



## **CRoLEV teams up with the PREPARED project at the Cyprus Forum 2023**

**By Prof. Stéphanie Laulhé Shaelou and Dr Orla Drummond**

During September 2023, CRoLEV Director Professor Stéphanie Laulhé Shaelou, Head of the School of Law at the University of Central Lancashire in Cyprus (UCLan Cyprus) and Founding Director of the Interdisciplinary Centre for Law, Alternative and Innovative Methods (ICLAIM) invited Dr Orla Drummond, Senior Research Analyst and Human Rights Lawyer at Trilateral Research, for a Fireside Discussion on measuring the Rule of Law and values in Cyprus and Europe at the Cyprus Forum. The event provided all three organisations, partners on the Horizon Europe PREPARED project, with an opportunity to discuss research conducted by the EU co-funded Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence for the Rule of Law and European Values CRoLEV and disseminate the findings of the legal and human rights analysis conducted for PREPARED, including at grass root level which is a task that ICLAIM undertakes.

The Cyprus Forum is an independent and not-for-profit conference which brings together local and foreign political leaders, academia, civic society prominent figures from the public and private sector, and the media. Essentially, it provides an inclusive platform to initiate dialogue, facilitate the exchange of ideas and identify new and creative solutions to improve and promote sustainable and socially responsible policy in Cyprus and the wider Eastern Mediterranean region. You may view more here <https://cyprusforum.cy/about/>. It was held in late September 2023 in Nicosia and hosted a staggering 200 speakers under six key themes. The event was attended by many high-profile organisations and individuals, including representatives from States, NATO, the United Nations and the European Commission as well as national and international NGOs. As the 2023 edition of the Cyprus Forum was dedicated to Transparency,

it was very important for CRoLEV and the PREPARED project to be present and take advantage of the Cyprus Forum as a platform to disseminate and amplify their work on rule of law and human rights in times of global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Under the theme of Justice and Strong Institutions, and with a particular focus on the Rule of Law and Transparency, the speakers provided an overview of both projects, emphasising the need for robust research ethics and integrity in times of global crises. Key issues discussed were the need to sustain Rule of Law principles in times of crises, to enable the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms, and in particular, to ensure the protection of marginalised communities from disproportionate and negative impacts.

Professor Stéphanie Laulhé Shaelou started by introducing the Fireside Discussion on why it is important to measure the state of the rule of law and European values locally, nationally but also internationally, particularly in times of crisis, and how various research, ethics and integrity frameworks such as the ones under development at CRoLEV and at PREPARED can talk to each other and mutually enhance results and impact. She referred to the prime objective of CRoLEV which is to provide insights on the state of the Rule of Law and other European values and principles in troubled times, in Cyprus and beyond. She explained that out of the CRoLEV methodology, the project team came up with several pillars based on a thick conceptualisation of the rule of law principle. The data collection will be conducted in accordance with these pillars. The CRoLEV empirical research focuses on measuring aspects of (i) civic engagement (citizen empowerment and the protection/promotion of civic space in Cyprus/Europe); (ii) democratic governance (anti-corruption measures and transparency); (iii) the functionality of justice in Cyprus/Europe (administration of justice and access to justice); (iv) democratic values in Cyprus/Europe (media freedom and public responses to crises).<sup>1</sup>

With a focus on the Pillar of democratic governance, Professor Stéphanie Laulhé Shaelou referred to open access research findings at CRoLEV<sup>2</sup> that identify Transparency as “*both a necessary precondition for, and a key feature of a functional democracy. In the absence of transparency – understood as the ‘release of information about institutions that is relevant for evaluating those institutions’<sup>3</sup> – citizens cannot engage in meaningful decision-making. Without a commonly agreed-upon information base, people are unlikely to be able to participate in deliberation.<sup>4</sup> Yet the effects of a lack of transparency extend beyond this, to a declining trust in public institutions. Civic distrust is often associated with increased apathy, disillusionment with democracy, and disengagement from political processes.<sup>5</sup> A lack of civic engagement leads to the misplacement of public trust in private networks, further diminishing*

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<sup>1</sup> S. Laulhé Shaelou et al, ‘CRoLEV Scoping Paper’ (CRoLEV, February 2023) [https://crolev.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/CRoLEV\\_Scoping-Paper\\_D4.2.pdf](https://crolev.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/CRoLEV_Scoping-Paper_D4.2.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> S. Laulhé Shaelou et al, ‘CRoLEV Scoping Paper’ (CRoLEV, February 2023) [https://crolev.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/CRoLEV\\_Scoping-Paper\\_D4.2.pdf](https://crolev.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/CRoLEV_Scoping-Paper_D4.2.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> See Lindstedt & Naurin, 2010, p. 301.

<sup>4</sup> See Coleman, 1990; Reporters without Borders, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> See Berman, 1997; Bernhard & Karakoç, 2007.

*satisfaction with democratic institutions. At its worst, it may bolster anti-establishment sentiments, which can effectively result in violations of the Rule of Law<sup>6</sup>”.*

The general discussion included exploration of aspects of the Rule of Law principle including formal requirements, i.e. that laws are general, public, non-retroactive, etc., and procedural requirements, i.e. that laws emanate from democratic procedures and substantive requirements, or that no law can violate key democratic principles, such as participation in law-making, or the ability to challenge, contest, and otherwise criticise decisions.<sup>7</sup> Both speakers focused on the need for transparency, fairness and inclusiveness in all public emergency responses, advocating for adherence to the principles of good governance in law-making and human rights protection in a public health crisis.

As stated by Dr Orla Drummond, “*As a human rights lawyer, for me, the rule of law provides safeguards for fundamental human rights, helping to shield the most vulnerable in our societies, and protects democratic political structures from being abused or hijacked by negative political forces. [...] High-quality democracy requires a truly democratic rule of law that ensures political rights, civil liberties, and mechanisms of accountability which in turn affirm the political equality of all citizens and constrain potential abuses of state power.*”

The session was well attended and included lively debate and questions from audience members. Input was generally in relation to legislative and governmental responses to COVID 19 and the rapidity of law making during the pandemic. Audience members asked how law-making could retain its rigid oversight during times of rapid social change. The speakers relayed the need for specific oversight mechanisms to be adhered to during crisis and emergencies to ensure the quality of any laws created and to guarantee that authoritarian governance remained checked. In conclusion, the Cyprus Forum provided a vivid platform to appraise the key findings from CRoLEV and PREPARED’s outputs and to disseminate key learning to policy makers and civil society, highlighting democratic values of universal reach such as fairness, legitimacy, solidarity and inclusiveness, informing the work of CRoLEV and PREPARED.

You may view the Fireside Discussion here:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6HS7VWNU\\_pM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6HS7VWNU_pM)

For more information on CRoLEV, please visit <https://crolev.eu/>

For more information on PREPARED, please visit <https://prepared-project.eu/>

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<sup>6</sup> See Letki, 2004; Letki & Evans, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> [https://crolev.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/CRoLEV\\_Scoping-Paper\\_D4.2.pdf](https://crolev.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/CRoLEV_Scoping-Paper_D4.2.pdf) P.3

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