

# The Smaller Issues Complicating the Larger Picture

ARNE STRAND

There are direct negotiations underway in Cyprus, and there is hope for a negotiated settlement of the Cyprus conflict. This is, academically speaking, a very interesting phase of a peace process, where a number of studies looking comparatively at differences between such processes become relevant.<sup>1</sup> In particular, such studies have analysed the issues that have been included or excluded from the final agreement texts. In Cyprus the two parties negotiating, i.e. the leaders of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities, have chosen to maintain a relatively closed process. Beyond their advisors and reports to political parties and other governing bodies, very limited information has been made available and interaction or debate with civil society has largely been excluded from the process.

While all conflicts are different, my research on other conflicts (including Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and the Aceh Province of Indonesia) indicates that some issues are frequently left out of the debate on a possible settlement, either because they are deemed at the time to be less important compared to the larger issues at stake, or because of a strategy of postponing their resolution until after the larger problems have been resolved. The experience from hindsight is, however, that these issues form an important part of the larger conflict picture, and avoiding addressing them in a coherent manner might increase the challenges of implementing a negotiated peace settlement. On the contrary, addressing them early in the negotiation stage can contribute to reducing the underlying conflicts emerging on the large issues and ease the way towards reconciliation and development of common strategies. Moreover, if tended to in the peace negotiations these issues might prove instrumental in confidence building and in establishing a settlement that can be acceptable to larger parts of the population.

There are from my experience three issues that are frequently left out of negotiation debates: (i) the rights, role and influence of women, (ii) the rights, role, and influence of minorities, and (iii) environmental issues. The latter is of concern to everyone, gender issues to at least 50 % of any population and minority issues to a varying proportion of the population, depending on how well organised the various minority groups are and the extent to which the conflict is seen to affect them.

---

1 See, i.e. S.J. Stedman, D.S. Rothchild and E.M. Cousens (Eds.) (2002) *Ending Civil Wars: The Implementation of Peace Agreements*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers; P. Wallensteen (2007) *Understanding Conflict Resolution*. London: Sage Publications; R. Paris (2004) *At War's End: Building Peace After Civil Conflict*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

These have been recognised as concerns in the negotiation process in conflict areas like Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Aceh of Indonesia, to mention but a few, where decades of violent conflict and to some extent culture and religion have had a considerable effect on gender and minority roles. Environmental destruction has frequently been the direct result of conflict, or caused indirectly due to lacking ability and will to undertake environmental sound planning. Drilled wells have dried out the traditional underwater irrigation channels in Afghanistan as these lacked maintenance or were mined, rain forests were cut down to secure the military income in Indonesia. The initial question to be asked in connection to this is whether the same concerns are valid for Cyprus, a country located in Europe and ranked in 28<sup>th</sup> position in the UN Human development Index?

Yes, I will argue. The Republic of Cyprus has been ranked as far down as 41<sup>st</sup> place out of 108 countries in the 2008 Gender Empowerment Measure rank; there are a number of minority groups with Cypriot citizenship, notably Armenians, Maronites and Latin; and the environmental challenges the island faces are evident in daily debates on the lack of water, concerns about the groundwater reserves and the impact of global climate change.

### **Allowing Women Larger Influence**

If we start with gender, the United Nations Security Council passed in 2000 a resolution that called for broader participation of women in peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction, frequently referred to as resolution 1325.

In the introduction to the resolution the Security Council, after unanimously calling on all actors involved in negotiating and implementing peace agreements to adopt a gender perspective, they point out that:

“Such a gender perspective would also include measures that supported local women’s peace initiatives and indigenous processes for conflict resolution, and that involve women in all the implementation mechanisms of the peace agreements, as well as measures to ensure the human rights of women and girls, particularly as they relate to the constitution, the electoral system, the police and the judiciary.”

This is an area where major improvements will be easily achieved in both parts of Cyprus. There are presently no women on the peace negotiation teams, and only one female minister in the Cabinet in the Republic of Cyprus (and none in the National Council). In the north the speaker of the Parliament was until the recent elections a woman, as is the head of the Immovable Property Commission. The participation of women in the respective parliaments is 8 out of 56 in the south and 5 out of 50 in the north, and out of the 6 members that Cyprus elects to the European Parliament none is a woman. Within Europe Cyprus is ranked among the countries with the highest gender segregation in occupation, and in an interview in February 2008 lawyer Androula Vassiliou stated that for the Republic of Cyprus “... there is a difference of 30 per cent in women’s

salaries compared to male colleagues, in both the private and public sector”.<sup>2</sup> There is no available data for the TRNC<sup>3</sup> for comparison, but one might expect the same difference. As for employment, a recent report stated that the gender difference in employment is 19.1 per cent in southern Cyprus, while as high as 30 per cent in northern Cyprus, while the EU average is 14.4.<sup>4</sup>

While there are a range of women’s organisations and initiatives in both parts of Cyprus, there are no common initiatives geared towards ensuring the interest and opinions of women in the peace negotiations. Neither have the two leaders and their teams taken any joint initiatives to invite such organisations and initiatives to express their views on the process, let alone having them represented in the negotiation teams.<sup>5</sup>

How is it then possible to create awareness among both men and women, convincing them that women can do as well as men and that by allowing them to participate in top level decision making the quality of decisions is bound to improve? This is no way denying that collective wisdom is more encompassing than that of only 50 per cent of the population, and that the democratic process could certainly be better served if decisions that affect the whole of the population are not only taken by half of it.

Hence the question remains whether this is primarily a lack of awareness, or, taking a more cynical view: rather that the current male dominated establishment resists the sharing of power with the female part of the Cypriot population.

And while, arguably, changing gender roles is a long process that needs to include and involve both women and men (and certainly boys and girls), there are ways found to kick start the process. Several countries have taken quite drastic measures to ensure a higher degree of influence for women, as the Security Council resolution calls for. Afghanistan’s constitution set the female representation in the parliament to a minimum 25 per cent, thus ensuring a formal female representation and allowing women the experience of holding public office. More temporary measures might be to encourage political parties to promote women in top positions in parliamentary elections and in nominations for various committees. And, some countries outside of the EU have gone further. In Norway, publicly listed companies have to comply with a law requiring a 40 per cent female quota for board members as from 1 January 2008, following the same regulation introduced for publicly owned companies in 2004. The result: the female board

---

2 Jacqueline Theodoulou. ‘I don’t think there is full democracy in Cyprus’, *Cyprus Mail*, 7 February 2008.

3 Although the northern part of the island is referred to as TRNC in this essay, it is acknowledged that the TRNC is not recognised by the international community except Turkey.

4 Women’s Initiative in the Comprehensive Settlement Process (2008) *Recommendation for the Inclusion of Gender Equality in the Negotiation Process*. Report from a Working Group established by the Turkish Cypriot Women’s Solidarity Council. Nicosia, 2 September 2008.

5 Mehmet Ali Talat has welcomed and received input and advice from Turkish Cypriot women’s organisations.

representation in Norway is up from 6 per cent in 2002 to at least 40 per cent in 2009<sup>6</sup> and more women are getting prepared for an even more active role in the business community.

However, just starting with fulfilling the recommendations provided by the Security Council would mark the beginning of major changes for Cyprus. The United Nations could even be challenged to help facilitate the process, using their extensive experience from other conflicts.

### **Ensuring the Rights of Minorities**

Historically the minorities in Cyprus were living in all parts of the island. With Independence, only Armenians, Latins and Maronites were recognised as minorities, leaving other smaller communities out. Moreover, the minorities were given the choice of either accepting a Greek Cypriot or Turkish Cypriot citizenship. There was no option of maintaining their minority identity; they had to choose the citizenship they thought could best secure their interests. Thus, many of them were to experience migration in two forms, from their identity and (for those that moved following the division) from their land.

Comparing their treatment under the two regimes, it should be noted that Armenians, Latins and Maronites were granted representation as religious minorities in the Parliament of the Republic of Cyprus but that there was a complete exclusion of minorities from the TRNC Parliament. Yet, even in the Republic's parliament, minority representatives were not granted voting rights or the possibility to address or raise issues in the House of Representatives. Thus, they ended up being observers to political processes that came to affect their lives rather than being allowed to influence the course of history.<sup>7</sup>

Over recent years their struggle for acceptance as minorities has continued, not least to ensure them the rights minorities are granted within the framework provided by the European Union and the Council of Europe. An example here is the struggle for recognition of Cypriot Maronite Arabic as a language in need of protection, as the Armenians have managed to secure.

Turning to international conventions that provide guidance to the matter, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe is the most comprehensive, acceded to by Cyprus without any reservations.<sup>8</sup>

The introduction to this convention explains that the need for a convention for "... the creation of a climate of tolerance and dialogue is necessary to enable cultural diversity to be a source and a factor, not of division, but of enrichment for each society;"

---

6 [http://eng.kilden.forskningsradet.no/c52778/nyhet/vis.html?tid=57242].

7 For a full presentation and discussion on minorities in Cyprus, please see Costas M. Constantinou (forthcoming 2009) 'Cyprus, Minority Politics and Surplus Ethnicity' in A. Varnava, N. Koureas and M. Elia (eds), *The Minorities of Cyprus*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publications.

8 Council of Europe (1995) *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*, Strasbourg, 1 November 1995, European Treaties Series – No. 157.

Thus, in article 3, part 1, it is pointed out that:

“Every person belonging to a national minority shall have the right freely to choose to be treated or not to be treated as such and no disadvantages shall result from this choice or from the exercise of the rights which are connected to that choice.”

And in article 5, part 1, it is stated that:

“The Parties undertake to promote the conditions necessary for persons belonging to national minorities to maintain and develop their culture, and to preserve the essential elements of their identity, namely their religion, language, traditions and cultural heritage.”

And, article 15, establishes that “[T]he Parties shall create the conditions necessary for the effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in cultural, social and economic life and in public affairs, in particular those affecting them”.

Thus, not only does the Convention (which Cyprus ratified back in 1996) provide clear guidance on how the rights of minorities are to be secured and maintained in Cyprus, it also instructs the parties, which in this case arguably includes the Turkish Cypriot community and their elected leader as citizens of the European Union, to ensure effective participation of minorities in issues of public affairs, which certainly a peace negotiation must be defined as.

That might both rectify past discrimination of minority rights in Cyprus, and help ensure that the hopefully forthcoming peace-agreement is in compliance with internationally accepted guidelines for the protection of minorities. Moreover, it will also allow minority groups ownership of both the process and the final results.

### **Protecting the Environment**

The environmental issue is arguably less about international conventions and rights than about opportunities and the ability to meet common and international challenges. And while the literature places emphasis on the possible conflicts that can be caused by struggle over scarce resources, as water is in Cyprus, there is an increasing body of academic work identifying the potential for unification and development of common environmental strategies. As Zikos, Rauchmayer and Sorman point out in a recent research project abstract,<sup>9</sup> drawing on the work of Wolf: “There is historical evidence that water can function both as a unifier promoting collaboration between entities at different levels and scales but also an irritant worsening already bad relations.” The authors go on to argue that “... exactly because of the very nature of the resource, water is rather the medium for successful negotiation between stakeholders, leading to consensus building, collaboration and peace”.

---

9 D. Zikos, F. Rauchmayer and A. Sorman (2009) *Participation, Conflict and Cooperation over Water Resources: Experimenting in Cyprus*. Research project abstract. Leipzig, Helmholtz – Centre for Environmental Research.

There is substantial evidence that the drought that has affected Cyprus over the last years might not be only a temporary matter, but rather a first indication of a more permanent climate change. There is growing attention internationally to the increased use of renewable energy and lowering of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, areas where Cyprus fares less well despite its agreement in March 2007 with the EU binding targets to increase the share in renewable energy. The target by 2020 is for a coverage of 13% in Cyprus (20% in average for the EU), which is up from 2.9% in 2005. This is a target a united Cyprus will strive hard to accomplish. Added to this are issues such as management of waste and sewage water. In short, environmental issues are major issues, and it is as such that they need to be addressed at the earliest and in a coherent manner.

That in itself is a reason for placing environmental issues high on the leaders' negotiation and consultation agenda, not least as a range of issues that can only be resolved effectively if addressed in a holistic way, as "island-wide issues". Moreover, the opportunity a politically neutral and internationally recognised theme as the environmental issue poses for initiating collaboration and common planning beyond the water issue cannot be overstated. Not least as it opens up avenues for collaboration between civil society organisations and technical experts in the two communities and can bring about suggestions and plans that will hold strong positive impact on the lives of all Cypriots. It is what both academics and politicians like to term a "win-win" solution.

### **Final Comment**

I have in the above examples tried to illustrate both the opportunities that lie in the ongoing peace negotiations to address three issues that have proven vital for other peace negotiation processes to succeed and be sustained. As all peace researchers know, a peace agreement is itself no guarantee for peace to be secured.

These three issues moreover offer, as I hope I have managed to demonstrate, an opportunity to ensure a structured dialogue with groups in the two communities whose rights, based on international and European treaties, needs to be addressed in a peace agreement. By structuring consultations with these groups, possibly with the help of the United Nations or the European Union, and allowing for their input to the negotiation process the final outcome might be more easily owned by these stakeholders.

From a negotiation point of view, as is the duty of the two leaders to consider, is there any risk that the demands will be very different in the two communities and that such a consultation might add further difficulties to the peace negotiations? I would argue no. On the issues identified there are no major differences in opinions and views held in the communities in Cyprus, and there is a set of international legislation and guidelines that provide a framework that both the parties negotiating and those that should be consulted need to abide by.

And, moreover, such a strategy might help address important issues that so far have been left unresolved because of the larger conflict. By addressing them in a coherent and consultative manner some of the contributing causes of the conflict will be addressed, and thus help strengthen the final text the two leaders are expected to agree on.