



More and more tourists are discovering the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. This region is known for its sandy sea shores and for some of the cleanest waters in Europe. An increasing number of tourists are coming to this side of the island.



The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus attracts tourists and investors with lower prices and tourism-friendly conveniences—such as pools and restaurants.

The grimace of the conflict splitting Cyprus: the consultant is turned into a criminal

The conflict over land ownership taking place between the Republic of Cyprus and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus has also painfully affected a Lithuanian woman. The real estate consultant was unexpectedly detained at Nicosia airport and has been unable to leave France for more than a month and a half.

Milda KUIŽINAITĖ,
correspondent for LR

A trip to the Cannes Film Festival ended unexpectedly for the real estate consultant Rasa Žilevičė, who hails from Šiauliai but currently lives in the northern part of Cyprus, aged 43.

Instead of watching the rising stars of the stage, she walked with trembling legs through the airport corridors, toward those held in custody.

Although the European arrest warrant issued to her lists serious crimes, R. Žilevičė is confident that she was detained because of her everyday activities—consulting buyers of the allegedly real estate.

About the life in France lasting almost a month and a half, and her concerns about the future, R. Žilevičė told “Lietuvos rytas”.

— How and for what were you detained? right?

— On May 14, I was detained immediately when, together with my 17-year-old son, we arrived at Nice airport. French border officials checked my passport, but they could not scan something about it right away, so they asked me to step a little aside from the general line.

I honestly suspected nothing bad. I was feeling really good: the Cannes Film Festival was coming—such beauty, culture... That's why I took my son with me. While the officials were checking my documents, my son had gone to get the luggage.

Since I understood it would take time, I asked the officials to bring my son over.

After locking the boy in a separate little room, they continued to check me—they took all my belongings, my phone, and allowed me to keep only the book I was reading at that moment.

The officials gave me a document written in French to sign. My hands were shaking—I didn't understand anything—and I asked them to explain what they had written.

to detain me. When I heard that the Republic of Cyprus, I immediately understood that this request would be connected with immovable property.

— However, a European arrest warrant is usually issued for serious crimes.

— At first glance, that is indeed the case. In the European arrest order issued by the Republic of Cyprus, it is stated that I am accused of conspiring to commit a serious crime and fraud, as well as with fraudulent agreements involving immovable property belonging to another person.

It is also emphasized that these charges were formulated based on entries in my social media accounts.

What an absurdity! Only later it was explained that the charges brought against me sound like this: fraud, organized criminal activity, and money laundering.

I do not understand these charges at all, because I have nothing to do with them. For the activity that I carry out as an international real-estate consultant, I would not be prosecuted in France or in any other country.

In the northern part of the island, officially called the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, I work as a real-estate consultant.

I do everything legally and pay taxes. For me to be accused of fraud, there must also be victims, but no one has been harmed by my activities.

That's why I declined and the state lawyer offered by the officials. What can a lawyer working in France understand about Cyprus's internal matters?

We insisted that we be able to use our lawyer's services, and while I was waiting, my son had already managed to find a French lawyer and call him. The officials agreed.

The next day, the lawyer who came told me that this is a very clear case: under French laws, they do not—

it is no crime at all, and France does not interfere in Cyprus's internal affairs.

— What happened next?

— I spent two days in the detention cell at the airport, and at the same time I was taken to court, which was supposed to order a measure of custody. The court did not release me and ordered me to report to the police twice a week.

So that I wouldn't leave the country, my personal documents were taken. I did not leave the country and worked together with the officials. Therefore, the one I go to for registration, the officials already know me.

On June 24, the court decided not to hand me over to the Republic of Cyprus. We appealed this decision to the Supreme Court, which must make a decision within 20 working days.

We are waiting for the final decision in France together with the children: we are renting an apartment. From my friends and acquaintances I receive a lot of support and help. My family, friends, and acquaintances from the northern part of Cyprus help a lot. This inspires me and I understand that the truth is on my side.

— How do you assess the decision of the Court of Appeal in Aix-en-Provence to extradite you to the Republic of Cyprus?

— This shocked both me and the well-known French lawyer defending my interests, legal expert Philippe Ohayon.

He noted that this decision directly contradicts the practice formulated by the same court: just half a year ago, the same panel of judges considered a very similar request by the same prosecutor and rejected the Republic of Cyprus's demand to extradite Behdad Yafari, a construction contractor who had worked in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

As far as I know, three more real-estate agents detained in the same place in Cyprus admitted their guilt—they most likely signed documents in which they agreed with the charges brought against them.

What pressure was being put on them, and what were they threatened with, so that they admitted it?

Real-estate agents can only find out whether the plot(s) of land that buyers are interested in currently have owners, or whether they had—

them, decades ago. Such information is available only after the 1974 war, and there is simply no information about the earlier owners. Or if there is, Southern Cyprus does not share it.

— How did you end up in the northern part of Cyprus?

— I have been living for more than a decade—I lived and worked in the Republic of Cyprus. However, later a lot happened that changed the usual course of life—COVID-19 pandemic, quarantine began, we separated from our spouse—

as well. Left alone with two minor sons, I decided to move north, where everything seemed cheaper—so living should have been easier.

At first I was looking for any kind of job—I was transporting goods from the airport to hotels and tidying up homes. In the northern part of Cyprus, after the pandemic tourism started to grow rapidly, so neither jobs nor guests from Lithuania were in short supply.

Naturally, Lithuanians started to contact me, who needed advice on where to buy real estate better.

I provided them with neutral information on what is better to buy in the territories and what in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, whose real-estate companies looked reliable.

I worked having an official license, all legal documents, and paying taxes.

Although I was not directly selling real estate, I neutrally consulted buyers about possibilities for acquiring it, the terms, and I answered people's questions and doubts.

— Did you receive any help from the embassy?

— I'm grateful to that embassy employee who spoke to me for eight minutes, listened to me, and did not put the receiver down.

I speak six foreign languages, but not French, so I translated the pile of documents using artificial intelligence.

I asked the embassy if perhaps someone could translate at least the case summary, but I received the advice to find a translator myself.

I called another and another translator; they said that translating one document is about 1500 euros.

I thought that spending 10,000 euros on translations alone is not worth it, and

I decided to rely completely on the lawyers. I put myself into the hands of justice, and in France I hope for a fair trial—not an unfair one.

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— Are you not considering the possibility of returning to Lithuania?

— Although both I and my sons are citizens of Lithuania, I found out from the Lithuanian embassy in France that this is impossible—that Lithuania allegedly

also has obligations to Cyprus. I was advised to search for myself directly lawyers and defending oneself against accusations.

— Why do real-estate developers and sellers in Cyprus face problems with property rights?

— The situation is similar to the first years of independence in Lithuania, when people were being returned property they had previously owned. If, historically, in the place belonging to them there were no available plots, they



Stuck in France, R. Žilevičė is seeking to return to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus as soon as possible, where she has been living for several years.

were being approved on the other side of the country. The same is true in Cyprus. After the 1974 conflict, mass disputes arose over ownership.

Therefore, while working as a real-estate consultant, I always communicated with both the lawyers of the Republic of Cyprus and the lawyers of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

Their services were needed to find out whether the plot of land could be transferred, or whether it had been returned to someone.

To find out which property can be transferred and which cannot was difficult—the island's southern and northern institutions do not have a shared database.

They didn't send me from office to office, because there is no office, there is no list, there is no internet portal, or a responsible person who could answer whether it is truly safe to buy that land.

Over 18 years of work, I still have not found a tool to verify land ownership.

— And does selling someone else's plot of land automatically make you a criminal?

— Yes. But for which real-estate agent, seller, or developer, you face a sentence of seven years' deprivation of liberty. At the moment, in the northern part of Cyprus, many real-estate businessmen operate from various countries, especially from Asia.

Isn't the Republic of Cyprus trying to put all of them in prison? That would be a kind of genocide.

Because of this situation, everyone who works in the real-estate business lives under constant fear. People I know even advised me not to go to France, but believing

I ruled out European bias, I was sure that in the disputes between South and Northern Cyprus over land, Europe is impartial.

I don't accept any of the accusations, but still, I woke up in the middle of the night and often thought about what I could have done differently.

— When your case ends one way or another, will you stay in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, or will you run as far away as possible?

— I'll definitely not run. We live there; my children study there; our friends are there; our roots are there. My sons are teenagers—I want them to finish school there and be able to live wherever they want.

I still have hope that the laws will change and that people will no longer be afraid to do business with real estate. I hope,

Became hostages of the conflict	
R. Žilevičė by lia rya ki no de-the political drama of the Cyprus island lasting for centuries. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus remains an unrecognized state among the international community, where currently about 600 thousand people live. Because of this status, legal and property-related transactions on the island have for half a century remained an extremely sensitive political issue. Striving to resolve in a legally sound way the mass disputes over property rights that arose from the conflict after 1974	the northern part of the island established a special Commission for Immovable Property (TMK). The European Court of Human Rights officially recognizes this commission as an effective and lawful domestic remedy. According to official data, through this mechanism, people who lost property in the northern part of the island have already been awarded and paid compensation totaling nearly 800 million euros.
	compensation.

Lower price—higher risk	
Investments / immovable property in the northern part of Cyprus are characterized by lower prices than in other countries of the Mediterranean region. The developed tourism infrastructure—pools, SPAs, restaurants—ensures that the property will be rented out.	According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, international courts have issued decisions requiring foreign buyers to return property to the former legitimate owners. However, there are also opposite cases when similar cases were examined in favor of the Turks, especially since 2005.
This selection collides with significant legal and political risk due to the status of the international region.	All foreign buyers must obtain a special permit from the government of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in order to own and register property.
The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (URM) officially warns that the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is not internationally recognized, and therefore buyers face the risk of receiving legal claims from the former Greek-origin Cyprus property owners.	The Northern part of the island of Cyprus / the accommodation providers are attracted by and a favorable taxation system—lower property maintenance and capital growth taxes than in many other countries.

that an instrument would be developed to make it possible to verify what can be bought in the northern part of Cyprus. That a Lithuanian, a Pole, or an Iranian arriving in this country could, on some internet website or by calling someone, find out information whether the plot being offered belongs to no one.

I want clearer laws and directives so that I can adjust my business in such a way that I comply with the requirements of the laws of the Republic of Cyprus. As Cyprus tells me to run my business, that's how I will do it.

I love Cyprus. For me, this island is an oasis of peace. I don't divide people living in Cyprus into Greeks or Turks. For me, Cyprus is one island.

Even living in the north, I traveled to

to the south of Cyprus. The borders are open, clearly defined, and normal life goes on. I would like to continue living like this.

* * * Although, according to sources from foreign media, the charges brought against R. Žilevičė sounded extremely strict, the attorneys representing her interests noted that they are not supported by any evidence. The Lithuanian side is trying to justify it with entries on social networks “Instagram” and “LinkedIn”.

At the moment, R. Žilevičė is being consulted by Lithuanian lawyers as well; however, the European arrest warrant procedure and judicial proceedings take place in French territory in accordance with local and EU law, therefore Lithuanian legal representatives cannot directly represent the client in a French court or influence the court's decisions.