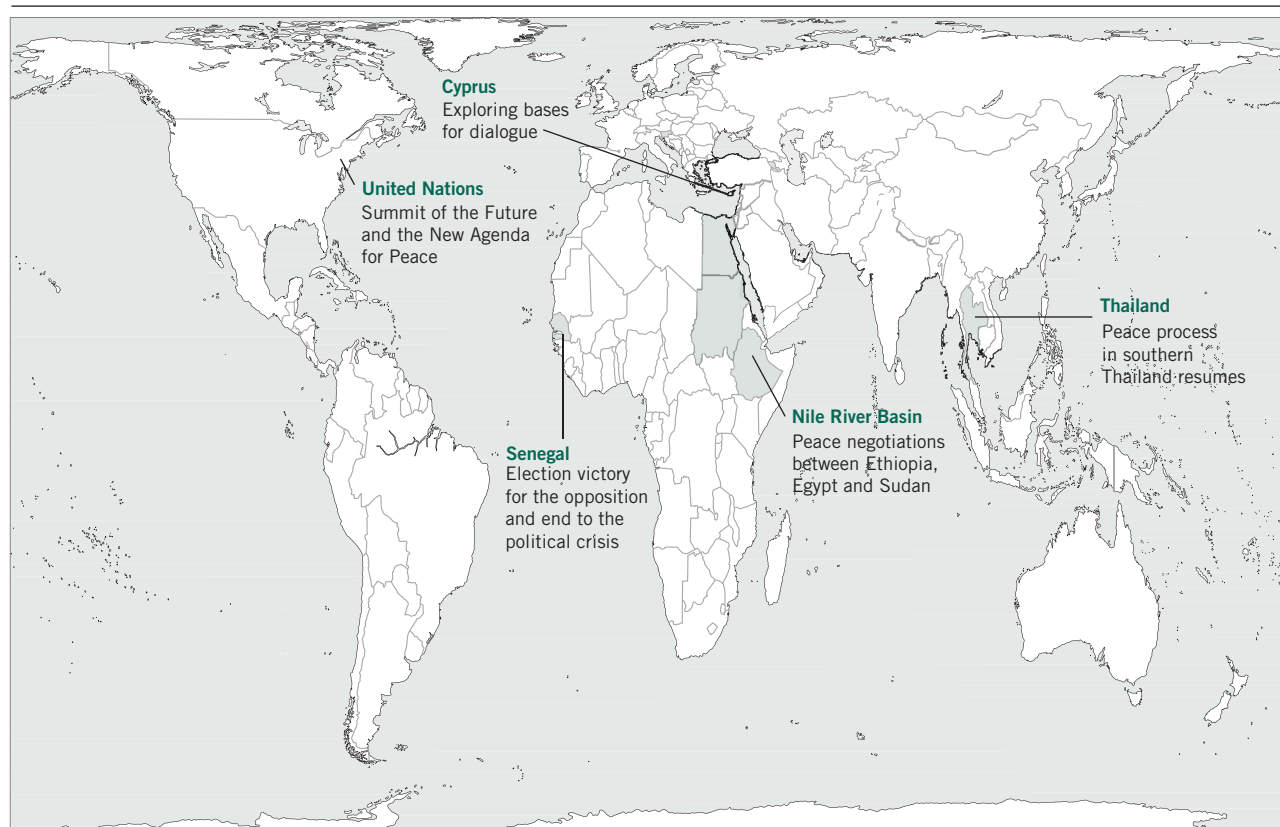


4. Opportunities for peace

After analysing the year 2023 from the perspective of conflicts and peacebuilding,¹ in this chapter the UAB's School for a Culture of Peace highlights five areas that are opportunities for peace in the future. They are contexts where there is, or has been, an armed conflict or socio-political crisis in the past where a series of factors converge that could lead to a positive transformation. The opportunities for peace identified refer to the resumption of contacts between Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan on the management of historical disputes regarding the Nile basin; the impact that the opposition's victory in the March 2024 presidential elections may have on the political crisis that Senegal has gone through in recent years; the resumption of the dialogue process in southern Thailand after almost a decade of Military Junta (2014-2019) or a Government emerging from it (2019-2023); the dialogue options regarding the status of the divided island of Cyprus based on the rapprochement between Greece and Türkiye in 2023 or the appointment of a personal envoy of the UN Secretary General with the mandate to carry out good offices to explore bases of agreement to advance the resolution of the conflict; or the potential of the so-called Summit of the Future –convened by the UN Secretary General for 2024– to promote multilateralism, the governance of global crises, peacebuilding or the women, peace and security agenda.

All these opportunities for peace will require the effort and real commitment of the parties involved and, where appropriate, the support of international actors so that the synergies and positive factors already present foster peacebuilding. As such, the analysis by the School for a Culture of Peace aims to provide a realistic vision of these scenarios and themes, identifying the positive aspects that encourage expectations of change while also highlighting the existing difficulties and problems that could hinder their crystallisation as opportunities for peace.

Map 4.1. Opportunities for peace



1. The analysis of each context is based on the yearly review of the events that occurred in 2023 and includes some important factors and dynamics of the first four months of 2024.

4.1. Hopes for peace in the Nile River Basin?

The Nile River has been at the heart of disputes in the Horn of Africa and East Africa for decades.² Historically, the Nile Basin has been dominated by unilateral and exclusionary policies conducted by Egypt and Sudan, which in turn have used the colonial legacy to justify their monopoly on the use of the shared water resource, instead of viewing it as part of a complex and fragile ecosystem to manage given the severe climate emergency. Since 2011, Ethiopia's construction of the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the course of the Blue Nile, a tributary of the Nile that runs through its territory, has exacerbated the situation and the tension between Ethiopia and Egypt, and to a lesser extent, Sudan. However, direct contacts between the three countries resumed in 2023, which could present an opportunity to begin laying the foundations for resolving this historical dispute. Although the regional context gives little reason for optimism due to the rising tensions between Ethiopia and Somalia and between Eritrea and Ethiopia, as well as the different armed conflicts raging in the Ethiopian regions of Oromia and Amhara, the devastating war in Sudan and the reports of ongoing genocide by Israel in Gaza, with direct consequences for Egypt, this same deterioration could be an opportunity that pushes these three countries to resolve a dispute that requires their joint cooperation.

In recent years, initiatives to reduce tension between the three countries have proliferated. However, not only do they fail to agree on any result, but they are unable to agree on the mediation mechanism. Egypt prefers to internationalise the issue while Ethiopia prefers regional mediation by the AU. Egypt and al-Burhan's government in Sudan want a legally binding agreement that affects how Ethiopia fills the dam in times of drought, which Ethiopia considers unacceptable. In 2015, the leaders of the three countries signed the GERD Declaration of Principles, which stressed their commitment to cooperate and peacefully resolve their differences, but with no results to date. In late 2019, the three countries resumed talks with the United States and the World Bank (WB) as observers, though Ethiopia abandoned the talks in 2020, arguing that the US and the WB were violating the framework of impartiality as observers by proposing measures that favoured Cairo. During 2020, the EU and South Africa (as the country that holds the presidency of the AU) joined them as observers. The AU took the lead in facilitating the dialogue. However, tripartite talks facilitated by the AU have been stalled since 2021 and the 2022 Abu Dhabi initiative also failed.

The tension clearly escalated in 2022 when Ethiopia announced that it had unilaterally completed the third phase of filling the reservoir and the start of hydropower production, provoking reactions from Sudan and Egypt. Cairo threatened Ethiopia, saying it would do everything possible to stop the process. It protested against Ethiopia's decision before the UN Security Council in February and July 2022, holding Ethiopia responsible for any impact that the situation could have on Egypt. However, after months of impasse, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi met on 13 July for the first time since the 2019 Sochi summit. Their meeting came during the Summit of Neighbouring States of Sudan held in Cairo on 12-13 July, aimed at helping to promote peace in relation to the instability affecting Sudan. They issued a joint statement agreeing to restart talks on the GERD to reach a final agreement on filling and managing the dam in four months,³ which was considered a historic announcement.⁴ The deal came after Ethiopia promised to ensure that Egypt and Sudan received sufficient water flow during the fourth annual filling, which could last until September. Thus, they agreed to resume direct talks to reach an agreement. However, in the four negotiating rounds held since then (27-28 August, in Cairo; 23-24 September, in Addis Abeba; 23-24 October, in Cairo; and 17-19 December, in Addis Abeba), the parties failed to make any progress.⁵ In September, two weeks after the first round, the Ethiopian prime minister announced that Ethiopia had completed the fourth and final filling of the reservoir. Egypt blasted the decision, describing it as unilateral and illegal. Egypt and Sudan insisted on first reaching a binding agreement with Ethiopia on filling and operating the dam to ensure a continuous flow of water from the Nile River.

In 2022, Ethiopia announced that it had started producing electricity. Thus, in February 2022, the dam produced power through its first turbine and delivered it to the grid at a speed of 375 MW. A second 375 MW turbine was put in service in August 2022, though there were plans for the installation of another 11 turbines producing 400 MW each.⁶ However, Ethiopia's grid is not sufficiently developed to absorb the additional capacity that the GERD can produce, which analysts claim could rise to an installed capacity of 5.15 GW (16,000 GW/hour per year). Transmission and distribution networks are either non-existent or under construction in most parts of the country and there is a

2. See "The Nile Basin: cooperation or conflict" in chapter 5 (Risk scenarios for 2021) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Alert 2021! Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2021.

3. Joint Statement on Ethiopia – Egypt Relation, "Ethiopia, Egypt agree to finalize GERD filling, rules of operations agreement in four months", Addis Standard, 13 July 2023.

4. Addis Standard, "Ethiopia, Egypt agree to finalize GERD filling, rules of operations agreement in four months", *Addis Standard*, 13 July 2023.

5. Reuters, "Egypt says talks over Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam have failed - statement", *Reuters*, 20 December 2023.

6. BBC, "Ethiopia starts generating power from River Nile dam", *BBC*, 20 February 2022; Africanews, "Ethiopia announces that second turbine in GERD is in operation", *Africanews*, 11 August 2022.

lack of adequate high-voltage links with its neighbours to support the export of electricity.⁷ Beyond the technical components, the project would require cooperation and integration between neighbouring economies, which is not happening at the moment. Furthermore, no credible environmental impact study has been carried out on the dam, despite the large amounts of sediment it retains, at a time when the negative impacts of human action on the climate are increasingly obvious.⁸

Moreover, all three countries are being subjected to instability and conflict, with regional dynamics of division and the creation of blocs.⁹ The deteriorating security situation in Sudan and Ethiopia during 2023, as well as the war in Gaza, have become distractions for all three countries' negotiating efforts. They have also become more entrenched in lines of dispute. During 2023, Egypt negotiated with the government of Somalia to establish a military base there.¹⁰ Although the base is expected to be a training camp for the Somali Army, it will also be a base for the Egyptian Army in Somalia, where the Egyptian Security Services (GIS) will carry out activities as an outpost on neighbouring Ethiopia in the case of a hypothetical military offensive. Ethiopia viewed the construction of this military base with concern. According to analysts, Egypt wanted the base to be built in Puntland, but successive local governments in Puntland refused, considering it a potential source of instability due to its regional implications. Ethiopia responded immediately and on 1 January 2024, it reached a memorandum of understanding with Somaliland by which it supposedly recognised the independence of Somaliland in exchange for the cession of part of its territory.¹¹ As a self-proclaimed independent region of Somalia with disputed status, Somaliland lacks the international legal capacity to decide over its territory.¹² Ethiopia's offer to recognise Somaliland in exchange for the lease of more than 20 kilometres of Somaliland's coast to grant it port and naval access to the Gulf of Aden provoked a new diplomatic row between Somalia and Ethiopia, allies of convenience in the fight against al-Shabaab. At the same time, in the current Sudanese Civil War, Egypt, Eritrea, South Sudan and Somalia support General al-Burhan and the Sudanese Armed Forces,¹³ while Ethiopia and the UAE back his rival Hemedti, the leader of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, drawing new regional lines of division over

those that already exist.¹⁴ Egypt is supported by most of the Arab League, as clearly stated in the Jeddah Declaration issued during the Arab League summit in May 2023, which condemns Ethiopia's unilateral filling of the dam and demands that the UN Security Council become more involved in the issue. Still, the pressure on Ethiopia had no effect.

After the failure of the four tripartite rounds between August and December 2023, there are no new meetings planned in the short term to resolve the conflict. However, as the GERD becomes fully operational and the waters of the Nile become even more susceptible to climate change, the dispute could become even more important for the three countries and the region in general, so political negotiations will be essential. Instability in Ethiopia and now in Sudan and Gaza has clearly been a distraction from negotiating efforts, allowing Ethiopia increasingly and unrestrainedly to continue to establish the GERD as a *fait accompli*. In early 2024, Ethiopia announced that the dam was already 94% complete.¹⁵ The fact that the status quo on the ground has changed suggests that the three parties to the conflict need to resume the negotiations with a new mandate, or at least a more scientific and less political and confrontational attitude, since the GERD is not going to disappear, according to various analysts.¹⁶ Egypt should leave behind its policy of making threats and start studying the positive aspects of the GERD. Ethiopia should act less unilaterally in its management of the dam and be more responsive to Egypt and Sudan's needs for guarantees over their vital water supplies. Ethiopia is aware that the dam is now full enough that any threat of military attack to damage it is totally unlikely as it would flood Sudan, so the reality on the ground is forcing negotiations that support its interests. However, one of Ethiopia's initial objectives and arguments encouraging its neighbours to support the GERD, to export energy and ensure orderly management of the waters of the Nile River for the benefit of the region, has been postponed and subject to Ethiopian decision-making. If its full potential is not used and developed, the GERD may become a white elephant project,¹⁷ similar to the INGA I and II dams and the INGA III project in the DRC. The GERD has been built at a time when it has been shown that these megaprojects can be dangerous for basins such as the fragile Nile, especially in light of the growing impact of climate change.

7. Woldemariam, Yohannes and Genevieve Donnellon-May, "The politics of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam", *Climate Diplomacy*, 2 February 2024.

8. Ibid.

9. See the section on the Horn of Africa in chapter 2 (Socio-political crises).

10. Qoobey, Jibril, "INFORMATION: Egypt is establishing a military base in central Somalia", *Idilnews*, 16 August 2023.

11. Faisal, Ali, "Ethiopia and Somaliland reach agreement over access to ports", *The Guardian*, 1 January 2024..

12. Somaliland remains officially part of the Republic of Somalia, although the central government has not been able to control Somaliland since 1991 and the region calls attention to its stability and democracy (with Western-type political institutions coexisting with traditional institutions) compared to neighbouring Somalia.

13. ADF, "Al-Burhan Tries Shuttle Diplomacy to Achieve What Has Failed Militarily," *ADF*, 3 October 2023.

14. Al Jazeera, "Leader of Sudan's RSF visits Ethiopia in rare foreign trip as war rages", *Al Jazeera*, 28 December 2023.

15. Actaç, Tufan, "Ethiopia completes 94% of controversial Renaissance Dam", *Anadolu Agency*, 5 January 2024.

16. Fabricius, Peter, "GERD is a *fait accompli*, so it's time to get real", *ISS*, 28 April 2023.

17. A "white elephant" is a concept used in architecture to describe an unfinished structure whose high costs make it difficult to maintain. In disuse, it can be a source of corruption, characteristic of Africa in the 1960s and 1970s.

4.2. Senegal: The opposition wins the presidential election, seemingly ending the political crisis in the country

After three years of tension between the government of President Macky Sall and the opposition, which set off a major political crisis, Senegal's presidential election on 24 March 2024 was won by opposition leader Bassirou Diomaye Faye. Thus, Senegal seems to have ended one of the most difficult and controversial periods in its political history, paving the way for a new government that faces major political, economic and social challenges.

The political crisis in the country dates back to 2019, when Ousmane Sonko, a young man from the southern region of Casamance, ran for election leading the party Senegalese Patriots for Work, Ethics and Fraternity (PASTEF, its French acronym). His anti-colonial political platform criticises the economic control exercised by France and promises greater sovereignty, eliminating the CFA franc and renegotiating mining and oil agreements. Sonko finished third in the race, but his stature grew throughout the country. In February 2021, Sonko was arrested and accused of rape, causing his followers to take to the streets, believing that it was a move to end his presidential candidacy. Though acquitted of the rape charge, Sonko was sentenced to two years in prison for "corrupting the youth" in 2023, which de facto disqualified him from the presidential election. The government later dissolved PASTEF. This sparked new demonstrations and protests across the country that were harshly put down. The rise in tension prompted President Macky Sall to announce that he would not run for re-election, for what would have been his third term of office. This had been one of the central issues behind the protests of the opposition, which accused Sall of violating the Senegalese Constitution, since it only allows two terms.

In the midst of the political crisis, three weeks before the presidential election, scheduled for 25 February 2024, Sall announced that it would be postponed for an unspecified period, making it the first time in the history of the country that a presidential election was put off. On 5 February, the Senegalese Parliament voted to delay the presidential election until 15 December in a chaotic voting process that took place after opposition lawmakers were expelled by the chamber's security forces when they tried to block it. Parliament also approved extending Sall's term, which was supposed to end on 2 April, until the new election was held. The decision triggered intense protests in various parts of the country. The government restricted access to the

Internet. The growth of the protests and of the political crisis in the country caused the West African regional bloc ECOWAS and other countries to urge Sall to reverse the decision.

In a historic ruling on 15 February, Senegal's Constitutional Council struck down a presidential decree issued by the outgoing president to postpone the presidential election, ruling that Article 103 of the Constitution prohibits any changes to the number or duration of the presidential term of office. The Constitutional Council found that if President Sall remained in power after his term ended on 2 April, it would violate the Constitution. Recognising that it would not be possible to hold the election on 25 February, as initially planned, the Constitutional Council ordered for it to be held as soon as possible. Thus, 15 of the 20 candidates approved to run in the presidential election signed a joint statement asking that the new vote be held no later than 2 April, the day that Sall's term officially ended. The statement was signed by some of the main candidates, including detained opposition candidate Bassirou Diomaye Faye and former Dakar Mayor Khalifa Sall, but not by Prime Minister Amadou Ba, the ruling party's candidate.

In response to the Constitutional Council's ruling, Sall called for a national dialogue to agree on a date to hold the election, adding that if agreement could not be achieved, he would ask the Constitutional Council to find his replacement when his term ended on 2 April. The national dialogue was attended by various civil, political and religious leaders, but was boycotted by almost all the presidential candidates. The outcome was an agreement to hold the election on 2 June. This was again rejected by the Constitutional Council, which called the election first for 31 March and later for 24 March, so as not to coincide with Holy Week. In this way, the candidates approved to run would have 17 days to campaign, instead of the 21 normally provided for by the electoral code. The Constitutional Council also ruled that the list of 19 approved candidates, which did not include opposition leader Sonko or Wade, could not be reviewed. With this decision, the electoral crisis in the country ended.

In an attempt to ease the political tension, Sall proposed a bill granting general amnesty to political protesters arrested since 2021 during the political crisis, which, according to some human rights groups, could number more than a thousand people. Among them was Sonko,

In just 11 days, opposition candidate Bassirou Diomaye Faye went from being in prison to winning the election as the youngest president in the history of Senegal

imprisoned since July for “incitement to insurrection” and unable to run in the presidential election. His party's substitute presidential candidate, Bassirou Diomaye Faye, was also in prison, but was authorised to run. The Senegalese Parliament passed the amnesty bill, 94 votes to 49. Critics said that the bill opens the door to impunity, since it includes the security forces responsible for the death of around 60 people during the protests. However, Sall's government argued that the amnesty would allow the country to emerge from its three-year political crisis. The ministry of justice said that a judge would have to decide who benefits from the law. A week after the law was passed, Ousmane Sonko and Bassirou Diomaye Faye were released from Camp Manuel prison in Dakar, causing thousands of people to take to the streets to celebrate.

As determined by the Constitutional Council, on 24 March, the presidential election was held in the country. Bassirou Diomaye Faye, Sonko's right-hand man, ran on behalf of the PASTEF party. The day was peaceful and had a high turnout. More than 7 million people were registered to vote in a country of approximately 17 million inhabitants. The results gave victory to Faye with 54.28% of the votes, thereby avoiding a runoff. His main rival, Amadou Ba, the candidate of the Benno Bokk Yakaar (BBY) coalition supported by outgoing President Sall, got 35.47% of the votes cast. The rest of the candidates did not receive more than 3%, reflecting the polarisation of the election. Ba and Sall admitted defeat, congratulated Faye and named him the winner. This is the

fourth democratic transfer of power in Senegal since it gained independence from France over six decades ago.

In just 11 days, Faye went from being in prison to winning the election to be the youngest president in the history of Senegal at 44 years old. After being sworn in as president, he took his first action in office on 2 April by appointing Ousmane Sonko as prime minister, who announced that he would present Faye with a list of ministerial appointments for his approval.

The new government now faces major challenges, starting with overcoming the political crisis in the country and facing the deteriorated economic situation, with a high unemployment rate and a huge increase in immigration. Faye has promised to fight corruption, reform the economy and tighten Senegal's control over its natural resources by promoting national companies, renegotiating oil and gas contracts and introducing a new currency. In foreign policy, he has announced the reform of ECOWAS after the outbreak of various crises between the body and so many countries in the region: Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger (see the section on Western Sahel). However, Senegalese analysts argue that the lack of a majority in the Senegalese Parliament and the financial conditions imposed by the IMF could prevent him from implementing his platform. In fact, Faye had to backtrack on his promise to create a national currency, announcing that he will first seek to reform the CFA regional currency, shared between 14 West and Central African nations.

4.3. The peace process in southern Thailand resumes after a decade of authoritarianism

In southern Thailand, the negotiating delegations of the Thai government and the armed opposition group BRN met in Kuala Lumpur in February 2024 following a 12-month impasse in the peace process. In late February and early March, the technical teams met to finalise the commitments made by both sides and were expected to convene again in late April. Although no details were officially revealed about the agreements reached during the meeting, some indicated that both sides are negotiating and developing a road map (officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan toward Peace) focused mainly on two issues: reducing violence in the southern part of the country and conducting public consultations with significant and representative political, social and religious actors in the three southern Muslim-majority provinces (Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat) to address political solutions to the conflict and the substantive issues of the negotiations, such as the form of governance in southern Thailand and aspects related to identity, religion, education, the economic model and human rights. In late February, at the end of the seventh round of negotiations since the peace process began in 2013, facilitator Zulfiki Zainal Abidin, acting on behalf of the government of Malaysia, held a press conference with the heads of the government and the BRN's negotiating panels and said that the agreement between the parties indicated that significant progress had been made and was an important turning point in the peace process. Though many have identified major obstacles to the negotiating process and are sceptical about its future, several factors currently give us some reason to hold out hope for the resolution of a conflict that dates back to the early 20th century (specifically, the 1909 border agreement between the British Empire and what was then called the Kingdom of Siam, which included the three southern Muslim-majority provinces in the territory of what is now Thailand). Over 7,500 people have been killed and more than 14,000 have been wounded in the conflict since it broke out again in 2004.

Firstly, the round of negotiations in February not only broke the impasse in the process, but it was the first after almost a decade of Thai rule by the military junta (2014-2019) and the government that emerged from it (2019-2023). In fact, since the negotiating process began in 2013, shortly before the 2014 coup d'état that brought the military junta to power, practically the entire process has taken place under the direction of the Thai Armed Forces, so there are expectations that the first civilian government in a decade will take a different political approach to the negotiating process and the options for resolving the armed conflict

politically. Illustrative in this regard, the BRN's chief negotiator, Anas Abdul Rahman, indicated in February that he expected to achieve a lasting peace with the new government of Srettha Tahvisin, who took office in September 2023 after long negotiations among the political parties following the May 2023 elections. Shortly thereafter, in November, the new government appointed Chatchai Bangchuad, the deputy secretary-general of the Council for National Security and the first civilian to hold the position, as head of the negotiating panel.

Secondly, the Malaysian government seems willing to play a more proactive role in facilitating dialogue between the government and the BRN. According to some observers, Malaysia has not only facilitated the negotiations since 2013, but has historically provided support to the Pattani nationalist movement and has hosted some historical leaders of the different insurgent groups that have operated in southern Thailand in recent decades, so Kuala Lumpur may have some influence over them. The inauguration of new Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim in November 2022 raised significant expectations, confirmed by his frequent visits to Thailand and direct appeals to both sides to advance a political solution that respects Thailand's territorial integrity while allowing the Pattani identity to survive by establishing some formula of autonomy or self-government in the southern part of the country. In line with the resumption of the negotiations sought by Kuala Lumpur, in January 2023 the Malaysian government appointed a new mediator, Zulfiki Zainal Abidin. Shortly thereafter, in February 2023, it announced that both parties agreed on the "Joint Comprehensive Plan toward Peace", a kind of shared road map to achieve a peace agreement towards the end of 2024. The facilitator of the negotiating process also revealed that the BRN would have accepted the participation of other armed groups operating in the south in the peace talks. Though not publicly specified later, the statement seemed to indicate the BRN's good will towards the negotiating process. Between 2013 and early 2019, the Thai government negotiated with MARA Patani, an umbrella organisation that brought together the different insurgent groups that had historically operated in the southern part of the country.

Thirdly, in early March 2024, a statement was made public for the first time by four experts in peace processes who have observed and supported the negotiations since 2019 at the request of both parties, both in their official format and in informal and exploratory talks between them. The four observers,

from Thailand, the United Kingdom, Germany and Norway, made the public statement to highlight the importance and significance of the commitments achieved and to appreciate the parties' determination to reach a political agreement through dialogue. Since the negotiating process began in 2013, both MARA Patani and later the BRN had demanded international support and observation of the process to provide it with greater credibility and guarantees. However, the Thai government had always been reluctant to accept any format to support the negotiations for fear that the conflict could become international. According to the International Crisis Group¹⁸, after several years of exploratory contacts between the Thai government and the BRN sponsored by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, in November 2019, after the negotiations between Bangkok and MARA Patani had ended, both sides signed the Berlin Initiative, which establishes the framework and principles for direct negotiations between the Thai government and the BRN. In the next round of negotiations, held under a new negotiating format (April and May 2022), both parties agreed on the General Principles of the Peace Dialogue Process, in which they pledged to seek political solutions to the conflict in accordance with the will of the Pattani people and within the framework of the unitary state and the Constitution of Thailand. The parties' commitment gave rise to a series of formal and informal negotiations that led in early 2023 to the "Joint Comprehensive Plan toward Peace". Regarding its two main lines (the reduction of violence and the exploration of political options to resolve the conflict), some think that the new civilian government of Srettha Tahvisin is in a better position than the previous governments led by the military junta and its heirs to create the conditions necessary to consult with people and organisations with adequate representation and legitimacy in southern Thailand on possible proposals for governance and self-government, security, the economic model, education, culture and religion.

Other analysts view the future of the peace process more cautiously. Firstly, this is because the Thai Armed Forces have had a historically complex and tense relationship with the prime minister's party, Puea Thai, having carried out two coups against its leaders (one in 2004 against party leader Thaksin Shinawatra and another in 2014 against Yingluck Shinawatra, Thaksin's sister, who was the prime minister at the time). According to some analysts, parts of the Thai Armed Forces are opposed to resolving the conflict through dialogue and want to step up counterinsurgency operations. Martial law and a state of emergency imposed in 2004 still apply in most of the three Muslim-majority provinces

and there are nearly 3,000 military checkpoints in the region. Some critics say that despite the civilian nature of the government and the fact that it is apparently the Council for National Security that leads the negotiating panel, operational decisions on the ground continue to be made by the Thai Army.

Along the same lines, some analysts think that, beyond the power of the Thai Army and its historically tense relationship with the current governing party, the civilian government has so far not shown unequivocal signs of political will or a solid commitment to the peace process. In fact, Puea Thai did not win the May 2023 elections and could only form a government after a three-month impasse and after gaining the support of parties and senators linked to the Thai Armed Forces. The election of the Thai government requires the joint vote of both chambers and the 250 senators are not elected democratically, but are appointed by the military junta. Furthermore, there have recently been many complaints about the human rights situation

The resumption of the dialogue process in southern Thailand after almost a decade offers some positive perspectives for the resolution of the armed conflict through negotiations

in the southern part of the country and about repression against activists and civil society organisations, which shrinks the civic space and consequently makes it less likely that civil society can participate actively in coordinating proposals to resolve the conflict (one of the key aspects of the negotiating process). In January 2024, for example, Human Rights Watch stated that the new government had not enacted human rights reforms and that the authorities continued to restrict fundamental rights, particularly freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Also in January, more than 30 human rights groups and NGOs from southern Thailand sent an open letter to the United Nations alleging that Thai state security forces harass civil society groups for holding public meetings. In June 2023, several security agencies filed charges against a group of student activists who carried out a mock referendum on self-determination at Prince of Songkla University, which provoked a strong reaction from various political parties and groups in Thai society.

Another aspect that provokes uncertainty about the negotiating process is the apparent internal split within the BRN between factions that want to prioritise the negotiations and consultations with civil society and factions that consider it unacceptable that the Thai government has limited the negotiations to the Thai Constitution and a unitary state and advocate continuing the armed struggle. For example, in late March 2024, in one of the largest coordinated attacks in recent years, 44 incidents of violence were reported in a single hour in the four southern provinces (including Songkhla), which local authorities blamed on armed groups rejecting the

18. International Crisis Group, *Sustaining the Momentum in Southern's Thailand Peace Dialogue*, Briefing, Asia, 19 April 2022.

agreements reached in February and March. On previous occasions in recent years, significant episodes of violence also occurred after agreements were made between the parties. One aspect that had led to more impasse and blockage in the dialogue since 2013 has been the BRN's lack of will to curb the violence and the inability of the insurgent movement's political representatives to demonstrate to the government that they have control over the BRN's operational decisions on the ground.

In any case, for the first time in 20 years since the outbreak (or recrudescence) of the armed conflict in southern Thailand, some of the conditions necessary for finding a political solution to it seem to exist: the drastic drop in violence in recent years; the end of the

period of authoritarianism led by the military junta and the expectation that the growing democratisation of the country will have an impact on the negotiations; a stable infrastructure for facilitating the dialogue (with Malaysian mediation and international support and observation); greater civil society participation in identifying grievances and proposing alternatives; an agreement between the parties on the principles, mechanisms and substantive agenda of the negotiations; and, ultimately, verification by the Thai government and the BRN that the armed struggle and counterinsurgency and militarisation operations in the southern part of the country have not been effective in achieving their political objectives (the eradication of the insurgency in southern Thailand and Pattani independence, respectively).

4.4. Cyprus: towards another failed opportunity or a chance to build bridges?

The dispute over the status of the divided island of Cyprus has decades of failed negotiations behind it. The conflict also continues to be interwoven in broader multidimensional sources of tension in the eastern Mediterranean regarding issues such as access to hydrocarbons and the delimitation of exclusive economic zones and maritime borders, pitting Greece and the Republic of Cyprus, on the one hand, against Türkiye and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), on the other, in more militarised regional and global contexts. In this complex scenario, modest opportunities are nevertheless coming together alongside the momentum generated by the UN Secretary-General's appointment of a personal envoy to explore whether there may be a basis for an agreement to break the impasse in finding a solution. However, there are major opposing factors as well. Different local, regional and international efforts are therefore required to create bases for rapprochement and build trust.

Inhabited by a Greek majority and a Turkish population and other minorities, and with a recent history of British colonialism (1878-1960) after three centuries under Ottoman rule, the island of Cyprus is staring down a long-term unresolved conflict. Preceded by paramilitary and intercommunity violence in the 1950s, Cyprus became independent in 1960, with a Constitution that established a bicomunal state, with power sharing between the two main communities of the island and quota-based representation. Thus, the Constitution ruled out two opposing visions on the island: the Greek Cypriot goal of union with Greece (*enosis*) and the Turkish Cypriot aim of partition of the island (*taksim*), protected by Türkiye. However, the conflict intensified after independence. Greek Cypriot action for a more unitary state and intercommunity violence led Turkish Cypriot representatives to leave the government in 1963, alleging a lack of security,¹⁹ and causing the fragile architecture of the power sharing government to crumble. The UN deployed a peacekeeping mission (UNFICYP) in 1964, though the violence continued. A coup d'état carried out in 1974 to unite Cyprus with Greece, supported by the Greek military junta, triggered a military invasion of the island by Türkiye. The island was split between the northern third, under Turkish Cypriot control and with troops from Türkiye, and the two southern thirds, controlled by the Greek Cypriots and separated by a demilitarised buffer zone called the "Green Line", supervised by the UN. The different stages of violence had serious impacts on civilians in both

communities, including killings, forced displacement, looting and sexual violence. The Turkish Cypriots and Türkiye accused the international community of serious bias for viewing the Republic of Cyprus, consisting of a Greek Cypriot government without Turkish Cypriot participation, as the only legitimate and internationally recognised administration. In 1983, the Turkish Cypriots proclaimed the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC).

Throughout the decades of division on the island, the leaders of both sides have participated in UN-supported negotiations, but without reaching agreements to resolve the conflict. The negotiations have focused on the solution of a bizonal and bicomunal federation for the island and recent moments of critical progress ultimately failed, such as the Annan Plan for reunification, supported by the Turkish Cypriot population but rejected by the Greek Cypriots in a referendum in 2004. Nevertheless, the Republic of Cyprus, meaning only the Greek Cypriot part, entered the EU that year, while the Turkish Cypriot part remained politically and economically isolated and dependent on Türkiye. More recently, the 2015-2017 negotiations did achieve some rapprochement and progress, but ultimately ended when no agreement was reached during the second international conference in Crans-Montana in July 2017. Furthermore, while the negotiations focused on issues such as governance and power sharing, property, territory, security, guarantees, the EU and the economy, other issues, such as the clarification of truth, memory and reconciliation, have been neglected over the decades.

Formal high-level negotiations have not resumed since 2017, with dialogue only conducted at lower levels. Notable difficulties include the gap between the parties' positions and the mutual lack of trust. Since the rise to power of Ersin Tatar in 2020, the Turkish Cypriot authorities have promoted a two-state solution, supported by Türkiye, which clashes with the solution of a bicomunal and bizonal federation sought by the Greek Cypriot authorities and still reflected in the United Nations framework for a solution. The Turkish Cypriot position holds that this model is outdated and asserts that there can be no solution without equality of sovereignty and equal international status. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has called for international recognition of the TRNC before the UN

Despite the great challenges in the long-running dispute in Cyprus, modest opportunities are coming together alongside the UN Secretary-General's appointment of a personal envoy

19. International Crisis Group, *An Island Divided: Next Steps for Troubled Cyprus*, Europe Report no. 268, 17 April 2023.

General Assembly. Despite these new and profound difficulties owing to the magnitude of disagreement between both sides, some opportunities have emerged.

The first opportunity is the UN Secretary-General's appointment of former Colombian Foreign Minister María Ángela Holguín Cuéllar as his personal envoy for Cyprus, charged with using good offices to seek common ground on how to move forward on the Cypriot issue. The appointment itself demonstrated the achievement of an agreement between the parties, by overcoming recent disagreement about it.²⁰ Holguín Cuéllar is a diplomat with extensive experience, including as a plenipotentiary negotiator in the negotiating process between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrilla group (2015-2016), which ended with a peace agreement. Holguín Cuéllar's appointment comes after a few years without a figure at that level dedicated to the Cypriot dispute, reactivating and giving some impetus to the search for solutions. She does face restrictions, however, as according to the Turkish Cypriot authorities and Turkish government their condition is that her term of office be limited to six months.

Since assuming her new role, Holguín Cuéllar has taken an inclusive and participatory approach, consulting with a broad ecosystem of actors, including both sides' leaders, negotiators, members of the joint technical committees, political parties, mayors, chambers of commerce, journalists, religious leaders, think tanks and associations, including women's groups, international actors involved in the dispute and others. Her analysis stresses the experience of her team of advisors and attempts to transcend the binary framework of a federation solution versus a two-state solution and distinguish between a mutually beneficial peace and an unsustainable status.²¹ In any case, it remains to be seen if the growing divide between the parties will widen into a gulf or if it may be possible to bridge it and resume the negotiating process. At the very least, Holguín Cuéllar's work may have helped to clarify in detail both sides' positions at this new stage, which is necessary to tone down the accusatory rhetoric and discover possible new ground for common understanding.

Even in scenarios in which negotiations cannot be restarted in the short term, the renewed push to explore common ground could facilitate minimal progress, such

as new confidence-building measures or cooperation in certain areas. In early 2024, Greek Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides announced new confidence-building measures that included granting citizenship to children with one Turkish Cypriot parent when the other parent is from Türkiye. However, his announcement was criticised by the Turkish Cypriot authorities, who viewed them as rights and not confidence-building measures. Tatar's references in 2024 to the need for specific action to end Turkish Cypriot isolation and his allusions to issues such as direct flights, direct trade and sports indicate the need and possible scope for new cooperation and confidence-building measures if there is the will and the possibility of dialogue and agreements in certain areas, though this is still uncertain.

Another possible opportunity lies in the rapprochement between Greece and Türkiye in 2023. Their dispute cuts across several different dimensions (the Cypriot issue, the delimitation of their maritime borders, their exclusive economic zones, their continental shelves and air space, their access to hydrocarbons and the disputed sovereignty of various islands) and in recent years has led to greater militarisation of the Eastern Mediterranean and serious moments of crisis, such as when two warships from Greece and Türkiye collided in 2020. The dispute has also been channelled through mechanisms of dialogue, though it has not always been easy. In 2023, both countries took steps towards rapprochement, which culminated in a meeting in Athens between Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in the latter's first visit to Greece since 2017 as part of the Greece-Türkiye High-Level Cooperation Council (HLCC). Both signed a non-binding, 10-point declaration of "friendly relations and good neighbourliness" in which they committed, among other things, to resolve any dispute peacefully.²² The rapprochement may contribute to more relaxed regional relations. It does have its limits, however, since no explicit mention was made of the Cypriot issue and it will not necessarily have an impact on the negotiations over Cyprus. Furthermore, the dynamic of militarisation underway in the region and on the island continues and it remains to be seen how this approach impacts human security in the region, since the agenda included areas of *securitization* of migration and displacement.

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20. International Crisis Group, "How to Reinvigorate the UN's Mediation Efforts in Cyprus", *ICG Commentary*, 18 August 2023.

21. Kaymak, "Erol, Reviving Peace Talks in Cyprus: Diplomatic Innovation and the New UN Envoy", SWP Comment no. 7, *Centre for Applied Turkey Studies*, February 2024.

22. See the full text in the article by Kokkinidis, Tasos, "Full Text of the Friendship Declaration Between Greece, Turkey", *Greek Reporter*, 7 December 2023.

23. European Council, *European Council conclusions, 17 and 18 April 2024*, 2024.

24. Foreign Ministry of Türkiye, *Regarding the Conclusions of the Extraordinary European Council of 17-18 April 2024*, press release no. 63, 18 April 2024.

On the other hand, potentially promising was a certain recent relaxation in relations between the EU and Türkiye, which could have a positive impact on the Cypriot issue. However, this opportunity already seems to be fading. In the European Council's conclusions of April 2024, the EU makes the strengthening of EU-Türkiye cooperation conditional on the resumption and progress of the Cypriot dialogue process.²³ Türkiye categorically rejected the EU's strategy of linking the progress of EU-Türkiye relations to the Cypriot issue.²⁴ Since his election in 2023, the Greek Cypriot leader has called for a more active role for the EU in resolving the conflict, including via the creation of a special envoy, which the EU has ruled out for now. However, and in view of the European Council's conclusions of April 2024 and Ankara's reactions, it remains to be seen whether the EU will contribute to intra-Cypriot confidence-building and cooperation or whether confrontational dynamics between Türkiye and the EU will prevail.

Finally, civil society actors on the island, including women's organisations, continue to push for dialogue

and to promote and participate in intercommunity initiatives. The negotiating process also has complementary tracks, such as dialogue between political parties (supported by Slovakia) and between religious actors (backed by Sweden). However, the ability of pro-dialogue civil society to influence leadership was limited. There is also a legacy of decades of separation between the populations and a limited approach to truth, memory and reconciliation. Other current problems include the growing pressure of climate change on the island, the increase in inequality and rising vulnerability and violence on the island against the growing migrant and asylum-seeking population, which bring other challenges and needs, but also other paths of potential cooperation.

Altogether, some modest opportunities are coming together in the current context, but they are limited and heavily offset by factors that dim the prospects of finding common ground to resume the negotiations in a way that could result in an agreement.

4.5. The Summit of the Future and the United Nations New Agenda for Peace: an opportunity to strengthen multilateralism

The early 2020s have witnessed major global crises, with doubts raised about the global multilateral system. The rise of authoritarianism and the decline in gender equality in many countries, the worsening of the climate crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the genocide in Gaza, combined with three dozen armed conflicts and exponential growth in military spending, are symptoms of these international crises. Meanwhile, compliance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 is seriously compromised by the lack of sustained progress. For example, in its latest report on the progress of the SDGs, the United Nations predicts that if current trends continue, 575 million people will still be in extreme poverty in 2030. The global hunger situation is worse than at any time since 2005 and if the same trend continues, it will take 286 years to close the gender gaps related to discriminatory laws. Furthermore, if we stay the current course, 84 million boys and girls will still be out of school in 2030.²⁵ However, the Summit of the Future is scheduled to be held in 2024. Convened by the UN Secretary-General, the Summit aims to promote multilateralism and global governance to respond to these global crises. It also gives impetus to achieving the SDGs, which hang in doubt because of the limited progress made.

The multilateral system is being put to the test by different governments and global actors, at times with flagrant breaches of international law and International Humanitarian Law. The most recent example is the Israeli military campaign in Gaza, which many different lawyers and human rights organisations consider genocide and has been brought before the International Court of Justice for this reason. Given these global crises, the UN Secretary-General proposes the Pact for the Future, a document that presents an opportunity to give fresh impetus to multilateralism. This proposal for an international agenda should be endorsed by the countries at the September 2024 Summit. It is based on his report *Our Common Agenda*, which proposed 12 commitments to face the challenges of the coming years. These commitments had previously been established to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations in 2020 and include protecting the environment, promoting peace and preventing conflicts, guaranteeing justice and international law, improving digital cooperation, modernising the United Nations, prioritising women and girls and including youth. More specifically, the Pact for the Future will cover five themes: sustainable development and funding for development; international peace and security; science, technology and innovation

and digital cooperation; youth and future generations; and the transformation of global governance.

The Secretary-General's proposal for a new peace agenda identifies some of the most important global challenges in terms of peace and security and suggests action to take in five areas. Some of this action addresses peace and security issues that have recently become more important in the aforementioned global crisis, such as the elimination of nuclear weapons and the promotion of preventive diplomacy, which the Secretary-General links to stark geopolitical divisions. He also places great emphasis on strengthening tools of prevention and enhances the implementation of the 2030 Agenda as a matter of peace and security, as it should address the root causes of violence and insecurity. He also raises issues such as the interrelationships between climate, peace and security and the need to rethink peacekeeping operations.

In recent years, feminist peacebuilding and the women, peace and security agenda have been weakened by the lack of progress and government commitment and by the march of political movements and misogynistic governments that question fundamental women's rights. The United Nations New Peace Agenda could be a good platform for boosting the active and significant participation of women and civil society in international peacebuilding. This agenda is clearly committed to dismantling patriarchal power structures and promoting women's full, equal and meaningful participation at all levels of decision-making on peace and security issues. It also identifies some threats to peace that are clearly significant for women and civil society in general, such as violence that does not take place in contexts of armed conflict, the shrinking of space for participating in civil society and the climate emergency. In addition, it is committed to global solutions that address the root causes of violence rather than prioritising security responses.

In line with the international questioning of the multilateral system, institutions responsible for promoting women's rights have also been challenged and criticised in an attempt to halt the progress made in equality and the recognition of rights in recent decades and as part of global strategies to undermine the legitimacy of the United Nations. At the same time, the global feminist movement has become more powerful in the last decade, with its discourse permeating a good part of public opinion worldwide, marking important milestones and mobilising hundreds of thousands of women on crosscutting issues such as the recognition

25. United Nations, *Informe de los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible 2023: Edición especial. Por un plan de rescate para las personas y el planeta*, United Nations, 2023.

of sexual and reproductive rights, especially the right to abortion, the fight against gender violence, the defence and promotion of the rights of LGBTIQ+ people and the participation of women and feminist agendas in peacebuilding. Thus, different governments have described their foreign policies as feminist, which still receive criticism from civil society due to their lack of ambition, but also demonstrate feminism's ability to influence issues on the international agenda. There is opportunity in this tension between the rise of political movements opposed to the multilateral order and defenders of patriarchal and misogynistic systems and the strength of the feminist movement and the growing institutionalisation of feminist policies. In this regard, the framework developed by the UN Secretary-General supports a more inclusive and transformative approach.

The New Agenda for Peace and the Pact for the Future have drawn some fire for not being ambitious enough about tackling the climate crisis, currently one of the main threats to human security. Critics say that their

rather rhetorical and repetitive commitments fall short of profoundly transforming the international economic and military system in a way that could reverse the increasingly serious effects of climate change. A more specific commitment to the rights of women and girls and gender equality is also needed, as they remain relatively invisible through a crosscutting approach. Criticism of the main shortcomings of this new agenda must be addressed to make the Pact for the Future truly transformative, addressing in detail the causes of the global crises that threaten the wellbeing of most of the world's population and that could get even worse if the aforementioned trends continue.

However, the Summit of the Future can serve as an international catalyst in turbulent political times if the Secretary-General can gather enough support from governments that wish to intensify their commitment to the multilateral system, addressing pending transformations and strengthening necessary commitments to peace and human rights.

