

WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA: A ROADMAP FOR TURKEY

NATO brings about change in the traditional militaries through the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, transforming the understanding of security. The UNSCR 1325 frames how women's inclusion in conflict resolution increases women's, therefore everyone's well-being. This article lays out that despite the discussions around the Istanbul Convention, EU's dethronement as a moral norm-exporter, and the sour discourse against Syrians in Turkey, it is still possible to write a National Action Plan (NAP) for UNSCR 1325 with the support of the resilient and independent women's civil society. While there is no one-size-fits-all recipe for a NAP, women's civil societies' involvement in international security issues with organizations such as NATO could open new discussions within the civil sphere and contribute to the international discussion around the WPS to push for positive change for women in Turkey.

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If you are a reader of Turkey's international relations, there is a big chance that as of July 2019, you have become an expert on S-400s, the Russian missile defense system that Turkey purchased despite the concerns and economic sanction threats of its traditional allies, namely NATO and the West. Meanwhile, an opinion poll on Turkish people's perception of foreign policy reveals that 60.8 percent of the population believes that Turkey should maintain its membership of NATO, and 69.9 percent agrees that NATO membership is beneficial for Turkey because of the collective defense clause.¹

If you are a scholar of international organizations, though, you would know that NATO is more than the defense organization it was designed to be. In a world where security threats surpass traditional arms races, NATO is the only internationally functioning bureaucracy that has the potential to transform the military and its structures.

For many years, militaries and security structures had been ruled and organized by men solely, as if women were from another planet. After years of hard work from women's civil society organizations, women diplomats and politicians, NATO adopted the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda that protects women, girls, and children during and after conflict, and incorporates women in security mechanisms and decision-making processes. Today, the same military and security structures are implementing policies that account for gender differences. In fact, it has been proven that women's inclusion increases conflict management and the effectiveness of armed violence prevention.²

This article aims to highlight how NATO can bring about change in the traditional militaries through the WPS agenda and its potential role in transforming the understanding of security. The article will also underline why NATO is important for a country like Turkey, where the Alliance is solely perceived as a security organization. One might argue that domestic public opinion does not matter in international relations, yet those who prefer Turkey to stay in the Western camp should be reminded that there are other benefits to NATO in conjunction with military relations. More specifically, women's civil societies that have not been involved with international security issues and with organizations such as NATO could open new discussions within the civil sphere and contribute to the international discussion around the WPS.

¹ Mustafa Aydın et al., "Türk Dış Politikası Kamuoyu Algıları Araştırması," *Türkiye Çalışmaları Merkezi-Kadir Has Üniversitesi*, 4 July 2019, <http://ctrs.khas.edu.tr/sources/CTRS-TDP-2019.pdf>. On the other hand, 56.5% of the people, do not think that Turkey is under the threat of being demarcated, which is a long seated internal syndrome most Turks have held. In this survey, 29.7% of people still think so.

² "Inclusive Security: NATO Adapts and Adopts," *Inclusive Security*, March 2016, <https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/publication/inclusive-security-nato-adapts-and-adopts/>.

Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Turkey

Women, Peace and Security agenda is not a novelty for those who follow women's activism in Turkey. Since 1990s, women in Turkey who know and experience the links between violence against women and conflict have raised awareness, stood in solidarity with each other and their international friends, founded groups, and did whatever they could to open up spaces for women in their work for peace. In 2009, Women for Peace was founded with the belief that the Kurdish 'problem' was not without a solution and that it was only possible through women's participation in the peace process.³ However, with the peace process with the Kurds coming to an end, and the failed coup attempt in July 2016, the WPS was left with no place to exist, let alone be implemented. While there can be no peaceful solution for the Kurdish issue without women's participation, as in any other peace process anywhere in the world, WPS Agenda and the seven subsequent resolutions are guidelines to improve women's participation in decision-making mechanisms, guarantee peace-building and recovery, and protect women from violence.

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Considering its rank in the human development index, Turkey is surprisingly poor in gender equality. Turkey enjoys high human development, yet it ranks very low in women's empowerment, and women's political and economic participation; in fact, women still face challenges such as legal discrimination and intimate partner violence.⁴ Therefore, it would be important to point out the advantages of implementing the UNSCR 1325 in Turkey.

First off, UNSCR 1325 provides a comprehensive framework that improves women's engagement in society, protects and promotes the rights of women and girls, and prevents violence against women and girls. For instance, it recommends an increase in women's participation at all levels of decision-making in national, regional, and international institutions as mediators, partners, leaders in peace negotiations, and as soldiers, police, and civilians in peace operations. Second, UNSCR 1325 policy

³ “Barış için Kadın Girişimi” [Women's Initiative for Peace], *Kadının İnsan Hakları Yeni Çözümler Derneği*, 2 August 2019, <http://www.kadinininsanhaklari.org/portfolio-view/baris-icin-kadin-girisimi/>

⁴ “Women Peace and Security Index, Country Profile: Turkey,” *Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security*, 18 October 2017, <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/turkey/>

recommendations such as to “expand the role and contribution of women in United Nations field-based operations, and especially among military observers, civilian police, human rights and humanitarian personnel”⁵ may also be implemented, as Turkey’s foreign policy prioritizes mediation, conflict resolution, and humanitarian assistance. Third, 79 countries have written their own National Action Plans (NAP), including many countries in Turkey’s region, from Iraq to Italy, Tajikistan to Jordan, Ukraine and Slovenia.⁶ Regional partnerships in various forms would strengthen Turkey’s hand in international relations as the country’s international engagements will only improve and become more enduring with the adoption of a gender perspective.

How Can a UNSCR 1325 NAP Be Written?

Each country is unique in its international standing and has different domestic concerns relating to women. Therefore, there is no specific way of writing a NAP nor implementing the 1325 policies. What the women’s movement around the world have achieved to do, however, is to embrace this heterogeneity and share their experiences through their networks, trainings, and research. The UN published the Global Study on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 in 2015, marking the 15th anniversary of the Resolution.⁷ The study includes very valuable lessons and points out that despite their aspiration, NAPs are most effective when they are written in collaboration with state institutions and most importantly, when there is budget allocated to their implementation.

An analysis of different NAPs from different countries shows that each NAP can have a distinctive focus. For instance Sweden’s 2016-2020 NAP is in tandem with its feminist foreign policy⁸ and aims to increase Sweden’s leadership in the Women, Peace and Security agenda.⁹ Yet not all countries enjoy a feminist foreign policy and gender sensitive donation policies. Therefore, the focus of a NAP can be as simple as including more women in the security sector. In that case, collaborations with the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior, the military, and any other relevant institution should be secured to ensure proper implementation.

⁵ UNSC, “Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security, Adopted by the Security Council at its 4213th Meeting, on 31 October 2000,” [https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325\(2000\)](https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325(2000))

⁶ “National Action Plans for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security,” *Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom*, 2 August 2019, <https://www.peacewomen.org/member-states>

⁷ UN Women, “Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325,” <http://wps.unwomen.org/>

⁸ Therese Hydén, “Sweden’s Feminist Foreign Policy Illustrated,” *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No.1 (Spring 2019), pp. 12-18.

⁹ “Women, Peace & Security: Sweden’s National Action Plan for the Implementation of the UN Security Council’s Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security 2016–2020,” *Government Offices of Sweden*, 2 August 2019, <https://www.government.se/contentassets/8ae23198463f49269e25a14d4d14b9bc/women-peace-and-security-eng.pdf>

What type of a collaboration shall be pursued? The more collaborative the writing process of a NAP, the better chances of its effective implementation. For instance, institutions usually lack the knowledge and experience that civil society gains from fieldwork, but civil society does not have the resources nor the political weight to collaborate with bureaucrats to implement their plans. These actors are not without their differences but should collaborate from the beginning of the planning and writing processes to improve the quality of a NAP.

What Can Be Done in Turkey?

Neither international organizations nor civil society or state institutions are static structures. NATO has changed over time, and civil society in Turkey has gone through tough times, especially since the attempted coup and the transformation of Turkey's ruling system into a presidential one. In the midst of all these changes, women's status in Turkey has not improved. There is clearly a need for transformation.

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UNSCR 1325 and NATO's embracing of the Women, Peace and Security agenda might provide a new venue and a fresh start to a new conversation between the parties. It will benefit not only Turkish women but also the refugees, migrants, displaced women living in Turkey, women in conflict zones where Turkey is an aid-donor, and the Turkish army in Peacekeeping Missions.¹⁰

It is worthy to mention that Turkey has been a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) since 1985. Since then, Ankara has been keen on working on Sustainable Development Goals that not only include a stand-alone goal for improving the situation of women and girls but also mainstreaming gender equality in all goals. In that regard, Turkey has been especially proud of its leading stance in relation to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) that took place in 2011. Although Turkey is a signatory of the treaty, it should be noted that the government is still accountable for

¹⁰ For a comprehensive report and data on where Turkey is in terms of women's participation in the WPS, see “Women Count Turkey 2018: Turkey's Implementation of 1325,” 23 August 2019, https://operation1325.se/sites/default/files/women_count_turkey.pdf

ensuring these treaties' implementation. Furthermore, UNSCR 1325 is also included in CEDAW's 2016 concluding observations on Turkey, calling Turkey to finalize and adopt a 1325 National Action Plan.¹¹ CEDAW's report also underlines that this process should incorporate demands of various women's organizations.

Adopting a National Action Plan for UNSCR 1325, especially one that is linked with not a very popular international organization, might seem futile. It may especially seem difficult with the discussions around the Istanbul Convention and the sour discourse against Syrians. However, the EU has ceased to be the moral norm-exporter in recent years, and the public opinion remains very dynamic for those who fight for equality in Turkey. Therefore, the feminist movement in Turkey can utilize its strong activism history that has been successful in pushing for change and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.

Feminists in Turkey were successful in pushing for changes in the Civil Code and the Penal Code in Turkey¹² and managed to overturn the adoption of draft laws such as the one that suggested pardoning men if they had sex without "force or threat" and subsequently married the victim.¹³ Women were the first ones to hit the streets after the 1980 military coup, under the oppressive regime of the time. It was also the women's movement that populated the streets after the emergency rule and the 2016 attempted coup, and still women continue to claim their rights.¹⁴

Women in Turkey have been at the forefront of several peace efforts. During the Kardak crisis back in 1996 for example, women from Turkey and Greece came together to improve the relations between their countries. In terms of UNSCR 1325, trainings and campaigning have also been conducted in Turkey. In 2016 and 2017, "The First Steps towards a National Action Plan for the UNSCR 1325 Project" brought together 14 women's organizations in Turkey and trained them on cooperative dialogue, the UNSCR 1325, and NAP writing.¹⁵ Women's organizations with varying degrees of knowledge and different political leanings, from women's investment platforms to rights-based groups, came together to foster dialogue between women about peace and conflict and received trainings from international experts

¹¹ CEDAW, "Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, Concluding Observations on the Seventh Periodic Report of Turkey," 25 July 2016, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/TUR/CO/7&Lang=En.

¹² Zeynep Alemdar, *Turkish Civil Society and the EU: Domestic Politics Through International Organizations*, (Germany: Verlag Dr.Müller (VdM), 2008).

¹³ "Turkish bill clears men of statutory rape if they marry," 23 August 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38030182>.

¹⁴ Dorian Jones, "Women's Day Spurs Femicide Protests Across Turkey," 23 August 2019, <https://www.voanews.com/europe/womens-day-spurs-femicide-protests-across-turkey>.

¹⁵ More info about the project can be found on the website, and inquiries to the author are welcome: "BMGK 1325," *Women in Foreign Policy*, 2 August 2019, <http://wfp14.org/calismalarimiz/bm-1325-sivil-toplum-egitim-programi/>

who have been involved in the writing of NAPs. The organizations that participated in the project were eager to contribute to write up a NAP for Turkey. Similar efforts still continue on a smaller scale as women think about, dream of, and realize efforts for peace.¹⁶ Therefore, writing a UNSCR 1325 NAP for Turkey can easily be realized by amassing the efforts of all these women and making use of the international frameworks that are already in place.

Conclusion

UNSCR 1325 provides a frame to improve women's well-being before, during, and after a conflict. Soldiers who have seen wars argue that no one can desire peace more than them. Therefore, NATO's ownership of 1325 is not an anomaly, but a necessity. It is vital for Turkey, who has gone through many wars, protracted conflicts, and sits within the most conflict-prone region in the world, to have a National Action Plan that empowers women, incorporates women's experiences, and increases women's well-being.

Writing and implementing a NAP would not only benefit women living in Turkey but also increase Turkey's normative power in its region. Besides discussing the implementation of a Convention on Domestic Violence that is named after Istanbul, Turkey should work on improving women's rights on every level, domestically and internationally, in a time when the Women, Peace and Security Agenda is more relevant than ever in the world.

¹⁶ Demir Leblebi Association based in Ankara produced awareness raising videos in Turkey, available at <https://demirleblebi.org/videolar/>; Women for Women's Human Rights included Women and Peace in their SDG awareness raising videos available at <http://www.kadinininsanhaklari.org/yayinlar/karsilasmalar/>; Further information on Women in Foreign Policy Initiative to bring together women scholars who work on security issues available at www.wfp14.org