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# **Engaging Women, Peace, and Security in Defence: The Role of the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives**

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## **Abstract**

As NATO marks its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary it is facing a future more uncertain than at any point since the end of the Cold War. The European security environment is changed and challenged by the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine, while the Israel-Gaza war poses further challenges. Given this critical moment, this article offers a strategic intervention to highlight and reinforce the essential role of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda in defence and deterrence, including through the integration of a gender perspective, for NATO members and partners. It does so by bringing together former Chairs of the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives (NCGP) into conversation about the continued importance of NATO's oldest committee in ensuring NATO's future approach to WPS is fit for purpose. Drawing upon their reflections and insights we recommend policy points to embed and advance WPS and the gender perspective in NATO's response to this new security environment.

## **Introduction**

*'Our world is contested and unpredictable. The Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine has shattered peace and gravely altered our security environment. Its brutal and unlawful invasion, repeated violations of international humanitarian law and heinous attacks and atrocities have caused unspeakable suffering and destruction. A strong, independent Ukraine is vital for the stability of the Euro-Atlantic area. Moscow's behaviour reflects a pattern of Russian aggressive actions against its neighbours and the wider*

*transatlantic community. We also face the persistent threat of terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations. Pervasive instability, rising strategic competition and advancing authoritarianism challenge the Alliance's interests and values.'* (NATO, 2022)

As the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) Strategic Concept (2022) sets out, the challenge for NATO looking towards 2030 is to respond effectively to a changing and increasingly complex strategic environment. In this intervention, we point to some of the ways in which the effective implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, through the integration of a gender perspective, is an essential part of ensuring that NATO is suitably equipped to face this uncertain future. From the targeted use of sexual and gender-based violence, to highly gendered disinformation campaigns, the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has underscored the relevance of WPS and a gender perspective to defence and deterrence. It has also brought to the fore the relevance of focusing on the relationships between masculinities and militarism to understand global politics (Wojnicka, Mellström and De Boise, 2022). This gendered reality is reflected in the update to NATO's Strategic Concept (2022), which for the first time refers to WPS specifically and with ongoing updates to NATO's WPS architecture, policies and action plans (NATO, 2024); including the terms of reference of the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives (NCGP). NATO's new policy on WPS is set to be endorsed at the NATO Summit in Washington DC in July 2024 (NATO, 2024). Yet, there are continuing challenges in translating a gender perspective into defence and the military, as NATO's initial response to the war in Ukraine demonstrated, wherein the Alliance struggled to articulate the relevance of WPS (Wright, 2022).

Given this, it is both a critical and opportune moment to reflect on the role of defence in implementing WPS. As a political-military alliance, NATO requires not only political commitment but also an understanding of the military applicability of the WPS agenda to ensure its effective implementation, particularly in relation to defence and deterrence. As

NATO faces the reality of a war in Europe, developing and deepening this commitment and understanding is a necessity, and key to ensuring NATO's future approach to WPS is fit for purpose.

We (Matthew Hurley (Matt) and Katharine A. M. Wright (Katharine)) have been researching NATO's multifaceted and increasingly diverse engagement with the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda for well over a decade now. This research has taken place separately (Hurley, 2016; 2017; 2018a; 2018b; Wright, 2016, 2019, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2024; Wright and Bergman Rosamond, 2021, Forthcoming) and together (Wright & Hurley, 2017; Wright et al., 2019), culminating in the publication of the book *NATO, Gender, and the Military: Women Organising from Within* - co-authored with Jesus Ignacio Gil Ruiz - which was launched at NATO Headquarters in 2019. This contributes to a broader and rapidly expanding volume of scholarship which has sought to interrogate NATO's engagement with WPS (for example: Bastick and Duncanson, 2018; Hardt and von Hlatky, 2020; Hedling, Edenborg and Strand, 2022; von Hlatky, 2022; Bohdalová and Stojarová, 2023). A significant focus of our work has been on the historic and contemporary role of the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives (NCGP). This Committee traces its origins back to senior NATO women organising within NATO in the 1960s and was subsequently recognised as the Committee for Women in NATO Forces (CWINF) in 1976, making it one of NATO's oldest committees. As our research has highlighted, the NCGP has provided a central role in NATO's more recent engagement with the WPS agenda, providing crucial recommendations to the Military Committee on the relevance of a gender perspective to defence and in its focus on three main aspects of WPS work: operational planning and operations; training and education; and the recruitment and retention of women in the armed forces.

As we have outlined, the European security environment is much changed since we published *NATO, Gender and the Military* in 2019. Given such changes, it felt incumbent to re-assess the

continued role of the NCGP in supporting the Alliance's WPS work. On 29<sup>th</sup> November 2023 we brought together three former Chairs of the NCGP and the former Chief of the Office of the International Military Staff (IMS) Gender Advisor (GENAD) to participate in a high-level roundtable discussion at Sheffield Hallam University, UK. The aim of the event was to reflect on the work of integrating WPS into defence at NATO from the perspectives of those who chaired or supported the Committee at different points in its development, from the 2000s, the 2010s and the 2020s. As feminist researchers we are interested in the connections between the personal and international (Enloe, 2014), and relatedly, the personal and institutional. As method then, this article centres our speakers' lived experiences (see also Sylvester, 2013; Bergman-Rosamond and Kronsell, 2018; 2022); the issues, and opportunities they faced in steering such an important committee and on what we might learn about the continued relevance and future trajectory of the NCGP. Our dialogue offers a unique, feminist way of making sense of how the personal, international, and institutional interconnect at NATO, particularly in (gendered) matters of security, deterrence, and defence.

Our speakers stand out for their achievements; forging careers in the military spanning logistics, civil and structural engineering, civil-military cooperation and coordination (CIMIC) and light infantry. Notably Kristin and Katrien have broken glass ceilings within the armed forces on an international level, while all three have become champions of WPS in defence; seeking to ensure women are an accepted and expected part of the military at a national and international level. Major General (Rt) Kristin Lund (Norway) served as Chair of what was then the Committee on Women in NATO Forces (CWINF) from 2003 to 2005. Prior to her retirement she was, amongst other notable achievements, the first woman to command a United Nations peacekeeping operation, serving as Force Commander for the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus from 2014 to 2016 and first woman as Head of Mission for United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) 2017 to 2019. Brigadier General

Katrien D'Hert (Belgium) served as Chair of the NCGP from 2017 to 2019 and is currently Director of Logistics at the European Union Military Staff (EUMS), becoming the first female General to serve within the EUMS. Lieutenant Colonel Diana Morais (Portugal) chaired the NCGP from 2021 to 2023 and is currently an advisor to the Portuguese Minister of National Defence, leading on Portugal's implementation of the WPS agenda. We were also joined in the conversation by a self-described 'genderman', Colonel (Rt) Jesus Gil Ruiz (Spain), who has championed WPS in defence at NATO and beyond (Figueroa-Domecq et al, 2015). Jesus was the Chief of the IMS GENAD Office from 2012-2015, co-author of our book (Wright et al, 2019) and has since gone onto work for UN Women. The IMS GENAD provides the secretary support role for the NCGP and is instrumental in ensuring the smooth running of the Committee and its positive reception at NATO headquarters.

The discussion was structured around three sets of questions. To start, we asked our panel to reflect on their motivations for taking up the role of Chair, their perceptions, and understandings of the Committee before they took up the position and how these changed during their tenure. They then identified the main achievements and challenges of their time as Chair. To conclude, we discussed what they saw as the role of the NCGP for supporting NATO's continued engagement with the WPS agenda and the integration of a gender perspective into defence.

What follows in this article is an edited and condensed version of the conversation that took place, highlighting five key themes recurrent in the reflections of the participants<sup>1</sup>: Firstly, that the NCGP serves as a hub for nations to learn and develop their approach to implementing the WPS agenda and the integration of a gender perspective – in short, NATO remains a (gender) teaching machine (Wright et al., 2019); Secondly, that NATO leadership needs to hear from

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<sup>1</sup> The event was livestreamed on YouTube and can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bHgJMIL0W1Y>

those with experience of serving in NATO operations on what a gender perspective looks like in practice to fully discern its value to NATO; Thirdly, that coordination between the military and political/civilian sides of NATO is imperative, this relationship should be complementary, not competitive. Fourth, the importance of leadership at all levels from the NATO Secretary General down not just talking the talk but putting into practice their commitments. Finally, that there is considerable value in academic, practitioner and policy-maker dialogue to enhance understandings of problems from multiple perspectives.

This article concludes with our recommended policy points for engaging WPS in defence in this changed, changing and challenging security environment. As NATO marks its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary it is a prescient moment to reflect on the Alliance's continued engagement with the WPS agenda; because to understand where it has come from gives us the tools to set out a vision and ambition for where it should go.

### **The Teaching Machine Continued: The NGCP as a (Military) Gender Hub**

*Katharine:* We will start our conversation by asking, what made you take up the role of Chair of the committee? What were your perceptions of the role on day one?

*Kristin Lund (Kristin):* I come from Norway. Norway is one of the 'founding mothers' of the Committee. They were there from the beginning in 1961, and in Norway we have always been at the forefront on gender equality. I was part of the first generation in the military educated the same as the men in our Defence forces. It has sometimes been a struggle, so you want to share and you want to empower other people. You don't want them to fall into the same traps, or take the long way up that you did. So I started first being a part of the team that was sent to the Committee, and after a while, I became the delegate and then NATO asked who is willing to be the Chair Elect?, so I took on that role and then Chair from 2003 to 2005. I think it was

actually my Defence Headquarters that asked me to do it. And I think that it is important to have that link back to your nation.

*Katrien D'Hert (Katrien):* The first time I heard about the NCGP was back in 2013, when the then National Delegate for Belgium asked me to take her place at the annual conference. And I said, 'What is this? What are you talking about? Explain please' because I was not aware of the NCGP. One of the first issues I encountered, similar to at a national level, was that the nature of the work of the Committee on Gender Perspectives was not really known. And to me, I was not well aware of what exactly WPS was. People that know me, will have really understood my reaction: 'Me, why me?'. So, I attended in a backseat to support the National Delegate, and then I saw for the first time the added value of the NCGP. I understood what WPS was all about. So that was for me a real eye opener, and only then did I realise this is something I want to do.

*Diana Morais (Diana):* I attended the annual conference in 2016 for the first time, and it's exactly like Katrien said, I was overwhelmed with the conference. I was really fascinated because one of the benefits of the Committee and the conference in particular is that you bring together a lot of experts, practitioners, people that have the same problems and the same challenges. So being able to discuss your problems and feel you are with people that really understand what your concerns are was amazing.

*Matt:* It is really interesting to hear of your personal encounters with the Committee, and how your first impressions changed. How has the Committee's focus evolved in this time to support nations with the implementation of WPS in Defence?

*Diana:* The Committee began with a focus on the recruitment and retention of women in the forces and it was very important, and then in 2009, it shifted to focus on integration of gender perspective and military operations. In my opinion, the NCGP needs to focus on both. It needs



to have two lines of effort because I have had many nations coming to me as Chair and asking, what is NATO advising on sexual harassment policies? What is it doing to support the recruitment of women? And I believe the NCGP needs to support nations, including through exchanges of information regarding policies on gender perspective, and WPS, alongside advising NATO military leadership.

*Kristin:* One of the important aspects, that Diana points to, is that the Committee should be a hub where nations can ask do you have policy on this? For example, if they are renewing their [National Action Plan] NAP.<sup>2</sup> That is also something that this committee should be involved in, to check that.

*Katrien:* Not every nation is moving forward on WPS at the same pace, but that's okay... It is okay for some nations to move slower than others, as long as the willingness is there to move forward. That is one of the main things the NCGP can still act upon and help everyone; to be a forum. Where different delegates from the nations can come together and learn from each other. To discuss what works, what doesn't work, and what are the best practices?

*Katharine:* This 'hub' or 'forum' supports what we refer to in the book as NATO's role as 'teaching machine' sharing lessons and best practice on WPS and defence (Wright et al, 2019). The Committee now includes partner nations, so this role has widened. How and why did that come about?

*Kristin:* We introduced the need to bring in the Partnership for Peace (PfP) countries, in that early period [2000s]. And I think that is important because during the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, it became apparent that NATO is totally dependent on other partner nations to maintain operations over a longer time.

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<sup>2</sup> While we note NAPs aren't the only way in which to implement WPS, they are a good indicator of commitment to the agenda; currently 107 states have adopted a NAP, and of the 31 NATO nations at the time of writing, only Greece, Hungary and Turkey had not adopted a NAP.

*Katharine:* And today we see a different, but equally important rationale for engaging partners because following the full-scale Russian invasion, WPS has become a key part of Ukraine's defence, including but not limited to the role of women in the armed forces (Suslova, 2023) and the NCGP can provide a vehicle for sharing these important lessons on WPS and defence with the alliance more broadly.

### **Leadership and Experience: The Gender Perspective 'On the Ground' and 'In Action'**

*Matt:* The NCGP looks different from other NATO Committees, specifically the Executive Committee is often composed of those not based at NATO headquarters but rather located in the nations. Why does this matter, and why is it so important for this topic in particular?

*Kristin:* I took up the Chair in 2003 straight from deployment in Afghanistan. And I felt I had the experience to tell what was important and what was not; I told the Military Committee that we are not fulfilling the mandate for ISAF in Afghanistan, and they looked at me as if to say: 'what is she talking about?' I told them examples, including when we deployed in 2003 and I was working with civil-military cooperation coordination, and in that Annex, there was no mention of gender. There were no activity lines on how to engage in this civilian society; when we had NATO exercises, the civilian population, they were gone, they were not the problem, and it was a different reality we faced in Afghanistan. The Military Committee at that time were old Generals and Admirals that had never been deployed in NATO operations because the NATO operation started in the Balkans.

*Katrien:* On the NCGP, you need a balance of representation between military experts, that includes people that have lived experience of operations, but also people that work on the political level that understand how policymaking works. I remember when I became Chair, I only had my boots on the ground experience until then, I did not know how it worked at the Ministry of Defence level. How do you make things work at the political level? I didn't have

a clue. So you need this mix of people with different backgrounds and experiences in the room to make things happen.

*Diana:* I believe that the Gender Advisors of the Strategic Commands, Allied Command Operations (ACO) and Allied Command Transformations (ACT), need to be included as non-voting members of the committee. As Chair, I felt a real benefit in having them in the monthly meetings of the NCGP Executive Committee because they are the ones working to execute what NCGP decides. They are the ones tasked by the MC to implement the Committee recommendations, so it's good to have them involved in the work of the community and have a voice there.

*Jesus:* Yes, I agree. During my time they were invited to the meetings.

*Katharine:* It is clear the unique design of the Committee allows NATO to access the expertise of those with direct experience of implementing a gender perspective in defence on the ground, in their capitals and at NATO. Building on this, we wondered what makes the Committee so effective at supporting NATO's implementation of WPS on the military side of the house? And what are some of the challenges that arise from the NCGP not being your 'usual' NATO Committee?

*Jesus Ignacio Gil Ruiz (Jesus):* You are right, the NCGP is not a regular NATO committee and that is the problem, but also the beauty of the NCGP. We are special, but we are also always in a delicate situation because of this. People don't like us because we are a difficult committee that requests to be listened to, we make recommendations and the recommendations are never welcomed because they are about gender. They don't realise that gender means gender mainstreaming, and if they don't mainstream gender, they will not do their job in a good way.

*Kristin:* The Committee also needs to work sideways to other committees, they should be aligned in a way where they can pick up things from other committees because they share some of the same goals, and in this way it is much easier to achieve them. And we also have to remember that this is the responsibility of all the nations and I think that's what that is why I am stressing the enormity of the task of the Committee, and when working together it becomes easier.

*Katharine:* We've talked a lot about leadership of the NCGP and its Executive Committee, but I wonder how this discussion relates to the national delegates which make up the NCGP?

*Jesus:* The delegates coming to the NCGP conference need to have not only the proper rank, but the proper experience and training because sometimes they come not from Heaven, but from Mars. The delegates in my time, some of them had no idea about gender and they just came because it was presumed 'a woman goes to this meeting'. So, we always had the 'usual suspects' nations providing comments and ideas. It is necessary to ask the nations to send delegates with the appropriate rank and experience; if they send more than one, this should include one from the Ministry of Defense (political strategic level) and the other from the Chief of Defense office (strategic level).

*Kristin:* Yes, a challenge was getting nations to send the right people, you need to be a certain level, the Committee at this time was supposed to be for senior women<sup>3</sup>, and then we realised that the ones who were coming were so young.

*Diana:* I also think it has to be mandatory to raise the rank of the Chair, as this discussion has touched upon. We are in a military organisation where rank is very important. There have been discussions about how we address the importance of Gender Advisors being at least Majors

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<sup>3</sup> The CWINF as the precursor to the NCGP was focused on senior women, with WPS falling within its remit as a result. It became the NCGP in 2009 with the implementation of a gender perspective formally included.

and senior officers, and it is the same issue for the Chair of the NCGP; the Chairs of the other MC Working Groups are at least Colonels, but many of them are flag officers (meaning generals or admirals). I am a Lieutenant Colonel, so I had the same rank as the Secretariat for the NCGP and this meant, since I was not in her chain of command, I could not give orders or task her. That rank makes a difference to how the NCGP operates and is received.

### **Military/Political/Civilian Divides: Complementary Coordination, not Competition**

*Matt:* NATO has a dual political-military structure how did this factor into your work to support WPS at NATO through the Committee?

*Kristin:* Yes, on the civilian/political side you have the NATO Secretary General's Special Representative (SGSR) on WPS, so there are two strands to this work at NATO.

*Diana:* This is why there is a need for the NCGP to redefine its scope. Prior to the creation of the SGSR in 2012, the NCGP was tasked with advising NATO leadership on both the military and political sides and the Terms of Reference for the Committee still reflect this. Today its main task is advising the military leadership.

*Katrien:* I had good cooperation with the SGSR on WPS, and good coordination between both worlds is an imperative. The NCGP provides the military view, while the SGSR gives you the political overview on this topic. So you are not in competition, you are complementary. And we need that complementarity, with both the civilian view on this topic and the military view on this topic.

*Jesus:* The coordination between these two military and political sides could be difficult. During my time, there was a perception that the military side worked with 100% of the population (women, men, boys and girls) with a focus on the gender perspective, while the SGSR worked with only 50% of the population (women and girls) through the WPS agenda. And here there was a difference. The other difference, of course, is that the SGSR has more

visibility externally, and reports to the Secretary General and the IMS GENAD and NCGP will report to the DGIMS and Military Committee respectively. So, there is a difference in terms of accountability. And that is why coordination sometimes depends on personalities. There is also the issue of power. The SGSR is at a higher level usually than the IMS GENAD and Chair of the NCGP in terms of rank. During my time, coordination was very easy. The SGSR wanted to create something, and she understood that she needed the military side to make that happen.

Matt: A theme coming up here is the importance of key institutional actors and leadership; and related to that, the support the NCGP and military side of the house can provide to the SGSR when looking to realise the political commitment to WPS in practice, which for NATO means its translation as relevant to defence and deterrence.

### **Walking the Talk: Political and Military Leadership on WPS**

*Katharine:* We have talked about some of the key actors, we wondered if you could reflect further on what some of the challenges are for the NCGP at an institutional level, particularly in terms of getting leadership buy-in for the work of the committee?

*Diana:* So the difficult part is making the actions happen and making people accountable, because it is time consuming. You have an entire political side, for example, the Secretary General, Deputy Secretary General, everybody very committed, but on the military side of the house we need to have the same commitments and not only the talk, but the actions. For many years, the NCGP has been making recommendations to the Military Committee, but if there's no tasking within the NATO Command Structure, who is going to either study what we are recommending, or develop a policy or military guidelines?

*Katrien:* I heard only recently that I was the last chair to address the Military Committee on the outcomes and recommendations at the end of the NCGP conference in 2019. So if we are to be an advisory body to the Military Committee on gender perspectives, what we should have

is direct access to the Military Committee. There you have the Chair of the Military Committee, and all Military Representatives, all Generals and Admirals, from all the nations that are part of NATO. And if you can address them directly, whether you are a Major or Lieutenant Colonel, regardless of the rank you have, and tell them yourself as a Chair, what you have achieved with the Committee and what your objectives are for the year to come, that has real value, and they ask questions.

I remember the first time I attended the Military Committee as part of the Executive Committee; we could listen in, but there were no questions asked. But that was the first time, the second time there was already a question, and I can tell you from the number of questions I had in 2018 and 2019 that they were really interested in what we wanted to achieve, and how they could cooperate and help us in achieving those goals. Because they understood, you know, and the more you interact with them, the better they understand the relevance of what you are doing.

*Matt:* What does best practice look like in terms of leaderships' support for the implementation of WPS in defence, and by extension the work of the NCGP?

*Kristin:* Leadership is important for setting the tone. During my time the Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, stated that WPS was not just about transforming structures and preparing our new roles, but also about the way NATO functions, and a wish to be perceived as an open, transparent and modern organisation; recognising and promoting the role of women throughout the Alliance. So of course, with those words he opened up our annual conference, and we had a lot of buy-in.

*Katrien:* We achieved a lot too because we really got the appetite and the willingness of the Secretary General, Jen Stoltenberg. You see me in one of the pictures handing the book [*NATO*

*Gender and the Military: Women Organising from Within*<sup>4</sup>] to him. I don't know if he read it, but he was very interested in the topic and in what the NCGP was, and about and what we could achieve. There was also the Deputy Secretary General addressing the conference in another year. They wanted to walk the talk, so senior leadership buy-in was one of the things we needed to invest in.

And while we keep trying to involve our senior leadership, and they all say the right things, words need to lead to action, and it is very difficult. It is very difficult, because it is the nations that are responsible for providing the troops for example, to make NATO's work happen.

*Jesus:* In the case of NATO, it is explicit in documents what the relationship between the leadership and the Gender Advisors should be, we just need to follow these directives and these protocols. The problem is that the leadership can claim that they have other responsibilities and that this is not a priority. And this is something they need to understand is problematic. At least in my case, when I was at NATO, the leadership listened to me.

There is another important point here beyond the relationship with the leadership, and that is the relationship with people at all levels. With the subordinates, at collateral levels, at the superior level, and especially outside the military chain of command. For example, with a civilian structure or with other departments of the country where we work, this includes national institutions, non-governmental organisations, and women's civil society groups.

*Katharine:* This outside cooperation is an important one, on the political side there is a formal mechanism for NATO to consult with civil society to improve the implementation of WPS, which is the Civil Society Advisory Panel on WPS (Wright, 2023). The military side does not

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<sup>4</sup> NATO, *Gender and the Military: Women Organising from Within* was launched at the 2019 annual conference of the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives at NATO Headquarters.



have that formally, however, in practice the NCGP has provided such a space for civil-military dialogue and the sharing of expertise. This is the topic we turn to next.

### **Similar Problems, Different Angles: The Value of Academic, Practitioner and Policy-Maker Dialogue**

*Matt:* Katharine and I have worked a lot with those on the inside at NATO; our research would not be possible without the access we have had, and in so doing we have sought to be ‘critical friends’ to those doing gender work at NATO (Wright et al, 2019). What do you see as the value of academic, practitioner and policy-maker dialogue and why is it so important for implementing WPS into defence?

*Katrien:* We should not forget academia. Their perspective on this topic is as important as the political or the military perspective. It means we can learn also from the past; we need to learn from our mistakes and learn from our respective bases to not repeat the same mistakes again because we all make mistakes. And when it comes to the future, I think what really needs work and attention is the aspect of accountability. Because this is what we struggle with. That we are not where we are supposed to be yet is mostly due to a lack of accountability, but how to make NATO accountable, that's not easy to figure out.

To support this, making the National Reports to the NCGP visible on the website was part of my fight as Chair, and to have the nation's reporting in a procedural way and not in a chaotic way. This is important because when we had meetings at NATO with the military representatives, we heard them comment many times that they did not know we had such a small number of women in our armed forces. They are not aware of the numbers, and they are not aware of the limitations that women face when they want to work in the combat area.

*Katharine:* The National Reports are certainly an important contribution of the Committee, they are freely available on the NATO website<sup>5</sup>, and they are useful for NATO and the nations, but they have added value in this respect as a resource for students and scholars interested in the status of women in NATO forces over time, and the integration of WPS in Defence. There have been a number of studies that have drawn on them, some funded by NATO, some not, and this research can in turn be used to support NATO's work on WPS (see: Schjølset, 2013; Obradovic, 2014; Figueroa-Domecq, Palomo and Gil-Ruiz, 2017).

### **Conclusions and Recommended Policy Points**

The collective reflections on past experiences, challenges, and opportunities within the NCGP captured above provide important insights into how the implementation of WPS in defence can be supported at NATO, at the national level and beyond. At a time of significant change, both institutionally and within the European security environment, the NCGP – one of NATO's oldest committees – has a central role to play in continuing to embed and advance WPS and the gender perspective into NATO's core tasks. The revision of the NATO Policy on WPS, due for endorsement by the allies at the NATO Summit in July 2024, has made it necessary to consider how the military has engaged with WPS to date, and how NATO has supported the translation of a gender perspective into defence. This is an opportune moment given the Alliance faces a future more uncertain than at any point since the end of the Cold War, this is not simply desirable, but essential. And while support from NATO leadership on WPS has been forthcoming and is essential, such rhetoric must be accompanied by action and accountability. It requires action from both the political and military side of NATO working together to realise the effective implementation of WPS. Given this, we recommend the following policy points

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<sup>5</sup> [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_132342.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_132342.htm)

to ensure NATO continues to benefit from the effective integration of a gender perspective through the implementation of WPS:

- **Incorporate military guidance into the revised NATO WPS policy.** The political and military stakeholders on WPS and a gender perspective at NATO are not in competition, but complementary to each other. Military guidance is crucial to making political commitments a reality.
- **Political and Military leadership on WPS at NATO should work together to advance the agenda.** There is a wealth of experience within NATO which is best mobilised through effective and ongoing engagement, collaboration, and coordination across the political and military structures.
- **The Military Committee should task the NCGP to provide recommendations to further determine the relevance of a gender perspective to all aspects of the current security environment.** The NCGP provides an essential structure through which the relevance of WPS and a gender perspective to deterrence and defence can be further determined in a challenging and changing security environment.
- **NATO allies and partners must send delegates to the NCGP with the appropriate rank and experience.** This facilitates the role of the NCGP as a ‘hub’ supporting gender learning across and within allies and partners. This includes in developing national approaches to implementing WPS and integrating a gender perspective; and strengthens NATO’s overall approach to WPS.
- **The NCGP should retain its unique structure to ensure a diversity of perspectives inform its work.** The positioning of members, and sometimes the Chair, outside of NATO Headquarters ensures the experience and expertise of those who have served in NATO

operations and seen the value of a gender perspective in practice are shared with allies and partner nations.

- **NATO and the NCGP should continue to engage with scholars and civil society on WPS and defence to enhance understanding on all sides.** This strengthens learning and approaches to WPS and the integration of a gender perspective, through critical discussion and evaluation. There is considerable value in academic, practitioner, policy-maker dialogue, acting as critical friends, to address similar problems from different perspectives.

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