

# The Exclusion of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the Cyprus Peace Negotiations: A Critical Perspective

by Maria Hadjipavlou



On the 20th anniversary of UNSC resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres invited four women from the Central African Republic (CAR), Mali, Darfur (Sudan) and Cyprus for a virtual UN roundtable discussion. During the meeting, the failure of the Cyprus peace negotiations at Crans Montana, in Switzerland, in 2017 was mentioned.

Guterres remarked on the key role that women had had on both sides of the peace table in the previous years and continued to have afterwards in strengthening dialogue, cooperation and trust, and stated that women

must be involved also when the peace processes move to the top levels.<sup>1</sup>

This statement carries a loud message to the Cypriot leaders to rethink the exclusion of women and what this entails. For me, as an academic, it begets the question of “what women” should sit at the negotiations and whose agenda they should advocate for.

Historically, women have always been sidelined in peace processes and negotiations. According to UN

<sup>1</sup> UN Secretary-General, *Remarks at Roundtable Discussion on Women, Peace and Security in Peacekeeping Contexts*, 8 October 2020, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/node/253168>.

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Women, from 1992 to 2019, women have constituted only 13 per cent of negotiators, 6 per cent of mediators and 6 per cent of signatories in peace processes – a very dismal presence indeed. Resolution 1325 in 2000 was welcomed globally as a feminist achievement in acknowledging war, peace and security as gendered phenomenon. It promotes the equal and meaningful participation of women in the peace and conflict resolution processes as well as in all decision-making centres. This resolution and the subsequent nine in the context of 1325<sup>2</sup> are relevant to the Cypriot ethno-national conflict and other stakeholders such as Greece and Turkey whose interference in the internal affairs of the Cypriot communities has led to the geographic and ethnic division of the island since 1974.<sup>3</sup>

### A new leadership in Cyprus

After the failure of the 2017 negotiations, the peace process in Cyprus has remained dormant. Efforts are on

<sup>2</sup> UN Women website: *Guiding Documents*, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/node/39032>. These are the resolutions following 1325: 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015), 2467 (2019) and 2493 (2019). Taken together, the 10 resolutions represent a critical framework for improving the situation of women in conflict-affected countries.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Hitchens, "How Cyprus Was Betrayed", in *New Statesman*, 24 October 1975; Michael A. Attalides, *Cyprus. Nationalism and International Politics*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1979; Halil Ibrahim Salih, *Cyprus. The Impact of Diverse Nationalism on a State*, The University of Alabama Press, 1978; International Crisis Group, "An Island Divided: Next Steps for Troubled Cyprus", in *ICG Europe Reports*, No. 268 (17 April 2023), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/node/20632>.

the way to resume the negotiations but to date, no concrete progress has materialised. In October 2020, the Turkish Cypriot community elected a new leader, Ersin Tatar, a right-wing politician who promotes the "two-state solution" in the negotiations. This position is unacceptable to the Greek Cypriot leadership and community, who abide by the agreed framework of a bicomunal, bizonal federation (BBF), as has been agreed by the two sides since 1979 and referred to in all UN resolutions on Cyprus. For their part, in February 2023, the Greek Cypriots elected the eighth President of the Cyprus Republic, Nicos Christodoulides, backed by centre-right parties.

As the new leadership of Christodoulides initiates pathways toward resumption of the peace negotiations in accordance with his pre-election promises, we hope to see the inclusion of a WPS agenda in the process. This would mean the integration of a gender equality lens in all matters under discussion, ranging from governance to power-sharing, property, citizenship and the economy, as well as the participation of women in all phases of negotiations and in the drafting of the new constitution of a federal, reunited Cyprus. Yet, although the recently appointed Commissioner of Gender Equality, Josie Christodoulou, was tasked with promoting gender equality in all ministries and government departments as well as implementing the "National Action Plan on 1325" (published two decades after the adoption of 1325, and only in Greek), this would require both human and financial resources and coalition

building with civil society, which for the moment is not the case.

### *The missing WPS agenda*

In Cyprus, no woman has, in more than half a century of protracted conflict, participated in high-level peace negotiations with the same status as male negotiators. To be sure, women have been working behind the scenes, preparing documents and information for the negotiators and as note-takers too, a contribution that must not be underestimated. Yet, they have remained invisible and nameless. Cypriot women from all communities have worked for peacebuilding and reconciliation and have contributed to the unofficial peace process across the divide, challenging the dominant patriarchal, nationalist and militaristic narratives based on the “us and them” mindset, thus preparing a conducive environment for the high-level negotiations.

For instance, women academics (myself included) and activists from across the divide who form part of the Gender Advisory Team (GAT) have long noted that the leaders of the two major ethnic communities have never discussed gender equality or women’s rights in the negotiations. The issue of “equality” was discussed exclusively through the ethnic lens ignoring other dimensions of which gender is a crucial component. In this context, GAT members worked jointly to mainstream gender equality in all chapters of the peace negotiation. GAT, which has been working on 1325 since 2009 and continues until now, produced an alternative, multi-level, inclusive

analysis of the conflict and specific recommendations on governance and power-sharing, citizens’ rights, property rights and economic rights based on the principles of 1325. GAT’s contribution has nonetheless remained unacknowledged and unutilised by local political elites and mass media, despite the international recognition and numerous appeals by the UNSC’s reports to include women, youth and civil society in the Cyprus peace negotiations.<sup>4</sup>

In 2015, furthermore, a Technical Committee on Gender Equality (TCGE) was established by the former community leaders Nicos Anastasiades and Mustafa Akıncı, who appointed Turkish and Greek Cypriot women and two men from each community

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance: UN Secretary-General, *Report of the Secretary-General on His Mission of Good Offices in Cyprus (S/2010/603)*, 24 November 2010, point 43, <https://undocs.org/S/2010/603>: “In addition, mindful of the important role of women in peace negotiations, as recognized by the Security Council in resolution 1325 (2000), I would encourage the sides to continue their engagement with the Gender Advisory Team, consisting of civil society activists and scholars from across the island, and to seriously consider its gender-focused recommendations on the main areas under discussion in the peace talks.” Also see: Nayia Kamenou, “Feminism in Cyprus: Women’s Agency, Gender, and Peace in the Shadow of Nationalism”, in *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (2020), p. 359-381, DOI 10.1080/14616742.2019.1687000; Olga Demetriou and Maria Hadjipavlou, “The Impact of Women’s Activism on the Peace Negotiations in Cyprus”, in *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2018), p. 50-67, DOI 10.1080/13537113.2017.1422639; Maria Hadjipavlou and Olga Demetriou, “The UNSC Resolution 1325 and Cypriot Women’s Activism: Achievements and Challenges”, in Seema Shekhawat (ed.), *Gender, Conflict, Peace, and UNSC Resolution 1325*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2018, p. 197-214.

totalling 16 members, myself included. At the time, the TCGE was welcomed as a success by Cypriot women at the civil society level who had long worked on 1325 promoting the visibility of women. The TCGE worked hard and, with the help of the UN, submitted recommendations for the integration of gender equality provisions into the then-ongoing negotiations, suggesting also the establishment of a Ministry of Gender and Social Equality at the federal level. These documents were tabled in 2016 when there was euphoria for a new possibility of reaching an agreed solution. None of this work, however, was taken into account at the negotiation meetings in Crans Montana the following year. There followed a period of complete inactivity since the negotiations had reached a deadlock.

In 2021, in response to the UN Secretary-General's request on Cyprus,<sup>5</sup> and after

<sup>5</sup> UN Security Council, *Resolution 2587 (2021)*, 29 July 2021, point 5, [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2587\(2021\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2587(2021)): "Regrets the ongoing lack of meaningful participation of women's organisations and youth in the Settlement process, calls on the leaders of both sides to submit to the Secretary-General by 15 December 2021 an action plan, in coordination with the Technical Committee on Gender Equality, to increase women's full, equal and meaningful participation in peace talks and to provide direct support and encouragement to civil society organisations to enhance inter-communal contact and trust-building, and requests the Secretary-General to include this action plan in his next Good Offices report, and notes the Secretary-General's call to ensure the inclusion of at least 30 per cent women in future delegations and urges the parties to explore ways to ensure women's full, equal and meaningful participation and the inclusion of gender considerations in a possible resumed negotiation process". See also UN Security Council, *Resolution 2618 (2022)*, 27

months of difficult discussions – the TCGE members had resigned in 2020 and new members were appointed by the new leader, Ersin Tatar – the committee prepared an "Action Plan on how to ensure women's full, equal and meaningful participation in the settlement process/an eventual settlement process".<sup>6</sup>

In this Plan, the TCGE proposed, among other activities, the need for the public to be informed about the benefits of a future solution by increasing the level of understanding, cooperation and mutual trust between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots, and proposed that at least 30 per cent women should be at the negotiation table. In addition, it stressed the persistent barriers to women's participation to be addressed as a matter of priority and an integral aspect to ensuring gender equality. These proposed activities, however, have yet to be implemented as there are no mechanisms in place to hold the leaders accountable for not complying.

GAT noted previously the under-representation of women in the six appointed Working Groups on the

January 2022, point 6, [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2618\(2022\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2618(2022)); Jean Christou, "Leaders Agree on Action Plan for Women's Participation in Peace Process", in *Cyprus Mail*, 9 February 2022, <https://cyprus-mail.com/?p=498849>.

<sup>6</sup> Technical Committee on Gender Equality, *Action Plan on How to Ensure Women's Full, Equal and Meaningful Participation in the Settlement Process/an Eventual Settlement Process. Recommendations of the Technical Committee on Gender Equality to the Leaders, in Fulfilment of the Request of the UN Security Council in Its Resolution 2587 (2021)*, April 2022, [https://uncyprustalks.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/action\\_plan\\_on\\_how\\_to\\_ensure\\_womens\\_participation\\_in\\_cyprus\\_en.pdf](https://uncyprustalks.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/action_plan_on_how_to_ensure_womens_participation_in_cyprus_en.pdf).

different chapters under negotiation, in which only 35 per cent of members are women; in the seven Technical Committees, 35 are women – predominantly in the culture and gender equality and humanitarian committees – as against 77 men. The mandate of these Working Groups and Committees is to assist in the peace process whenever there are negotiations between the two communities as well as to engage in civil society trust-building activities to support conflict resolution.

The TCGE had proposed several activities; however, due to bureaucratic and hierarchical procedures, these have to be approved by the respective leaders and coordinators of the Technical Committees, which has proved to be discouraging. Approval is therefore contingent upon the political position that each side adopts regarding the overall solution, which can either facilitate or hinder the work of the committees. Thus, often this Track-I attitude causes delays and frustration among the members of the committees and negatively impacts motivation in the broader civil society. For these committees to be able to produce new ideas and projects for sustainable peace based on the WPS agenda and inject them into the negotiation process, a greater degree of autonomy would be required.

### *Disconnected levels in Cyprus's politics and society – and how to address them*

In the Cypriot political culture, there has been a lack of linkages between the macro level (Track I leaders), the meso-

level (opinion makers, academics, religious leaders, business people), and the micro-level (civil society and independent organised groups such as women's and youth). This can explain why often the numerous efforts undertaken at the meso or micro levels to promote peacebuilding and the WPS agenda have remained unrecognised and the gender equality perspective has not been taken into consideration at the macro level. Such linkages are important to build because they can enable negotiators to revisit some of their positions, options and ideas in light of the changes, concerns and needs emerging at the societal level. Thus, the gap between top-down and bottom-up may be addressed in a mutually beneficial way adding both inclusion and transparency to the peacebuilding process.<sup>7</sup>

As far as women's low participation in the decision-making and peace processes is concerned, as was pointed out during a series of two-day workshops supported by the UN's Good Offices mission in Cyprus involving women from both Cypriot communities and different organisations and orientations, four reasons may be highlighted: *historical* (including the legacy of colonialism, ethnic nationalism, militarism, forced separation of people); *structural* (entrenched patriarchy and hierarchic gendered institutions such as within the family, religion, education, trade

<sup>7</sup> Maria Hadjipavlou and E. Biran Mertan, "A Multilevel Intervention: The Case of the Cyprus Gender Advisory Team (GAT) Achievements and Challenges", in *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (August 2019), p. 125-137, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1542316619843258>.

unions, political parties and media); *political* (such as a male-dominated political culture, the private/public divide, gender stereotypes and hegemonic discourses leaving no space for women's concerns, fears, ideas and needs); and *psychosocial* (such as women internalising their oppression and subaltern role early on in their socialisation and education, fear of success and low-confidence).<sup>8</sup>

Among the numerous initiatives, public discussions and training workshops to raise awareness about these issues in Cyprus, one should mention those conducted by members of the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network/Cyprus Antenna and with support from the Italian Foreign Ministry, which also included the publication of articles on security from a feminist lens in various local media. Online petitions were initiated by women academics in 2021 demanding the meaningful participation of Cypriot women with expertise on the WPS agenda at the negotiating table. The petition received thousands of signatures and hundreds of shares; some of the promoters were interviewed on radio and TV programmes.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Mine Atli et al., "Women's Peace in Cyprus: Recommendations of the Gender Advisory Team (GAT) on Implementing UNSCR 1325 Provisions on Women, Peace and Security", in *PRIO Cyprus Centre Reports*, No. 3/2012, p. 5, [https://www.gat1325.org/\\_files/ugd/553524\\_7ac79c667b09943ec66546c610fa1b6b.pdf](https://www.gat1325.org/_files/ugd/553524_7ac79c667b09943ec66546c610fa1b6b.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> On media campaigns, see Sophia Papastavrou and Magda Zenon (eds), *White Book. Pathways towards Sustainable Peace*, Nicosia, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Office Cyprus/World Vision International, 2017, <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/zypern/13473.pdf>.

These initiatives are a good example of how a dialogue amongst different civil society groups working on gender equality and conflict resolution should cooperate at different levels to open up space for civil society's contributions, ideas, concerns and needs.

### *What difference can a WPS agenda make in the Cyprus peace process?*

Cypriot women and academics have produced a wealth of ideas and documents that can complement and broaden the analysis and the negotiation agenda beyond the male, legalistic power-sharing approach that is merely based on the Greek/Turkish Cypriot ethnic divide. A feminist analysis will incorporate the gender lens and an inter-sectionality dimension, asking different and complementary questions regarding power-sharing and how positions can be allocated in all institutions at the federal and constituent levels. In a patriarchal political culture, some temporary special measures (such as quotas or affirmative action) will be needed to improve the gender balance at all levels. Furthermore, in the drafting process for the future constitution, women will advocate for a gender-sensitive language and prohibit any form of discrimination.

As far as security issues are concerned, Cypriot leaders and negotiators have addressed these exclusively from the state-centred lens, that is, the military/defence guarantees. A WPS lens focuses on human security impacting the daily lives of citizens such as safety in the streets, protection of women against violence, gender discrimination



and structural inequalities, health, education, human rights for minorities, LGBTQ and migrants, the need for social protection services, structural changes in police and reforms in the military masculinised culture in both communities.

It is thus important that women, youth and civil society actors participate in all the discussions and negotiations throughout the peace process. We need a plurality of voices, which will legitimate the negotiations by increasing public ownership and later commitment to the implementation of the signed agreement. As research has highlighted, when women are present at the negotiation table the resulting agreement is 35 per cent more likely to last for at least 15 years.<sup>10</sup> The overall outcome of the Cyprus negotiations will therefore benefit from a comprehensive inclusion of the WPS agenda in the process.

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<sup>10</sup> Christine Bell, "Women and Peace Processes, Negotiations and Agreements: Operational Opportunities and Challenges", in *NOREF Policy Briefs*, February 2013, <https://noref.no/Publications/Themes/Gender-and-inclusivity/Women-and-peace-processes-negotiations-and-agreements-operational-opportunities-and-challenges>; Sanam Naraghi Anderlini, *Women Building Peace. What They Do, Why It Matters*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 2007.

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