

OSCE
Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

**Report of the First Meeting in the ODIHR Human Rights Discussion Series for
Representatives of the Forum for Security Co-operation**

Armed Forces and Women's Access to Combat Positions

(19 April 2013, Vienna)



Disclaimer

This report should neither be interpreted as official OSCE recommendations based on a consensus decision, nor as opinion of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights or of any particular OSCE participating State. The content of this report reflects opinions expressed by participants in the Meeting on Armed Forces and Women's Access to Combat Positions on 19 April 2013 and no additional information has been included since then. The reader should therefore refer to other sources for updates on this topic. The meeting was conducted entirely under Chatham House Rules. The comments contained in this report, while not attributed to specific individuals reflect the views and opinions expressed by panellists and participants during the meeting.

Table of Contents

<i>Executive Summary</i>	2
Introduction and Background	3
The OSCE FSC Framework and Other Applicable International Obligations.....	4
Addressing the Topic of Women’s Access to Combat Positions	6
The Merits of an Inclusive Process.....	9
Granting Women Access to Combat Positions in Practice.....	11
Recommendations	12
Annex I – Background Paper	14
Annex II – Meeting Agenda.....	19
Annex III – Background Information on the ODIHR Human Rights, Gender and Security Programme	22

Executive Summary

The OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security calls on OSCE participating States to protect the human rights of military personnel. These rights include full economic opportunities for servicemen *and* servicewomen, non-discriminatory employment practices and equal access to jobs. However, women in the armed forces are still being prevented from serving on the front lines in a number of OSCE participating States and, therefore, are restricted in their prospects for promotion and career advancement in the military.

Against this backdrop, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) organized a one-day event on Armed Forces and Women’s Access to Combat Positions on 19 April 2013. The discussion was organized primarily for the benefit of OSCE participating States’ representatives to the Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC) who are generally the military advisers and OSCE First Dimension experts in each delegation.

The panellists speaking during the event included active servicemen and servicewomen, representatives of civil society and staff from independent research institutions, who addressed women’s access to combat positions as a matter of military effectiveness, as a human rights concern and as a reflection of front line reality. The discussion provided guidance on who decision-makers should consult when deliberating whether to grant women access to combat positions and provided some concrete recommendations for OSCE participating States, OSCE structures and institutions going forward. Furthermore, the discussion focused on changes, infrastructural, procedural and otherwise, that need to take place at all levels and in all units in order to effectively implement a policy that provides women with full access to all military positions.

While dominant models, emphasizing the primary role of men in armed forces, still persist, the debate reflected a growing recognition among OSCE participating States that furthering women’s full access to all military jobs has become more of a question of *how* to do it, rather than a question of

challenging the reasons as to *why* women should be fully integrated. There was an overall understanding that although integration of women in combat forces inevitably involves challenges, the advantages of an inclusive approach would outweigh any negative impact in the long run. Participants identified the concepts of change in cultural norms and leadership as two main determinative factors that enable decision-makers to support women's better and more equal representation at all levels in the armed forces.

The meeting confirmed that the FSC welcomes the Human Dimension perspective to its discussions, in particular, in the deliberations concerning the review and implementation of the 1994 OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security.

Introduction and Background

This report provides a synthesis of the discussions of the Meeting on Armed Forces and Women's Access to Combat Positions, organized by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) on 19 April 2013 in the OSCE Headquarters, Vienna.

Since 2008, the Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC) and ODIHR have been engaged in a fruitful exchange such that human rights and gender perspectives, and corresponding Third dimension commitments, are taken into consideration when interpreting the 1994 OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security; primarily, a document originating in the First Dimension. Concurrently, ODIHR is supporting the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and subsequent resolutions addressing this issue.

The decision to highlight the topic of women in combat is based on the fact that OSCE participating States have strived to ensure full economic opportunity for women, including *non-discriminatory employment policies and practices* (Moscow 1991) and have called on each other to "[c]onsider taking measures to create equal opportunities within the security services, including the *armed forces*, where relevant, to allow for balanced recruitment, retention and *promotion* of men and women" (MC Decision 7/09; Athens 2009).

ODIHR first brought this topic to the attention of the FSC during a Security Dialogue on 27 February 2013, since a number of States across the OSCE region still restrict women's access to positions in the armed forces that involve close or direct ground combat, including those on submarines. In the span of two hours, an overview was given of the on-going debate regarding women in combat roles.

More than 60 participants attended the 19 April event. This group consisted of OSCE Secretariat and ODIHR officials, FSC representatives, active servicemen and servicewomen in the armed forces of several OSCE participating States as well as representatives of civil society and academics. The discussion focused on the current status of initiatives within the OSCE region to grant full access to women and provided practical guidance for military and civilian leaders on how to establish and implement an all-inclusive policy that allows for women's full participation in the armed forces, including in combat roles. Speakers from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Denmark, Ireland,

Moldova, Norway, Serbia, Spain, and the United States shared their national as well as personal experiences on the topic.

This event was the first in a human rights series that ODIHR is organizing for the benefit of FSC members in 2013. The purpose of this series is to analyse current issues of concern to both servicemen and servicewomen and to inform the daily deliberation process that takes place within the FSC with the latest human rights and gender trends. The event and future events in this series provide FSC members with the opportunity to freely exchange views, focus on analysing the lessons learned from national level policymaking, and derive practical examples for implementation in their respective countries.

The OSCE FSC Framework and Other Applicable International Obligations

1. Addressing the rights of women who serve, ensuring that they have access to all employment opportunities, including combat positions, and ultimately providing for an environment of non-discrimination in which they can progress on equal par with men, is firmly rooted in both international and regional obligations. Five United Nations Security Council resolutions (UNSCR 1325, 1820, 1888, 1889, and 1960) call upon States, *inter alia*, to ensure the full inclusion of women in prevention of conflict, conflict management, and post-conflict reconstruction. Furthermore, States undertake legally binding obligations when signing and ratifying treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to “take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women” in public functions at all levels of government (Article 7(b)), education (Article 10), and employment (Article 11).
2. OSCE participating States have undertaken political commitments to address the rights of women and women's security issues delineated in UNSCR 1325, subsequent resolutions in this vein, as well as in CEDAW. The documents that outline these commitments are:
 - Ministerial Council decision No. 7/09 (2009) on “Women's Participation in Political and Public Life”
 - Ministerial Council decision No. 3/11 (2011) on “Elements of the Conflict Cycle, Related to Enhancing the OSCE's Capabilities in Early Warning, Early Action, Dialogue Facilitation and Mediation Support, and Post-Conflict Rehabilitation”
 - Ministerial Council decision No. 14/05 (2005) on “Women in Conflict Prevention, Crisis Management and Post-Conflict Rehabilitation”
 - Ministerial Council decision No. 15/05 (2005) on “Preventing and Combating Violence against Women” (including VAW in conflict delineated in 1325)
 - Ministerial Council decision No. 14/04 (2004) adopting the “2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality.”
3. The development of this comprehensive body of gender-focused commitments in the OSCE region, in addition to the aforementioned UN standards, is an expression of the shift in

international understanding of women's central role in preventing and resolving conflict and building peaceful and prosperous societies.

4. However, a much earlier OSCE document acknowledges the rights of all those who serve in the armed forces of participating States: the 1994 Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security (Code of Conduct). This extensive set of commitments confirms the OSCE's "comprehensive concept of security ... which relates the maintenance of peace to the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms." Consequently, the Code of Conduct explicitly indicates that OSCE participating States commit to "ensure that military, paramilitary and security forces personnel will be able to enjoy and exercise their human rights and fundamental freedoms as reflected in CSCE documents and international law, in conformity with relevant constitutional and legal provisions and with the requirements of service." In the Code of Conduct, participating States agreed to ensure that the human rights of armed forces personnel are *legally protected* subject to the requirements of military service. Among these rights are economic and social rights to which both male and female members of the armed forces are entitled. Supplemented by OSCE commitments to women, peace and security and to gender equality in general, the Code of Conduct provided for a robust foundation for this event.

On-going Dialogue on the OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security

5. This meeting, the first in the ODIHR Human Rights Discussion Series for the FSC, sought to inform a larger process of deliberation of the OSCE on the Code of Conduct within the First Dimension. FSC members include ODIHR representatives in their regular meetings that seek to review the implementation of the Code of Conduct in order to ensure that the human rights aspects of the code are analysed.
6. The politically binding Code of Conduct is a comprehensive document and participating States bear the ultimate responsibility for its implementation. Several advancements have been made to improve the annual information exchange by participating States that demonstrates the application of the Code of Conduct at the national level. This includes a reference guide developed in 2011 aimed at improving the quality of the replies to the annual Code of Conduct questionnaire by participating States. Furthermore, OSCE participating States can include information on the status of women in the armed forces and other related information on a voluntary basis. It has been suggested that these particular questions can be refined in order to foster better, more complete answers that are indicative of women's status in the national militaries of OSCE participating States. Another positive development has been the establishment of a website platform accessible to the public, making the information exchange more transparent and accessible.
7. The FSC Support Section of the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre provides statistical overviews of the information exchange. However, more effort should be made towards translating all questionnaire replies into English from other OSCE working languages. Once a year, the OSCE organizes an event dedicated to reviewing the on-going implementation of the Code of Conduct. Recognizing the potential inspirational value of the Code of Conduct for countries beyond the

OSCE region, an Arabic translation of the document was presented to the Contact Group with the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation on 1 March 2013.

8. ODIHR contributes to the yearly review of the Code of Conduct by drawing on analysis from its main publication in this area, the Handbook on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Armed Forces Personnel. Furthermore, ODIHR actively supports outreach and dissemination efforts by the FSC and CPC to raise awareness about the Code of Conduct throughout the OSCE region. The latest endeavour in supporting the FSC is the more specialised ODIHR Human Rights Discussion Series which was initiated on 19 April by addressing the timely topic of women's access to combat positions.
9. The role of women and their contributions to peace and security measures are increasingly in the public eye and are taken seriously within the context of FSC discussions. During the 19 April event, FSC coordinators indicated their appreciation to ODIHR for highlighting an issue that is most relevant to women currently serving in armed forces.

Addressing the Topic of Women's Access to Combat Positions

10. During the course of the meeting the participants touched on a number of key issues and perspectives to be taken into account when addressing the topic of women's access to combat positions in the armed forces. The issues highlighted by the participants included historical perspectives, recent developments and broader military trends, operational impact, equal career opportunities, as well as overcoming and effectively addressing discrimination, stereotypes and sexual abuse in the armed forces.

Historical Perspectives

11. Throughout history women have played many roles in the military, from ancient times, the Second World War, to current conflicts. Largely due to sociocultural gender norms, women's active contribution on the front lines has rarely been officially acknowledged. Women have served and continue to serve, but have not subsequently been recognized for their efforts. More often than not their needs have been overlooked in rehabilitation programmes for combatants who leave the battlefield.
12. Women's engagement in direct combat has always been a controversial issue and has fostered heated arguments ranging from the physical suitability of women in combat positions due to their perceived physical weakness to the effects inclusion of women has had on battalion morale. A counter argument has been the added value of having women on a team in order to reach out to greater parts of populations affected by conflict.

Recent Developments

13. In many participating States across the OSCE region there has been a change in the perception of women in the military and an increasing recognition that armed forces benefit from having

women in all ranks and roles. Consequently, women have been given access to the front lines in several contemporary armed forces. For instance Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Norway, Serbia, Sweden and Switzerland now permit women to undertake active combat roles.

14. In many cases, for countries that deploy peacekeeping troops to the United Nations (UN) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) women have deployed into conflict zones such as Iraq and Afghanistan. This has exposed them to combat but has not necessarily translated into formal recognition and promotion in rank. Thus, opening combat positions to women within national armed forces structures is, in these cases, acknowledging a reality that is already there.

Operational Benefits

15. Participants reiterated a well-known principle that a military force where the rights of the personnel are respected is a content and more effective military force. In any military team cohesiveness is vital. Women bring added value to the military as their presence enables a more diverse unit composition, additional perspectives in decision-making, a different communication style, different analytical skills and other attributes which can improve teamwork. Since combat units are often among the first military actors to interact with local society in mission areas, having both female and male soldiers can help to improve the overall relationship with the local civilian population. Furthermore, the discussion among decision makers in post-combat situations is very different when women are present and contribute their views about measures for reconstruction and peace building.
16. Speaking from operational experience, some participants indicated that women who choose to enter male dominated militaries often come motivated and better prepared physically when they enter training than their male counterparts. The armed forces of one participating State where women are allowed to serve in all positions observed that servicewomen on long term contracts have a lower tendency to leave the armed forces than their male colleagues.

Equal Career Opportunities

17. Ensuring women's access to combat positions is an important and timely economic and social rights issue and a tool against non-discrimination. Women's access to combat positions is not just a matter of finding ways to achieve gender equality in *all* ranks and roles, but it is also an obligation on the part of military decision makers to protect the job-related rights of their service members.
18. In OSCE participating States that have formally allowed women to serve in all positions, it remains difficult for females to form and pursue a career as well as rise in the ranks within the armed forces. Although most women successfully complete their military education, there is reluctance in many countries to assign women to international missions and strategic command positions that would aid with their promotion. For the servicewomen themselves access to combat positions often constitutes a great change and a challenge to a persistent glass ceiling effect as previously they had limited career paths and promotion opportunities. However,

gender stereotypes still limit career possibilities for women in the military who frequently are ignored in promotion rounds in some countries.

Addressing Discrimination against Women

19. Although most countries have equal treatment and equal access legislation, differential treatment of men and women that leads to discrimination exists both in the public and the private sphere. The starting point in addressing discrimination against women who serve their country is for military leadership to commit to a policy of ensuring their full inclusion at all levels and positions in the military. In addition to opening up combat positions to women, the entire armed forces infrastructure needs to become gender mainstreamed as well. This means that recruitment and benefit policies as well as promotion opportunities, oversight mechanisms, ombudsperson offices and other means for addressing discrimination related grievances must be evaluated from a gender perspective. In particular, grievance mechanisms must be evaluated for their ability to operate independently from the chain of command. A major overhaul will be developing new occupational standards for both men and women in all positions, including combat positions, within the armed forces. Training needs to be provided to military personnel on diversity and a gender balanced working environment. Furthermore, a gender focal point network should be established in the armed forces. Participants recognized that the above mentioned changes would need to be supported by a budget at a time when national resources are shrinking everywhere in the OSCE space and, as such, financial considerations must be made at the very initial stages when adopting a policy to grant women full access.

Overcoming Stereotypes

20. Gender stereotypes concerning the military are still deeply engrained including those focused on women's ability to serve on the front lines. Some participants argued that reasons for restricting women's access to combat positions are more reflective of cultural stereotypes and assumptions concern societally assigned gender roles rather than a question of military readiness or combat effectiveness. Women wishing to serve in the military have to confront gender biased opinions about the armed forces. For instance, an overall idea persists that conflict is ultimately "the business" of men. Furthermore, some have argued that it is somehow more tragic when female soldiers are killed and that it is more traumatic for a woman to be a prisoner of war. Participants agreed that such stereotypes must be eradicated as they impede upon women's ability to achieve their full potential in the military. OSCE participating States should acknowledge the importance of addressing ingrained, biased notions about gender roles pertaining to the armed forces.

Sexual Abuse in the Military

21. More steps should be taken to prevent unacceptable criminal behaviour, such as sexual harassment, sexual assault or rape, in the armed forces of OSCE participating States. One speaker pointed to a study which revealed that a more equal age distribution in military units reduces the likelihood of sexual harassment. A typical approach is to ensure separate sleeping quarters for women and men. Based on requests by female service members to fully become

part of informal discussions in a unit, the armed forces in one participating State have recently changed its practice to now allowing women and men to sleep in the same rooms. Presumably, this eases tensions between the sexes and also discourages men from breaking into rooms when they know that there are other men inside. This integration initiative presupposes a functioning complaint mechanism that independently and effectively addresses cases involving sexual harassment, sexual assault or rape and encourages their reporting and prosecution via proper channels established to handle such grave situations. Another speaker noted that if female service members are victims of sexual violence it may also be the case that all-male units face similar problems.

Broader Military Trends and Their Effect on Female Participation

22. Participants indicated that new trends, societal imperatives and the changing nature of military operations will likely drive increased female participation in the armed forces. Today's non-linear battlefields mean that *all* positions that are in operational theatres may be exposed to combat. As a result of functional changes in warfare, modern armed forces increasingly require a multitude of skillsets in addition to physical abilities in order to engage in combat. The complex tasks current militaries perform demand a more sophisticated and better educated infantry.
23. The changes in the security landscape since the end of the Cold War and technological advances have generally minimized the manpower requirement in the military and the need for raw physical strength and conscription. Thus, in many OSCE participating States steps have been taken towards professionalizing the armed forces. The overall decrease in the number of conscripted military personnel opens up career opportunities for women in the military. The increased requirement for a skilled and educated workforce within the military often means that persons wishing to join the military often have to make a long term commitment to service and bring with them skills other than physical strength. Countries which transitioned to an all voluntary, otherwise known as professional, military have generally seen an increase in female participation in the ranks.

The Merits of an Inclusive Process

24. While challenges exist to fully integrating women into the armed forces, they are not insurmountable and a steady commitment on the part of military and civilian leaders will ultimately provide women with real opportunities such that they reach their highest potential in any job within the armed forces. It is important for leadership to consult with research institutions, independent experts (either on an individual basis or via commissions), representatives of civil society, individual men and women who are serving, and counterparts from other countries. Participants reiterated that there are several merits to engaging in such an inclusive process leading up to the decision to create policies that enable women's access to combat positions. They indicated that, thus, decision-making can become better informed, transparent, and more easily translatable to the target audience and to the general public.

Research Institutions

25. Research institutions are important since policies improve if the implementers are provided with sound information and updated data. However, it is essential that an effort is made to translate the language of academics into a language that is of practical use to ministries of defence and military leadership.

Diversity and Human Rights Commissions

26. Responding to a general public demand for fairness and equality, a diversity or human rights commissions can conduct inquiries into why women and minorities are underrepresented in the military. A commission can assess the quality of legislation and help identify systematic gaps in outdated policies. In addition to offering advice on how to implement gender neutral requirements in the military, commissions can hold the military accountable to ensuring equality.

Civil Society

27. Civil society organizations can assist by providing technical advice to policymakers and military leaders who are implementing a policy that grants women access to combat positions. Additionally, civil society actors can support and translate policy changes to the local level via awareness raising efforts.

National Experiences and Seeking Advice from Other Sectors

28. Examining experiences from other countries and speaking with similarly situated decision makers in the armed forces of those countries can offer inspiration on how to overcome the legal obstacles that hinder women's full participation in the armed forces. Former experiences of integrating racial and ethnic minorities in the armed forces may also offer good ideas for increasing female participation at all levels and in all positions.
29. Looking to other national public and private sectors that have already had experience in incorporating women into their structures can potentially foster practical ideas on how to implement a policy that fully includes women in the armed forces. For example, several parallels exist between women's inclusion into police forces and women's inclusion in the military.

Strategic Documents

30. In the process of creating internal policies that grant women access to combat positions, documents, such as national security strategies, gender national action plans, and gender strategies, should be consulted and revised if necessary. Due to increasing number of women in the security sector, the security landscape is changing and dominant social models are challenged. Hence the armed forces can also be a force for social change and new national policy and legislation. For example, a gender national action plan can be augmented by a UN Security Council Resolution 1325 national action plan that specifically focuses on women's participation

in the security sector and the responsibility of security sector actors towards them and towards addressing women's security needs in the community.

Personal Experiences

31. The experiences of servicewomen and servicemen are essential to ensure that policies will have the intended impact. Consulting former and active service members can provide policymakers with very tangible information on what the issues and opportunities are in military employment. In some cases, service members themselves have been the main agents of change towards better integrating women in the security sector.

Granting Women Access to Combat Positions in Practice

32. Equal opportunity in policy does not necessarily translate to equal opportunity in practice. A significant challenge lies in implementing a decision that provides women with full, official, realistic and workable access to all military positions, including combat roles. A number of considerations can be taken into account that will facilitate the move from formal equality to real equality. Above all, participants advised that OSCE participating States should adopt a comprehensive approach to implementing policy including by undertaking regular assessments, exercising military leadership, establishing gender networks and gender advisers in the armed forces, and conducting continuous monitoring and evaluation. Speakers stressed that the situation is unique and reality may prove that there is no one way to go about fully integrating women in the military. Nevertheless, it can be useful to look at processes that various countries within the OSCE region have undertaken in order to reform their security sector institutions and make these rights for women in the armed forces a reality.

Assessments

33. Recognizing that it often takes significant time from formulating a policy that delineates women's full access to implementing it in practice, integration of women in the armed forces needs to be reinforced on a continuous basis. Although women in one participating State were allowed to apply for fighter pilot training in 1992, it was only in 2005 when the first woman successfully graduated from the military aviation academy. In order to fully integrate women, regular needs assessments of overall policy and infrastructural changes should be conducted. Among other issues, these assessments should closely monitor the type of support that is provided to women in order for them to perform their jobs successfully and progress through the ranks.

Military Leadership

34. Some of the meeting participants noted that militaries are often tradition-bound and are well known for being reluctant to change. OSCE participating States are encouraged to share their national experiences with respect to what military leadership has to do *in practice* once a decision has been made to grant women full access. The attitude of military leadership,

especially at the officer levels, is instrumental for overcoming gender stereotypes and effectively ensuring the full and equal participation of servicewomen in all jobs. An issue adversely affecting the implementation of new policies is the fragmentation that can exist between the top level and the lower level leadership in the military. More effort should be made to close the gap between senior leadership and lower level commanding officers so that a decision made at the top level actually leads to the desired changes throughout the military structure. In order to change leadership culture, the rationale behind new policies to integrate women must be clearly communicated and understood by all affected service members.

Gender Neutral Standards

35. In positions where technology has not yet discounted the need for raw physical strength, having gender neutral standards should be the priority. However, the debate on how to define gender neutral standards is on-going. Training, physical and psychological standards should realistically correspond to operational requirements in mission areas. With regards to physical requirements, it has been suggested to test more on endurance and not strength. Contrary to popular conceptions about male physical superiority, some practitioners indicated that there have been cases where women actually perform better than men in physical endurance tests conducted after lengthy military exercises.

Gender Network in the Armed Forces

36. Acknowledging that gender diversity should be a value in itself, a gender network and full-time gender advisers within the armed forces can assist in providing specialized support to servicewomen. Furthermore, some countries have established designated hotlines where armed forces personnel can report concerns and seek advice on matters such as discrimination and maternity leave.

Monitoring Implementation

37. Continuous monitoring of the integration process related to women in the military is essential and should be carried out internally as well as by external groups or entities, such as independent ombuds institutions. Some of the issues that could be analysed in order to gauge whether the policies have the desired effect include assessing existing complaints procedures as well as analysis of sexual harassment incidents and personnel retention rates.

Recommendations

38. In addition to the above mixture of strategic context, policy and practical guidance, the meeting also put forward three concrete recommendations for OSCE structures and institutions and for OSCE participating States.

- A) The FSC should further encourage OSCE participating States to report on the status of women in their armed forces in response to the annual questionnaire on the implementation of the Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security.
- B) The OSCE Secretariat and ODIHR should analyse the reporting by participating States on implementation of UNSCR 1325 with the aim of providing guidance on how it can be enhanced.
- C) ODIHR and the FSC should continue to address the rights of servicemen and servicewomen in an informed manner via the Human Rights Discussion Series. A suggestion for a future ODIHR-led event for the FSC as part of this series was to discuss the topic of integrating minorities in the armed forces.

Annex I – Background Paper



Discussion Series on Human Rights, Gender and Security Sector Issues

ARMED FORCES AND WOMEN'S ACCESS TO COMBAT POSITIONS

Background Paper¹

Since the creation of the OSCE, an increasing number of participating States have moved towards allowing the possibility for women to serve in all positions in the armed forces.² However, several states across the OSCE region still restrict women's access to positions in the armed forces that involve close or direct ground combat. Advocates for women in the military argue that such restrictions limit earning potential, opportunity for advancement, and retirement benefits. Women have not been considered for the military's highest commanding posts because they lack officially recognized combat experience. Supporters have challenged policies which exclude women on the basis that such policies violate the principle of non-discrimination.

OSCE Commitments and International Standards

The OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security requires that military personnel are able to exercise their human rights, subject to the requirements of service.³ Such human rights include economic and social rights, and freedom from discrimination.⁴ Freedom from discrimination is a fundamental human right and it is essential for workers in any field to choose their employment freely, to develop their potential to the full and to

¹ This event will be devoted to the issue of women's access to close and direct combat positions in the military. Hence this background paper will explore the arguments that have been advanced for and against women's access, with a view to presenting the possible impact of implementing a policy that permits female troops to take on these roles.

² For in-depth analyses on national approaches to increasing participation of women in the armed forces see the reports "Diversity in the Danish Armed Forces" published by Centre for Military Studies, University of Copenhagen, 2012;

"Hidden Women in the Netherlands Armed forces" René Moelker and Jolanda Bosch, published by the Faculty of Military Sciences No. 2008/01 Netherlands Defence Academy, 2008;

"Tiltak for å øke kvinneandelen i Forsvaret", Frank Brundtland Steder and Maria Fleischer Fauske, published by Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), 2012.

³ Paragraph 32.

⁴ Vienna (1989). Commitments pertaining to non-discrimination can also be found in various OSCE documents from Helsinki (1975), Vienna (1989) and Copenhagen (1990).

reap economic rewards on the basis of merit. OSCE commitments on equality require participating States to “ensure full economic opportunity for women, including non-discriminatory employment practices”⁵ and call on each other to “[c]onsider taking measures to create equal opportunities within the security services, including the *armed forces*, where relevant, to allow for balanced recruitment, retention and *promotion* of men and women.”⁶ Participating States have recognized that “the knowledge, skills and experience of *both* women and men are essential to peace, sustainable democracy, economic development and therefore to security and stability in the OSCE region.”⁷ Thus, OSCE participating States have resolved to undertake “concrete action” to fully integrate women in conflict prevention, crisis management and post conflict rehabilitation efforts.⁸

Other standards pertaining to equal access to work include those established in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which has been ratified by 53 OSCE participating States. The ICESCR recognizes the right to work, and provides everyone with an equal opportunity to be promoted to a higher level in their employment, subject to no consideration other than those of seniority and competence.⁹ The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) provides for equal employment opportunities for men and women, “including the application of the same criteria for selection in matters of employment,” “the right to free choice of profession and employment” and “the right to promotion.”¹⁰ CEDAW has been ratified by 54 OSCE participating States.

The Debate

Proponents for women's inclusion in all military positions ground their arguments on the idea that democracies require all citizens to compete in public endeavour and share in civic obligation,¹¹ and that such principles as well as the mission of national defence are best served through a diverse workforce which allows women to perform in direct combat.

With the security of the population at stake, opponents have argued for military effectiveness - and not diversity or equal opportunity - to be the guiding principle when considering whether to grant access to women. Many claim that women do not possess the requisite physical capacities - the upper body strength, stamina and physical might – for the role. In response, proponents have stated that capability should be judged against defined and appropriate gender neutral physical standards and those that meet such standards should be permitted access. A recent study found sparse direct evidence to support claims

⁵At the Moscow Meeting (1991) OSCE participating States also pledged to “achieve not only *de jure* but *de facto* equality of opportunity between men and women,” encourage “measures to facilitate combining employment with family responsibilities for female and male workers,” and “seek to ensure that any structural adjustment policies or programmes do not have an adversely discriminatory effect on women.”

⁶ MC Decision 7/09; Athens 2009

⁷ MC Decision No. 14/05; Ljubljana 2005

⁸ MC Decision No. 14/05; Ljubljana 2005

⁹ Articles 6 & 7, respectively.

¹⁰ Article 11

¹¹ See, for example, ‘Women in Combat: Civic Duty or Military Liability?’, Lorry M. Fenner & Marie E. deYoung, 2011

that all women lack the physical ability to perform in combat roles, noting that women and men have overlapping physical capabilities.

Proponents have argued for a shift in focus on intellect and motivation, which they perceive as more pertinent to military effectiveness than physical prowess. A study on the armed forces of one state reported that female combatants often exhibited superior skills in areas such as discipline and motivation, maintaining alertness, shooting abilities, managing tasks in an organized manner, and displaying knowledge and professionalism in the use of weapons. Another state found that women possessed useful negotiation and communication skills. Similarly, women bring diverse viewpoints in leadership.

Certain qualities perceived as being innate to women have been considered by some to be a potential obstacle to their successful performance in direct combat. Many claim that women are not as equally geared towards aggression, lack the necessary emotional strength to endure the overall brutality of the combat experience, and suffer post-traumatic stress disorder at higher rates than men.¹² Advocates for women's access suggest that, if women are indeed less aggressive, they may be less likely to make rash decisions or to act with disproportionate force in the heat of the battle. Further objections include the argument that if women would adjust to a more masculine and aggressive approach, this would further the arguments that conflict is inevitable, perpetuate militarism and destroy the prospects of peace in the world.¹³

One of the most frequently cited objections to women's participation in direct combat has been the impact of mixed gender units on morale and team cohesion. The prospects for sexual and romantic relationships within combat units – with the potential for jealousy, favouritism, and frustration - has raised concern amongst policymakers who fear scandals and the effect on the ability of colleagues to regard one another as solely co-workers. On the other hand, proponents have argued that women have acted as confidants for male peers and boosted morale amongst the team. Even considering the possibility of negative effects arising from personal relationships, supporters have queried why it is the qualified women – and not the men – that should be punished by exclusion.

Many proponents have argued that contemporary battlefield practice renders the exclusion of women from direct combat roles superficial. In current conflicts, the traditional linear battlefield is absent; there is no "forward area," with the enemy being dispersed across national boundaries and employing irregular tactics. Supporters note that women are already serving, fighting and, in some cases, perishing in combat. In one country, women support direct combat units on the ground by serving in all female units. One of the stipulated purposes of the female units was to interact with female civilians during searches, raids, and the operation of checkpoints. In the course of these operations the women were routinely drawn into combat with the enemy. Though these women have fired in defence, many question whether the distinction between defensive and offensive attacks should be

¹² 'The Case Against Women in Combat', The Daily Beast, 23 October 2007

¹³ Madaleine Rees, the Secretary General of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, rejects the idea that increased militarization leads to better security. See, for example: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkUpi9mVOKQ>.

sustained in light of modern-day armed conflicts, in which combat can and does occur anywhere.¹⁴

Policy Implementation

The implementation of a policy permitting women's access to all combat roles would require adjustments, both logistical and psychological, for the military and its troops. With respect to changing the psychological aspect, it has been claimed that men's alleged desire to protect women may impede military effectiveness as it could interfere with their duty to place the welfare of the mission above all else.¹⁵ Regarding logistical changes, the needs of women, based on their biological differences vis-a-vis men, require that certain infrastructure and benefits be changed and be provided to all in order to facilitate women's ability to fully perform in combat roles.

Discussion Points for ODIHR Event

What are the international aspects?

OSCE participating States have well founded platforms for sharing experiences and best practices on security and defence issues. Bearing in mind the OSCE's role as a forum for regional dialogue and its comprehensive approach to security, there is significant scope for further international discussion on women's access to direct combat roles.

Why women in combat?

Effectiveness

The question of whether women should be granted access to close and direct combat roles is pertinent from a number of perspectives. Primarily, the armed forces, tasked with providing security for the state and its people, has an interest in attracting the most talented individuals and being effective in its operations. Considering women, in addition to men, for combat roles is at the core of this goal as it would allow OSCE participating States to enhance their overall military effectiveness.

Access as a Stand-alone Right

A decision to grant or deny women access to close or direct combat positions clearly affects the ability of servicewomen to exercise their human rights. Central to the OSCE's security concept is the "inherent dignity of the individual" and "respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms," as acknowledged in both the Maastricht (2003) and Astana (2010) documents.¹⁶ OSCE Participating States have agreed that protecting human rights is closely related to the maintenance of peace, not only on a national level but also across the region,

¹⁴ See, for example, 'Women in Combat: Issues for Congress', David F. Burrelli (2012) & 'Women in Combat: The Facts', Service Women's Action Network, February 2011.

¹⁵ *Supra* 12.

¹⁶ 2010 Astana Commemorative Declaration; Maastricht (2003)

given that “the security of each participating State is inseparably linked to that of all others.”¹⁷

Reflection of Reality

Formal assignment to combat positions is an important factor that determines promotion to leadership positions for officers and soldiers. In many instances, women have been serving on the front lines without recognition. They have been assuming the risk alongside their male colleagues without enjoying the opportunities, training and formal recognition afforded to men in their progression through the ranks.¹⁸

What are the merits of an inclusive process?

While the ultimate decision to grant or deny women access combat roles lies with the executive, defence policy makers and military command, the question of who should be consulted during the course of the decision making is significant. In one OSCE participating State, military policy was altered following the issuance of recommendations from an independent diversity commission. This move was challenged by some who perceived the commission to be lacking the necessary military expertise and, specifically, experience in direct ground combat. It has been argued that those most affected by these decisions, in other words, men who are currently employed in direct combat roles, should be consulted as well. Furthermore, the civil society platform working on security sector reform in a particular State should be engaged.

What to do in practice?

The question is clearly one of balance. Though, how best to achieve this in practice is a complex task. For those seeking to open direct combat roles to women, it seems unlikely that simply allowing women into these units will create equality. Careful consideration should be undertaken about what benefits are indispensable to facilitating access, and which ones are unnecessary and camouflage protectionism, stereotypes and discrimination, thereby hindering access.¹⁹ Furthermore, an assessment should be undertaken in order to determine the internal policy and structural changes that need to occur in order to effectively integrate women in previously male only positions and units.

¹⁷ 2010 Astana Commemorative Declaration

¹⁸ Remarks by Rachel Natelson, Legal Director for the Service Women's Action Network (SWAN), before the OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation, 27 February 2013.

¹⁹ See also *Women in the Sphere of Masculinity: The Double-Edged Sword of Women's Integration in the Military*, Noya Rimalt (2007)

Annex II – Meeting Agenda



ARMED FORCES AND WOMEN'S ACCESS TO COMBAT POSITIONS
VIENNA, HOFBURG, SEGMENTGALERIE I
April 19, 2013

AGENDA

08:30-09:00 **Registration of Participants**

09:00-09:30 **Welcoming Remarks**

Ms. Snježana Bokulić, *Head of the Human Rights Department, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)*

Ambassador Giedrius Čekuolis, *Chairperson, OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC)*

Ambassador Miroslava Beham, *Senior Adviser on Gender Issues, OSCE Office of the Secretary General*

09:30-10:30 **OSCE FSC Framework**

Panellists will explain the importance of addressing the issue of women's access to combat positions within the OSCE context. They will frame the discussion in terms of the OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security and OSCE commitments to UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

Moderator: **Mr. Fabian Grass**, *Support Officer, OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre, Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC) Support Section*

Panel Members:

Lt. Col. Detlef Hempel, *Co-ordinator for the Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security, OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC)*

Ms. Bilge Koçyiğit, *Co-ordinator on Matters Relating to UNSCR 1325, OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC)*

Questions/Answers

10:30-10:45

Coffee Break

10:45-12:15

Panel Discussion: Why Women in Combat?

Panellists will address women's access to combat positions as a matter of military effectiveness, as a human rights concern and as a reflection of front line reality.

Moderator: **Ambassador Miroslava Beham**, *Senior Adviser on Gender Issues, OSCE Office of the Secretary General*

Panel Members:

Dr. Gary Schaub, Jr., *Senior Researcher, Danish Centre for Military Studies*

CWO Alain Guimond, *Sergeant Major, Joint Task Force Central - Land Forces Central Area, Ontario, Canada*

Lt. Col. Olga Scripovskaia, *Commander of the Territorial Military Centre of Bălți, Moldova and former peacekeeper in Liberia*

Col. Mersida Mešetović, *Expert Advisor, Analysis and Assessment of Defence Activities, Department of Policy and Planning, Ministry of Defence of Bosnia and Herzegovina and former peacekeeper in Ethiopia/Eritrea*

Questions/Answers

12:15-13:30

Panel Discussion: What are the Merits of an Inclusive Process?

Panellists will provide advice as to whom the decision makers should consult when deliberating whether to grant women access to combat positions. Emphasis will be placed on how to engage with independent diversity commissions, active servicemen and servicewomen, and civil society organizations.

Moderator: **Mr. Daniel de Torres**, *Deputy Head, Special Programmes, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces*

Panel Members:

Dr. Amanda Kraus, *Principal Research Scientist, Center for Naval Analyses, Alexandria, VA, United States of America*

Col. Jennie Carignan, *Chief of Staff, Joint Task Force Central - Land Forces Central Area, Ontario, Canada*

Mr. Nenad Bosiljčić, *Programme Coordinator, Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence, Serbia*

Questions/Answers

13:30-14:30

Lunch

14:30-16:00

Panel Discussion: What to Do in Practice?

Panellists will discuss the implementation of a decision that provides women with official access to all military positions, including combat roles. They will stress the need to conduct assessments of overall policy and infrastructural changes that must occur in order to fully integrate women and the type of benefits that women will be provided.

Moderator: **Ms. Andreea Vesa**, *Human Rights Officer, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)*

Panel Members:

Col. Patrick Mc Daniel, *Military Adviser, Permanent Mission of Ireland to the OSCE*

Mr. Frank Brundtland Steder, *Senior Scientist, Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI)*

Cdr. Fernando Izquierdo, *Chief of the International Gender Issues Section, Ministry of Defence, Spain*

Questions/Answers

16:00-16:15

Closing Remarks

Ms. Snježana Bokulić, *Head of the Human Rights Department, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)*

Annex III – Background Information on the ODIHR Human Rights, Gender and Security Programme



Human Rights, Gender and Security Programme

In January 2012, ODIHR launched a comprehensive programme to assist OSCE participating States in mainstreaming human rights and gender into their daily security sector activities. The programme is based on relevant OSCE commitments and international standards and builds on ODIHR's track record in this field since 2005. The HRGS programme bridges the Politico-Military and Human Dimensions of the OSCE and works along three thematic areas:

1. Increasing the effectiveness and responsiveness of the security sector by applying human rights and gender equality standards in its work.

ODIHR promotes this through training based on the [Gender and Security Sector Reform Toolkit](#) and other human rights training materials, as well as through assistance to national defence and police academies to mainstream human rights and gender standards in their curricula. The Office also reviews new or existing legislation, regulations, and codes of conduct that govern the activities of the security sector to ensure that a human rights and gender perspective is incorporated in their work.

2. Improving respect for and protection of the rights of all those working within the security sector.

ODIHR raises awareness about the rights of security sector staff through the [Handbook on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Armed Forces Personnel](#) inspired by the 1994 OSCE [Code of conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security](#) and organizes discussions in this area together with OSCE field operations, the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, defence institutions in OSCE participating States, and non-governmental organizations. Follow-up 'peer-to-peer' events focus on further analysing the issues and challenges identified during the discussions.

3. Increasing the diversity of the security sector by providing equal access to and opportunities for advancement in the security sector for men and women of all backgrounds

ODIHR underscores these standards through training based on the [Gender and Security Sector Reform Toolkit](#), as sessions highlight the importance of recruiting, retraining and promoting women in all security sector institutions. The Office also reviews national action plans for the implementation of [UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security](#), as the basis for increased gender balance in the security sector and encourages the development of such plans in all OSCE participating States.

Key strategic priorities for the programme are: strengthening partnerships and co-operation with all relevant stakeholders, facilitating dialogue at different levels, strengthening capacities and synergies, and developing new programmatic resource documents to increase programme effectiveness and impact.

For more information about the ODIHR Human Rights, Gender and Security programme, see <http://www.osce.org/odihhr/44257>.