

**SPEECH BY ERATO KOZAKOU MARCOULLIS ON
“THE CYPRUS PEACE PROCESS AND MY VISION FOR OUR FUTURE”
WOMEN WALK AND TALK CYPRUS - KARPAS - 17 JUNE 2023**

“Dear friends,

One thing that strongly unites the “Women Walk and Talk”, is our common vision regarding the role of women and the way we see the future of our country.

Through our regular “Walks and Talks”, on both sides of our divided island, we are sending a message of peaceful co-existence, reconciliation, respect for each other’s religions, languages and cultures and determination to see our homeland reunited.

Within this framework, we have invited speakers from both sides and from the United Nations, men and women alike, to talk on a range of issues, and most importantly, we have engaged in discussions, that are meant to enrich our knowledge and to view with empathy the positions of the other community.

Today, it is my privilege to speak! For this purpose, I chose to talk about the “Peace process» with particular emphasis on «My Vision for our future”.

What I would like to leave with you, is my dream for the future of this country, with the hope that we may find ways to join forces, as women and men, to put an end to our nearly 60 years of separation and to prevent the permanent partition, which is at our doorstep.

Negotiations to find a solution, to what has been termed “The Cyprus Problem”, have been going on for almost half a century. The agreed negotiating framework, within which negotiations have been conducted since 1974, was that of a Bizonal, Bicomunal Federation (BBF), with political equality, one state of Cyprus with a single sovereignty, single international personality and single citizenship.

From December 1963, when the violent intercommunal conflict started and UNFICYP was established in March 1964, seven United Nations Secretaries-General have held the Cyprus problem under their auspices, starting with U-Thant, Waldheim, Perez de Cuellar, Boutros-Boutros Ghali, Kofi Annan, Ban Ki Moon and the present Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres.

During the same period, 27 distinguished personalities, ranging from Mediators, Special Representatives, and Special Advisers, were appointed to help the Secretaries-General in their task, starting from the first UN Mediator, Sakari Tuomioja, back in 1964, to the present Special Representative and deputy Special Adviser on Cyprus, Colin Steward.

Regrettably, all the efforts exerted so far, all the moneys spent, and all the manpower used, throughout these past nearly 60 years, have not produced any results! Many initiatives, ideas, plans and frameworks have been put forward and have been either supported or opposed by one leader or the other at different times, or voted down in referenda, as was the case with the Annan Plan, the only comprehensive settlement plan, which was put to referenda in April 2004 and was voted down by a 76% majority of the Greek Cypriot side, while it was supported by a 65% majority of the Turkish Cypriot side. I was amongst the 24% minority of the Greek Cypriots, who voted in favor of the Annan Plan and the disappointment was heartbreaking, as were the consequences devastating!

More recently, we had the same tragic failure during the Conference held at Crans Montana, in July 2017, when, after two years of intensive negotiations, which resulted in a whole range of convergences, in the exchange for the first time of maps and in the Secretary- General’s submission of a framework, to facilitate the reaching of a strategic agreement, regrettably, the Conference collapsed and was terminated by the Secretary-General.

In his assessment of the negotiations, the Secretary-General concluded that “a historic opportunity was missed in Crans-Montana” and that “while the parties were moving closer on substance, they remained far apart with respect to the trust and determination necessary to seek common ground through mutual accommodation, ultimately preventing them from reaching the broad outlines of a strategic understanding across the negotiating chapters, that could have paved the way for the final settlement deal”.

In my opinion, there was a fatal mishandling of the whole situation during the dinner, before the collapse of the Conference, and considerations prevailed that had nothing to do with the solution of the Cyprus problem. For all these reasons, I have been and continue to be very critical on our former President, not only on the way he handled the negotiations during that dinner, but most importantly, that he concurred with the Secretary-General's conclusion " that the Conference would likely not achieve a result and should be closed", a conclusion that, to my mind, was incorrect, because some additional time should have been given to the parties, to conclude the strategic agreement. So much work and so much effort, had been abruptly terminated, putting at risk the negotiating process itself and the future of a peaceful solution in Cyprus.

All these successive failures and the persistent deadlock that we have been facing, since the collapse of the Conference in Crans Montana nearly six years ago, have resulted in increasing disappointment and frustration of the people and have led to their alienation and lack of interest in any future process.

The fact that the negotiations, the way they have been conducted so far, have been between the two leaders (all men), assisted by negotiators (again all men) and small elites of advisers, the fact that political will of leaders to reach a settlement, has, at different times, been limited or completely lacking, on the one or the other side, the fact that the civil society has never been involved in any way in this process, the fact that the negotiating process has not been transparent and has been conducted in secrecy, without the much needed public discussion on the convergences agreed or the issues that have remained unresolved, the fact that there has been very limited participation of women in the negotiations and women's concerns have not been taken on board, the fact that very limited discussion has taken place regarding the benefits of the solution, the fact that people have not been adequately informed about the way a federal system functions and, as a result, they have been misled by politicians who have been working against a federal solution, all these factors have contributed towards maintaining and, at times, widening the gap between the positions of the two sides and destroying the prospects for a solution.

Women in Cyprus have remained largely disengaged from the political process, since politics remains, to a large extent, a "men's world". This has been shown by several research projects and specifically, the Security Dialogue Initiative research, conducted in 2016- 2017, which found differences in the way men and women viewed the conflict, their security concerns, and their relationship with the other community.

Talking about women's involvement in the peace process, I find it necessary to mention that I recently had an extremely interesting experience, during a discussion, at the residence of the Irish Ambassador, on the occasion of the visit to Cyprus of two Northern Ireland women, who had taken part in the mobilizations to end violence in Northern Ireland and the participation of women in the negotiations, leading to the Good Friday Agreement. This year marks 25 years since that agreement was reached in April 1998, an agreement that ended the so-called "troubles", which cost the lives of over 3,500 people.

Mary Montague and Liza Wilkinson, shared with us their experiences from the peace negotiations, and told us about the very essential role played by women, both in the negotiations themselves, and in the communication efforts between the warring parties, to bring about peace. Mary Montague explained how she took the decision to get involved in these efforts, being a young mother at the time, and with no experience in these matters. She explained that she and other women in Northern Ireland, on both sides of the warring groups, were fed up with the constant killings and loss of life on all sides. In almost every house in her neighborhood, there was a person killed and many women became widows and remained unprotected, while many children had been traumatized by violence, since many times, their own parents were murdered in cold blood before their eyes.

A group of women, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, took the decision to act in the direction of the various warring groups, to send the message that this violence must stop. The meetings were successful beyond their expectations because people had really reached the limits of their patience and could no longer stand violence. So, these women were eventually heard and taken seriously into account, and later, when negotiations began in 1996 under the mediation of U.S.

Senator George Mitchell, they also took part in the negotiations and their views were finally considered, in the formulation of the final agreement.

They even created a political party, the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, made up of women, both Catholic and Protestant, who vigorously demanded a voice and a seat at the negotiating table, which they succeeded to get. The motto of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition was "SAYING GOODBYE TO THE DINOSAURS"!!! I stand with immense respect in front of the women of Northern Ireland, for the role they played in ending violence and in bringing about peace.

And I really wonder, why in Cyprus, people and especially women, have become so complacent, as if they have become accustomed to the status quo? The violence that existed in Northern Ireland, in the period before the negotiations, may not be present in Cyprus now, but if the Cyprus problem is not resolved, the future of a reunited Cyprus remains at stake. There is a very strong possibility that we may eventually end up with partition, or even worse, the annexation of the northern part to Turkey. If any of these horrible scenarios materializes, violence and conflict could not be excluded in the future. These genuine threats should be the driving force to unite the women in Cyprus and initiatives should be taken in that direction, to work together to reverse the partitionist course, towards which our country is heading!

'The road to peace is never easy,' US President Bill Clinton, who played a decisive role in the Good Friday agreement, said at the time. The path of peace, I add, is a one-way street, if we and our children and grandchildren really want to live in a free, safe, progressive, and reunited homeland, together with our Turkish Cypriot compatriots and the other communities of Cyprus.

Having talked, perhaps at more length than initially intended, about the peace process and the repeated failures we have suffered, I will now present my vision for our future and how I would wish the peace process to develop, to make this vision a reality:

I was born in a united Cyprus, and I have strong memories of the coexistence of the two communities and the other religious groups. Cyprus was and continues to be a multicultural treasure, whose true value we have never truly appreciated!

Cyprus is the homeland of all its people, Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots, Maronites, Armenians and Latins and I am convinced that the majorities on both sides still want to live in a reunited island. This is my primary vision and my most fervent dream!

As a strong believer in the federal idea, I firmly believe that to achieve reunification, only a federal system can effectively work to heal the wounds from our nearly sixty year-long separation. It has been acknowledged that federalism can be useful in conflict resolution, in that it can provide a viable power sharing between ethnic, cultural, and religious groups, that have been engaged in conflict and have moved or are moving towards secession.

In such cases, through the establishment of a federal system of governance, power is divided and coordinated between at least two levels of government, the constituent state or provincial and the federal or national government. In that sense, a federal system implies that there exists a common agreement among the parties to a federation, to do certain things separately and other things together.

There is no single model of a federal country, from the more than 25 federal countries that exist in the world. Every federal country shapes its own institutions according to its needs and has its own characteristics.

Nevertheless, there are certain principles which are common in all federal countries, such as continued intergovernmental consultation and cooperation, the need for all political actors to build trust and tolerance towards each other, and the need for federal loyalty, a moral commitment of all the parties to work together to achieve the objectives of the federation, as well as to support and give legitimacy to the common state.

In a Bizonal, Bicomunal Federal Cyprus, each community will be governing its own affairs, having full autonomy in exercising those powers which will be agreed to be exercised at the constituent state or provincial level, usually having to do with socio-economic affairs, affecting the daily lives of the citizens.

The remaining powers will be exercised at the federal level, and they usually involve foreign affairs, defense, citizenship, immigration, naturalization, international commerce and customs, natural resources, finance, banking, currency, coinage, and nationwide public services.

In Crans Montana, we came very close to achieving agreement on most of the core issues and this prompted the Secretary-General to put before all the parties, a six-point framework, aiming at helping them to bridge remaining differences and to achieve a strategic agreement, thus expediting the course of the negotiations and shortening the period needed to finalize the agreement. As I explained earlier, this course of action was not followed through, especially because of what transpired during the dinner of the 6th to the 7th of July 2017, and the Conference tragically collapsed.

My expectation is that we may go back to that point in time, when the negotiations were terminated and restart from where we left them off, with all the body of work on board, including the convergences, the maps, the Secretary General's framework, and the proposals of the parties. This is not an easy task, but, to my mind, this is the only way that would allow us to finalize an agreement in the shortest possible time, thus preventing partition, which is imminent.

And this is where our role as women lies!

My vision is that we, as Women Walk and Talk, along with other women's bicomunal organizations and other bicomunal groups, will join forces, make our voices heard and exert the necessary pressure on our respective leaderships, in favor of restarting the negotiations from where they were cut off in Crans Montana.

I dream of a federal Cyprus, member of the European Union, whose citizens will be able to enjoy freely all the rights, benefits and privileges accorded to all EU citizens, without any form of discrimination.

I dream of a federal Cyprus without checkpoints and barbed wires, buffer zones and mines, where all the citizens can move, establish themselves and work freely in any part of their country, exercising freedoms that are fundamental in the European Union treaties.

I also dream of a federal Cyprus where women will have equal say and equal participation, at all levels of government, in all decision-making affecting the future of their country, their societies and their families.

I dream of a federal Cyprus where both languages, Greek and Turkish, will be taught and learned at schools and where Cypriots will be fluent in both. The knowledge and use of the language of the other community will unleash many possibilities and opportunities for cooperation and interaction in all areas. Above all, it will build trust and mutual respect and tear down the walls of suspicion that have plagued relations between the two communities for more than half a century. Each community will be able to better understand the other, its problems and concerns and appreciate the full range of its culture and civilization. Learning the two languages before the solution, and especially among young people from both communities, will give a strong signal that we still believe and hope for a solution and that we are preparing the ground for that blessed day when this vision will become a reality.

In the same context, I dream of the day when the Turkish language, as one of the two official languages of Cyprus, will also become an official language of the EU. This should have already taken place at the time we joined the EU. Unfortunately, this did not happen, and this anomaly must be corrected!

I dream of a common homeland, where Greek and Turkish Cypriots will be first proud for being citizens of a federal Cyprus and honor and respect their country and its symbols, and then be proud of their other identities, like ethnic origin, language, or religion.

I dream of the day that a federal Cyprus will be fully demilitarized, and all defense spending will be diverted towards education, health and other social services and instead of staging military parades on national holidays, a federal Cyprus will be celebrating its rich and diverse cultures, that need to be cherished and protected.

I dream of the day when Cypriot athletes, artists and all kinds of professionals will be closely cooperating in a federal Cyprus, exchanging experiences, joining their talents, and jointly

embarking in cultural creations, that will enhance the image of our country. We have been blessed to have a great wealth of talent in both communities and this needs to be supported and projected. I dream of the day when all towns and villages throughout the island, from Paphos to a free and fully restored Famagusta, from Kyrenia to Limassol, from Morphou to Larnaca and Nicosia, will be an inseparable part of a federal Cyprus, reaping the fruits of peace and cooperation, which are so important for their sustainable development and growth and for the prosperity of our country in general!

I dream of the day when all our archaeological and religious sites will be adequately restored and protected, all our citizens will feel proud and will embrace our entire rich cultural heritage, irrespective of their ethnic origin or religion and when respect for all cultures, religions, languages, customs, and traditions, will be promoted at schools from an early age.

I dream of the day when peace, cooperation, reconciliation, trust, understanding, empathy, and solidarity will be the prevalent values and principles in a reunited, federal Cyprus, thus allowing the country to function as a normal state, and the Cypriots to enjoy the fruits of peaceful coexistence and progress.

Finally, I dream of the day when in a federal Cyprus, we will be able to establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the same way it was established in South Africa and a host of other countries with similar problems. Even though many of the perpetrators of the crimes committed and many of the relatives of the victims have already perished, the wounds have not healed. The establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, tasked with investigating human rights abuses committed from 1963 to 1974, would serve to answer the many unanswered questions generated by enforced disappearances, extrajudicial executions and other crimes committed, thus starting the process of healing.

What I have put before you today are not a utopia. Not only they can be implemented, but they should be implemented. What is needed is vision and determination. This is a dream that I will continue to struggle to make a reality. If we put aside any existing differences, if we all see this dream as a common goal for the reunification of our country, we may one day, in our generation, see this dream materialize!

We need a seismic change in mentalities! We need to rid ourselves of the poisonous nationalism and any racism and prejudices that have nurtured hatred and intolerance! Let us help bring about this change!

The Northern Ireland women have succeeded! Why not us?"