

CYPRUS: THE EURO-MED REGION'S ULTIMATE 'COUNTRY OF COMMON INTEREST' IS ABOUT TO HAVE ITS MOMENT



By Roudi Baroudi

Lebanon, Beirut – 07/01/2026

January 1 marked a watershed moment for Cyprus, the first day of a six-month stint in the rotating presidency of the European Union that will give the tiny island nation massive influence, not just over the current agenda, but also the future direction of the entire EU and the destiny of the Eastern Mediterranean region.

The real significance of the moment lay not in the position itself, though, nor even in the considerable (but temporary) increase of Nicosia's raw political power. In fact, this is not even the first time that Cyprus has held the presidency; that came in the second half of 2012.

Instead, what makes this time different is that a) the Cypriot leadership has laid out a highly ambitious agenda, one designed to generate recurring benefits for both the EU and its Mediterranean neighbors; b) regional circumstances cry out for precisely the kind of engagement that Nicosia envisions; and c) Cyprus today is far better-equipped to advance its politico-diplomatic goals than it was in 2012, not just because its economy and finances are in better shape, but also because it is now on the verge of becoming an oil and gas producer and exporter. If well-managed, this latter point figures to drive growth for decades to come, enabling historic investments in education, healthcare, transport, and other drivers of greater economic competitiveness and better living standards, not to mention greater ability to influence – and stabilize – the surrounding region.

None of this has happened overnight. Geography and history have situated Cyprus – both literally and figuratively – athwart what is both our planet's most long-lived maritime trade route and its most famous crossroads of different languages, cultures, faiths, and ethnicities. The island's copper and other resources have always had their own attractiveness, rising or falling in value depending on the period, but it was location – specifically its proximity to each of Asia, Africa, and Europe – that made Cyprus a strategic prize for millennia, and that same location gives it enormous potential today.

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strategic prize for millennia, and that same location gives it enormous potential today.

For decades, the centerpiece of this toolkit has been a foreign policy which seeks friendly relations with as many countries – especially neighboring ones – as possible. And it has worked. Both during and since the Cold War, for example, Nicosia has been able to maintain working relationships with governments on both sides of the East/West divide, and its search for neutrality has been equally assiduous on the Arab-Israeli front. By habitually staking out the middle ground, Cyprus has not only insulated itself against most external problems, but also steadily burnished its bona fides as a helpful player on the international stage.

All of this helped, but it was not enough. Try as Cyprus might to parlay its neutrality into tangible benefits at home and abroad, its economy remained fragile and unbalanced, distracting and undermining the freedom of action of successive governments. After its banks had to be rescued with EU bailout funds in 2012-2013, support began to grow for reforms that would prevent future meltdowns, restore the stability of the financial services industry, and rebuild its ability to finance private and public activities alike.

By the time President Nikos Christodoulides took office in early 2023, Cypriots of all persuasions were fed up with “business as usual”. Because he had run as an independent and attracted support from a broad cross-section of society, he had a strong mandate to make sweeping changes, and these have included an increase in the minimum wage, income tax cuts for working people, more effective financial regulation, and a far-reaching program for digital transformation. His administration also has run a tight fiscal ship, dramatically reducing public debt (from 115% of GDP in 2020 to a forecast 65% for 2025) and thereby making more credit available to the private sector. As a result, Cyprus’ sovereign rating was upgraded by all three of the major credit rating agencies in

2024, and as of this writing, two of them regard its outlook as positive, while the third views it as stable.

At the same time, Christodoulides' background as a professional diplomat has empowered him to focus closely and effectively on foreign policy, recognizing its capacity to help shield the island against exogenous shocks, shore up the stability required to pursue its domestic social and economic development goals, and restore regional stability in the aftermath of the war in Gaza. It is no surprise, therefore, that his government has been at the center of international efforts to assist Palestinian refugees affected by the conflict, making Cyprus the staging ground for a vital flow of relief supplies.

Earlier this year, Christodoulides also teamed up with his Lebanese counterpart, President Joseph Aoun, to make sure their respective negotiating teams finally concluded a long-awaited maritime boundary agreement. The MBA clearly defines who owns what on the seabed, making both countries' offshore hydrocarbon sectors more attractive, especially to the major oil and gas companies whose capabilities will be required to explore, develop, and extract the resources in question. Nicosia and Beirut are considering several other agreements as well, including ones that would expand cooperation in electricity and other fields, but the MBA was crucial because of the doubts it removed and the doors it opened.

All of these factors are steering the entire Eastern Mediterranean region to what can only be described as its "Cyprus moment": the day when this miniscule country finally rises to its full stature as an exemplar of effective governance at home and a voice for peace and prosperity abroad. By some measures, this moment has already arrived, but the first exports of Cypriot natural gas to the European mainland will leave no doubt, and those are currently planned for late 2027.

Some say that timeline will be difficult to meet, but the positive effects are already being felt, and historians looking back will rightly regard the precise start state as a footnote. The economy has responded well to treatment, growth is expected to average 3% for the next couple of years, and diversification is already under way, including a variety of technology-related businesses that are helping to reduce the island's traditional reliance on tourism and construction.

Most importantly, the buzz generated by offshore hydrocarbons has attracted the attention of international investors, and they like what they see: in addition to its prime location and increasingly sophisticated workforce, Cyprus also offers some of the EU's most favorable tax conditions, strong investment protections, and a common law legal system modeled on the United Kingdom's, making it more familiar and easier to use for many outsiders. The result? Over the past few years, hundreds of companies have relocated to Cyprus, including some 270 in 2024 alone, adding at least 10,000 new jobs to the island's economy.

When gas production starts adding extra motive force to the economy, even more opportunities will open up. The advent of domestic energy production will not only spur employment both directly and indirectly, but also reduce the country's need for expensive energy imports, and put downward pressure on domestic energy prices across the board, imparting a key competitive advantage on the entire economy. If all goes according to plan, this would be just the beginning, because while the savings and security enabled by production will be significant, the really lucrative next step will be exports, and Western Europe – the world's hungriest energy market – is right next door.

As luck would have it, one of the island's first commercially operational undersea gas fields figures to be Cronos, which lies within easy distance of existing Egyptian infrastructure, meaning its production can be easily piped to the Egyptian

processing facility at Damietta and then delivered to European customers by LNG carrier. Nicosia's plan is for this flow to begin in 2027, but again, that is just the beginning: Cyprus also expects the nearby Aphrodite field to be a major money spinner, and the plan there is to install a Floating Production Storage and Offloading Unit directly above the deposit. This would enable both dry gas shipments for use in Egypt and further production of LNG for export further afield.

In the longer term, other streams are under consideration as well, including undersea pipelines to Greece, Italy, and/or (one day) even Turkey, and possibly a fully fledged liquefaction plant onshore that would be far and away the largest infrastructure project in Cypriot history. The investments being made and planned now are expected to fundamentally alter the path of Cyprus' economic and social development. What is more, if and when the time comes, the same infrastructure could also be used to help neighbors like Lebanon and Syria, both of whose coasts are less than 100 nautical miles away, to get their own gas to market. That could be crucial in enabling both of those countries to start recovering and rebuilding after decades of stagnation, and like Cyprus itself, the EU at large has a vested interest in seeing peace and prosperity spread across the Levant.

These and other factors give Cyprus' strategy a level of importance that goes beyond the purely national. Gas exports to Europe also will help increase the EU's energy independence, for example, further reducing continuing dependence on Russian energy supplies, and strengthening Europe's position in any negotiations over the situation in Ukraine. An LNG plant also would make affordable primary energy supplies available to several African countries, enabling them to pursue the electrification strategies they need to modernize their own economies. Again, Europe has countless reasons to want a stabler, happier Africa on its doorstep, beginning with the fact that this would

automatically reduce the flow of undocumented migrants making their way across the Med.

The Cypriot approach is nothing less than inspiring, especially since it springs from the very same wells of good will, good governance, and good sense that inspired the Barcelona Declaration more than 30 years ago. The EU envisioned by Barcelona, a strong and cohesive bloc closely integrated with vibrant neighborhoods in the MENA region, has been long-delayed by the collapse of what was then a promising Israeli-Palestinian peace process, and some countries have largely given up on that dream.

Clearly, Cyprus is not one of those countries. Instead, it has wagered on cooperation, weaving good governance and sensible diplomacy into a bold and hopeful venture.

No longer is Cyprus just a sunny little island filled with charming holiday homes and ringed with the Mediterranean's cleanest beaches; now it is also going to be a regional energy hub, a magnet for international investment, a docking mechanism to help its non-EU neighbors access European markets, and a catalyst for EU dialogue and engagement with Africa and Asia. In short, the country has refashioned itself into the ultimate "project of common interest" – a venture that serves so many useful purposes, both inside and outside the bloc, that it verily demands support from Brussels.

The before and after contrast is increasingly striking. Once a fragile neophyte dependent on handouts from Brussels, today's Cyprus has transformed itself into the very model of a Euro-Mediterranean country envisioned by the Barcelona process: a hopeful, peaceful, and universally useful land whose success promises only more opportunities for its friends and neighbors.

Cyprus: The Euro-Med region's ultimate 'country of common interest' is about to have its moment

LEBTALKS INTERVIEW: INTERNATIONAL ENERGY EXPERT ROUDI BAROUDI APPLAUDS 'HISTORIC' LEBANON-CYPRUS DEAL, DISMISSES 'BASELESS' CRITICISMS FROM NEIGHBORS



Following criticism of the Lebanon-Cyprus Maritime Boundary Agreement (MBA) by the governments of Israel and Turkiye, LebTalks spoke with energy and policy expert Roudi Baroudi,

who has authored several books and studies on sea borders in the Eastern Mediterranean. Baroudi praised the pact as “full of positives” for the interests of both parties and stressed the words of Lebanese President Joseph Aoun, who pledged after signing the MBA that “this agreement targets no one and excludes no one.”

LebTalks: How significant is the signing of the maritime boundary agreement between Lebanon and Cyprus?

RB: The official signing of the Lebanon-Cyprus deal is a major achievement, one that confers important advantages on both parties. This process was delayed for a very long time for no good reason, so President Joseph Aoun and the government deserve congratulations for having seized the initiative, and for having seen the job through to completion. So do Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides and his team, because they did the same thing. What made this historic agreement possible – after an impasse lasting almost two decades – was that Lebanon finally had a president who both understood the need for an MBA and made achieving it a top priority.

LebTalks: What does Lebanon gain by signing this deal?

RB: The agreement, which was reached by the negotiating teams in September, provides several benefits for both countries in the short, medium, and long terms.

The new equidistance line between the two states, defined according to the rules and guidelines of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), provides a fair and largely uniform boundary between the two brotherly countries' maritime zones. Most of the new turning points used to draw the line have moved in Lebanon's favor compared to the earlier negotiation in 2011, giving it an extra 10,200 meters on its western front while Cyprus received 2,760 meters.

Crucially, the MBA wipes away all overlapping claims caused by previous uncertainty over the precise location of the border.

Accordingly, this eliminates 108 km² of (map attached) Lebanese offshore blocks that were actually in Cypriot waters, as well as 14 km² of Cypriot blocks which were also on the wrong side of the line.

Apart from removing a key risk for would-be investors, the agreement also contributes to stability and security by providing clarity and thereby enabling easier cooperation, not just bilateral, but also, potentially, involving other states as well. It really is full of positives for both Lebanon and Cyprus, and therefore for the region as a whole.

LebTalks: What should Lebanon do to follow up on this agreement?

RB: To make the most of this clearer playing field, the logical next step is for Lebanon and Cyprus to immediately start drafting a joint development agreement, which would allow them to have a smooth partnership in place for any hydrocarbon reserves which are found to straddle their maritime boundary.

Perhaps the most important feature of the Lebanon-Cyprus MBA is that it provides a clear and stable starting point, putting Lebanon in ideal position to finish defining its maritime zones. The new line means that Lebanon's existing maritime boundary arrangements with Israel, signed in 2022, should be tweaked a little, but it also makes it easier to do that – and to negotiate a similar agreement in the north with Syria when that country's new leadership is ready to do so.



LebTalks: What about the objections voiced by Israel and Turkiye?

RB: With all due respect, these claims and complaints are completely baseless. As President Aoun has stressed from the very day it was signed, this accord targets no one, excludes no one, challenges no one else's borders, and undermines no one else's interests. I know there has been some negative commentary from both Israel and Turkiye, but there really is nothing here for anyone to be upset about. The line agreed to by Lebanon and Cyprus, which Turkiye has claimed is 'unfair' to residents of the self-styled 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus', is literally several kilometers away from any waters claimed by the TRNC. Beirut and Nicosia were very careful to make sure of this.

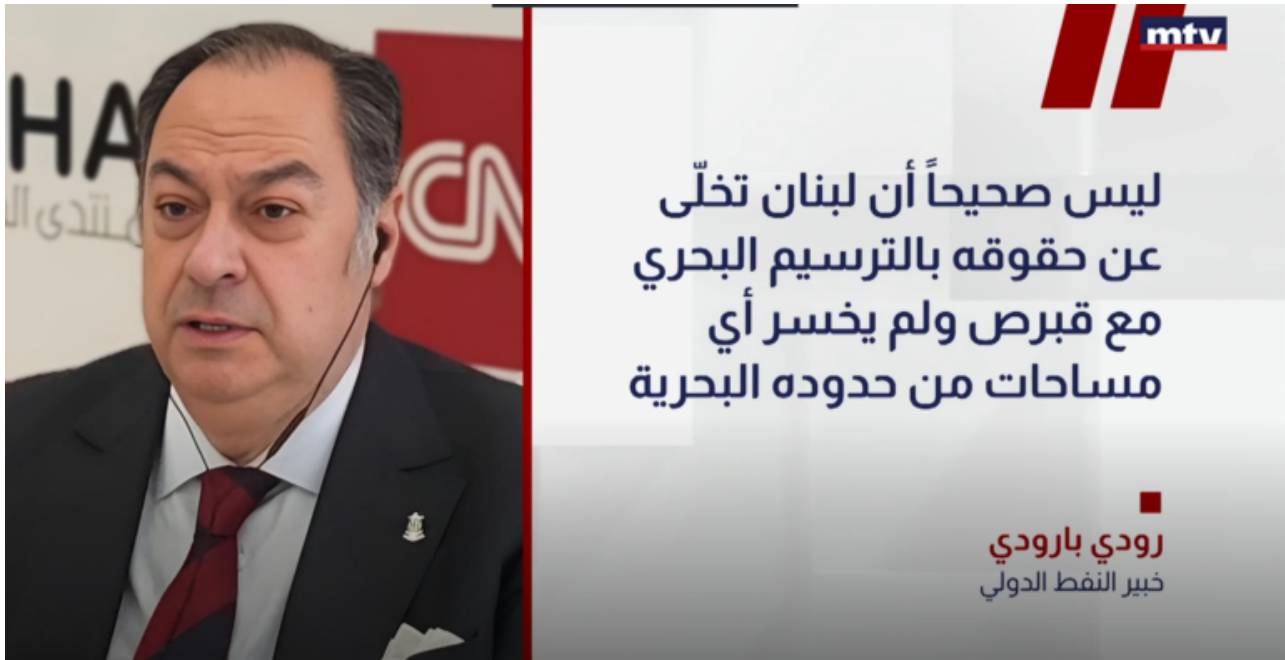
As for the Israelis, the only material change relating to the Lebanon-Cyprus line is that it pushes the Israel-Cyprus line in Cyprus' favor. But that's not Lebanon's fault. Or Cyprus' or anyone else's. It's just a fact of new mapping technologies, which today are far more precise and more accurate than those used when the Israel-Cyprus line was drawn

in their 2011 treaty.

On that subject, I would also note for all stakeholders in the East Med that while Lebanon and Cyprus are the region's only full-fledged members of UNCLOS, all states are subject to its rules and precedents, which have become part of Customary International Law. Since the Lebanon-Cyprus deal adheres strictly to those rules and the science behind them, the criticisms haven't got a legal leg to stand on. This is especially true with regard to Israel, whose own treaty with Cyprus was negotiated on the basis of the very same laws, rules, and science.

I have to assume that a lot of this is posturing, that both Israel and Turkiye will settle down once they've had more time to analyze the deal and see that, far from damaging them in any way, it could help all concerned by contributing to regional stability and economic growth. And again, I would go back to Aoun's words on signing day, when he declared that "this agreement should be a foundation for wider regional cooperation, replacing the language of violence, war, and ambitions of domination with stability and prosperity."

اتفاية ترسيم الحدود البحرية مع قبرص



https://euromenaenergy.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/WhatsApp-Video-2025-11-05-at-21.02.16_2f318946.mp4

Σε συνομιλίες η Κύπρος για την ΑΟΖ με τον Λίβανο. Οι επαφές που κάνει ο πρόεδρος της Κύπρου



Οι τεταμένες σχέσεις Ισραήλ-Λιβάνου και οι ραγδαίες εξελίξεις στη Μέση Ανατολή έχουν κινητοποιήσει τη Λευκωσία για επαφές υψηλού επιπέδου για την επικύρωση της ΑΟΖ με το Λίβανο. Έτσι ο πρόεδρος της Κύπρου Νίκος Χριστοδουλίδης συναντήθηκε με τον εμπειρογνώμονα περιφερειακής πολιτικής Ρούντι Μπραούντι, μακροχρόνιος υποστηρικτής του διαλόγου, της διπλωματίας και της ειρηνικής ανάπτυξης, ως προς τις ασφαλέστερες διαδρομές προς μεγαλύτερη σταθερότητα για ολόκληρη την Ευρω-Μεσογειακή περιοχή και άτυπο διαμεσολαβητή των δύο χωρών. Μάλιστα έχει γράψει και σχετικά βιβλία, όπως την «οριστικοποίηση θαλάσσιων Συνόρων στην Ανατολική Μεσόγειο: Ποιος θα Είναι ο Επόμενος;» και «Ένα Κλειδί, Πολλαπλά Έπαθλα: Οριστικοποίηση θαλάσσιων Συνόρων ανάμεσα στην Κύπρο, το Λίβανο και τη Συρία».

Ο κ. Χριστοδουλίδης και ο ομόλογός του από το Λίβανο, ο πρώην Γενικός Τζόζεφ Αουν, συμφώνησαν τον Ιούλιο να διαπραγματευτούν και να οριστικοποιήσουν μια γραμμή θαλάσσιων συνόρων. Και οι δύο χώρες αναμένουν ότι θα αποκομίσουν πολλά οφέλη από μια τέτοια συμφωνία, και η κατοχύρωση εδαφικών συνόρων στη θάλασσα

θα καταστήσει ευκολότερη την προσέλκυση ξένων επενδυτών για την ανάπτυξη των ενεργειακών πηγών τους.

«Η επίτευξη συμφωνίας θα ανοίξει όλες τις πόρτες για την Κύπρο και το Λίβανο», δήλωσε ο κ. Μπαρούντι μετά από τη συνάντηση. «Οι τάσεις πηγαίνουν στη σωστή κατεύθυνση, και όχι μόνο σε σχέση με το Λίβανο. Ο πρόεδρος της Κύπρου έχει φιλόδοξα σχέδια εξωτερικής πολιτικής, ιδιαίτερα σχετικά με τις δραστηριότητες της Κύπρου τους πρώτους έξι μήνες του 2026, όταν θα έχει την προεδρία του συμβουλίου της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης».

«Εκμεταλλεύτηκα επίσης την ευκαιρία να ευχηθώ στο πρόεδρο της Κύπρου καλή επιτυχία σε αυτή την αποστολή», πρόσθεσε, «ειδικά καθώς αναμένεται να εστιάσει όχι μόνο στην ενίσχυση της συνοχής της Ευρώπης, αλλά και στην ενίσχυση του ρόλου της Κύπρου ως γέφυρα μεταξύ Ευρώπης και γειτονικών χωρών.»

Πράγματι, η Λευκωσία έχει ένα φιλόδοξο πρόγραμμα για την προεδρία της και συνεργάζεται στενά με τη Δανία, που ασκεί την προεδρία αυτό το εξάμηνο, και την Πολωνία, που θα διαδεχθεί την Κύπρο. Η λεγόμενη«τριπλή προεδρία» βοηθά στη διασφάλιση συνέχειας από τη μία προεδρία στην επόμενη.

Ο κ. Μπαρούντι έχει γράψει αρκετά βιβλία και μελέτες σχετικά με το πώς τα υπάρχοντα εργαλεία του ΟΗΕ μπορούν να βοηθήσουν τις παράκτιες χώρες να συμφωνήσουν δίκαια και ισότιμα θαλάσσια σύνορα, να μειώσουν τις εντάσεις και να αποκομίσουν σημαντικά οικονομικά και κοινωνικά οφέλη. Έχει επίσης γράψει και μιλήσει δημόσια για διάφορες ευκαιρίες περιφερειακής συνεργασίας, από διασυνδεδεμένα ενεργειακά δίκτυα και υπεράκτια αιολικά πάρκα μέχρι κοινή διαχείριση θαλάσσιων προστατευόμενων περιοχών.

Το 2023, απονεμήθηκε στον κ. Μπαρούντι το Βραβείο Ηγεσίας από το Transatlantic Leadership Network, ένα think-tank της Ουάσινγκτον, για τη «πολύτιμη συμβολή του στην οικοδόμηση μιας ειρηνικής και ευημερούσας Ανατολικής Μεσογείου».

Σε δεκάδες άρθρα, μελέτες, εμφανίσεις στα μέσα ενημέρωσης και ομιλίες, για παράδειγμα, ο βετεράνος της κλάδου έχει

τεκμηριώσει την επιχειρηματική βάση για το νησιωτικό κράτος να γίνει κέντρο επεξεργασίας και διανομής φυσικού αερίου για τους γείτονές του. Αυτό θα περιελάμβανε την Κύπρο να δημιουργήσει έναν υπόθαλάσσιο αγωγό φυσικού αερίου προς την ευρωπαϊκή ενδοχώρα, ένα εργοστάσιο υγροποιημένου φυσικού αερίου (LNG) που θα ήταν το μεγαλύτερο έργο που έχει ποτέ η χώρα, ή και υπεράκτια πλωτά συστήματα αποθήκευσης και υγροποίησης για την εξυπηρέτηση απομακρυσμένων χωρών δια θαλάσσης.

«Όλες αυτές οι μελέτες και οι παράγοντες που ανέδειξαν παραμένουν επίκαιροι σήμερα», δήλωσε ο κ. Μπαρούντι. «Η Κύπρος διαθέτει την εγγύτητα, τις τιμές γης και τις σχέσεις με τους γείτονές της για να γίνει ο συνεταιριστής όλων στις εξαγωγές ενέργειας, αλλά και να λειτουργήσει ως θεμέλιος λίθος για μια πιο σταθερή και ευημερούσα περιοχή.»

Amid Maritime Boundary Talks in the Region, Cypriot President Receives International Energy Expert, Roudi Baroudi, on UN Demarcation Tools



NICOSIA – 29, September 2025: Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides met today with the international energy policy expert, Roudi Baroudi, who presented copies of his two latest books, “Settling Maritime Boundaries in the Eastern Mediterranean: Who Will Be Next?” and “One Key, Multiple Prizes: Settling Maritime Boundaries Among Cyprus, Lebanon, and Syria”.

Baroudi, a long-time advocate of dialogue, diplomacy, and peaceful development as the surest routes to greater stability for the entire Euro-Med region, said he felt “honored to have been received by the President.”

Christodoulides and his Lebanese counterpart, former General Joseph Aoun, agreed in July to have their respective teams negotiate and finalize a maritime boundary line (MBL). Both countries expect to derive numerous benefits from such a pact, and having treatyed borders at sea will make it easier to attract the foreign investors required to develop their

respective offshore oil and gas resources.

Reaching a deal “will open up all sorts of doors for Cyprus and Lebanon,” Baroudi said after the meeting. “The trends are going in the right direction, and not just vis-à-vis Lebanon. The President has ambitious foreign-policy plans, particularly with regard to Cyprus’ activities for the first six months of 2026, when it will hold the rotating presidency of the European Union.”

“I also took the opportunity to wish His Excellency every good fortune on that mission,” he added, “especially since it is expected to focus not only on shoring up Europe’s cohesion, but also on beefing up Cyprus’ role as a bridge between Europe and its neighbors.”

Indeed, Nicosia does have an ambitious agenda for its time in the presidency, and is working closely with Denmark, the current holder, and Poland, which will follow Cyprus’ term. The so-called “trio presidency” helps to ensure continuity from one presidency to the next.

Baroudi has published several books and studies on how existing United Nations tools can help coastal states to agree fair and equitable maritime boundaries, reduce tensions, and reap significant economic and social rewards in the bargain. He also has written and spoken publicly about a variety of opportunities for regional cooperation, from interconnected power grids and offshore wind farms to joint management of marine protected areas. In 2023, he was awarded the Transatlantic Leadership Award by the Transatlantic Leadership Network, a Washington think-tank, for what it described as “his valuable contribution in building a peaceful and prosperous Eastern Mediterranean.”

In addition to these works, ever since 2011, when the full potential of the East Med’s offshore hydrocarbon deposits began to emerge, Baroudi’s advocacy role has seen him provide

thought leadership for a variety of projects and proposals that would transform Cyprus into a regional energy hub. In dozens of articles, studies, media appearances, and speaking engagements, for example, the industry veteran has made the business case for the island nation to become a gas processing and distribution center for its neighbors. This would include Cyprus hosting one end of an undersea gas pipeline to the European mainland, a liquified natural gas (LNG) plant that would be the country's largest-ever project, and/or offshore floating storage and gasification units(s) to serve more distant customers by ship.

"All of these studies and the factors they highlighted are still relevant today," Baroudi said. "Cyprus has the proximity, the land prices, and the relationships with its neighbors to make it everyone's partner for energy exports, but also to serve as the bedrock for a stabler and more prosperous region."

**'The madness has to end':
Long-time promoter of
dialogue says 'decent
nations' must 'finally'
punish Israel for**

‘indefensible outrage’ in Doha



Israel's strike on a residential building in Doha on Tuesday was a "cowardly, treacherous act of war" that "cries out" for stronger efforts to end the war, a prominent Lebanese expatriate said in a statement after explosions rocked the

Qatari capital.

“This is an indefensible outrage, an unprovoked attack on a country that has done nothing but try to reduce tensions and help the region regain some semblance of stability,” said Roudi Baroudi, a high-profile executive, author, and energy expert who has spent years advocating for dialogue, diplomacy, and peaceful development across the Mena region.

“This country and its government have done everything possible to help end Israel’s continuing wars, mediating ceasefire talks since the beginning of the conflict in Gaza, also helping to end the brief but exceedingly dangerous clash between Israel and Iran, and using its good offices to reduce tensions on several other fronts as well. Qatar’s leaders and diplomats have worked tirelessly, arranging several possible off-ramps that would not only have helped to spare the Palestinian and other peoples, but also to give Israel a way out of the corner its prime minister has painted it into. The Israelis should be thanking Qatar for having played such a diplomatic constructive and selfless role,” he added.

“Instead, today, the Netanyahu government has carried out a cowardly, treacherous attack that cries out for the international community to finally step in and apply all the pressure at its disposal. History will not look kindly on a government that clearly seeks to prolong the war – and the suffering of the Palestinians and others – for no other reason than to keep itself in power. Those who fail to stand for the defenseless civilians who continue to die under Israeli bombardment and blockade will not escape the same historical judgment.”

“The madness has to end, and for that to happen, all states with any influence over Israel have to use it,” Baroudi stated. “It must be made unequivocally clear that no state can conduct itself in this manner without inviting a swift and painful response from the decent nations of this Earth: stop arming it, stop protecting it, stop funding it, stop trading with it – stop everything unless and until it starts behaving itself.” We need peace for all.

The true cost of ocean plastic pollution



The problem of maritime plastic-waste pollution first became apparent in the 1970s. In the half-century since then, the

problem has become ever more widespread, as scientific expeditions conducted by the Tara Ocean Foundation (of which I am executive director) have shown. Large pieces of debris, such as fishing nets, and their disastrous effects on marine life, are the most visible symptom. Such waste is estimated to kill more than one million seabirds and over 100,000 marine mammals annually, often through entanglement or suffocation, and promotes transport of invasive species, triggering a cascading effect on the ecosystems in which they play a central role.

Less visible, but more pervasive, are microplastics, which have been found in the deepest ocean trenches and all types of marine life. Microplastics can, among other things, modify bacterial and viral communities and disperse chemical toxins in food chains (often after being ingested by marine organisms). Some of these toxins, such as phthalates, are associated with the chemistry of plastics, while others, such as pesticides and heavy metals, are absorbed by the plastic before it reaches the ocean and enters the food chain.

How these toxic substances interact with plastics has been the subject of much study. Plastic is comprised of monomers that have been chemically bonded to form long chains of polymers – ethylene, styrene, and propylene become polyethylene, polystyrene, and polypropylene. But the process of polymerisation is often imperfect, and some of the unpolymerised monomers that remain in plastic, like different types of styrene and bisphenol, pose major environmental and health risks.

Moreover, other chemical additives, including plasticisers, fillers, colorants, flame retardants, and antioxidants, are incorporated into polymer formulations to modify their properties. And non-intentionally added substances (NIAS) – impurities, raw materials used in manufacturing, byproducts, and degradation products – bind to finished plastics. In most cases, because free monomers, additives, and NIAS are simply

trapped within the tangle of polymer chains, rather than being chemically bound to them, they are more likely to leach out during the production, use, and disposal of plastic, migrating into liquids, gases, and solids. Some 16,000 such molecules have been identified, but their effects are still not fully known, nor is their toxicity, which can change depending on how they are combined. What we do know is that one-quarter of these 16,000 molecules pose a hazard to human health or the environment by disrupting biochemical processes in living organisms.

Halting the flow of microplastics and toxic pollutants into the world's bodies of water is a Sisyphean task. Nevertheless, scientists are trying to stem the problem. For example, the Tara Europa expedition, in coordination with the European Molecular Biology Laboratory and more than 70 scientific institutions across the continent, has spent the past two years investigating how these hazardous substances make their way into the seas and oceans bordering Europe. The mission plans to share its findings soon.

But the generation of toxic waste and debris is not the only way that plastic can harm ocean health. The plastics industry has been a major driver of climate change, accounting for an estimated 3.4% of global greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions. Plastic production is on track to contribute 15% of GHG emissions by 2050, exacerbating global warming and thereby increasing the threats to marine life, which is sensitive to rising water temperatures.

Because plastic degrades the entire biosphere, not just the ocean, it is not a waste problem that can be solved by a few sustainability-minded citizens' recycling efforts. This is a systemic crisis that requires an economy-wide solution. A better approach is to understand plastic as one of the "new entities" that must not leak into the environment, a view initially formulated by the Stockholm Resilience Centre in its work on planetary boundaries and later endorsed by the United

Nations. While acknowledging the impossibility of defining a precise threshold for harm, such an approach highlights the need for a drastic reduction in plastic use.

Research suggests that it would be economically feasible to halve global plastic production at a cost which would almost surely be less than the cost of inaction. But, according to a recent study by researchers at the University of California, Berkeley, even this reduction would not be enough to limit global warming to 1.5° Celsius above preindustrial levels, the target set by the Paris climate agreement. Instead, they found that meeting this goal would require a 75% reduction in plastic production compared to 2015.

**‘THE POSSIBILITIES ARE
ENDLESS’: ENERGY EXPERT
LAUNCHES NEW BOOK ON
RESOLVING MARITIME BOUNDARIES**



ZOUK MOSBEH, 23-04-2025: Energy expert Roudi Baroudi signed copies of his latest book during a launch event at Notre Dame University – Louaize on Wednesday.

The book, “Settling Maritime Boundaries in the Eastern Mediterranean: Who Will Be Next?”, is part of Baroudi’s years-long effort to promote regional energy cooperation. In it, the author makes the case that if East Med countries are serious about exploiting their offshore hydrocarbons, they need to settle their maritime borders in order to attract the major energy companies whose technical and financial muscle are virtual prerequisites for undersea oil and gas activities.



Co-hosted by the Office of NDU Publications (which published the book) and the university's Office of Research and Graduate Studies, the signing event took place at NDU's Pierre Abou Khater Auditorium. All proceeds from sales of the book will go toward Student Financial Aid at NDU.

Inspired by the landmark US-brokered October 2022 agreement that saw Lebanon settle most of its maritime boundary with old foe Israel, the new tome stresses the need to define other East Med borders as well, including those between Lebanon and Cyprus, Lebanon and Syria, Syria and Cyprus, Cyprus and Turkey, and Turkey and Greece.

Publication was delayed by the outbreak of the Gaza war in October 2023, but the author says that conflict – which also led to massive destruction and loss of life in Lebanon – only underlines the need for regional players to find a new *modus vivendi*.



“We can’t keep doing the same things over and over again, and then expecting a different outcome,” Baroudi said during the NDU event. “For the first time in many years, all of Lebanon’s branches of government – Parliament, Cabinet, and Presidency – are fully functional. We have to start thinking of ways to reduce the scope for friction, to open the way for foreign investment, and hopefully start producing offshore gas.”

“Almost all of Lebanon’s energy needs are met by imported hydrocarbons; imagine if we discover enough gas to provide 24/7 electricity to all Lebanese,” he added. “And what if we had enough to start exporting it, too? Lebanon’s coast is less than 100 kilometers from Cypriot waters: this means that once the island and its partners have built a pipeline and/or a liquified natural gas plant, Lebanese gas could flow straight into the entire European Union, one of the world’s largest energy markets. The possibilities are endless. And now imagine all of the countries of the region having similar prospects – just because they finally got around to figuring out where their national waters begin and end.”

In addition to the manifold benefits of energy security and lucrative export revenues to fund domestic investment in things like education, healthcare, fighting poverty, and transport, Baroudi said the exercise of negotiating sea

borders could help build trust and good will.

“There isn’t enough of those commodities in the East Med region, and often for good reason,” he explained. “But we have to start somewhere, and maritime boundaries are a great place to do that because they open the way for investment and various forms of cooperation, direct or indirect, including fisheries monitoring and regulation, marine protected areas, tourism, weather forecasting, search and rescue, etc.”

With more than 47 years of experience, Baroudi has worked in multiple fields, from electricity, oil and gas, and petrochemicals to pipelines, renewables, and carbon pricing mechanisms. He also has led policy and program development with, among others, the World Bank, the US Agency for International Development, the International Monetary Fund, and the European Commission. The author of several books – including “Climate and Energy in the Mediterranean: What the Blue Economy Means for a Greener Future” (2022) – as well as numerous studies and countless articles, his expertise has made him a highly sought-after speaker at regional energy and economic conferences. Currently serving as CEO of Energy and Environment Holding, an independent consultancy based in Doha, he is also a Senior Fellow of the Transatlantic Leadership Network, a Washington think-tank. In 2023, he received the TLN’s Leadership Award in recognition of his efforts to promote peace.

Trump’s move to exit Paris accord to hit harder than

last time



This US withdrawal will take effect in one year, faster than the 3.5-year exit period when Trump first quit the accord.

A second US withdrawal from the world's primary climate pact will have a bigger impact – in the US and globally – than the country's first retreat in 2017, according to analysts and diplomats. One of President Donald Trump's first acts on returning to office on Monday was to quit the Paris Agreement as part of his plans to halt US climate action.

The impact will be to increase the chance of global warming escalating, to slow US climate funding internationally, and leave investors struggling to navigate the divergence between European and US green rules.

This US withdrawal will take effect in one year, faster than the 3.5-year exit period when Trump first quit the Paris accord in 2017.

Since then, climate change has become more extreme. Last year was the planet's hottest on record, and the first in which the average global temperature exceeded 1.5C (2.7F) of warming – the limit the Paris Agreement commits countries to trying to stay below.

“We are looking at overshooting 1.5C – that is becoming very, very likely,” said law professor Christina Voigt at the University of Oslo.

“Which, of course, brings to the forefront that much more ambitious global action on climate change is needed,” she said.

Today’s climate, measured over decades, is 1.3C warmer than in pre-industrial times, and on track for at least 2.7C of warming this century. While perilous, that is less severe than the 4C projected before countries negotiated the 2015 Paris Agreement. Each country’s pledge toward the Paris goal is voluntary. Nevertheless, Trump is expected to scrap the US national emissions-cutting plan and potentially also Biden-era tax credits for CO₂-cutting projects.

All of this will “further jeopardise the achievement of the Paris Agreement’s temperature goals,” Michael Gerrard, a legal professor at Columbia Law School, said.

“That has obviously an impact on others. I mean, why should others continue to pick up the pieces if one of the key players once again leaves the room?” said Paul Watkinson, a former French climate negotiator who worked on the 2015 Paris Agreement.

Some US states have said they will continue climate action. Regardless of politics, favourable economics drove a clean energy boom during Trump’s first term – with Republican stronghold Texas leading record-high US solar and wind energy expansion in 2020, US government data show. But Trump has already taken steps to try to prevent a repeat of that, on Monday suspending offshore wind leases and revoking Biden’s electric vehicle targets.

The US produces around 13% of global CO₂ emissions today but is responsible for most of the CO₂ released into the atmosphere since the Industrial Revolution.

As part of the Paris Agreement exit, Trump on Monday ordered an immediate cessation of all US funding pledged under UN climate talks.

That will cost poorer nations at least \$11bn – the US

government's record-high financial contribution delivered in 2024 to help them cope with climate change.

Together, all rich countries' governments combined contributed \$116bn in climate funding for developing nations in 2022, the latest available OECD data show.

That does not include the huge climate-friendly government funding Biden rolled out domestically, whose future under Trump is uncertain.

Total US climate spending – counting domestic and international, from private and public sources – jumped to \$175bn annually over 2021-2022, boosted massively by the 2022 Biden-era Inflation Reduction Act, according to non-profit research group the Climate Policy Initiative. The US is also responsible for funding around 21% of the core budget for the UN climate secretariat – the body that runs the world's climate change negotiations, which faces a funding shortfall.

The We Mean Business Coalition, which is backed by Amazon and Meta, said Trump's disruption of the US business environment could drive green investment elsewhere.

It could “open the door for other major economies to attract greater investment and talent,” the non-profit group said.

Three investors told Reuters the transition to green energy, including in the US, will move forward regardless.

One impact of the Paris exit will be to prevent US businesses from selling carbon credits into a UN-backed carbon market that could be valued at more than \$10bn by 2030, according to financial information provider MSCI.

While no longer able to make money from selling any surplus credits, US companies would be able to buy them on a voluntary basis. – Reuters

Climate displacement is also a health crisis



By disrupting care services, climate displacement deprives affected communities of access to doctors, hospitals, and pharmacies.

Every year, 21.5mn people are forcibly displaced by floods, droughts, wildfires, and storms. This number is set to rise dramatically over the coming decades, with up to 1.2bn people expected to be driven from their homes by 2050. The unfolding climate crisis is not just a humanitarian disaster but also a global health emergency.

Climate displacement poses both direct and indirect threats to public health. By disrupting care services, it deprives affected communities of access to doctors, hospitals, and pharmacies. Climate-induced migration also exacerbates poverty, overcrowding, and social instability. Food production is often severely affected, while unsanitary living conditions

fuel the spread of infectious diseases.

As the climate crisis threatens to derail global efforts to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the health and well-being of hundreds of millions of people across the developing world are at risk. High-income countries are not immune: in the US, 3.2mn adults were displaced or evacuated due to natural disasters in 2022 alone.

Pharmaceutical companies must play a pivotal role in bolstering global health resilience. Their involvement is particularly critical in conflict zones at the forefront of the climate-displacement crisis, where life-saving medicines and vaccines are often in short supply.

While the pharmaceutical industry has made strides in reducing carbon dioxide emissions and adopting more sustainable practices, its efforts fall far short of mitigating climate-related disruptions to supply chains.

Some pharmaceutical companies, such as Novartis and Novo Nordisk, have launched targeted programmes to aid populations displaced by extreme weather events, while others have donated cash or supplies in response to natural disasters. The demand for these donations has risen with increasing climate and humanitarian needs. Hikma, a generic medicine manufacturer founded in Jordan, reported \$4mn in donations in 2020, and \$4.9mn in 2023, mostly serving the needs in the surrounding region.

No company has developed a comprehensive strategy to ensure that displaced communities have sustained access to health products. A more holistic approach is needed. Amid the ongoing climate-displacement crisis, pharmaceutical companies should adopt a four-pronged strategy to strengthen healthcare systems. For starters, they could help deliver medicines to vulnerable communities in remote areas by revamping their supply-chains, from building redundancy into shipping networks to redesigning products to be more stable in hot climates where refrigeration may be unavailable.

Second, pharmaceutical companies must invest in research and development to create vaccines, diagnostics, and therapeutics

targeting climate-sensitive diseases. Rising global temperatures are accelerating the spread of mosquito-borne illnesses such as dengue, malaria, and Zika, as well as waterborne diseases like cholera and shigella, putting displaced populations at even greater risk.

Third, pharmaceutical companies should forge long-term partnerships with humanitarian organisations focused on climate displacement. Public-private collaborations have also proven effective in strengthening health resilience. Since 2010, for example, leading vaccine manufacturers like GSK and Pfizer have supplied Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, with billions of vaccine doses, protecting vulnerable populations in some of the world's most resource-constrained countries.

Lastly, pharmaceutical companies must boost efforts to cut greenhouse-gas emissions across their value chains. While the climate impact of pharmaceuticals may get less attention than that of traditional manufacturing industries, the sector emits more CO₂ per \$1mn of revenue than the automotive industry.

The active support and engagement of shareholders, employees, and other stakeholders is crucial. Investors, in particular, must encourage companies to align their business practices with global health and climate goals.

Climate displacement is not a distant or hypothetical threat; it is a rapidly escalating health emergency. The pharmaceutical industry has a moral responsibility to act. To do so effectively, companies must get ahead of the curve and provide vital, life-saving treatments to those on the front lines of the climate crisis.