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Women and Peace Negotiations in Cyprus

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The integration of a gender agenda in the peace negotiations in Cyprus has been elusive over the five decades. However, it is only since the late 2000s that civil society and international observers have problematized this lack and attempted to address it through various initiatives. These have included local and international efforts to mobilize Cypriot women across the divide around an agenda based on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security, which led to the formation of the Gender Advisory Team in 2009. They have also included research efforts by local and international organizations and think tanks to document the extent to women's inclusion in the peace process on the island. These efforts eventually led to the set-up of the Technical Committee on Gender Equality which is attached to the peace negotiations since 2015, but the impact of which has remained marginal. One of the key problems frustrating the integration of a gender agenda in the peace negotiations remains the fact that despite great advances in both societies north and south of the dividing line in many areas of gender equality, the hard politics relating to the Cyprus conflict and its resolution remain contentious and politically perilous to oppose, while also being discursively disconnected from perceptions of 'gender' and feminist concerns.

Synonyms

Cyprus UNSCR 1325, Cypriot women in peacebuilding, feminist agenda in the Cypriot peace negotiations, gender and peacebuilding in Cyprus, gender in the negotiations in Cyprus

Introduction

Conflict is a gendered phenomenon and affects women and men differently. This is true of the Cyprus conflict as well, where men have dominated the political sphere in conflict and peace times throughout the island's modern history. Attempts to resolve conflict, through political negotiation and peacebuilding efforts are also gendered, as men and women involved in them tend to have different roles. In Cyprus, all the negotiators at the highest official levels in the last decades have been men, but women have begun taking on roles in negotiating teams since 2000s. While official negotiations consisted of male majorities on the whole, the peacebuilding work that was carried out after the end of hostilities in 1974 was more inclusive of women. This developed into more coherent groups and structures in the 1980s and 1990s and was recognised as 'track II' diplomacy. The proliferation of these groups also allowed room for a greater

spectrum of themes to be addressed, among them gender concerns. However, effective implementation of the parameters of UNSCR 1325 which require substantive representation and meaningful participation of women in peace processes remains a major concern for Cypriot women's organizations and international observers.

Main text:

1. Women and the conflict in Cyprus

In ethno-national conflicts, like the Cyprus conflict, populations of opposing sides are called upon—through dominant national narratives, which are patriarchal, militaristic and oversimplified—to choose their side and locate themselves on the conflict map (Hadjipavlou, 2006, 2010). In the case of Cyprus, events that have marked different conflict stages, according to the dominant narratives are mostly those of violent confrontation (Anthias, 1989). December 1963 marks the time when Turkish-Cypriot parliamentarians protested against the Greek Cypriot president's amendments to the constitution to diminish their rights and withdrew from office. Segregation ensued and violence spread when Greek-Cypriot police killed a Turkish-Cypriot man and a Turkish-Cypriot woman during an identity check in a mixed urban area. In 1967, violence flared again, and a Greek-Cypriot paramilitary commander was ordered to leave the island. The Greek junta with the Greek-Cypriot National Guard carried out a coup in July 1974 and Turkey intervened by invading the island and capturing its northern part, into which Turkish-Cypriots were encouraged or forced to move. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus was unilaterally declared in November 1983, but it has failed to gain recognition by the UN since then. These events are contested and form the bedrock of differential readings of history, which mire the negotiations for a peace settlement to this day (Vassiliadou, 1997). These negotiations have taken different forms over the decades but have been carried out officially under a UN mandate since 1974. They have thus far yielded high level agreements in 1977 and 1979, which aim at setting up a bizonal bicommunal federation on the island, and a comprehensive peace plan (known as the Annan Plan) with detailed power-sharing arrangements, which was signed in March 2004 but rejected at referendum by the Greek-Cypriots the following month.

Women have largely been written out of these accounts of history, except for their roles as victims of the conflict and aides to military men (Agathangelou, 2004). In the anti-colonial struggle that preceded the conflict (1955-1959) and which was waged by the Greek-Cypriot nationalist organisation EOKA (*Ethnikí Orghánosi Kypríon Aghonistón*), women in secondary roles served as helpers, carrying messages and hiding men in their houses, and exceptionally as officers in the organization. Turkish-Cypriot women were similarly involved in support roles in the Turkish-Cypriot paramilitary organization TMT (*Türk Mukavemet Teşkilatı*) which fought for the division of the island in the wake of EOKA's call for union with Greece. During this first period of violence, large numbers of the population across the ethnic and gender divides faced physical insecurity and economic hardship. Leftists were particularly targeted and inter-ethnic relations were viewed as undesirable. This was also a period however, when women's education became valued, they began to enter the labour force after the WWII, and family structures modernized, especially following independence in 1960. Feminist discourses also arose in this period, mostly in the field of education and the letters, and were separated across the ethnic binary. This continued in the 1960s, when inter-ethnic violence perpetuated a general insecurity and communal separation.

In the war of 1974, the experiences of men and women were highly differentiated, most military casualties being men, while women fled their homes and were tasked with making new homes in refugeehood. Conflict imagery in Cyprus centres heavily still on the feminization of victimhood on both sides, depicting strong images of women in desperation mourning their husbands, and sons, or looking for relatives who went missing (Roussou, 1986). This imagery accentuated a concept of female vulnerability that was often belied by the strength that women had to exhibit in rebuilding their lives post-war and becoming wage earners in the conditions of impoverishment that ensued: in the south because of the loss of the north, and in the north because of international isolation.

The impact of the conflict on gender equality is evident in two particular examples of legislation: the marriage clauses of the Constitution of the Republic (1960) and the abortion law of 1974. The first stipulate that married women belong to the community of their husbands and that family life is the domain of Communal Chambers which regulated community affairs before 1963. Effectively, until 1990 when civil marriages were recognised, only religious marriages were allowed, and initially civil marriages were recognised only amongst Greek-Cypriots. The law on abortion, on the other hand, was passed in November 1974 as an emergency measure to stop pregnancies coming to term that had been the result of war rapes and is pervaded by a discourse of 'honour and shame'. It was only amended in 2018, which allowed abortions under more lenient terms and on the basis of women's human rights (Demetriou, 2018).

In effect, the conflict has had a profound impact on women's lives in Cyprus, affecting not only their social positions and the roles they have performed as home makers and workers, but also their legal rights as citizens of the Republic. Turkish-Cypriot women and minority women were multiply affected by this situation, since they have had to face intersectional forms of discrimination (Lisaniler, 2005).

2. Women and peacebuilding

Women's peace efforts have taken multiple forms over the years and have encompassed variable understandings of 'peace' (Hadjipavlou, 2010). Since the de facto division of the island into north and south there have been different independent women's initiatives aimed at raising women's voices and desires for peace and demilitarization and expressing the desire to 'return home'. One of the first such groups was the 'Women Walk Home' march organized by educated, mainly middle-class women from the Greek-Cypriot community. The first 'Walk' along the dividing line in the Spring of 1975 was organized soon after the war and partition of 1974 and articulated the desire of Greek-Cypriot women to return to their homes peacefully, now within the zone occupied by the Turkish military. This was the first women's peaceful resistance to the division of the island. Thousands of Greek-Cypriot women and many invited female personalities from abroad participated in that first Walk (Kamenou, 2019). The walk grabbed the attention of international media and was followed by other Walks, in 1977, in 1987 (June and November) and in March 1989. After that, the group became inactive as different political parties tried to appropriate it. Yet, many of the women who participated continued to take an active part in politics, either as members of political parties, or as civil society actors. Perhaps the most well-known follow-up activity from the Walk was the lawsuit against Turkey at the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), brought by Titina Loizidou, a woman who had been detained and ill-treated by

Turkish police during the Walk, after she attempted to access her house. The *Loizidou v. Turkey* case is a landmark case in litigation on property rights and on the responsibility to protect in refugee legislation.

From the late 1990s onwards other women's groups began to appear, which were intercommunal and more focussed on rapprochement and cooperation. They included the 'Metamorphosis Cypriot Women's Group' established in 2000 by professional women, which worked on joint projects and produced an important video of ordinary women from both communities who had struggled to bring about social change and challenge social and cultural taboos in their communities.

'Hands Across the Divide' (HAD) was another such group, established officially in 2001. It was the first organization to bring UNSC resolution 1325 to the attention of the Cypriot leaders and talk about the relevance of the Resolution to the peace process. HAD works for reconciliation and social justice at the grassroots level. HAD was unique in its establishment because it registered officially as an NGO in the UK, at a time when there were legal barriers in being recognized on both sides. It also made a point of holding frequent, face-to-face meetings in locations where women from both sides could meet (the village of Pyla). The group has a dual goal: (i) political intervention, bringing out statements on the process of the negotiations and holding activities and events at crucial points before and after the Annan Plan referendum; (ii) providing a safe space for women to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences, about the effects of patriarchal and nationalist dynamics on their own lives (Hadjipavlou and Mertan, 2019).

FEMA is a Turkish-Cypriot feminist organization working on gender equality and against gender-based violence in the Turkish-Cypriot community, as well as on reconciliation and peace but through focussing its work in the northern part of the island and lobbying authorities there. FEMA has a keen interest in engaging women to claim their rights. It has organized workshops and training events focused on education, empowerment, and activism. It has also produced a journal, *Gaile*, with the aim of reaching a wider audience. Its view has often been internationalist in scope, making connections between global and local realities. FEMA has crucially been a key collaborator with women's organizations on the other side of the divide.

The 'Gender Advisory Team' (GAT), which was established in 2009 was the first to focus exclusively on UNSC resolution 1325 and its implementation in Cyprus and, more specifically, in the Cyprus peace process (Demetriou and Hadjipavlou, 2016).

3. Women's participation in politics and the negotiations

On both sides of Cyprus, women's participation in political life is noticeably low. Suffice it to say that the first female member of parliament in the Republic was elected in 1982, while Turkish-Cypriot Kadriye Hacıbulgur, was the only woman to be elected to the Turkish-Cypriot Communal Chamber in 1960. In the Republic of Cyprus, according to World Bank statistics, women's participation percentage in parliament ranged between 5% and 18% since 1997. In the north in 2018 there were nine out of 50, equalling 18%—up from 8% in previous years. The single time in which a woman held the highest post was in 2013 in the north, when the ruling Turkish Cypriot party appointed a governmental council for a short pre-election period, headed by Sibel Siber. In 2013, Praxoulla Antoniadou contested the

Republic's presidential elections unsuccessfully, and in 2015 Sibel Siber did so in the north. Women ministers have been appointed sparingly since the 1960s, reaching a percentage of 18% in the late 2010s on both sides. Such appointments have tended to be in ministries for issues considered relevant or secondary, such as social welfare, health, education, and transport, except in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where Erato Kozakou Marcoullis has served twice. Emine Colak was appointed to a parallel post in the north between 2015 and 2016. Two women have occupied Cypriot MEP positions amongst 17 men since accession in 2004, Antigoni Papadopoulou and Eleni Theocharous, and two have been appointed EU Commissioners out of four Cypriot Commissioners in the same period: Androulla Vassiliou (2008-2014) and Stella Kyriakidou (2020-). All of the major parties on both sides have women's branches, and there has often been criticism of their work from feminist circles. Such criticism focusses on the sphere of priorities of these organizations, which remain secondary to the activities of the 'main', male-dominated party machinery.

Stella Soulioti (1920-2012) was the first woman to participate in the negotiations for a political settlement to the conflict, in an advising role to Archbishop Makarios since 1968, while she also held the position of Minister of Justice (1960-1970) and Minister of Health (1963-1970). She was adviser to the President on the Cyprus issue since 1975 and she retained a Special Adviser role to all presidents of the Republic until 2008, serving also for parts of that period as Law Commissioner and Attorney General. Within a revised negotiation frame after 2008, women were appointed to a number of Technical Committees and Working Groups that evolved from older structures set up in the early 2000s in the framework of developing the Annan Plan. Leading among them was Erato Marcoullis who headed the Greek-Cypriot working group on property.

Until the early 2010s gender had not been addressed as an issue in the negotiations, even though women's groups had raised concerns over this omission at least a decade earlier. These calls were noticed by international scholars and practitioners and over the next years efforts were made to support the budding women's peacebuilding civil society, which coalesced around a small group of professionals and activists, Hands Across the Divide (Cockburn, 2004). In 2008, the UN mission on the island engaged a conflict assessment and participation expert, Joyce Neu, to report on the situation on gender inclusion in Cyprus. A wide range of political actors were engaged and some of the women who came together in these meetings formed the Gender Advisory Team (GAT), an informal network of academics and experts that provided recommendations on gender inclusion in the negotiations in 2012 and 2014. The issue gained further prominence through references to reports of the UN Secretary General on Cyprus, while other civil society organizations took up the call and conducted research (SeeD, FES, MIGS, AHDR). In 2015, the Technical Committee on Gender Equality was set up to provide formal feedback to negotiators and act as a bridge with civil society. However, since the breakdown of the negotiations in 2017, opportunities for intervention and input have been minimised. Meanwhile, the Mediterranean Women Mediators' Network established an antenna group in Cyprus in 2019, with the goal of highlighting and bolstering women's mediation efforts in regard to a political settlement.

4. Women's inclusion in the peace process and the negotiations

The calls for inclusion of women and gender perspectives in the peace process and the negotiations have varied over the years and have encompassed different issues and agendas (Demetriou and Hadjipavlou, 2018). On a minimum level, they have agreed on the need for women to be present at the negotiating table, in visible roles, and with decision making powers. Whether an explicitly feminist negotiation agenda is pursued by such women or not is a moot point, as is the question of which women would be suitable candidates for such roles and who should decide. A number of proposals for including women in the negotiations have also raised the issue of equitable representation, calling for example for all teams related to the negotiations (including technical committees, working groups, advisers, consultants, etc) to be gender balanced a minimum ratio of 1/3, and to include gender focal points to ensure that all measures, policies, and suggestions take account of gender implications. Yet other proposals have centred on the need to take account of women's needs across the island who are marginalised and not at the centre of attention by peacebuilding efforts; these include minority women, women who are migrants, women who live away from urban centres, women in poverty, young women, women with disabilities, and women subject to multiple forms of discrimination (Aliefendioglu, 2012). Various initiatives have sought to record the views of such groups, focusing primarily on geographical distinctions thus far – e.g. women in rural communities. However, as of 2020, concrete proposals about ensuring representation, or regarding specific demands and concerns have not been put forth.

GAT's recommendations remain one of the most concrete set of suggestions for integrating gender sensitive provisions in a future peace plan and constitution. They contain suggestions in the areas of governance, property, economy, and citizenship. On governance, the recommendations centre on integrating up to date best practices into the legal instruments that will arise and on introducing gender quotas throughout the governance structures and setting up monitoring systems. On property, they aim at gender proofing property rights clauses by paying attention to property clauses in family law, considering specific needs of displaced and resettled women, and taking into account women's perspectives on communal property including of minority groups and on ensuring women's representation in wealth management institutions and in wider post-agreement reconstruction and development initiatives. On economy, they aim to ensure gender sensitive economic planning and resource allocation post-agreement and on implementing gender budgeting. On citizenship, they suggest disentangling citizenship rights from ethnically-determined power-sharing so that voting is disentangled from other rights, including residency; the general philosophy behind this is that citizenship rights are not treated as a unitary bundle but as transferable between the two constituent states, which is a novel way to conceptualise citizenship in Cyprus and one that has not thus far been part of negotiation discussions.

These recommendations build on longer efforts to bring about a transition from a patriarchal, nationalist and militarist culture to a peace culture, in which many women have been involved, yet without articulating an explicitly feminist agenda. Intersections in these efforts exist in the call to reform the military or disband it altogether, to revise the educational system, and to reposition the role of religion and the Church in social and political life. All these recommendations, which were also shared with the UN Good Offices personnel in Cyprus and references to which appeared in the UN Secretary's Reports on Cyprus, cover a broad spectrum of political positions, ranging from accepted liberal equality

standards to more radical demands for changing local traditional structures and adopting feminist principles.

In other words, women's inclusion in the negotiation process and in post-conflict reconstruction in Cyprus has been interpreted in very different ways, from minimal demands for presence, to maximalist demands for an overhaul to the conceptual premises on which the negotiations are conducted. Within this range of possibilities, concrete steps for inclusion have been rudimentary until 2020, and have focused mainly on presence at the fringes of the negotiations in the form of the Technical Committee on Gender Equality. However, this limitation must be understood within a wider context of successive failures of the negotiation process to deliver a concrete agreement and a general lack of resignation among both politicians and the population that it can do so. Consequently, it is more likely for the negotiation process to be affected from efforts and processes external to it, rather than arising and nurtured within it.

Summary:

The Cyprus case exemplifies some of the key issues that surround the implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda that has developed since UNSCR 1325. It shows that the adoption of UNSCR 1325 has created opportunities for inclusion of women and for women's civil society to be recognised. It also shows, however, that the limitations of UNSCR 1325 and its follow-up resolutions are bound to the wider environment within which negotiations are conducted. Radical change is impossible to effect in a climate of distrust and stalemate and it is very difficult to effect in situations where key parameters of an agreement (such as citizenship) have already been fixed. It is possible however, to create structures (Committees, consultative bodies, etc) that remain alert to the situation and the issues and that can be mobilised once the negotiation dynamics improve. In other words, UNSCR 1325 is not about putting women in the driving seat, but about involving them in processes already in train.

In terms of mobilization, the case of Cyprus also holds lessons for women's solidarity strategies within the Women, Peace, and Security agenda. It shows that while disagreements on the scope of the agenda and demands within it can enrich the landscape of women's activism, it is only baseline demands on which everyone coalesces, and which also enjoy the support of international actors (such as presence of women at the table), which are more likely to be answered. From then on, solidarity behind specific goals can make the difference between what is taken up and what is not, while hints of fractures in those solidarities can gravely undermine goals. This means that structurally, there is a higher premium on consensus demanded of women's civil society than of other groups seeking representation (youth, religious groups, minorities, etc).

Within this landscape, perhaps the biggest obstacle facing women's effective inclusion in the Cyprus peace process today, barring the indigenous problems of the process itself, is resourcing. This stifles progress on the other two fronts because it means that women across various groups do not have the resources to engage in an in-depth and sustained exchange to formulate the content and structure of their demands and to build a platform on which all concerns will be taken into account and a consensual strategy built on addressing those concerns in a post-agreement environment as well as the post-conflict situation that pertains today.

Cross-references:

Liberal peace; Civil society; Human security; UNSCR 1325; GPS agenda; Everyday peace; Women negotiators; Feminist IR; War rapes; Women refugees; Cyprus conflict

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Figures and tables:

Timeline: Women's presence in Cyprus negotiation phases

1960s	• Negotiations held with view to managem inter-ethnic violence • Female Minister of Justice also acting as adviser to President
1970s	• Negotiations post-1974 yield 1977 and 1979 agreements on Bizonal Bicommunal Federation • Female chief adviser on Cyprus issue in Republic's MFA
1980s	• Peace talks freeze and climate worsens after unilateral declaration of independence of the north (TRNC) • Peace efforts become difficult, particularly for women
1990s	• Agreement is initially reached in 1992 over a UNSC frame (Ghali Set of Ideas) as basis for settlement but eventually rejected • No substantial inclusion of gender concerns or women in the talks
2004	• Negotiations yielded Annan Plan with minimal explicit attention to gender aspects • Technical Committees working on provisions of the plan included one woman in senior role
2006	• New frame for negotiations agreed without timeframe and based on local ownership • Structure of working groups and technical committees set up but with little gender balance
2008	• Direct talks initiated between leaders • Women's civil society stepped up lobbying efforts for women's inclusion
2015	• New Technical Committees set up in efforts to include peacebuilding civil society • Technical Committee on Gender Equality appointed
2017-	• Negotiation round failed but structures remained in place • Funds for Technical Committee work released but gender mandate remains unclear

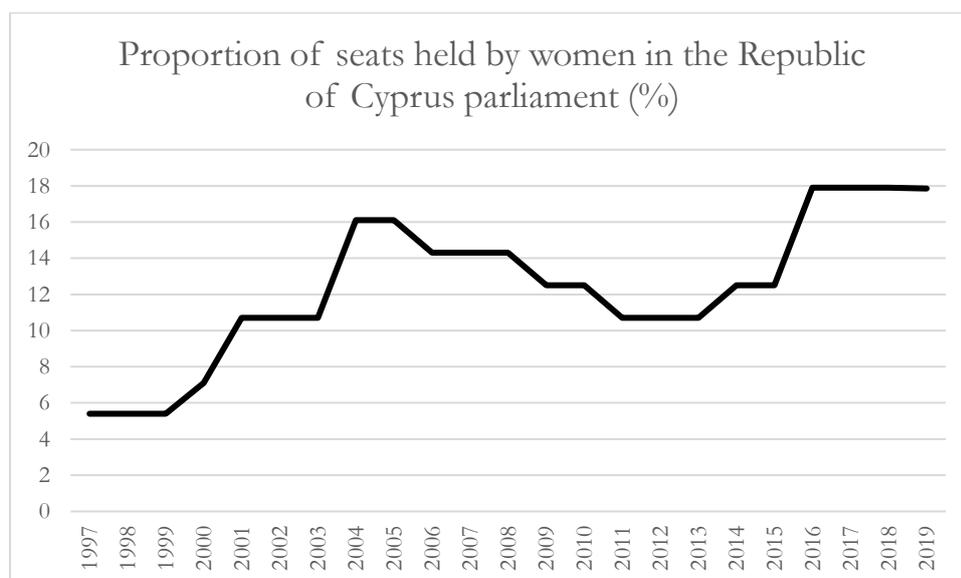Graph: Proportion of seats held by women in the Republic of Cyprus parliament (%)

Proportion of seats held by women in the Republic of Cyprus parliament (%)

Table: Application of UNSCR 1325 to the case of Cyprus

Pillar	UNSCR 1325 article	Main Implementers (Cypriot negotiators and politicians / UN)	Cyprus applications	Progress (Yes/No/ Some)
Participation	1, 2, 8b	CY	(i) Women in key positions at negotiations	N
			(ii) Consideration of input on gender dimensions by negotiators	N
			(iii) Quota systems in make-up of negotiating teams	N
			(iv) Direct consultation channel between women's civil society and negotiators	S
	3, 4, 5	UN	(i) Appointment of women to top positions in UNFICYP and UN Good Offices missions	Y
			(ii) Appointment of gender focal points for coordination with civil society and across the mission	Y
			(iii) Appointment of gender and law experts in facilitation teams	N
Protection	5, 6, 7	UN	(i) Direct communication of peacekeepers with women's civil society and individual women on the ground	N
			(ii) Involvement of Cypriot women in UN training	N
	8c	CY	(i) Use of gender-sensitive language in the constitution	N
			(ii) Inclusion of gender-balance articles in all areas as, for example: special measures in governance, flexibility on internal citizenship, uniformity in family law, coordination of all authorities under federal umbrella, coordination in prosecuting gender crimes	N
			(iii) Centralisation and reach of gender equality mechanisms in a system that is both networked (from grassroots to government) and coordi- nated	N

			(through a single top-level federal body like a Ministry)	
Prevention	1, 9	CY	(i) Fostering of a peace cultures and support of peace initiatives in education and public discourse	S
			(ii) Awareness raising about gender equality, women's rights, and sexual rights	S
	7, 14, 15	UN	(i) Support for awareness raising and peace initiatives with a gender perspective	N
			(ii) Support for coordination activities between women's groups	N
Relief and Recovery	7	UN	(i) Support of UN bodies for Cypriot initiatives in relevant areas (box below)	S
	8a, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13	CY	(i) Investigation and prosecution of gender crimes in the history of the conflict	N
			(ii) Measures for women refugees	S
			(iii) Coordination of justice and police mechanisms to deal with gender crime	N
			(iv) Gender balance and women's effective representation in reconstruction bodies	N
			(v) Gender balance and women's effective representation in economic development institutions	N
			(vi) Monitoring and combating of situation in relation to trafficking	N
				S
			(vii) Inclusion of minority women in decision-making structures on communal property	N
All (mainstreaming)	16-18	UN	(i) Systematic research, reporting and monitoring on all of the above	N