

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The WPS Agenda in the Eastern Mediterranean:

The Cases of Greece, the Republic of Cyprus and Turkey

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Abstract

The implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda, despite its global prominence, has been slow in the Eastern Mediterranean. This article is aimed at examining how three neighbouring states in the Eastern Mediterranean, namely: Greece, the Republic of Cyprus¹, and Turkey, have responded to the normative traction of the WPS agenda. It is not only their geographic proximity that have rendered a comparative analysis of the three countries important but also the ongoing tensions that Greece and Cyprus experience at different times with Turkey. An evaluation of the three countries' standing regarding the promotion of the WPS agenda will shed light on the missed opportunities that a substantive commitment to the WPS would have offered, especially in the context of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Cyprus adopted in 2020 its first WPS National Action Plan while Greece finalised its first WPS National Action Plan (NAP) in 2021 and awaits its official adoption. Turkey is yet to adopt a NAP despite its deteriorating women's rights record. The article evaluates the perspectives that both Greece and Cyprus have adopted in their NAPs and assesses Turkey's perspectives on gender equality. Through a content analysis with the support of respective secondary literature, the article highlights the unexplored, and thus missed, opportunities that a substantive implementation of the WPS normative settings would have offered in a region suffering from tensions, power competition and revisionism.

Keywords: Greece; Cyprus; Turkey; WPS; Conflict Prevention

Introduction

The Eastern Mediterranean is a challenging area for the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (hereinafter "WPS") Agenda.² This is a geographical area that comprises diverse regional actors having very different – in terms of dynamics – bilateral and multilateral relations between each other. These regional actors are often displaying very different security concerns that may ultimately transcend their national frontiers and thus threaten to jeopardize stability and security in the region. For example, some countries in the region (Greece, Italy, the Republic of Cyprus, Turkey) have been experiencing tremendous problems with the refugee and immigrant influxes, while Turkey's regional

¹ In international intergovernmental organizations like the UN, the Council of Europe, the EU, the short name used for the Republic of Cyprus is "Cyprus". The authors are using both names interchangeably throughout the text.

² In the wider Mediterranean region, there are only a few states that have not adopted a 1325 NAP yet - for example, Egypt, Syria, Libya, Israel, Algeria and Turkey.

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posture is tarnished by the rise of radicalization, authoritarianism and populism as well as the foreign fighters' flow on its soil (International Crisis Group 2020). Moreover, maritime and energy security issues by certain actors compound an already tenaciously competitive regional context (Bellou 2018).

The Eastern Mediterranean region is not just home to a number of security challenges with wider regional implications, but it is also the southernmost front for many regional intergovernmental organizations. States in the region are members of various international organizations; this means that their national policies can be influenced by the policies of these international organizations, including their postures regarding the implementation of the WPS agenda. In particular, Cyprus and Greece are members of the EU; Greece and Turkey are members of NATO, and all three countries are members of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe [hereinafter "OSCE"]. All three inter-governmental organizations (IGOs), have embraced the WPS Agenda having developed their own commitments as regards its implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 [hereinafter "Res.1325"] and its supporting documents. In light of the above, one would have expected that the three countries would have capitalized on the UNSCR 1325 as to adopt their NAPs on WPS and thus facilitate policies on conflict prevention and peacebuilding (Lyytikäinen & Yadav 2022).

Moreover, the attention that has been paid to the WPS Agenda by other intergovernmental organizations, especially the UN human rights bodies and mechanisms, including *inter alia* the Universal Periodic Review process³ (hereinafter "UN UPR"), serves as evidence that the WPS agenda is not only a peace and security issue, but also a critical part of the human rights agenda (Bulduk 2019; Chainoglou 2021). The synergies between the UN and regional human rights mechanisms and the WPS agenda, offer ample room for states to improve their modest human rights' records. Human rights violations, especially women and girls' rights, must be understood as a peace and security issue under the WPS Agenda (CEDAW 2013). Whenever such violations occur, they should ideally be understood as a root cause of conflict and early warning signs of risks for the deterioration of women and girls' rights. For this reason, the implementation of the WPS agenda through the adoption of NAPs should rather require moving beyond 'instrumentalised and securitized approaches' (O'Rourke & Swaine 2018) and 'towards furthering women's rights and gender equality' (Peroni 2020).

This article is aimed at examining how the WPS Agenda fits in the national policies of three states in the Eastern Mediterranean, namely, Greece, Cyprus and Turkey. These three countries have been selected not only because of their geographic location, but also, and more importantly, due to the ongoing tensions between Greece and Turkey, and, Cyprus and Turkey. The island of Cyprus remains *de facto* divided since the 1974 Turkish aggression, with the Northern part being illegally occupied by Turkey and the Southern part of the island being the RoC. To this day, Turkey does not officially recognize the RoC as a state and it disputes RoC's sovereign rights over the exclusive economic zone. Greece and Turkey have been at loggerheads over Greece's right to extent of territorial waters, ownership of islands and islets by Greece, maritime delimitation boundaries and energy drilling activities in the Aegean Sea, the violation of Greece's airspace by Turkey as well as the massive influxes of illegal immigrants and refugees reaching the Greek borders (Tol 2020). Given the fact that the relations amongst these three states could have been a parameter for stability and development in the Eastern Mediterranean, the question as to how and whether the WPS can contribute to conflict resolution in the region is more important than ever.

³ The UPR process is a peer-review process conducted by the UN Human Rights Council to assess how states put human rights into practice. The UPR cycle is a four-and-a-half year period within which all states' human rights records are assessed. Greece, Cyprus and Turkey have undergone their third UPR cycle (2017-2022).

This article examines the three states' efforts to implement the WPS agenda by taking into consideration the legislative, administrative and institutional measures that have been adopted towards this end. The article reviews the women's rights records of these three countries and sheds light on the way WPS is understood in their national settings. In the cases of Greece and Cyprus, the analysis is based on examining the content of the Greek and Cypriot NAPs and the measures adopted advancing women's rights and gender equality (Fritz et al. 2011). In the case of Turkey, the authors take into consideration the reports by international organisations and civil society actors concerning women's rights and point out the factors that have hindered Turkey from finalizing a NAP. The article argues that the developments in both Greece and Cyprus are positive steps for the normative traction of the WPS Agenda in this geographical area. This progress, however, has not been integrated into the good regional stability posture that both Greece and Cyprus could cultivate in the region. In the same vein, Turkey's lack of political will to advance women's rights, let alone a NAP on WPS, appears to have contributed to a missed opportunity for the three countries to capitalize on the WPS agenda and thus generate amongst them initiatives supporting conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

We begin with an examination of the conflict prevention narrative developed through the WPS policy agenda by looking at the respective literature, including a subsequent discussion about the way in which regional IGOs fashion conflict prevention through the promotion of the WPS agenda. The article continues with an evaluation of the Greek forthcoming NAP on WPS as well as the NAP that RoC had adopted to be followed by a brief comparative analysis between the two. It will be shown that despite their European credentials, both Greece and Cyprus have not included the WPS agenda on their regional co-operational policy schemes. The article concludes with a review of Turkey's policies and stances towards gender equality in recent years reflecting its reluctance to adopt a NAP on WPS. The article shows that despite the institutional regional setting in the Eastern Mediterranean that promotes the WPS agenda, Greece, Cyprus and Turkey have missed the opportunity to cultivate low profile conflict prevention postures as promoted by the WPS agenda, especially on issues that unite women's organizations from the three countries such as protection against gender-based violence and the promotion of participatory governance, including human rights protection.

Looking at WPS's agenda on conflict prevention and the role of regional organizations

The WPS agenda commits one of its four pillars on conflict prevention. According to Res.1325, the Security Council "reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding [...] as well as the need to increase their role in decision making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution." (Res 1325 (2000), preamble). Supporting Resolutions, such as Res.1820 (2008) and Res. 2122 (2013) are more explicit in their call for expecting regular updates on the progress made in the area of women's participation in conflict prevention. In the view of Res. 2122, conflict prevention can be performed by women also "through consultations with civil society, including women's organizations.... (Res. 2122 (2013), para. 2 (c)). Also Res. 2242 reiterates the importance of involving women at all levels of decision making in national and international structures as well as in conflict prevention (Res. 2242 (2015), para.1). Yet, despite these calls from respective Resolutions, "the Security Council has maintained a largely ambivalent approach toward getting behind women and promoting their role in preventing conflict" (Kapur & Rees 2019, p.136). In any case, conflict prevention although rather underestimated by governments, it sustains a normative dynamic on which a number of actors still optimize (Ackermann 2003).

In recent years, a new approach is developing favouring the structural version of conflict prevention that fashions long-term practices aimed at dealing with the origins of tensions

and conflict. They focus on developmental, democratization or judicial support programmes.⁴ These policies point to the grass-roots, and “often involve national and international development agencies, non-governmental organizations and local civil society actors” (Drumond et al. 2021, p. 3). In other words, it is not rare that civil society actors, such as women groups, to participate in conflict prevention initiatives which have either been supported by international agencies or have been generated from local civil society organizations (CSOs). Despite occasional difficulties in the implementation such initiatives in patriarchic or conservative societies, the WPS agenda does promote such initiatives while the role of international organizations can prove of instrumental importance (Sengul et al. 2022).

As regional IGOs, the EU, NATO and the OSCE, have all adopted respective action plans on implementing the WPS agenda. In recent years, they have also united forces in order to accelerate their efforts (OSCE 2011). In 2018, the EU and NATO even advanced their respective cooperation by including the WPS agenda into their Joint Declaration of 2018 and thus increased the agreed areas of operational cooperation between the two organizations (Wright 2019). The EU has set out a number of initiatives to promote the implementation of Res. 1325 and is committed to mainstreaming a gender perspective in all its internal and external actions.⁵ In 2008, it adopted a Comprehensive Approach to the EU implementation on UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 on WPS while in 2018 it adopted the EU Strategic Approach to Women, Peace and Security to be followed a year later by the EU Action Plan on WPS in 2019 (Desmidt 2021). Despite its efforts and good-willing strategies, the EU has neither achieved a perfect score for gender equality in peace and security nor has it managed to have the intended impact on the advancement of the WPS Agenda (Martinez 2015; Almquist 2021). However, in recent years the EU ‘is building momentum to rekindle the WPS agenda not only by meeting the WPS demands in its own actions but also globally by showing others what to do. (Almquist 2021, p. 3) Yet, this objective remains to be fully materialized.

NATO has also been attracted to the normative traction of the WPS Agenda. In 2010, NATO adopted its first regional action plan and it committed to bringing women’s perspectives to the forefront of peace and security across the alliance’s three core tasks: collective defense, cooperative security, and crisis management. In 2018, NATO released a revised version of its regional action plan identifying integration, inclusiveness and inclusivity as the three fundamental principles according to which NATO, the allies and the partners should implement the WPS Agenda. This effectively translates into gender-mainstreaming in all NATO’s policies and projects; promoting the inclusion of women into NATO’s and national forces; advancing women in leadership roles; protecting women’s rights in NATO’s missions and operations; creating an environment of deterrence for crimes against women in conflict zones; and engaging with the civil society to improve women’s outreach, especially from countries in conflict. NATO’s engagement with the WPS Agenda has helped NATO improve its image and has changed the way NATO projects itself as a responsible international actor (Wählen 2020). NATO’s revamped profile during the past two decades is boasting values

⁴ Conflict Prevention is mostly viewed through its operational and structural perspectives. The former perspective involves a top-down engagement of states and international institutions in formal preventive diplomacy while the latter is related to the adoption of a long-term perspective targeting more generic elements that civil society can promote aiming at building inclusive policies of common interest. (Johnstone & Walton 2021)

⁵ One could see in combination EU’s documents on gender equality with those promoting the WPS Agenda. See for example, the 2008 EU regional Action Plan, the EU Action Plan on WPS 2019-2024, the Gender Action Plan 2021-2025, the EU’s new Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in External Action 2021-2025 (GAP III).

concerning *inter alia* the promotion of democracy and the rule of law, human rights protection, elimination of gender-based violence, compliance with humanitarian law which coincidentally tick all the boxes of the WPS Agenda too (Wright & Bergman 2021). In October 2021, NATO adopted its most recent Action Plan on WPS giving emphasis on the promotion of the WPS Agenda to NATO's partnerships with third countries, international organizations and civil society. Important issues such as innovation, climate change, resilience and new technology are regarded the filters through which the WPS Agenda will be further promoted. (NATO 2021b). Despite NATO's intentions concerning the implementation of the WPS Agenda, the organization has been criticized for the lack of funding to support substantive action in order to bridge the chasm between the rhetoric and the reality of implementation of the WPS Agenda. Furthermore, there are still NATO allies (for example, Turkey) and partners who have not yet adopted a 1325 NAP. One would have expected, NATO to have projected its WPS priorities in the Eastern Mediterranean which is an area in which gender equality and participatory governance is missing.

Since 2004, the OSCE promotes gender equality policies including the WPS agenda in accordance to the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality (OSCE 2004). The OSCE is committed to provide government and civil society actors with reports, analyses, practical tools, training material and expert knowledge in order to facilitate states to develop their NAPs on WPS. Moreover, its Programme for Gender Issues in collaboration with the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre develops measures as to help interested stakeholders to launch programs for the inclusion of women in "conflict prevention by fostering dialogue, negotiation and peace processes in the OSCE region" (OSCE 2022). It monitors annually and on voluntary basis, its participating states regarding the measures their security services have taken as regards the commitments on WPS agenda which are viewed as part of the OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security (OSCE 2022). Most importantly, OSCE offers its expertise on conflict prevention and its policy tools in order to be used by its member states (OSCE 2020). In such a context, it is rather unfortunate that neither governments nor civil society groups have not optimized initiatives that could contribute to conflict prevention in the region. Greece, Cyprus and Turkey seem to retain their hesitancy in promoting these low-politics conflict prevention perspectives while civil society groups remain weak and underfunded to promote such initiatives. Furthermore, while Greece has already drafted its first NAP on WPS and Cyprus adopted one in 2021, both NAPs indicate a hesitancy to demonstrate a dynamic profile in projecting the WPS outside their borders.

Implementing the WPS Agenda in Greece: A Top-Down Approach

Greece has started to promote gender equality policies at the national level since the mid-1980s, when the Hellenic legal framework on family rights was substantially amended (Karamanou 2003; Stratigaki 2003). Despite the formation of a strong legal framework concerning the advancement of gender equality based on the ratification of many relevant international legal instruments on gender equality, including *inter alia* the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (Law 1342/1983) and the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (known as the Istanbul Convention), (Law 4531/2018), substantive implementation of gender equality policies lags behind (Johnson-Freese 2021). Whilst gender equality is embedded in the Hellenic Constitution including the notion of positive actions against women's discrimination, in practice, implementation efforts are impeded by a patriarchal mentality across the society and the institutional infrastructure while power structures appear to abhor transformation. The slow alignment between law and practice has made Greece to appear as underperforming in indexes related to gender equality (EIGE

2021a). At the WPS Index 2019-2020 prepared by the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, Greece ranked 51st on a total of 167 countries, while its performance in the grouping of the developed countries was found to be the weakest (Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security and PRIO 2019, p. 35).

An acceleration of efforts has only recently been observed with regard to the promotion of gender mainstreaming. This is evident, for example, in the adoption of the “Law on Promoting Substantive Gender Equality” (Law 4604/2019) and national strategies on gender equality and non-discrimination, such as the NAP on Gender Equality (Hellenic General Secretariat for Gender Equality 2018). In December 2020, Greece adopted a NAP against Racism and Intolerance (Hellenic Ministry of Justice 2020). In 2021, Greece opened the process of public debate for the adoption of its second NAP on Gender Equality (Hellenic General Secretariat for Demography and Family Policy and Gender Equality, 2021a); Greece also authorized the drafting of a National Strategy for the Equality of LGBT People (Hellenic Committee in Charge of Drafting a National Strategy on Equality of LGBT Persons in Greece 2021) and completed the public consultation process leading to the adoption of the NAP on WPS. These efforts have been commended by many states in Greece’s third cycle UN UPR in 2022. At the same time, many states noted the need for Greece to accelerate the adoption of more measures on gender equality and women’s economic empowerment (UN Human Rights Council 2022).

The formation of a NAP was not among the strategic priorities of previous governments until 2015 when the migration crisis unveiled a grim picture concerning women’s rights, especially migrant and refugee women’s rights. Until then, an expression of interest in issues related to promoting the WPS policy agenda, let alone the formation of a prospective NAP, remained only at the level of academic interest. Even though Greece was not negatively predisposed towards the implementation of the WPS Agenda, it nonetheless seemed to perceive the existing legal framework on gender equality as broad enough to also cover the security sector (Bellou 2016). One could argue that the belated governmental interest in accelerating its efforts to promote gender equality policies and prepare a WPS NAP was the culmination of a number of factors such as the migration crisis of 2015, the presence of thousands of vulnerable female refugees and migrants to Greece, the need to improve its image in international organizations including the EU. In addition, the financial crisis of the last decade has contributed in multiple ways to the deterioration of women’s quality of life. It has only been during the last three years that Greece has been preparing the administrative process, including the mobilization of the civil society, in order to produce the Greek NAP on WPS. Even though the public consultation on the final draft of the first Greek NAP on WPS was completed in 2021, as of May 2022 the government has not officially launched the Greek NAP. In any case, the overall Greek effort on the preparation of the Greek NAP indicates Greece’s intention to adjust primarily to its international obligations concerning gender equality as they are highlighted in the context of the respective Action Plans and related Strategies of the UN and the Euro-Atlantic institutions. Although such a belated effort by the Greek government should be welcomed, one can hardly escape the assumption that the absence of a first NAP up until now on WPS has deprived Athens so far from playing an important role in promoting the Agenda at the regional level. In the future, this development could augment Greece’s diplomatic posture in contributing to regional conflict prevention by supporting initiatives that promote participatory governance.

Greece's NAP on Women, Peace and Security

As of May 2022, Greece remains only a final step away from adopting its NAP on WPS. This step regards the official announcement from the State Authorities. The NAP has been the result of a consultation process amongst a great number of ministries and governmental stakeholders as well as academia and civil society. The NAP was formulated by the respective Inter-ministerial Commission under the aegis of the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The NAP sets out its priorities according to the four-pillar scheme of the WPS Agenda (prevention and protection, rehabilitation and empowerment, representation/participation, and the WPS mainstreaming process). The NAP reaffirms Greece's readiness to contribute to international peace and security on the basis of gender equality. The NAP moves towards two directions. One direction concerns the commitment to endorse the entire WPS background that has already been established at the international and regional level, while the second direction moves towards mainstreaming this logic to public administration in line with *Law on Promoting Substantive Gender Equality* and seeking to encourage a mainstreaming approach to internal and external governmental policies. Throughout the text, there are references to the international and regional legal framework on gender equality, International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian law. The NAP also mentions Greece's commitment to adjust to the external and internal practices that have been codified in the documents promoting the WPS policy agenda by the EU, the Council of Europe and NATO, at both the strategic and operational level. It is curious though that the OSCE is not mentioned in the draft NAP.

The final draft of the Greek NAP sets particular objectives consistent to the four pillars of the WPS agenda. As regards the prevention and protection objective, the NAP commits to policies that provide protection to women and girls that are victims of all forms of violence, including conflict-related violence. It also highlights the importance of addressing violence within family structures, including migrant and refugee families. It should be stressed out that the increase in gender-based violence, especially domestic violence, has been associated with the austerity measures as much as with the restrictive measures introduced to reduce the spread of COVID 19 (Council of Europe 2018; Hellenic General Secretariat for Demography and Family Policy and Gender Equality 2021b). Indeed, this has been a period of time during which the phenomenon of femicide has substantially increased (Hellenic General Secretariat for Demography and Family Policy and Gender Equality 2021b). As of October 2021, 13 women were reportedly killed by their partner or husband within a period of one year (Grus 2021; News247 2021). With regard to empowerment and rehabilitation of the victims of violence from conflicts or gender-based violence, the NAP stresses the immediacy of launching supportive measures optimizing the existing shelters and other support structures that have already established by the local authorities (municipalities and regions). Moreover, it urges to guarantee the balanced representation and participation of men and women in decision-making roles, especially those related to foreign policy, security and defence. Finally, gender mainstreaming in public administration especially in the social services sector is considered an additional objective. This can be achieved by empowering the public administration to be responsive to contemporary issues related to the WPS agenda, such as COVID 19 and climate change, at both national and international level.

The NAP lays out five pillars under which the WPS agenda will be implemented. The first pillar focuses on conflict prevention, as well as preventing gender-based violence, domestic violence, sexual exploitation and abuse. The Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Civil Protection, the General Secretariat for Demography and Family Policy and Gender Equality (GSDFGE) as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Defence are mandated to implement the aforementioned objectives. Training and awareness initiatives are expected to be facilitated by both the academia and the Ministry of Education.

The second pillar is related to the promotion of gender balance in decision-making, especially on policies related to foreign policy, defence and public life in general. At this point, the objective is to form policies empowering women as to become emancipated agents of democratic and peaceful change. The NAP calls the respective Ministries to empower women's participation in power structures related to politics, business, developmental fora, including mediation processes. Given the very weak position of Greece on women's participation in power structures, one could have expected a more elaborate framework of policy directions to be advanced in order to meet the goals of Res. 1325. This applies also to the entire security sector that remains at the level of policy recommendations.

The third pillar refers to policies that aim at protecting women from all forms of violence, including violence related to conflict situations or related to domestic violence. This pillar of protection from violence has attracted much attention recently as the COVID-19 led to an increase in the number of domestic violence and gender-based violence cases between 2020-2022 (Eurobarometer 2022b; Kitsantonis 2022). Policy responses are called for against abuses of humanitarian law as well as human rights law. The Greek NAP affirms Greece's obligations arising under international humanitarian law, international human rights law, international refugee law, international criminal law, the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime and the Protocols thereto, as well as the relevant EU gender equality policies and Council of Europe human rights legal instruments. Under this pillar, Greece purports to fully cooperate with international judicial mechanisms and in particular the International Criminal Court. As regards national policies, the Ministry of Justice as well as the GSDFGE are considered leading actors in evaluating the formulation of policies and their impact on the ground.

Pillar four has become particularly important in recent years. It regards the policy responses to provide relief and rehabilitation of women that have been victims of domestic violence, as well have experienced sexual abuse. The increasing number of incidents concerning gender-based violence affecting not only migrant and refugee women but also Greek women has rather urged the government for the strengthening of the national efforts to provide shelter, advice and psychological support to the victims⁶. For this reason, the number of support structures financed by local authorities is due to steadily increase. Finally, pillar five stresses the importance of promoting the WPS Agenda within bilateral, regional and international settings. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) is considered the key national agent in forming international and regional initiatives and seeking exchange of good practices in order to further enhance substantive gender equality in all the phases of conflict resolution. An interesting closing session of the NAP focuses on monitoring the implementation of the NAP to which the Inter-ministerial Committee has the primary responsibility. This Committee is composed of gender experts, including members of the academia. One could argue that as a first NAP, the current document is balanced, legalistic and moderate. At times it looks more prescriptive rather than providing clear policy directions. In this line, one could argue that the quest for a strong public awareness campaign making the WPS policy agenda visible both at the national and regional level, especially in the Mediterranean area, could have been more visible in the document.

⁶ A Eurobarometer report reveals that nine in ten women in Greece (93%) believe that the COVID-19 pandemic led to an increase in physical and emotional violence against women in their country. A quarter of the participating respondents in this survey say that they know of women in their circle of friends and family who have experienced domestic violence or abuse since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (Eurobarometer 2022b).

Launching a National Action Plan on WPS in Cyprus: One step at a time

Cyprus's foreign policy is largely structured upon dealing with the consequences of the Turkish illegal invasion (the so-called "Cyprus question" in terms of the UN language) (Kouskouvelis & Chainoglou 2016). Overall, Cyprus's contemporary actorness has been defined by seeking to raise its status across the international community by employing diplomacy and using international organisations to advance its foreign policy agenda (Pedi & Chainoglou 2022). Accordingly, Cyprus has signed a great number of UN and regional human rights conventions and is cooperating with UN and regional human rights mechanisms. For example, Cyprus has been one of the handful of states across the UN system to undergo a voluntary national review on its implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Directorate General for European Programmes, Coordination and Development 2021). Cyprus has also accelerated the implementation of human rights obligations due to the positive impact of the EU integration process (EIGE 2021c). Cyprus joined the EU in 2004 as a de facto divided island state; this means that the whole of the territory of the island is EU territory. However, as Cyprus does not have effective control of the occupied territory, EU legislation is suspended in the occupied territory and Cyprus cannot enforce its national legislation and human rights-related policies therein. This means that Cyprus cannot guarantee the protection of the human rights of the Turkish-Cypriots who live in the occupied territory; on the contrary, Turkey bears sole responsibility for any human rights abuses occurring in the northern territory that is under its control (European Court of Human Rights, *Loizidou v. Turkey*, 1995; European Court of Human Rights, *Cyprus v. Turkey*, 2001).⁷ As a consequence, the legal obligation to implement the WPS Agenda in the occupied territory lies primarily with Turkey rather than with Cyprus.

In 2019, the national report of Cyprus was reviewed by the UN Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (third cycle) in a very positive, if not elated, tone (UN Human Rights Council 2018). During the UPR process, 82 delegations made statements and a significant number of states (about 31 UN member states representing all geographic regions) commended or congratulated Cyprus on its efforts in advancing human rights, and especially women's rights, and praised the adoption of national action plans on gender equality and on the fight against domestic violence and gender discrimination in employment. Cyprus also received 35 recommendations by UN member states to continue advancing the active participation of women in the peace process and to incorporate women in senior negotiating positions in future reunification talks (UN Human Rights Council 2019a). It should be noted that one of the interesting twists in this UPR was that the importance of women's participation in conflict resolution was understood not only as falling under the umbrella of the settlement efforts on the "Cyprus question", but also as a human rights issue. This is one of the few cases where the UPR process has openly treated the implementation of Res.1325 as a human rights law obligation (Chainoglou 2021). It is interesting to note that in the UPR review of Cyprus there are explicit references to the "WPS Agenda" and "Resolution 1325" throughout the text, something that is amiss in the UPR review of Turkey where there is not an explicit reference to "Resolution 1325". This is a point of deviation that suggests the UN member states are rather treating Cyprus as a mature human rights-law abiding state as opposed to Turkey.

Despite the improving human rights record of Cyprus, there are still women's rights issues that call for more action. For example, the participation of women in the political life is still relatively small. As of January 2021, the percentage of women in parliament was down to

⁷ Based on this caselaw, one may assume that Turkey's extraterritorial human rights obligations, including any WPS-related human rights obligations, exist in any areas that are under the effective military control of Turkey, for example areas in Syria that are under Turkey's military control at the time of the writing of this article.

21,4%, with only 12 women members of parliament and only 3 women holding ministerial positions (UN Women 2021). Within this context, the lack of participation of women in the peace process has been a thorny issue in the Cypriot society (CEDAW 2018). The political landscape within this country has been devoid of considerations such as the absence of women from the peace process, the persistent exclusion of women in high-rank peace negotiating tables or the lack of recognition of how gender-related issues could have an impact on a sustainable solution to the “Cyprus question” (United Nations Human Rights Council 2021).

For many decades, Cyprus had been seeking to resolve the “Cyprus question” through international organizations (UN, Council of Europe), but it did not embrace the inclusion of a gender perspective in the peace negotiations (United Nations Security Council 2010; UN Security Council Resolution 2135 2014; UN Security Council Resolution 2168 2014; UN Human Rights Council 2015). The setting-up of the bicomunal Technical Committee on Gender Equality in 2015 signaled an official recognition on the part of both Greek and Turkish Cypriot that women must be part of the peace process. Women’s grassroots organizations and other civil society actors have been advocating for a change in the status quo- that is a change to the male dominated Cypriot political space that falls short of presenting women’s voices and perspectives on gender equality and peace (Demetriou 2019; Papastavrou & Zenon 2016). Two of the first groups that brought attention to the importance of including women in peace negotiations were the Gender Advisory Team (GAT) and the Hands across the Divide (HAD), a bi-communal women’s group (Papastavrou 2021; Hadjipavlou & Mertan 2019). The efforts of such CSOs as well as women activists in claiming their operational space within the Cypriot society has contributed to putting women, peace and security on the agenda in Cyprus (Papastavrou 2021), without necessarily aiming at a particular solution to the “Cyprus question” but rather aiming at cementing gender equality within any political and peace process.

The focus on the gender elements of the peace process has been boosted by the contribution of the Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Cyprus and the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNIFICYP).⁸ Since 2018, there is a steady pace at organizing intercommunal events with the purpose of empowering different elements of the civil society and creating space for women’s full, equal and meaningful participation in the peace process (United Nations Human Rights Council 2021; UNIFICYP 2020; UNIFICYP 2022). As laudable the support to these CSOs can be, one needs to bear in mind that the UNIFICYP’s engagement with the WPS Agenda in the context of the peace process in Cyprus has been relatively recent, both across the mission and with external actors (UN Secretary General 2019, p.10). UNIFICYP’s mandate has been recently reinforced with Res. 2618 which calls *inter alia* for gender considerations to be taken into account as a crosscutting issue throughout its mandate, and underlines “the importance of sufficient gender expertise in all mission components and capacity strengthening in executing the mission mandate in a gender-responsive manner” (Res. 2618 (2022), para. 16(a)).

The need for the equal and meaningful participation of women’s participation in building peace in Cyprus as well as the inclusion of youth in the peace process has been repeatedly noted by the Security Council (see Res. 2561 (2021); Res. 2587 (2021); Res. 2618 (2022)). At the same time, ongoing tensions on the ground, such as the reopening of a part of the fenced-off area of Varosha that was announced by Turkey in 2021, and tensions within and outside

⁸ UNIFICYP’s mission is to prevent the recurrence of fighting and a breakdown of the 1974 Ceasefire Arrangement. The mandate of the mission is to maintain a peaceful environment between the two communities within which a just and long-lasting solution can be found. The mandate of UNIFICYP included an explicit reference to the WPS Agenda for the first time in 2018.

the buffer zone, where for example Turkish Cypriot forces challenged the presence of UNIFICYP, appear linked to a broader divisive political context (UN Secretary General 2021, para. 5). These tensions alarmed the UN Security Council which called all parties “to avoid any unilateral actions that could raise tensions on the island and undermine the prospects for a peaceful settlement” (Res. 2587 (2021), paras. 4 and 5; Res. 2618 (2022), paras. 3-4). Furthermore, following the elections in the occupied territory, Turkish Cypriot members of the Technical Committee on Gender Equality resigned (UN Secretary General 2021, para. 24).

With Resolution 2587 (2021), the Security Council called for the inclusion of at least 30 per cent women in future delegations and requested from the leaders of Greek and Turkish Cypriots, in coordination with the Technical Committee on Gender Equality, to submit an action plan by 15 December 2021 on increasing women’s full, equal and meaningful participation in peace talks. Despite both sides agreeing on a set of recommendations by the Technical Committee on Gender Equality, the UN Secretary General announced that agreement on a joint action plan was not reached with both sides submitting their own versions of the plan instead (UN Secretary General 2021, para. 44). An action plan was eventually approved by the Security Council in 2022 (Resolution 2618 (2022)). The action plan provides for the inclusion of no more than two thirds of any gender in the delegations participating in settlement processes, the soliciting of the views of CSOs with the leaders of the two communities in order to prepare for the settlement process, for example through workshops, and the allocation of adequate human and financial resources to support the activities required for the successful implementation of the action plan (Technical Committee on Gender Equality 2022). As the plan was officially launched only in April 2022, it remains to be seen how its implementation will pan out.

Furthermore, the impact of COVID 19 pandemic exacerbated power imbalances that were already experienced by women while it negatively impacted upon the confidence-building measures. For example, it slowed the pace of the implementation of the WPS Agenda as the restriction of movement hindered the physical communication and engagement of actors from all over Cyprus (United Nations Human Rights Council 2021; Eurobarometer 2022a).

RoC’s NAP on Women, Peace and Security

The first Cypriot NAP (2021-2025) was prepared by the Commissioner for Gender Equality in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs upon the participation and contribution of all relevant Ministries/Departments, political/trade unions and civil society actors. It should be mentioned that well before the adoption of its first NAP, RoC had already established the bi-communal Technical Committee on Gender Equality to implement Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and advise the formal peace process. The official version of the first NAP was adopted by the Cypriot Ministerial Cabinet on 22 December 2020 and it coincided with the 20th anniversary of Resolution 1325 (Office of the Commissioner for Gender Equality 2020). Following the structure of Res. 1325, the NAP is structured upon four pillars, entitled: 1) Participation and Empowerment, 2) Protection, 3) Prevention, 4) Promoting and Informing the Civil Society about Res.1325.

The first pillar aims at 1) promoting the full participation of women in all decision-making concerning conflict, peace-building, and peace negotiations, 2) supporting women in political life, and 3) empowering and granting full participation to women in all decision-making roles in the country and abroad.

The second pillar aims at the protection of women and girls in conflict from gender-based violence and sexual exploitation by 1) harmonizing the national legislation according to international human rights standards and mechanisms, including the provisions of Res. 1325, 2) offering psychological support services to women that are victims of violence due to “a constant and wrongly-induced” crisis, as in the case of RoC, 3) contributing to raising

awareness between men concerning the elimination of violence against women, human trafficking and gender-based violence.

The third pillar aims at conflict prevention, including gendered based violence and the sexual exploitation of women and girls and during armed conflicts by 1) implementing policies and legally binding regulations concerning the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, and the promotion of human rights law, gender equality and international humanitarian law, 2) contributing to the peace, stability and security of RoC, 3) implementing relevant provisions on the prevention and elimination of sexual violence and gender-based violence in RoC.

The fourth pillar is aimed at raising awareness on Res. 1325 across Cyprus by 1) promoting the inclusion of women in all positions of the political, social and economic life, 2) encouraging the participation of women civil society organizations in raising awareness on Res. 1325, 3) supporting skill-setting projects for the effective implementation of the NAP, and 4) carrying out education campaigns, seminars, and workshops across Cyprus, and in particular in the urban areas.

The NAP provides for the setting up of the Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (appointed by the Commissioner for Gender Equality in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) which will have an advisory role in over-viewing the implementation of the NAP. Furthermore, the NAP creates the Permanent Consultation Mechanism (appointed by the Commissioner for Gender Equality in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) with the participation of gender and peace-building women experts, women academics and representatives of women's civil society organisations. The mandate of this body is to make recommendations on the WPS Agenda related issues with the purpose of impacting on the foreign policy agenda of Cyprus (i.e. when drafting or sponsoring UN resolutions, organizing intergovernmental diplomatic conferences, etc). This body will be convening every four months.

The Cypriot NAP takes a conscious leap of faith to transcend the mentality of implementing a policy that has been produced by an international organization (UN), and to operationalise it by relying on the civil society actors. Apart from utilizing the existing institutional infrastructure to bring forward the goals of this NAP (i.e. ministries, law enforcement bodies), many of the funded activities, which are listed in the Cypriot NAP, concern the inclusion, education and gender-equality training of women's organizations and women's minority organizations. Also, the capacity-building potential of the NAP's list of activities offers some guarantee for sustainability and continuity, yet there is no reference to other measures usually encountered in NAPS, such as the creation of a network of gender focal points within public institutional infrastructures. In this NAP, Cyprus acknowledges that due to the ongoing occupation of its Northern territory by Turkey, it is difficult to guarantee that the Turkish-Cypriot women will be able to enjoy their rights on the territory that Cyprus does not have any effective control on. This NAP is nonetheless targeting their inclusion as much as possible. However, these are early days, and it remains to be seen whether the Cypriot NAP can set norms that will change relations on an inter-communal level and allow for more participatory processes, eventually leading Cyprus to a more sustainable peace (Dimitriou & Hadjipavlou 2018). Perhaps future plans for the development of local action plans in villages and cities would be conducive to the conditions of sustainable peace.

Comparative overview of the Greek and Cypriot NAPs

As opposed to other countries that are already in their second or their third cycle of NAPs, that the Greek and Cypriot NAPs are the first NAPs adopted in both countries. This means that their WPS implementation efforts are at best in a gestational period. The implementation efforts have also been affected by the COVID 19 pandemic emergency

measures. The two NAPs display some common features as they both: 1) set clear priorities and rely on the progress they have made concerning human rights and the advancement of the gender equality, 2) have clear timeline for actions and present the tools to effectively implement the actions, 3) utilize to the maximum the existing institutional infrastructure within the national ministries to implement the WPS Agenda, 4) incorporate the pillars of Res. 1325, for example, they address domestic and sexual gender-based violence and advance women's participation in decision-making, 5) make the effort to integrate women's experiences across their societies, for example there are references to women refugees, women who have been impacted by conflicts and gender-based violence or women's different socio-economic status, 6) include girls and youth (for example, the Cypriot NAP also refers to unaccompanied minors in its listed projects) 7) identify reporting and feedback processes and relevant overseeing institutions, 8) explain their methodology and the proposed indicators upon which their performance will be measured, 9) clearly intend on involving the civil society and have listed projects attached to the NAPs (at national and international level). Furthermore, both NAPs identify to a certain extent the actors that led to the process of the preparation of the NAPs, without though specifying the identity or the profile of the civil society organizations involved. Neither the Greek NAP nor the Cypriot NAP contains a list with the participating women (i.e. activists, academics, gender experts, etc) and women's organizations in the preparation of the action plans. This is a particular soft spot for the image of RoC as the country had repeatedly been criticized for women's underrepresentation and their non-meaningful participation in the peace efforts.

Having said that, the two NAPs also display points of deviation. Unlike the Cypriot NAP, the Greek NAP is a particularly long text, heavily referencing relevant Greek laws that can support the implementation of the plan. At a first glance, the strong connection of the Greek NAP to the "Law on Promoting Substantive Gender Equality" might be considered as a disadvantage since it appears to restrict the implementation of the Res. 1325 pillars to policies targeting the national milieu. However, due to the administrative mentality within the organizational structure of the Greek state and the Greek society in general, this connection will certainly encourage the diffusion of the five pillars perspectives across the administrative, regional and municipal units of the Greek state. This is because both the "Law on Promoting Substantive Gender Equality" as well as the Greek NAP are calling for specific implementation action plans at the level of local authorities, municipalities and regions. This "bottom-up meets top-down" approach is particularly important for the implementation of the WPS Agenda as it will engage the local authorities and civil society organizations in initiatives that directly affect women's everyday life. This also applies to protective measures for female refugees and migrants living in camps or other hosting structures that are the responsibility of certain municipalities and regions. On the other hand, the Cypriot NAP refrains from endorsing a "bottom-up" approach; hence it does not make any reference to implementing the plan at local or sub-local level. What the Cypriot NAP does though is that it has listed projects with the participation of particular minorities and communities, such as the Turkish-Cypriot, the Armenians, the Latins, and the Maronites.

What the Greek NAP falls short of achieving (as opposed to the Cypriot NAP) is to clearly specify the roles and the mandates of the different agents involved in the implementation process; this in practice, can negatively impact upon the communication and coordination between the various agents, especially within the many Greek ministries that are being included in the Greek NAP. On the other hand, the Cypriot NAP seems to have a much clearer lay-out of the implementation state agents, for example, ministries, law enforcement, social services, etc, and their role in the implementation process as it is explained therein how their mandate and working experience is related to the WPS Agenda.

Moreover, the Cypriot NAP clearly defines the role of civil society, including women's groups, in its implementation and monitoring: by creating the Permanent Consultation Mechanism, the Cypriot NAP effectively introduces an institutionalized process that guarantees the meaningful participation of the civil society and especially of women. This is an excellent approach to also create effective channels of communication and planning of joint initiatives for the inclusion of women's priorities. While the Greek NAP acknowledges the advisory role of the civil society in general, it falls short of setting up an informal or formal process within which the civil society actors can voice their concerns, express their opinions or effectively participate in the implementation of the WPS Agenda. Moreover, the Cypriot NAP has earmarked financial resources for the implementation of the listed targeted actions while the Greek NAP has neither clarified nor ensured that sufficient financial resources are allocated to the implementation of the WPS Agenda. This can eventually prove detrimental to the dissemination of the plan, the engagement of various actors intended to be involved because of their lack of knowledge with regard to its content, and the evaluation process of the plan.

The women's human rights situation in Turkey and the promotion of the WPS Agenda

The period from 2002 to 2011 is characterized for the political and legal progress on the advancement of gender equality and women's rights in Turkey; this is a period which is significantly influenced by the EU accession process (Güneş & Ezikoğlu 2022). However, after the 2011 elections there is a shift towards conservatism concerning women's policies (Yılmaz 2015). This shift is structured upon the advancement of women's traditional gender roles in the Turkish society and the focus on the role of women in the family (Yılmaz 2015; Güneş & Ezikoğlu 2022). Following the 2016 failed *coup d'état*, it is also observed that Turkey becomes the recipient of criticisms by civil society actors as well as international human rights mechanisms (i.e. UN human rights bodies) for either adopting policies and measures that jeopardize the protection of human rights or for not taking positive action in order to prevent the violation of human rights (Baser et al. 2017; Güneş-Ayata & Doğangün 2017; UN Human Rights Council (b) 2019).

In 2020, the national report of Turkey was reviewed by the UN UPR (third cycle) (UN Human Rights Council (b), 2019; UN Human Rights Council 2020). Turkey received more than 100 recommendations by other UN member states whereby Turkey is requested to take measures that essentially fit under the four pillars of Res. 1325. For example, Turkey is called to take measures to eradicate gender inequality; to encourage women, including women from minority groups and the LGBT community, to participate in decision-making; to limit restrictions on freedom of assembly of the LGBT community; to prevent and eradicate harmful traditional practices which discriminate against women and girls and to abolish early marriages; to provide women and girls with access to public services, primarily education and healthcare; to combat human trafficking; to protect women and girl refugees; to protect women and girls from domestic violence by enabling the prosecution and punishment of perpetrators and by supporting institutions offering shelter to victims of domestic violence (UN Human Rights Council 2020). Along these lines, the slow pace of advancing the socio-political status of women (i.e. access to healthcare or education) and the limited political representation of women in Turkey is also noted (Cinar & Kose 2018; Sumbas & Koyuncu 2019; UN Women & Women Count 2021). As of January 2020, the percentage of women in of parliament was down to 17.3% with only two women holding ministerial positions and with only 102 women parliamentarians out of 589 parliamentary seats. As of 2021, there were only 104 women out of 600 parliamentarians (UN Women 2021). Women's political underrepresentation is also evident in regional and local assemblies where women hold less than 10% of seats (EIGE 2021b). The scarcity of national and

international statistical data on Turkey does not provide us with a clear picture as to whether the national measures are sufficient in guaranteeing that there is substantive equality between men and women in other sectors too, for example the military and security sector. With the most recent data coming from a 2017 NATO report, Turkey had the lowest rank between the NATO allies (1.3%) with regard to the inclusion of women into the armed forces (NATO 2021). However, as of 2021 it is not clear whether and how many women are allowed to take combat roles in Turkey.

The concern about women's rights in Turkey has also been shared by the EU and the Council of Europe. The advancement of women's rights is an issue that falls under the Copenhagen criteria for EU accession and is an integral part of the EU-Turkey relationship (EU 2021). Furthermore, in 2021 the announcement of the withdrawal of Turkey from the Istanbul Convention has been a severe blow on women's rights. The withdrawal became effective on 1 July 2021 and it coincided with the release of Turkey's 4th National Action Plan on Combating Violence Against Women which "does not at all refer to the concept of gender equality" (Kadinin Insan Haklari Yeni Cozumler 2021). Never before had a Council of Europe member state pulled out from one of the human rights conventions of this regional organization (Çali 2021). Such a posture unfortunately has not been reversed by Ankara despite the interventions and the recommendations made by the international community (EEAS 2021; White House Statement 2021) or the civil society actors across Turkey (ESIK Women's Platform for Equality 2021). What is also worrisome is the fact that by pulling away from such a regional human rights convention, Turkey may be paving the way to also disengage itself from the CEDAW (UN CEDAW 2021).

NGOs report that the government has since 2017 shut down many civil society organizations and grassroots organisations working on gender equality across Turkey, especially in areas of dense Kurdish population (Istanbul Sozlesmesi Turkiye Izleme Platformu 2017; Merdjanova 2020). Furthermore, it has sought to oppress women politicians, for example, women affiliated with the Kurdish Women's Movement, Women's Peace Initiative (BIKG) and the Women's Freedom Assembly (KÖM) (Degirmencioglu & Kahana-Dagan 2020). An effort to reinterpret gender equality according to Turkish 'traditional' customs and identity could prove to be harmful to women's rights (The Advocates for Human Rights 2021). Turkey has increasingly been engaged with anti-women's legislative proposals (such as the "marry your rapist bill" in 2020) and retrogressive policies which push women into a more traditional role under the pretext that the patriarchal stereotypes and the 'traditional' family structures need to be protected (The Advocates for Human Rights 2021). Such legislative and policy measures could not only expand gender inequality but also threaten women and girls' lives. Between 2010 and 2020 more than 2500 femicides were reported in the Turkish media (Hurriyet Daily News 2021). 409 women and 367 women were murdered in Turkey in 2020 and 2021 respectively. Women's organisations, such as the Federation of Women's Associations of Turkey, explain the alarming number of femicides down to the unfortunate combination of legal loopholes, deficiencies in women's policies and the return of women into more traditional roles (Hurriyet Daily News 2022).

The retrogressive policies that enforce negative stereotypes against women in Turkey could be one of the reasons as to why Turkey has not proceeded with the adoption of a NAP. The government has been involved with efforts to quash activities related to the promotion of the WPS agenda, including acts of suppression against women's organisations and feminist associations (The Advocates for Human Rights 2021). Women and LGBT peacebuilders are reported to have been subjected to intimidation, arrests and detention (Serva 2021; Yavuz & Byrne 2021). For example, Turkish and Kurdish women peace activists have been imprisoned for their advocacy efforts and their imprisonment was extended under the pretext of the pandemic emergency measures (Serva 2021). There is a persistent

lack of political will to financially support women's organisations and to include women from minorities such as Kurdish, Armenian, and other vulnerable groups, such as refugee women, in conflict resolution (Alici et al. 2021). There is an overall feeling that the civil space for women in Turkey has significantly shrunk, especially in conflict-affected areas such as the Kurdish region (Alici et al. 2021).

Yet, even if the Turkish government lacks the will to create a 1325 NAP, at the same time "Turkey is host to a strong women's movement" (Sengul et al. 2022, p. 71). The civil society organizations, especially women's organizations, in Turkey remain the main driving force behind women's empowerment and the prospect of Turkey eventually drafting a 1325 NAP. For example, local and national women's civil society organisations have been engaged with gender equality training and WPS-related workshops and projects (Merdjanova 2020; Degirmencioglu & Kahana-Dagan 2020). At the same time, this 'strong women's movement' is facing the challenge of overcoming the division between secular and Islamist women in Turkey (Sigma & Goker 2017). Without solidarity among so different women's groups in Turkey, the women's movement runs the risk of polarization and being deprived of opportunities to find a common platform to resolve women's issues (Sigma & Goker 2017).

Conclusion

Despite the importance of having finally in place the Greek and Cypriot NAPs, it is unfortunate that neither of them is directly making a connection between the WPS Agenda and the Eastern Mediterranean security priorities. One could hardly escape from noticing the absence of any reference or any substantive commitment to incorporating a gender perspective in Greece's external posture as a contributor to regional or international peace and security efforts. For example, one could have expected certain policy suggestions supporting conflict prevention or WPS awareness initiatives at the regional level. It seems that the apparent overreliance on the "Law on Promoting Substantive Gender Equality" in forming the implementation parameters seems to have strained the Greek NAP from its international posture by means of contributing to regional stability and conflict prevention. Perhaps one could expect an Annex to the Greek NAP upon adoption, elaborating on the initiatives that could contribute to projecting the promotion of gender equality to both the Northern and Southern neighbourhoods of Greece; if anything at all, conflict prevention initiatives should be tailored to fit and reverse the weaknesses of the Eastern Mediterranean region. Likewise, the RoC could have made a better effort in projecting its foreign policy priorities for a stronger and more democratic Eastern Mediterranean throughout the Cypriot NAP, for example, by identifying projects that would have been useful to the promotion of women's rights with countries from the region that the RoC is already in cooperation with or even by inserting the WPS agenda into its bilateral agreements with partners from the region.

On the other hand, Turkey's drift with authoritarianism has marginalized any prospects for the advancement of the WPS Agenda. This has serious repercussions for women who live in Turkey as well as for women who live in the countries that Turkey considers under its sphere of influence (Daniels-Nemsitsveridge et al. 2020; Yüksel 2021). For example, had Turkey embraced the WPS agenda, what could have been the role of women human rights defenders and women's organizations in Turkey in supporting a gendered, peaceful resolution of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan? What could have been the role of women peace and mediation networks and groups in exerting pressure on the Turkish government to support conflict resolution in the Eastern Mediterranean? It is not only that women are seriously affected by ongoing conflicts, but by delaying the incorporation of the WPS agenda in its official policies, Turkey is missing a great opportunity, on the one hand, to infuse the WPS agenda in the regional compact that it wishes to project herself as the

regional leader and, on the other hand, to compartmentalize common interests-based cooperation with other regional actors (some of them being EU member states) and NATO allies in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Promoting the WPS policy agenda in the Eastern Mediterranean by countries with strong democratic and human rights records may prove instrumental in fostering conflict prevention policies in the region. Furthermore, the EU and NATO can also optimize the existing networks of cooperation of their member states in the region in order to further promote the WPS agenda and thus contribute to their societal resilience. This paper examined the WPS prospects of three countries in the region, Greece, Cyprus and Turkey which are either members of the EU (Greece and Cyprus) or members of NATO (Greece and Turkey) and all three members of the OSCE. It has been shown that the uncertainty rounding Turkey in recent years as regards its poor record on human rights and gender equality, let alone the WPS policy agenda, does not establish a hopeful level playfield as to "lead by example" in promoting the WPS agenda in the region. On the contrary, both Greece and Cyprus in recent years have already established a strong network of regional co-operational schemes, involving both regional governments as well as great powers (Bellou 2018). Yet, the optimization of the WPS agenda in this framework is still missing. In addition, they have already demonstrated their commitment to move their strong democratic record on human rights and gender equality to the specific policy prescriptions envisaged in the WPS policy agenda as this article has shown. It remains to be seen whether the two states will be ready to incorporate the WPS Agenda into their external relations, whether that is tacit or formal, bilateral and multilateral agreements.

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