

**REMARKS BY DEPUTY HEAD OF PRESENCE, CLARISSE PASZTORY, AT
CONSTITUTION OF THE ALLIANCE OF WOMEN MPS**

Durrës, 17 December 2021

Dear Madam Speaker, members of parliament, colleagues,

Good morning! And I think it is a good morning indeed because I consider our joint presence here today already a meaningful success. Why:

1. A record number of women MPs was elected this year, 50 in total
2. an extremely competent female speaker was elected
3. and even the OSCE Presence in Albania has a female deputy.

And I couldn't be more happy that the speaker took up my proposal on 'not me'. I'll return to this in a second.

First, on behalf of the Presence in Albania I'd like to take a 'crumble' of credit for where Albania stands, the progress it already made.

The Presence in Albania, with generous Swiss funding, has done a lot over the years. It includes cross-party dialogues, apprenticeship programmes, individual mentoring programmes, regional peer exchanges, trainings on Gender Sensitive legislating; And of course our support for your parliament's first Gender Action Programme, approved in June 2020, as the first of its kind.

All of it - that must be mentioned - in excellent collaboration with the Assembly secretariat. I cannot laud enough their openness to work with us and constantly improve across the board. The engagement of administrative service staffers brings sustainability to all we do.

That's obviously not it. We aren't done yet.

We are here today to discuss next joint initiatives, not to rest on our laurels. Sihana will talk - and listen - to you more on concrete plans and initiatives, which will be launched next year.

I would like to leave you with two or three more personal thoughts:

I have never worked on WPS as a "file". But I have been a female crisis diplomat serving in some of the toughest places on earth. Kosovo, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina during the war and crisis years. Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Kurdistan since. Negotiating peace agreements. Dealing with security issues. Serving and succeeding in a hyper-male environments. Not because I am a woman. Not despite being a woman. But as a woman. As myself. Not working on theoretic concepts of women issues. But practically solving issues.

And that's my advice to the younger ones of you (the ones already longer in the politics don't need my advice, otherwise you wouldn't be still here!): women often make the mistake of

asking for power. Of waiting for somebody to hand it to them. But power is not granted. It is taken. It is lived. It's inside you. Power is where you are.

And that's the second advice: don't fall into the trap of self victimisation. The Speaker mentioned my 'not me' proposal. It's not enough to raise awareness but stop being victimized.

We are women. We are not weak or in need of guardians. I tend to scream when I hear 'women and children' mentioned in one breath. As if we were helpless creatures without agency. And men invincible. It's often portrayed as support but its really belittling. We are not little, nor few. Nor 'vulnerable' just because we are women. Everyone bleeds when they are cut. Men, women, children. What we need is a society that doesn't cut, or cut us out.

And that's what you are here to discuss today. How to advance the agenda - as speaker said. How to ensure inclusions, contribution, agency, focus on issues relevant to women. Not out of weakness, but out of your own strength, including your strength in numbers. 50 of you. From all parties. A female speaker. You can make a difference in this next legislative period. And I hope you will!