatives will be offered from the US, while AKEL opposing any prospect of Cyprus becoming engaged militarily in the war in Ukraine.

Analysts noted that the maintenance of the current Russian made armaments may prove cumbersome for Cyprus considering the EU’s sanctions against Moscow, which Nicosia had complied with. While the possible contribution of arms to Ukraine would likely be viewed as more symbolic than significantly tipping the scales, it would place Cyprus with historically warm ties to Moscow in the West’s camp, the Cyprus Mail reported, and noted that the Republic had already been listed as an “unfriendly” country by Moscow for its participation in EU sanctions²⁰.

20. Experts maintain that practically Cyprus could not have supplied arms given its own precarious situation - at least not in any short timeframe - and that the issue was never substantively raised by the US. The debate on a political and media level reflected more the “micropolicy” tendency in Cyprus rather than a debate based on reality. It should be noted, however, that Cyprus did offer military expertise to Ukraine, under a collective EU context, on mine-clearance/disposal.

On **5 April** the images from Bucha’s mass graves sparked global outrage and were widely reported on across the media with the exception of left-wing Haravgi. The gruesome footage of corpses of unarmed civilians combined with Moscow’s inadequate response were another turning point in terms of the Cypriot public’s perception of the war and the prospect of further EU sanctions and Cyprus’ support for them. On the economic front, the departure of the online gaming company Wargaming from Russia and Belarus made local headlines, given that the company had a significant presence in Cyprus. Politis noted that Wargaming’s departure could eventually benefit the Cypriot economy, as some of the company’s operations could be transferred to the island. On **7 April** the expulsion of up to 200 Russian diplomats from various EU member states including Greece made headlines but there was no reporting on whether Cyprus would follow, though media noted that “atrocities in Bucha have further worsened views against Russia”.

Key moment: Zelenskyy’s address to the parliament



On **April 8** the leading story in media - except in Haravgi - was the extraordinary plenary session of the House of Representatives - the day before - during which Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy addressed the Cypriot parliament via teleconference. Zelenskyy’s failure to mention Turkey’s invasion of 1974 cast a shadow over his address (‘Not a word reference to Turkish invasion’, said ANTI1 above) and was met with disappointment by the majority of the Greek Cypriot political establishment.

Crucially, the main opposition AKEL boycotted the session, citing the screening of a video-message from an Azov fighter during Zelenskyy’s address to the Hellenic Parliament the day before. AKEL’s decision caused a stir though several of its members of parliament explained that the party stood by the Ukrainian people but wouldn’t tolerate the legitimisation of neo-Nazi groups.

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Στην τελική ευθεία οι εκλογές

Ο κινήτρος «ελάφια» 110.000 από νερόνια

Ζητούμε να κλείσει η δίκη για τον φόνο του Νέφτι

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Μίλησε ο Ζελένσκι δεν άκουσε το ΑΚΕΛ

➤ Ζητούμε να κλείσει η δίκη για τον φόνο του Νέφτι. ➤ Ζητούμε να κλείσει η δίκη για τον φόνο του Νέφτι. ➤ Ζητούμε να κλείσει η δίκη για τον φόνο του Νέφτι.

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ΠΡΟΣΕ ΑΝΑΓΡΑΦΗΣ
Καθίσταται όποιον βάζει μπουράκι σου

ΕΥΡΩΠΑΙΚΟ ΣΥΜΒΟΥΛΙΟ
Παραπομπή λογισμίου για «κρυπτο» κρυπτογράφηση

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Παρασέρνει τα πάντα το τσουνάμι της ακρίβειας και η κυβέρνηση αδιαφορεί

Το κόστος για το νοικοκυριό και τις μικρομεσαίες επιχειρήσεις αυξήθηκε κατά 16,6%

Εκεί και τότε προέβλεπε το σενάριο για τον πληθωρισμό ο οποίος έφτανε στο 7,7% σύμφωνα με τον προγραμματισμό

Το Μέγιστο το 2021, στην πληθωρισμό το μέσο αυξήθηκε κατά 3,0% από 2,2% αντίστοιχα

Το κόστος στα νοικοκυριά Μεσογειακού αιώθηκε κατά 5,4% και κατά 2,7% για σπουδαία νοικοκυριά και τα οποία ελάφια

Αντιδράσεις σε Ελλάδα και Κύπρο προκαλούν τα διαγράμματα Ζελένσκι

Η ηγεσία ούτως, οι αντιδράσεις στην Ελλάδα και στην Κύπρο προκαλούν τα διαγράμματα Ζελένσκι

ΤΡΙΑ ΧΡΥΣΙΑ ΑΥΧΕΣ, 156 ΔΙΑΔΩΜΑΤΑ, 90 ΕΞΕΛΑΞΕ...

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President Anastasiades and members of his cabinet were in attendance as were foreign diplomats including the Ukrainian ambassador to Cyprus. The reports referred to Zelenskyy’s key messages - calling on Cyprus to fully block access to Russian ships and private yachts, annul Cypriot passports from Russian nationals until they proved they hadn’t worked to harm Ukraine, and for Cyprus and the EU to stop funding Russia. However, because of related remarks by the Cypriot president and the House Speaker, they focused less on Zelenskyy’s messages and more on their annoyance that the Ukrainian leader had failed to mention anything about Turkey’s invasion in Cyprus.

Phileleftheros noted that Zelenskyy’s addresses to the parliaments of Greece and Cyprus “set the stage on fire” which was indicative of how the media generally focused on the aftermath Zelenskyy caused and not the messaging the Ukrainian president had delivered.

Anastasiades, however, did say after the plenary session: “We did not expect a reference to the Turkish invasion today, of course there should have been one. What we expected today was to hear what the Ukrainian people are suffering now; we suffered the same in 1974. We are disturbed by the fact that there has not been any mention. The principles of law do not distinguish between states and the rights of some being violated and of others being ignored. What we did is our duty to international legality. If there are others with a more flexible conscience or who can tolerate similar acts as long as they are not affected, this is completely alien to the principles that govern a European country and especially a country that has experienced and is still experiencing to this day

the suffering of an invasion that was staged or justified with exactly the same arguments and on the same unfortunately non-existent facts.”

It must also be noted that in the lead up to the Russian invasion and when Zelenskyy addressed the parliaments of Greece and Cyprus there had been an undercurrent of presenting Ukraine as a neo-Nazi state based on real but as it turned out marginal expressions of it in the East of the country. This, some of our conversations with experts showed, was seen as a text-book communication tool used consistently by Russia since the Maidan Square protests in Kyiv. It caught on and was particularly attractive for the media and the political body politic of the left but tended to clash with the emerging Russophile new rich class of the financial services and property sectors. They had traditionally come from the depths of anti-communism but now had many dealings with post-Soviet Russian plutocrats. And though this narrative clashed with the Jewish ancestry of the president of Ukraine the inconsistency was never fully explored or filtered through critical or factual analysis except in two newspapers: Kathimerini and Politis.

A few days after Zelenskyy’s address, on **11 April**, most media reported on the outcry against Russia for alleged war crimes with more than 1,200 people reported killed in the outskirts of Kyiv. It was interesting that Haravgi also reported on this in its inside pages under the headline ‘Ukraine begins inquiries into 5.600 cases of war crimes’ and used remarks by the Ukrainian Attorney General describing Putin as ‘a war criminal of the 21st century’.

Η Ουκρανία έχει ξεκινήσει 5.600 έρευνες για εγκλήματα πολέμου

Με τις μάχες να συνεχίζονται στο πεδίο, αλλά και οι μίσητοι της προσημάνσης, μαίνεται ο πόλεμος στην Ουκρανία.

Τουλάχιστον 1.200 σοφοί έχουν ανακαλυφθεί στην περιοχή του Χάρκοβ, που είτε εν μέρει καταλήφθηκε για εβδομάδες από τις ρωσικές δυνάμεις, άλλως την Κυριακή η γενική εισαγγελία της Ουκρανίας, Ιρίνα Βενεντρίτσβα, στο Βρετανικό τσάινοσάι διαστο-Sky News. Την ίδια ώρα οι ουκρανικές Αρχές έχουν ξεκινήσει 5.600 έρευνες για εγκλήματα πολέμου, τα οποία φέρηται να διερευνάσαν από την έναρξη της ρωσικής εισβολής στις 24 Φεβρουαρίου.

Η Ιρίνα Βενεντρίτσβα, οι υπηρεσίες της οποίας είναι εμπιστευτικές με το σύνταγμα των υπηρεσιών προσημάνσης να ελεγχθεί οι αριθμούς των ανθρώπων που σκοτώσαν από την έναρξη του πολέμου, δεν διακρίθηκαν αν οι σοφοί που ανακαλύφθησαν είναι μόνο άμαχοι.

Πριν από μία εβδομάδα, η Βενεντρίτσβα είχε κάνει λόγο για τα πτώματα 410 αμάχων που είχαν βρεθεί στα εδάφη που απελευθερώθησαν στην περιοχή του Χάρκοβ.

Η εισαγγελία έχει αρχίσει τότε να εννοείται πως υπάρχουν μαζικά αμαρτωλίες και άλλες σοφοί που δεν είναι σωστή περιουσία και αφορολόγητες.

Μόνο στην πύλη Μπρούκλι, βασισμένα του Χάρκοβ, ασπών 300 άνωματα άρρωστοι σε αρ-

θικούς τάφους, σύμφωνα με απολογισμοί που είναι αναμενόμενοι οι ουκρανικές Αρχές στις 2 Απριλίου.

Χαρακτηρίζοντας τον Ρώσο Πρόεδρο Βλαντίμιρ Πούτιν «φασαίο εγκληματία πολέμου του 21ου αιώνα», η Ουκρανία γράφει εισαγγελικές δόλωμα πως έχουν ταυτοποιήσει 5.600 περιπτώσεις αφορολόγων εγκληματιών πολέμου, καθώς και 500 Ρώσους εγκληματίες πολέμου.

Αναγράφεται κυρίως στην επίθεση εναντίον του αεροδρομικού σταθμού του Κρατιντόρε (ουκρανικά) κατά την οποία 52 άμαχοι μεταξύ των οποίων 5 παιδιά σκοτώσαν σε ένα σπύτημα που αποδόθηκε σε ρωσικό πύραυλο.

Σύμφωνα με τον περιφερειάρχη του Ντιν-προπετρίεβ (γενναίτη Ουκρανική) Βολοντίμ Ρεβιτάνκο, οι αεροβόμβες του Ντινέρο βερ-



αριτη ενάντια ανθρώπινα δικαιώματα για να βοηθήσει τον κόσμο να διακριθεί από τις αφορολόγους συρροές στο ανατολικό τμήμα της χώρας, συμπεριλαμβανομένης της απαίτησης με άλλους σπύτηματα ηρώων από τη Μαρσάλια.

Πέραν των 4,4 εκατ. οι πρόσφυγες, ενώ η Ουκρανία αναφέρει ότι τουλάχιστον 1.200 σοφοί έχουν ανακαλυφθεί στην περιοχή του Χάρκοβ

βλήθησαν χίτες από τους Ρώσους και καταστράφηκε ολοσχερώς. Επίσης, άλλως ότι διακρίθηκε γράφοντες στα συνήματα μιας εγκατάστασης υποδομών που ζευγάνησαν στην πύλη Ζβόντοσε και πρόβλεπε πως λειτουργεί για θέματα δια αναμενόμενων αργότερα.

Εν ταυ μεταξύ, το Χάρκοβ συμφορμάνος για τη

το καλύτερο με άλλους και εκτοξούτες αεροβόμβες.

Η Επίτροπος Ανθρώπινων Δικαιωμάτων της Ρωσίας, Τ. Μοσκόβιτσοβα, επιβεβαίωσε ότι η Ρωσία και η Ουκρανία προσημάνσης το Σάββατο σε αναλλαγή ασφαλείας. Η ίδια είπε ότι μεταξύ αμάχων που παραδόθηκαν στη Ρωσία υπήρχαν τσάινοσάι τραγέματα στην Κρατική Εταιρεία Ατομικής Ενέργειας Rosatom και στρατιώτες.

Επίσης, το ρωσικό Υπουργείο Άμυνας ανακοίνωσε ότι ουκρανικό κομμάτι τηλεγραφιστήρων και αεροπορικών καταπύρησαν από ρωσικά μαχητικά ελικόπτερα.

Ο αριθμός των προσφύγων που εγκαταστάσαν στην Ουκρανία δια έστρωσαν πλέον τα 4,4 εκατομμύρια, σύμφωνα με τον ΟΗΕ. Το πρώτο του Σάββατου καταγράφησαν 59.347 προσεγγίσεις από την Τσεχοσκλαβία.

Kathimerini returned to its exclusive story that Washington had called on Nicosia to offer its Russian-made weapons to the Ukrainian army and how it caused a reaction from the Russian Embassy in Nicosia. The Russian ambassador was said to have pointed out to the Cypriot ministry of Foreign Affairs that contracts for Russian weapons had a clause that required Moscow’s consent, if the systems were to be sold on (ref. earlier footnote 20).

On **13 April** reports focused on 21 Russians who were to be stripped of their Cypriot passports as they were included in the European Commission’s sanctions list. Also, in a rare intervention the Archbishop of Cyprus called the Russian invasion of Ukraine “unjustified” and said the scenes the world witnessed could not be explained in any way. Speaking to state broadcaster CYBC the Archbishop called on Russian president Putin to desist and show compassion for the people of Ukraine.



Politis’ reporter and photographer who had entered Ukraine in mid-March travelled there again in April with their reports coming from Irpin, “which became a symbol of Russian atrocities”. On **14 April** they reported from Bucha and the mass graves discovered in the area. Similarly, Phileleftheros wrote about “a bloodbath in Ukraine”. It also reported that since the Russian invasion 14,000 Ukrainian refugees had arrived in Cyprus. Most of them were staying at relatives’ homes with only 6,000 applying for temporary protection. Hundreds had reportedly departed for other destinations or chose to return close to the Ukrainian borders.

Key moment: Russia's intentions in the northern part of Cyprus

On **17 April** the weekly Kathimerini reported that the Russian Embassy would be opening an office in the northern part of Cyprus to serve Russian nationals living there. The story generated considerable debate on social media. The Russian Embassy issued a statement refuting the claims clarifying that Moscow was “exploring the possibilities” of providing assistance to thousands of Russian nationals living in the territories over which the government of the Republic did not exercise effective control. Assistance, it said, might include consular services, but also humanitarian, cultural and educational support and that “all our steps are coordinated with the authorities of the Republic of Cyprus.” By the end of the month the general view was that the government had been aware of the development and had been consulted on Russia's intentions long ago and that while not exactly welcome, particularly in terms of timing, Moscow's move wasn't seen as an aggressive step or a sign of potential Russian recognition of the north.

Haravgi picked up a report from EURACTIV which said that Greece, Cyprus and Malta blocked sanctions against Russian-owned ships aiming to ban Russian ships, or those with Russian interests, from EU ports. It said the three countries vetoed the European Commission proposal for a full ban on all Russian-interest ships to European ports. Days later all media would report on the matter along with the Cypriot Deputy Shipping minister's concerns that if the sanctions were widened to cover all ships with Russian interests, not just Russian-flagged, then Cyprus's shipping register could expect losses of up to 10%.

On **20 April** the Speaker of the House of Representatives visited the Poland-Ukraine border together with the Women Presidents of EU national parliaments upon the initiative of the President of the Lower House of the Polish parliament. In statements to media, she said that the visit sent a political message on the need to stop the war, while it was also a message of cooperation and of solidarity towards refugees. But, the headlines led with her remarks that Cyprus deeply understood the situation because it had gone through the Turkish invasion of 1974.

By the **end of April** Mariupol's expected fall under the control of the Russian forces became the running top story while Politis's front-line correspondent spoke of fears that another war crime might be taking place in Izium, where 15,000 civilians were said to have been trapped. The last days of the month saw Russian Foreign minister Sergei Lavrov's warning (on 25 April) not to underestimate the elevated risks of nuclear conflict over Ukraine given what he viewed as NATO being “in essence” engaged in a proxy war with Russia by supplying Kyiv with weaponry.

Looking further ahead, another key moment came when **in September** the Russian Federation appointed Murat Zyazikov as its new ambassador to the Republic of Cyprus. All media - except the left's Haravgi and Dialogos - expressed concern

as Zyazikov was formerly a member of the intelligence services of Russia (FSB) and of the former Soviet Union (KGB). Also citing the fact that the ambassador was a Muslim, the media presented the appointment as “a message to several recipients”, speculating that he would seek to strengthen relations with the northern part of the island and increase contacts with the Turkish Cypriot leadership. Politis citing diplomatic sources said “It may also be another gift from president Putin to his Turkish counterpart Erdogan, who is his only interlocutor from the West”.



In the same month, on **22 September**, in a rare television address president Putin doubled down on the war in Ukraine and ordered Russia’s first mobilization since World War II. He called up hundreds of thousands of reservists and retired fighters saying more manpower was needed to win a war not just against Ukraine, but against its western backers. **On the 23rd** a scheduled meeting between President Anastasiades and Russian Foreign minister Lavrov in New York on the margins of the UN General Assembly was cancelled because of the developments in Ukraine and the EU’s decision to cancel all bilateral meetings with Russian officials.

Ο ΦΙΛΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΟΣ
 ΗΜΕΡΗΣΙΑ ΕΚΔΟΣΗ ΣΤΑΘΕΡΑ ΠΡΟΣΤΑΣΙΑ ΤΩΝ ΑΝΤΙΣΤΡΕΦΩΝ

ΚΑΛΩΣΗΡΑ ΕΓΓΡΑΦΗ
 Στον προσηλυτισμό κατά της Ελλάδας.
 Ένας ελληνικός εκδοτικός οίκος έχει βάλει στόχο να φέρει στην Ελλάδα τον αμερικανικό τύπο.

ΝΕΟ ΠΡΟΤΥΠΟ ΚΑΙ
 Φόβος για αντίστροφη μετά την επίθεση με Όθρυο.
 Ολοκληρώθηκε η πρώτη επίθεση με Όθρυο στην Ελλάδα. Ο φόβος για αντίστροφη μετά την επίθεση με Όθρυο.

ΠΡΟΣΑΡΜΟΓΗ ΣΤΟ ΔΕΛΤΑΜΑΧΟ
 Ο Ρουσόπουλος στην Ορόφυλο.
 Ο Ρουσόπουλος στην Ορόφυλο. Ο φόβος για αντίστροφη μετά την επίθεση με Όθρυο.

Μεγάλη παρουσία και αυξημένη αγορά
 Η παρουσία του Πρωθυπουργού στην Ελλάδα και η αυξημένη αγορά των εφημερίδων.

Πίνακας με Απελευθερωτές με Φιλελεύθερο
 Ο Πίνακας με Απελευθερωτές με Φιλελεύθερο. Ο φόβος για αντίστροφη μετά την επίθεση με Όθρυο.

Ολοκληρώθηκε η πρώτη επίθεση με Όθρυο στην Ελλάδα.
 Ολοκληρώθηκε η πρώτη επίθεση με Όθρυο στην Ελλάδα. Ο φόβος για αντίστροφη μετά την επίθεση με Όθρυο.

Αλλάζουν τους κόμβους, αφήνουν τα κεφάλαια
 Η Ελλάδα αλλάζει τους κόμβους, αφήνουν τα κεφάλαια. Ο φόβος για αντίστροφη μετά την επίθεση με Όθρυο.

Φύλακες 3 μηνών στις επαφές
 Φύλακες 3 μηνών στις επαφές. Ο φόβος για αντίστροφη μετά την επίθεση με Όθρυο.

Επείγει για όλα αρνημένοι οι Έλληνες
 Επείγει για όλα αρνημένοι οι Έλληνες. Ο φόβος για αντίστροφη μετά την επίθεση με Όθρυο.

Καλύτερη επιλογή στην Κύπρο για το 2022
 Καλύτερη επιλογή στην Κύπρο για το 2022. Ο φόβος για αντίστροφη μετά την επίθεση με Όθρυο.

ΔΙΟΡΚΙΣΜΟΣ ΣΤΑ ΑΣΤΡΑΧΑ
 Διόρκιμος στα Αστράχα. Ο φόβος για αντίστροφη μετά την επίθεση με Όθρυο.

78 βουλευτές δεχθήκαν επίθεση
 78 βουλευτές δεχθήκαν επίθεση. Ο φόβος για αντίστροφη μετά την επίθεση με Όθρυο.

Ανεβούν οι φορολογίες για να πάρουν φόρο
 Ανεβούν οι φορολογίες για να πάρουν φόρο. Ο φόβος για αντίστροφη μετά την επίθεση με Όθρυο.

ΠΟΛΙΤΗΣ
 ΗΜΕΡΗΣΙΑ ΕΚΔΟΣΗ ΣΤΑΘΕΡΑ ΠΡΟΣΤΑΣΙΑ ΤΩΝ ΑΝΤΙΣΤΡΕΦΩΝ

Απώλειες 180 εκατ. ευρώ από την αγορά καυσίμων από τα κατεχόμενα
 Απώλειες 180 εκατ. ευρώ από την αγορά καυσίμων από τα κατεχόμενα. Ο φόβος για αντίστροφη μετά την επίθεση με Όθρυο.

ΜΑΡΤΙΝΟΣ ΓΙΑ ΑΣΤΡΑΧΑ
 Τους έρπενε ο κρανίος, χωρίς αποζημιώσεις.
 Ο φόβος για αντίστροφη μετά την επίθεση με Όθρυο.

ΠΡΟΣΟΧΗ ΣΤΙΣ
 Κατά τις προεδρικές εκλογές του 2022.
 Ο φόβος για αντίστροφη μετά την επίθεση με Όθρυο.

ΠΡΟΣΟΧΗ ΣΤΙΣ
 Κατά τις προεδρικές εκλογές του 2022.
 Ο φόβος για αντίστροφη μετά την επίθεση με Όθρυο.

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 Κατά τις προεδρικές εκλογές του 2022.
 Ο φόβος για αντίστροφη μετά την επίθεση με Όθρυο.

By this time, seven months into the war, the media and public opinion had lost interest in the developments. Indicatively the call up of 300,000 reservists in Russia barely made the front pages of the newspapers (above and below in yellow).

Cyprus Mail
CYPRUS Migrants set up home in rough ground in centre of Limassol
BUSINESS 'Next state budget should focus on building resilience'
REPORTAGE Georgia Meloni set to become Italy's first far-right leader since Mussolini

ΧΑΡΑΥΤΗ
Εξέλιξη 12 νέα φέτες η κλήση μετά την απορρόφηση 300.000 Ρωσών
Εκδόσεις Στρατηγικοί ορισμοί οι κρίσιμοι στο ναυτικό ο έλεγχος της Αιγαίου
Εκδόσεις Στρατηγική Βίβλη το κλειδί σε κρίσιμα σκέπη

24 page supplement in Saturday's Cyprus Mail. Masters of the sea. **CYPRUS40** USHERING IN TRANSFORMATION

Putin's nuclear threat is reckless says Nato

Russia calls up 300,000 reservists to fight in Ukraine

Man jailed after found guilty of bestiality

Ο ένας από τους τρεις στέβους εκτελέσει για τον ΑΕΚ... ΟΥΤΟ ΕΤΙΟ ΣΥΝΘΑ ΗΛΕΚΤΡΙΑ ΜΕ ΙΣΑΙΩΤΕΡΑ ΕΡΜΑΙΑ ΑΝΤΑΓΩΝΙΣΤΑ ΟΤΙ ΟΙ ΑΕΕΕΣ ΕΝΤΕΣ ΟΚΤΩΒΡΙΟΥ Η ΟΜΟΡΙΑ...

Βαρύ το κόστος του πλεκτρισμού λόγω ανικανότητας της κυβέρνησης

Αντί για μέτρα μείωσης μεταξύ τους επίσηους και τάρα στένουν έναν το λογαριασμό στους πολίτες

3000 άνθρωποι με πολύ σκληρές αναπηρίες μένουν εγκλωβιστοί

ΑΕΚ: ΔΥΝΑΜΙΚΑ ΣΤΗ ΜΑΧΗ ΤΩΝ ΠΡΟΔΡΟΜΙΚΩΝ ΕΚΔΟΣΩΝ

Απόστολος Λοιβαράς

Απόστολος Λοιβαράς

Απόστολος Λοιβαράς

Απόστολος Λοιβαράς

One year after the war, on the first anniversary of the invasion on **24 February 2023** the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation's main news bulletin's rundown listed it as the third top story of the day.

Ειδήσεις στις Οκτώ 24/02/23

ΜΑΥΡΗ ΕΡΕΤΕΙΟΣ ΓΙΑ ΤΗΝ ΟΥΚΡΑΝΙΑ

The Public Sphere

It can safely be said that Jurgen Habermas' notion of the public sphere²¹, the critical space where societies are expected to engage in purposeful debate, not only exists in Cyprus but that it is, in fact, fairly lively. Yet, beyond a façade of sometimes intense chatter and sterile debate it is easily discernible that it is not only deficient but deeply dysfunctional.

Most importantly the country's overall information space is skewed by the fact that, in a collective sense, its media does not fully operate in the public interest. It is ultimately dependent on the corporate interests of those who control them and on a shadowy political establishment which feeds on the perpetuation of a self-serving and ineffective political party system.

This space is also skewed by the fact that there are very few independent think-tanks or policy formulation organisations. Those that exist are mostly underfunded and, critically, their output is not connected - at least in any meaningful way - to policy formulation at political party or government level. But it is also true that over the last two decades academia has made considerable inroads enriching the barren partisan political discourse with more informed, impartial and nuanced analyses of the issues at hand.

More recently, the political establishment's loss of favour and trust among the public has allowed academia to secure a stronger foothold in the media. The shift has been convenient for the media themselves given that they have moved to prioritize what we have come to call Opinion Journalism over Evidence-based Journalism. The need to secure readership, viewership and especially clicks has expedited this genre of opinion discharge. But, despite an engaged academic community the public debate is still partly framed by the political party system which dominates media narratives and guides public sentiment. In the not-so-distant past the debates had been completely shaped by the political party system. This is no longer the case.

News outlets - print and online - are in fact often overflowing with opinion editorials and commentaries reflecting a disorganized and cacophonous public sphere.

21. Habermas and the Media, Hartmut Wessler, 2018

Beyond academics, however, media are also inundated by vested-interest commentaries from the professional and service sectors - which though part of the public sphere - are again heavily slanted towards political or corporate interests spearheaded by communication consultancies that promote their clients' affairs.

One cannot ignore also that among the members of the House of Representatives there are owners or partners of law firms that had served the interests of Russian (and other nationality) oligarchs. Their defense of Russian interests in Cyprus can easily be traced particularly with regard to criticism of the European Union's sanctions policy. Many such "experts" consistently used disclaimers used in Russian narratives i.e., that Moscow was forced to start the war because of fears of NATO's eastward expansion and Ukraine's accession to the alliance and the EU, or that neo-Nazis and nationalists had seized power in Ukraine. This contributed to the strengthening of an anti-Ukrainian sentiment in Cypriot society and increased distrust in the actions of the EU and US authorities.

Once the series of sanctions began to be imposed experts began to question their effectiveness and legality while many more focused on the harm to the economies of Cyprus and the European Union which, though potentially valid, were smokescreens for the specific interests they served. These were strengthened by left-wing media narratives that regularly published articles about rising prices and declining living standards as a result of the war. In some outlets these were more prominently positioned than reports about the atrocities of the war.

All of this came on top of the chaotic social media sphere, especially X (former Twitter), where experts and academics co-exist uncomfortably with non-experts and general users as well as vicious anonymous trolling accounts. It might be a new more 'democratic' sphere that offers both easy access and broader reach but it is also a symbiosis that is deeply susceptible to risks that damage the credibility of academics and experts and the arguments they hold.

The war triggered a considerable outpour of opinion editorials, mostly in relation to how the Russian invasion compared with Turkey's invasion of Cyprus in 1974 and how the war affected the Cyprus issue geopolitically and diplomatically. More pressingly, of course, how it affected the Cyprus economy. Television and radio discussions were able to convey an array of perspectives on the war but, always in the same vein; questions of what was really happening were trumped mostly by lack of research and expertise and fell back to "What does it mean for Cyprus?"

News outlets also offered a mix of views, with some newspapers like the weekly *Kathimerini*, *Politis* and the *Cyprus Mail* (especially their Sunday editions), carrying a range of translated - in the case of the first two - op-eds from the *New York Times*, *Le Monde* and *The Guardian* and extensive pieces from agencies like *Reuters*. TV and Radio talk shows and in-news-bulletin interviews drew a

range of local experts and academics, perhaps more so than for other topics. This could be explained as a result of politicians being more cautious and hesitant to expose themselves in the minefield between Russian and Western interests.

For the purposes of this study the range of the opinion pieces selected reflect the caution and often the inability to reach a clear-cut decision to address the invasion plainly without any caveats about western provocation. As indicated in the chapter devoted to the coverage, president Zelenskyy's address to the House of Representatives was a turning point for public perception.

On the evening of the Zelenskyy's address, in early April, the presenter of SigmaTV's current affairs programme 'Χωρίς Περιστροφές' (meaning 'Straight Out' or, 'Unambiguously') summed up the day's events in a way that captured the tension and awkwardness of the Cypriot public's perception of the war always associating it to the way they perceived their own unresolved national problem.



The presenter said:

“The world watches with horror and disgust the continuing Russian invasion of Ukraine... whether the slaughter of civilians is an atrocity or not, or, a provocation or not, the essence of the matter is that Ukraine’s people are paying a high price. The war in Ukraine is a vicious war between East and West... Zelenskyy addressed the House of Representatives - in the way that he addressed it - and requested support - and rightly so - and accused the invaders - and rightly so - but on the other hand one expected that he would have also directly addressed himself to Cypriots as a people who have felt the barbarism of Turkey, a continuing occupation and the prospect of division as he and the Ukrainians are now living through.”

But, nothing! Why? Because in the case of Cyprus Turkey is involved, a Turkey that is now a guarantor of Ukraine, and because the enemy of Ukraine is Russia. It is time we the naïve finally understand that unfortunately states are not linked by friendship and love but only by interests. But have we understood it? Or have we turned this into a footballing contest and have become fanatics supporting one side or the other. We opt for a pro-West or a pro-Russian stance ignoring how our own interests should be safeguarded...”

On 23 February 2022, a day before the Russian invasion, in one of the more telling editorials, the Cyprus Mail captured the political quandary faced by the Cypriot political scene. Under the title ‘Our View: Political parties should not mince words over Ukraine,’ it said:

“Cyprus’ political parties grudgingly condemned Russia’s recognition of eastern Ukraine’s breakaway regions, even though some could not even bring themselves to mention Russia by name in their announcements. In Edek’s and Akel’s condemnations there was no mention of the country that had violated international law and the sovereignty of Ukraine by recognising the secessionist regimes of Luhansk and Donetsk.

While Edek “fully understood” Ukraine’s demand for the securing of its sovereign rights, it felt obliged to point out that “Nato should not cause instability in the region and put peace at risk.” Edek also censured the stance of “our European partners that rush to announce sanctions against Russia, but do not follow the same policy against Turkey.” Akel’s position was that “international law and the principle of territorial integrity of states must be respected by all states,” and that diplomacy and dialogue “must not be abandoned.”

Disy leader Averof Neophytou also avoided mentioning Russia with regard to the violation of international law in his statement, focusing instead on the need of Cyprus to act pre-emptively. Cyprus would align itself with the political decision of the EU, he said, but at the same time “we need to examine in depth how our country is affected at economic and political level.” He referred to the possible consequences for the Cyprus problem, the effects of possible sanctions on the economy and the repercussions of possible counter-measures by Russia. ...

There may be economic consequences for Cyprus, but instead of examining how the country’s interests would be affected by the chain of events sparked by Ukraine should the parties not be taking a stand on principle, as they constantly demand of the rest of the world in the case of the Cyprus issue? What Russia has done in the Ukraine is very similar to what Turkey has done in Cyprus. It has even labelled its actions as a ‘peacekeeping’ operation, as Turkey had done in 1974. This is why our political parties should be unequivocal in their condemnations, instead of mincing their words, and run the risk of being accused of ‘double standards’, which they accuse the rest of the world of.”

There were similar op-eds like “We shouldn’t bring the Cyprus problem into issue of Russian sanctions” on 1 March and overall, it could be argued that the English language newspaper offered varied perspectives while its own line was strongly on the side of the western narrative. And this despite its purchase in March 2019 by the owner of a large Cypriot legal firm with a significant Russian clientele with interests both in Russia and Cyprus (ref. footnote 11).

Even well into the conflict, on 10 April 2022, a critical op-ed by the Cyprus Mail again captured the essence of the dilemmas and the difficulty of the political establishment to let go of its Russian affinity:

“Cyprus could find it difficult to maintain its cozy relations of the past with Moscow. As an EU member, it belongs to the West which now sees Russia as a threat and has imposed crippling sanctions on it excluding it from the world financial system and closing its airspace to Russian planes. The West is waging a non-military war against Russia and Cyprus, by default, is on the side of West. Adopting the EU sanctions was described as a “non-friendly act” by Russia’s ambassador to Cyprus. The damage to relations that Akel was so worried about was done long before Zelenskyy addressed Cyprus’ parliament and it is doubtful Moscow will be very forgiving the ‘next day.’ The political leadership, including [now former] President Anastasiades, seems to labour under the illusion that everything will return to normal when the war is over and has been very careful in their public talk about what is happening in Ukraine, lest it causes offence to Moscow.

Only [former] Foreign minister Ioannis Kasoulides appears to have understood the new political reality being shaped and has a clear idea about which side of the world divide Cyprus should be on. This is in stark contrast with his predecessor Nikos Christodoulides [the current president] who grudgingly condemned the invasion without naming Russia and has avoided saying anything since, which is more in line with Anastasiades and the parties. Of the parties, only Disy has taken a clear pro-West stand, the rest fearing upsetting Moscow and its ambassador.”

While not widely read among Cypriots the Cyprus Mail is read by a section of the educated class, the growing non-Greek-speaking community and universally by the diplomatic community on the island. Like most other media outlets, it included pieces from members of the Economic Society of Cyprus, presidential candidates, energy experts and academics, acting and former diplomats (including a joint piece by the French and German ambassadors as well as a strong piece on solidarity with Ukraine by the Polish ambassador), former ministers, international commentators which were reasoned and varied in their tone and argument.

At the same time the Cyprus Mail which has acquired a curious habit of deleting controversial articles after they are published online was also the newspaper that

chose to run an extensive profile²² of Alex Christoforou from The Duran website and YouTube channel. The Stanford Internet Observatory's Cyber Policy Center describes The Duran as a Kremlin aligned website²³ while the independent MBFC rates it as "a questionable source based on far-right-wing bias, promotion of Russian propaganda, right-wing conspiracies, a lack of transparency, use of poor sources, plagiarism, and failed fact checks".²⁴

The Cyprus Mail's profile of Mr Christoforou though a legitimate pursuit in terms of journalistic interest - titled "An ordinary guy with 'dangerous' ideas" - described him as a citizen journalist broadcasting controversial political views on Ukraine from the streets of Cyprus. The profile drew one of the highest ever number of views for the newspaper as well as an inordinately high number of comments which have since been deleted. The Duran itself has a considerable number of subscribers at 377,000 with Mr Christoforou's own channel at 185,000, both considered astonishingly high for the level of insight and analysis that is on offer, numbers which experts suggest may be sustained by bots aiming at gaining the widest possible algorithmic traction.

Unending Audacity

Despite the abundance of views and the plurality within most of the media there were some outlets which were staunchly monolithic in their approach to the developments. On 18 March 2022, a commentary in Haravgi referred to the EU's "unending audacity" with which, it said, it continued to silence Russian media. According to the EU, said Haravgi, only Western media seem to possess and broadcast the absolute truth on the Ukraine-Russia war front. The commentary featured the relevant EU post on Twitter, whereby it affirmed the sanctions against the Russian news outlets RT and Sputnik as "the Kremlin's weapons of deception". The commentary reminded that the European Federation of Journalists condemned the silencing of these media, and ironically criticised the "EU of democracy and pluralism". [It is true that the EU's Sputnik-RT ban continues to divide the media community and some institutions in terms of the threat it poses to plurality but the problem with positions expressed in Haravgi is that they are never accommodating of the arguments of the opposite view, always coming across as intractably partisan].

Three weeks into the war a commentary in Haravgi referred to a post on Twitter by EU High Representative Borrell, where he stated that "21 days of Russia bombing Ukraine's cities. Committing war crimes. Targeting civilians. Starving people. Killing children. And shamelessly lying about it. Putin's war must stop now". Interestingly, the commentary said no one disagreed with Borrell, but that he could not be

22. <https://cyprus-mail.com/2023/02/22/youtube-political-analyst-ordinary-guy-with-dangerous-ideas/>

23. <https://cyber.fsi.stanford.edu/io/news/poland-ndp-disinformation>

24. <https://mediabiasfactcheck.com/the-duran/>

persuasive with his request to stop “Putin’s war” when countries such as Great Britain and the US were equipping Ukraine with arms. The commentary stated that the war began because there was a ridicule and inconsistency in the commitments of NATO and member states towards Russia, arguing that the war was essentially between Moscow and NATO, with Kyiv unfairly paying the price. The commentary also mentioned the unfair NATO attacks on third countries – from Yugoslavia to Iraq to Afghanistan to Syria and Palestine – of which, it said, “no one speaks”.

On **26 March** Politis featured a one-page placed op-ed from the Russian ambassador to Cyprus, Stavislav Osadchyi – entitled “Our goal is the rooting out of Nazism in Ukraine”. It followed the narrative of his interviews at the time highlighting Russia’s long-running attempts to make the West realise the threats it felt against its national interests by NATO’s eastward expansion. In Ukraine, he claimed, the Russians weren’t fighting the people, who were brothers, but rather nests of aggressive nationalism and neo-Nazism that had developed with the silent consent of the West. He covered the militarisation of Ukraine backed by the West and the response of sanctions which would harm Russia and its people, but then asked Western leaders to consider how much sacrifice to living standards *their* people could take.

On **27 March** Kathimerini’s John Ioannou addressed the disinformation threats affecting the social media ecosystem and asserted that Russia’s disinfo was especially prevalent in Greece and Cyprus. He pointed to the neo-Nazi narrative and the undermining of Zelenskyy and of approaching the war in a typically ‘whataboutist’ manner - not dissimilar to The Duran’s approach mentioned earlier.

Ioannou suggested that in Cyprus the disinformation scheming comes from far right, pro-Russia supporters some of whom he claimed expressed views through the left and conspiracy theorists. However, he added, generally, people followed the Western narrative, but the experience of the Turkish evasion did undermine that somewhat - because of the role of the “West”, and the preoccupation of viewing all international developments and ties to Russia through the Cyprus problem.

The online news site Dialogos, under the title “They supplied us with weapons and we are now ready to turn these against them!” focused on the US request that the Cyprus National Guard hand over Russian made weapons systems to Ukraine and claimed that the government did not have the legality to assume such a decision that would have serious political, economic and national consequences, and would tie Cyprus tighter to the US and NATO “wagon”. Small and semi-occupied Cyprus, it went on, could not get involved in such a militarisation of the problem reminding that at difficult times, it was Russia that equipped Cyprus with arms when the US and other NATO countries had imposed an arms embargo.



Αρχική | Χαιρετική | Στήλας | Μας εξόπλισαν και τώρα είμαστε έτοιμοι να στρέψουμε τα όπλα εναντίον τους

Στήλας | Χαιρετική

Μας εξόπλισαν και τώρα είμαστε έτοιμοι να στρέψουμε τα όπλα εναντίον τους!

April 5, 2022 - 10:20 am



In an opinion-article in Kathimerini on 28 February, ANT1 TV's Brussels correspondent under the title "Fiasco Demarche... EU-Russia 0-1" (below) argued that the EU's foreign policy is "essentially absent on big issues, such as the invasion and violation of international law by Russia". As such, the EU lacks substantive intervention, with the correspondent arguing that the EU lacks the necessary persons to express the EU's foreign policy when discussing with powerful states. The correspondent would return weeks later on 17 April when Finland's and Sweden's intention to join NATO intensified tensions between the West and Russia to say that these developments further increased the EU's security dependency on NATO, making life even harder for "neutral" member states like Cyprus and Malta. He claimed this feud will have a negative impact on Cyprus, as it had depended on Moscow "to have its views heard in the UN Security Council for many years."

Διάβημα φιάσκο... Ε.Ε.-Ρωσία 0-1

ΤΟΥ ΠΑΥΛΟΥ Κ. ΣΑΝΘΟΥΛΗ



Βισνάη και απαντώντας αρχά ενός «διπλωματικού διαβήματος» είναι να γνωρίζεις τις διαδικασίες και τη μεθόδους να είσαι σε θέση να αξιοποιήσεις το διάβημα προς όφελος των δικών σου συμφερόντων και όχι απλά να διαπραγματείσαι για την τιμή των άλλων και για λόγους κοσμητικής καταλληλότητας...

Το «διάβημα» στο οποίο προέβη την περασμένη Πέμπτη ο Γενικός Γραμματέας της Ευρωπαϊκής Υπηρεσίας Εξωτερικής Δράσης Στέφανο Ζαντίνο, στον επικεφαλής της αποστολής της Ρωσικής Ομοσπονδίας στην Ε.Ε., Πρόξω Βασιλείου Τσιζόφ, με επέκτασε τη ρωσική τερβόλα στην Ουκρανία, ανάγει στη δεύτερη κατηγορία. Από την διαπραγμάτευση χωρίς ουσιαστικό στόχευση και χωρίς επισημασμένα όρια, ο οποίος είναι εκ προνομίου κοτοφωκισμένος σε αποστολή. Το «διάβημα» Στέφανο Ζαντίνο κεντράρει, επίσης, για όλα μια φορά, ότι η Ε.Ε. δεν έχει εξωτερική πολιτική και ότι ο περιήρωτος του

Υπαιτού Επαιρουπόου Ρωσική Μπράβη είναι θεσπίζοντας ανάμεσα του πολιτικού εκπομπών του Ισπανού προηγουμένου της εξωτερικής πολιτικής της Ε.Ε. Διαπραγματεύσεις των ΝΥΝΑ και σχετικά όλα τα κράτη-μέλη της Ε.Ε., ο Στέφανο Ζαντίνο, κατέστη οδηγόν του Ρωσική Μπράβη, καλέσει στο γραφείο του τον Βασιλείου Τσιζόφ, προσκεκλημένο να προβεί οι διάβημα για την παράνομη επίθεση της Ρωσίας στην Ουκρανία και για τον ενταξίση για το δεύτερο πακέτο κυρώσεων που εγκρίθηκε λίγες ώρες αργότερα, το βράδυ της Πέμπτης, και επίσης και τη φροχολόγησι ενός τρίτου πακέτου μέτρων.

Το πρώτο σημείο αμφισβητήσεως του διαβήματος είναι το χρονικό σημείο που επιλέχθηκε. Δεδομένου μετά την εισβολή της Ρωσίας στην Ουκρανία και αφού η Μόσχα είχε αρχίσει το αναγκαστικά των ουκρανικών θέσεων, προκαρπάζει σε μεγάλο βαθμό στην πρόληψη των σχεδόν των.

Συνεπώς, το πρώτο που μπορεί να λεχθεί οφθαλμικά, είναι ότι το διάβημα της Ε.Ε.

δεν είχε σε καμιά περίπτωση προληπτικό χαρακτήρα. Μόλις είχε όμως καταστοχαστικό χαρακτήρα και θα μπορούσε να οδηγήσει τη Μόσχα σε αλλαγή θέσεως, όπως αυτές να αποσυρθεί τα όπλα της από την Ουκρανία.

Η απάντηση είναι επίσης αρνητική, καθώς το δεύτερο πακέτο κυρώσεων είχε ήδη διαρρεύσει στον Τύπο, είχε φωτογραφηθεί ευκρινώς και από την Πρόξω της Κομμουν Ομοσπονδίας στον Γενικό Λόγος και συνεπώς η επιστρέφει στο στο πλαίσιο ενός διαβήματος, δεν θα είχε καμιά περιθώρια επιτυχίας.

Μόλις τελικά το διάβημα ΕΥΕΔ προς τη Μόσχα εντάσσεται στο πλαίσιο μιας επιμετροπρίας πολιτικής οφθαλμίας των βρεζελιών, με στόχο να εντημερώσουν τη Ρωσία για τα μέτρα πριν εκδοθούν επίσημα το Συμβούλιο της Ε.Ε. - Όχι από μισή ώρα να ισχύει, καθώς όπως προαναφέρθηκε, το δεύτερο πακέτο κυρώσεων ήταν ήδη της πλέον γνωστή. Το μόνο που θα μπορούσε ενδοσκομώς κάποιος να σκεφτεί, είναι μάλιστα το διάβημα

της ΕΥΕΔ αποσκοπούσε τελικά απλά σε μια κίνηση εσωτερικής κοσμητικότητας, για να τονιστεί το υποτιμημένο κύρος της - αντιστοίχως - εξωτερικής πολιτικής της Ε.Ε. Είναι όμως δυνατόν, κατά να είναι η εξωτερική πολιτική της Ε.Ε.;

Σε καμιά πότμη περίπτωση, το αποτέλεσμα του διαβήματος μόνο ως φιάσκο θα μπορούσε να χαρακτηριστεί. Ο Στέφανο Ζαντίνο ανέφερε στην Βασιλείου Τσιζόφ όλα αυτά έχουν ήδη διαρρεύσει στη ΜΜΕ σχετικά με το δεύτερο πακέτο κυρώσεων, με τον Ρωσο Πρόξω να απαντά προσηγορικά ότι: «ο παράνομος και οφθαλμικός χαρακτήρας των μονομερών μέτρων (ο.ο. που λάβη η Ε.Ε. κατά της Ρωσίας) μπορούν μόνο να επεκταθούν στη ίδια λογική κατάσταση στις οσάδες Ρωσικής Ε.Ε.» Ο Ρωσος Πρόξως φρόντισε μάλιστα να προσθέσει ότι «αυτή η φροχολόγησι (ο.ο. της Ε.Ε.) αποσκοπεί στο να επισημασθεί με αντίκριση από τη ρωσική πλευρά, ότι κάποιος οσάστικα των Ε.Ε. και τα κράτη-μέλη της.

Το διάβημα Σαντίνο προς Τσιζόφ και το

αποτέλεσμά του επιβεβαιώνει για ακόμα μια φορά ότι η εξωτερική πολιτική της Ε.Ε. είναι ουσιαστικά απύρακτη στα μεγάλα ζητήματα, όπως αυτό της εισβολής και της καταλήψεως παραβίασης του διεθνούς δικαίου από τη Ρωσία.

Και ότι γίνεται σε πολύ γρήγορο χρόνο, χωρίς δυνατότητα ουσιαστικής παράβιασης. Δεν είναι μαρτυρία ότι η Ε.Ε. μπορεί σε επίπεδο προσημάνων και ότι ούτε η επικρατορία της ΕΥΕΔ Ρωσική Μπράβη, αλλά ούτε και ο περιήρωτος του έσκου το εκπομπή να κερκίζον την εξωτερική πολιτική της Ε.Ε., στην οσάστικα με κοσμητική κίνηση. Είναι όμως ελασκή στην ηρόληση πολιτικής οφθαλμίας μακρών κρατών-μελών, που προβόλουν επί ερωμαστικά τετράδια για να βρουν το δικαίο τους. Όπως στην περίπτωση της Κύπρου που είχε ενταχθεί τις σκέψεις της στον Μπράβη και τους συνεργάτες του, για να εξοφληθεί κάποιος κατά της Τουρκίας για το Βαρούο και την ΑΟΖ.

xanthopoulos.pavlos@gmail.com

Crossing the Rubicon

In March a columnist in Haravgi under the title ‘Were we born on the 24th of February 2022?’ (below) rejected the dilemma whether one agreed or not with the Russian invasion of Ukraine and claimed that one has a duty not to fall blindly into the West’s attempt to erase everything related to the war and attributed ‘heavy responsibility’ on the West, especially the United States, pointing to its post-1991 appetite to expand eastwards and to humiliate its old foe. Another columnist equated the EU’s decision to arm Ukraine with Putin’s actions bluntly stating that the EU had done what it had accused Putin of doing and had “crossed the Rubicon” by supplying arms to Ukraine.



Yannis Lefteris

Γεννηθήκαμε την 24η Φεβρουαρίου 2022;

Μία δε και τόσο ανεξήγητη, αλλά ανέμελη βάρβαρη παρεκκλίση καθημερινά από τις αδένες μας και δεν είναι άλλη από το «είν» φερωμένου ή ότι με τη ρωσική εισβολή στην Ουκρανία. Η κάθε εισβολή είναι καταδικαστική και αίτημα αν οι διαρροές λύνονται με τον πόλεμο, το θάνατο και την προσοχή.

Ωστόσο, κάποτε, και όχι στο παλιό μαρμαίνο μάλλον, κάποιος θα κλειθόταν να εξηγήσουν τους λόγους που οδηγούν στη ρωσική εισβολή στην Ουκρανία. Σήμερα, παρατηρείται ένα μίγμα από παλαιές κι αυτές καταδικάζουν και επιτίθενται σε άλλους που ζητούν το κούραμα αυτής της τραγικής ιστορίας. Γιατί όμως; Δεν πρέπει να εργαζόμαστε το οποίο αστακία με τους λόγους που οδηγούν μακριά εδώ. Γιατί είναι κακό και δομημένο να παίρνουμε τα πράγματα από την αρχή με σκοπό να κατανοήσουμε τι συμβαίνει.

Πρόκειται για μία παγίδα, στην οποία πολλοί ανθρωπιά να πιστεύουν, και καλά κάνουν, διότι να να προσπαθεί κανείς να εξηγήσει το

ιστορικό υπόβαθρο μιας σύγκρουσης μόνο καλό μπορεί να κάνει. Μήπως γεννηθήκαμε την 24η Φεβρουαρίου 2022; Μήπως τα ανάμεσα Σοβιετική Ένωση, NATO, Γαλλοσοβιετική κ.λπ. τα μάθαμε στις 24 Φεβρουαρίου 2022. Η γηραιά δεν έχουν εξηγηθεί ποικιλότητες και σε βάθος προηγούμενες συμβάσεις, οι οποίες φέρνουν πίσω τους εκατομμύρια νεκρούς.

Δεν πρόκειται να επισυβούν τα αυτονόητα ξανά, περί κατάθεσης της ρωσικής εισβολής στην Ουκρανία και τι αυτό σημαίνει για εκατομμύρια ανθρώπους. Σήμερα κρίση, όμως, να μην πάρουμε με κλειστά μάτια στην προσπάθεια της δύσης να στήσει σκηνή και κλείσει με τον σημερινό πόλεμο στην Ουκρανία. Σήμερα κρίση, να εξηγήσει, αλλά και να μαθαίνουμε τι προηγήθηκε για να φτάσουμε μακριά εδώ.

Η ζωή των τελευταίων ημερών υποστηρίζει το κλείσιμο των ματιών και των αυτιών στις βαριότητες ενόψει της δύσης και κυρίως των ΗΠΑ αστακία με την προσπάθεια ταπεινω-

σης και διάλυσης ενός προσημασμένου ατόμου εκτός... με θέματα ξανά κλειστές εμάς.

Το τέλος του Ψυχρού Πολέμου με την πτώση της Σοβιετικής Ένωσης άνοιξε την όρμη στην δύση και στο NATO να αδειάζουν ελεύθερα όλα και πιο ανασταλά. Προσημασμένη άνοχη είναι ότι το NATO θα ήθελε να έχει διαλυθεί μετά το 1991, αφού, όπως κι ήθελε έλεγαν για δεκαετίες, σκοπός του ήταν να ανακαταστή τον «σοβιετικό καβούρ».

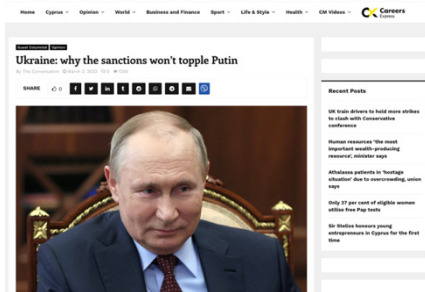
Τοναντίον οι ΗΠΑ βρήκαν την ευκαιρία και γρηγορήματα με ανώτερο σκοπό να εξουδερώσουν τα κίνητρα της πρώην ηλίθης Σοβιετικής Ένωσης, σε όλα τα μέρη και κλάτη, που κάποτε βλάσφαιναν υπό την ηγεσία της ΕΣ. παραδόξως, οπότε, οι ΗΠΑ έστησαν την αντίδοσιν στα άκρα.

Σήμερα, αν κάποιος εξουθιθεί στα άκρα και διαρραχθεί ένα έθνος, τότε εξουθιμήνεται είναι εγκληματίας. Οπότε, το δικαίωτο θα ρυθιστεί και άλλα πρόγραμμα και όχι μόνο «τις σχέσεις» το μακροί».

On 2 March the Cyprus Mail carried an opinion piece - which appeared in international outlets - by Sergey V. Popov, a Senior Lecturer at Cardiff University under the title “Ukraine: Why sanctions won’t topple Putin” offering a reasoned analysis of what the results might be.

CyprusMail

Founded 1945



In the same vein a high-profile lawyer and former minister of Justice of Cyprus, in an editorial in the Cyprus Mail on 19 June 2022 argued against the imposition of sanctions on Russia claiming that while Russia had flagrantly disregarded

international law when it invaded Ukraine this did not give the west carte blanche to disregard international law too: “We must rise above and adhere to international law. We cannot allow the rule of law our democracies purport to hold dear to be undermined. We cannot issue blanket sanctions on all Russian nationals, even dissidents. We cannot seize assets, including state assets and liquidate them without considering that we may be setting a dangerous precedent for world order... May we uphold the rule of law we wish to impose upon Russia. This can include targeted sanctions against specific persons and entities, freezing and not seizing assets, on a justified basis, and extricating ourselves from fiduciary duties only with extreme care and caution”.

UNCATEGORIZED

Άριστος Μιχαηλίδης: «Η Ουκρανία θέλει την Τουρκία για εγγυήτρια». Σοβαρά τώρα;

On 11 March the Editor in Chief of Phileleftheros under the title “Ukraine wants Turkey as a Guarantor’ Seriously?” while dismissing leftist rhetoric about Zelenskyy’s alleged corruption as a pre-text for Russia’s invasion, went on to attack the EU and its vision of a security architecture. He claimed this cannot be constructed without Russia, asserting that EU leaders should have taken care to have collaborated with Russia and not become a crutch for the United States in the promotion of NATO’s encircling of Russia. The writer then tangents off to the EU’s decision to consider Turkey as a candidate for accession and the demand to reject Russian ships from docking in Cypriot ports without ever protesting Turkey’s resurgent ties with Russia and Turkish claims that Ukraine wants Turkey as a guarantor.

In April reports that the Cyprus government had been asked to give its Russian-made weapon systems to Ukraine had put the government in a quandary. But the Cyprus Mail in its main op-ed argued that the matter was not closed and that eventually, Cyprus will have a bigger decision to make between East and West. The world, it said, was now divided and as an EU member-state Cyprus would no longer be able to step on both boats.

Much later, six months after the invasion, on September 25, the Cyprus Mail would carry an editorial that summed up Cyprus’ new post Ukraine position:

“By accident or design, Cyprus has finally joined the West. It may have not become a member of Nato, but the formalising of strategic relations and defensive cooperation with the United States is as good as. This also means the end of the Cyprus government’s traditional subservience to Moscow, which was justified on the pretext of Russia’s allegedly principled

stance on the Cyprus problem. That myth has also been laid to rest with Turkey becoming Russia's closest ally and supporter, although our political establishment doggedly refuses to see this reality. There will be no choice now. Our government, perhaps without realising it, has finally joined the grouping of the democratic and liberal West, which signals the end of its cozy relations with Russia. It was about time."

More recently, however, the attention focused on how Russia would avenge Cyprus' stance. In September 2023 the Russian government took its time to condemn an attack on the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus during a confrontation between the UN and the Turkish Cypriot authorities along the UN Buffer Zone in the village of Pyla. Equally, the set-up of a consulate in the non-government-controlled areas to deal with their (admittedly growing number of) nationals continued in ways that at other times would have been less adversarial. There was also concern that Russia might begin to undermine the process of the six-monthly renewal of the United Nations force in Cyprus.

A key dimension in this period, one that continues and which the scope of this study does not cover, is the social media sphere where experts have identified malicious Russian bot-factory interference in local debates that have to do with various local discussions such as sex-education and abortion. These are topics on which Russia is alleged to have interfered to sow discord and confusion.

The political columnist John Ioannou tweeted on 20 August 2023:

"The greatest achievement of Russian malicious influence in #Cyprus will be neither the recognition of the 'TRNC' (consulate etc.) nor the obstacles at the UN. It will be the potential entry into the [Cyprus] House of Representatives, in 2026, of a political party with conspiracy theorists, hunters and sex-education [opponents] as its front piece".

Public Opinion

A Flash Eurobarometer survey with fieldwork conducted in the third week of April 2022²⁵, showed that Cypriots did not at that time consider that the main responsibility for the war in Ukraine was borne by Russia.

While the majority of EU respondents either fully agreed (52%) or tended to agree (26%), in-total 78%, that the Russian authorities were primarily responsible for the conflict in Ukraine, Cyprus was the only country in which the majority (51%) disagreed with the statement. Only 21% of respondents totally agreed and 24% tended to agree (an overall 45%).

Cypriots also did not approve the financial sanctions against Russia (only 48% agreed, second after Bulgaria at 44%). The majority disagreed on sanctions targeting Russian oligarchs (only 46% agreed), while they did not support the dispatch of military equipment to Ukraine (69%), recording the highest percentage in the European Union.

**How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?
Russian authorities are responsible first and foremost for the current situation:**

	Totally agree	Tend to Agree	Tend to Disagree	Totally Disagree	Don't know
EU27	52	26	10	7	5
CYPRUS	21	24	28	23	4

Do you approve of economic sanctions against Russia?

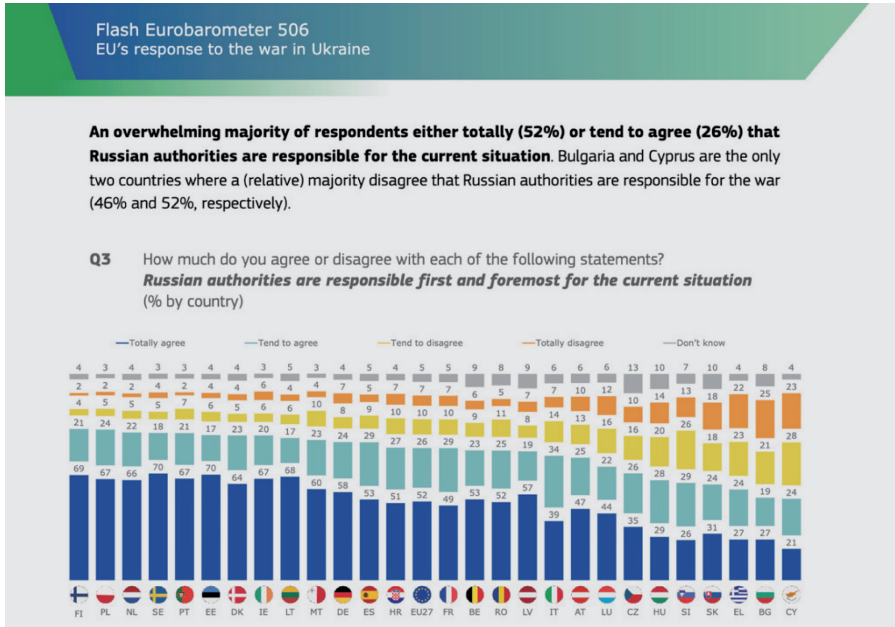
	Fully Approve	Tend to approve	Tend to disapprove	Fully disapprove	Don't know
EU27	55	25	9	7	4
CYPRUS	25	23	19	29	3

25. Flash Eurobarometer on the EU's response to the war in Ukraine by the European Commission, Directorate- General for Communication and Ipsos. Fieldwork 13-20 April 2022.

Do you approve of economic sanctions against wealthy Russians (oligarchs)?

	Fully Approve	Tend to Approve	Tend to disapprove	Fully Disapprove	Don't know
EU27	55	24	9	6	6
CYPRUS	25	21	23	25	6

The comparative graph below shows Cyprus respondents' position vis a vis the rest of the European Union members state respondents.



Two months into the war only 19% of Cypriot respondents approved the EU's actions and appeared to strongly disagree with the reaction of NATO, the US and the UN. It was also interesting to note the discrepancy between the EU and Cyprus in terms of trust to journalists (in general), with the latter's poor level of trust matching almost its level of trust in social media.

How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way the EU reacted to the war in Ukraine?

	Very Satisfied	Rather Satisfied	Rather not satisfied	Not at all satisfied	Don't know
EU27	8	43	27	16	6
CYPRUS	8	26	31	32	3

How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way NATO reacted to the war in Ukraine?

	Very Satisfied	Rather Satisfied	Rather not satisfied	Not at all satisfied	Don't know
EU27	9	40	26	17	8
CYPRUS	4	14	23	49	10

How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way your country reacted to the war in Ukraine?

	Very Satisfied	Rather Satisfied	Rather not satisfied	Not at all satisfied	Don't know
EU27	9	45	25	14	7
CYPRUS	8	31	27	27	8

Do you approve of financial support to Ukraine?

	Fully Approve	Tend to Approve	Tend to Disapprove	Fully Disapprove	Don't know
EU27	42	38	9	7	4
CYPRUS	35	38	14	12	2

Do you approve of financing the purchase and supply of military equipment to Ukraine?

	Fully Approve	Tend to Approve	Tend to Disapprove	Fully Disapprove	Don't know
EU27	33	34	13	13	8
CYPRUS	13	18	24	40	5

Do you approve of welcoming in the EU people fleeing the war?

	Fully Approve	Tend to Approve	Tend to Disapprove	Fully Disapprove	Don't know
EU27	55	34	6	3	3
CYPRUS	56	34	4	5	1

Generally speaking, how much do you trust the following sources of information regarding the war in Ukraine? The national authorities:

	Trust a lot	Tend to trust	Tend not to trust	Do not trust at all	Don't know
EU27	13	50	19	13	5
CYPRUS	7	37	26	28	3

Generally speaking, how much do you trust the following sources of information regarding the war in Ukraine? The European authorities:

	Trust a lot	Tend to trust	Tend not to trust	Do not trust at all	Don't know
EU27	12	52	19	12	5
CYPRUS	8	34	27	29	3

Generally speaking, how much do you trust the following sources of information regarding the war in Ukraine? Journalists

	Trust a lot	Tend to trust	Tend not to trust	Do not trust at all	Don't know
EU27	10	46	22	15	7
CYPRUS	3	29	35	29	4

Generally speaking, how much do you trust the following sources of information regarding the war in Ukraine? Social media:

	Trust a lot	Tend to trust	Tend not to trust	Do not trust at all	Don't know
EU27	3	25	38	25	9
CYPRUS	1	27	35	33	4

A commentary in Haravgi on the release of the Eurobarometer results in May of 2022 referred to the “EU’s brainwashing of public opinion”, reminding its readers of the censorship of “disliked” Russian information sources and the fact that EU citizens had not yet realised the impact of the EU’s sanctions on Russian oil and natural gas on their own households and enterprises.

Almost 12 months after the above survey, in a Standard Eurobarometer²⁶ released in July 2023 - which however by definition did not have an identical questionnaire as the Flash Eurobarometer - results showed very marginal changes in four similar questions posed (next page):

26. Standard Eurobarometer 99, Fieldwork 31 May - 20 June 2023; section on the invasion of Ukraine and its consequences.

In general, how satisfied are you with the European Union’s response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine?

	Totally Satisfied	Totally Not Satisfied	Don’t know
EU27	56	38	6
Cyprus	33	58	9

In general, how satisfied are you with your country’s response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine?

	Totally Satisfied	Totally Not Satisfied	Don’t know
EU27	54	41	5
Cyprus	36	54	10

Do you agree with imposing sanctions on the Russian government, companies and individuals?

	Totally Agree	Totally Disagree	Don’t know
EU27	72	22	5
Cyprus	35	56	9

Do you agree with welcoming into the EU people fleeing the war?

	Totally Agree	Totally Disagree	Don’t know
EU27	86	11	3
Cyprus	85	10	5

Overall, the public’s sentiment did not appear to shift in any substantive way despite part of the media recalibrating their perspective and coverage especially after the numbness in some in the first week of the war. The unchanging situation could be attributed to a public spectrum with deeply entrenched viewpoints, unwilling to shift, reflective of the polarized camps that have traditionally existed in Cyprus. It also implied - especially as time passed - that the public though partially acknowledging the grim reality of the situation it chose to remain indifferent to it, more comfortable in its own ‘whataboutism’.

One Cypriot columnist wrote in May 2022 that the only score in which Cyprus came close to the rest of Europe was “in begging for EU funds to level the impact of rising energy prices (Cyprus: 94 per cent - EU27: 90 per cent)!” In a country still suffering from an invasion very similar to Ukraine’s, he added, these were not very complimentary observations. The title of his piece was ‘Cyprus, the black sheep of Europe’.²⁷

27. <https://cyprus-mail.com/2022/05/15/cyprus-the-black-sheep-of-europe/>

Conclusions

The initial hesitant and rather lukewarm coverage in parts of the Cypriot media eco-system of Russia's invasion of Ukraine gradually became more engaged and pragmatic as the war intensified even if a few remained somewhat aloof. The media's approach was not much different to the initial stand of the Cypriot government and of the Cypriot socio-economic establishment. The government managed very quickly to adjust to the reality of what was going on understanding what it would mean to Cyprus' image, its standing in the European Union and above all to the national problem, if they were to dither and remain attached to their cautious treatment defending Russian interests. The socio-economic establishment has taken longer to adapt to this reality - in some quarters if at all - as has popular perception in general. There is still considerable resistance to accepting the Russian invasion for what it is - as opinion polls continued to show. The matter is complicated and woven into many aspects of the country's existence, its psyche, its perception of itself, the mechanics of its economy and of its media.

Still, some explanations can be attempted:

1 Russia's penetration of the Cypriot political-economic system had been a long and slow affair. It encroached quietly and over several decades and it was only when its hold was threatened because of the war in Ukraine that its audacity and duplicity began to become apparent. But the slow process and the objective circumstances in Cyprus which in time facilitated the flow of Russian plutocratic money, never made it feel like a grand conspiracy. The ground had been fertile. A conspiracy was not necessary; Cyprus was already in the bag.

The Soviet Union's diplomatic exploitation of Cyprus' national problem to serve its own interests during the Cold War continued with the Russian Federation's effort to reassert itself post-1990. Yet, a combination of Cyprus' post-Turkish invasion demonization of the West, the Christian Orthodox notion of 'mother Russia' and residues of Communist nostalgia in some quarters, clouded people's view and prevented the demythologization of post-Soviet Russia. Unable to see through the hypocrisy and self-interest, these elements lingered long after the Republic of Cyprus made the historic shift to join the European Union in 2004 and were left unaddressed when Russian money began pouring into the economy. This, of course, was a time when the European Union was itself improving and deepening its own relations with Russia and, as it turned out, developing a ruinous dependency on it.

But in time, as in several member states of the Union, in Cyprus perhaps more than in others, Russia's soft power infiltrated the landscape with hard cash. By creating a relationship of dependency, it gradually softened the resistances of an overwhelmingly pro-European country which had only just begun to make its first steps into the realm of political maturity.

Clearly the strategic operations of Russia's authoritarian leadership, its cynicism and tradition for active measures and influence operations through disinformation, especially as the country's status as a world player declined, were at play in Cyprus too. But it would be foolish to consider Cyprus' drifting into Russophilia as just the result of a malicious Russian grand plan focused solely on Cyprus.

2 This Russophilia fed on Cyprus' feeble political establishment, the collapse of its economy and the consequent desperation it brought both on a state and societal level. All this combined dangerously with the country's poor collective instinct for institutional oversight when it came to matters of political and corporate corruption.

Cyprus' capacity for progress and transparency, which showed hope during its EU accession harmonization process, had already begun to falter as its political and institutional foundations became eroded after years of neglect. The public had been blindsided by a deliberate and obsessive focus on the national problem by a populist political elite that sought to cling to power. It was made worse by the final blow of the financial crisis which brought unprecedented desperation and shook the foundations of the country's entire value structure.

Days before this publication went to print a global investigation by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) which included ZDF, The Guardian, Paper Trail Media and the Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) showed how Russian influence in Cyprus helped oligarchs structure their wealth over the years preceding the invasion of Ukraine and how local service providers scrambled to keep their clients a step ahead of looming sanctions. In many individual investigations, some not directly related to Cyprus, the reporting revealed what was described as "Cyprus' pivotal role in shielding the wealth of oligarchs and powering the Putin regime". [<https://www.icij.org/investigations/cyprus-confidential/cyprus-russia-eu-secrecy-tax-haven/>, 14 November 2023].

These and other revelations by international media often appear as a shock because there is no culture of investigative journalism in Cyprus itself - despite some important work that did occur over the years on the traumatic issue of the missing persons from the inter-communal fighting in 1963 and the Turkish invasion of 1974. But on issues of corporate or political corruption investigative journalism has been lacking because of the small size of the community, the political party system's hold on public discourse and the absence of truly independent media.

3 By extension the uncertain, confused and often clumsy reporting - with exceptions of course - that manifested itself during the invasion of Ukraine, at least in the beginning, cannot just be attributed to the dominance of Russia's narratives or Cyprus' weakening of its European resolve or, indeed its systemic institutional weaknesses.

It must also be attributed to the country's poor journalistic culture combined with the absence of a robust, independent and penetrating public discourse. Not all media, of course, and certainly not all journalists. The journalistic community includes some exceptional, independently-minded journalists. Many, however, are resigned to the way things operate in Cyprus. Others abandon the field completely, opting for stints in corporate and government positions. If any return to journalism they are never the same as when they left.

But it is also the servility to political and corporate power combined with the cacophony and overlap of the mainstream and online media landscape that results in a hasty, arbitrary and convenience-led journalism. Editorial processes have been eroded and have fallen back on a lazy culture of copy-paste, now pervasive, which combined to produce stereotypes that were adopted without challenge. Biases, which besides those of the left-wing media, were mostly personal rather than imposed by directive from above or outside.

The reporting was substantial but it was patched together as very few journalists are well-versed in history and international relations to be able to explore the developments solidly. Some weren't afforded the time; a few lost interest. There was one embarrassing case of a key news organization which hired a Greek journalist as its Kyiv correspondent only for it to discover that the journalist was in fact stationed in Greece and was converting second hand information into dispatches from the frontline. He was suspended early.

In Cyprus, foreign news has always been seen as "filler" to local news. As such it has for the most part been secured and relayed from mainly Greek news outlets never attracting the necessary attention and closer scrutiny by those who oversee it. Foreign news coverage has also depended on the language skills of the journalists which dictates the choice of sources they turn to. A consistent exception to this - despite its many problems - had been the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation which due to its institutional association with other European public service broadcasters has maintained journalists with good foreign language skills and a capacity to deal with other European (other than just Greek) sources on a frequent basis. One of the journalists with which the author spoke to admitted that "we simply do not have the capacity to filter international news, we consume it 'raw'.

4 The media's malfunctioning business model, the loss of revenue, the loss of trust, the loss of attention and respect from the public, their own loss of focus result in commercial ambitions inevitably trumping editorial concerns. It has meant less reporting staff to work on stories; it has also inexplicably meant that less staff were in fact being paid less. It has meant the loss of a desire for uncompromising journalism, the total absence of investigative journalism and, because of the nefarious situation regarding media ownership, it has meant a fall-back to self-censorship. The type of self-censorship that had dominated Cypriot media during the periods of one-way-patriotism following its independence. This time, however, it wasn't in the name of national survival but of corporate survival.

All of this made journalism more susceptible to risks of bias and the scourges of the social media disorder. Stung by the curse of social media and the dominance of the tech platforms they succumbed to the rules dictated by their operational model and fell for the obsessive monitoring and news triggering that has polluted the global media landscape.

5 This study focused mostly on the first two months of Russia's invasion. Unsurprisingly, as the war went on media interest and by extension public interest wore off. Even though the deep affinity for Russia continues and is likely to hold for a long time, Cyprus is shedding its controversial economic dependency and is officially aligning more comfortably with the EU. At the same time, in what could prove an intriguing twist, a lot of the sanctions-related controversies that were associated with Cyprus have now migrated to the non-government-controlled areas, where Russians opted to purchase properties and transfer funds.

More relevantly, the war in Ukraine had already begun to fade in media and public consciousness when another war much closer to home came to supplant it - almost completely. The crisis in the Middle East has raised equally difficult dilemmas and tensions within the complexly interwoven political, economic and media ecosystems of Cyprus.



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Cyprus media coverage of the war in Ukraine

What it reveals about Cyprus and its media

Nicholas Karides

In February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, marking the start of the biggest war in Europe since the Second World War. In the summer of 2023, the Institute for Mass Media undertook a project supported by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation to examine how the media in the areas under the control of the Republic of Cyprus, covered the early stages of the war.

The purpose was to attempt to capture the main elements of the coverage, how their content and tone were particular to Cyprus' broader political and economic context and to better understand how the public perceived and responded to the developments.

Ultimately it was also an attempt to comprehend what the coverage revealed about the state of the country's media eco-system.

The Report can be downloaded from:
www.imme-universitas.org
www.freiheit.org/greece-and-cyprus

Cyprus Library Cataloging-in-Publication Data
ISBN 978-9963-711-94-4



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