



Ulkoministeriö

Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland

Utrikesministeriet

Remarks of Minister for Nordic Cooperation and Equality of Finland

Mr. Thomas Blomqvist

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**Secretary-General Schmid,
Vice-president Ms. Ionova,
Mr./Mrs. Chair,
Excellencies,
Esteemed attendees,**

I would like to express my appreciation to the Polish Chairpersonship and OSCE Office of Coordinator of Economic and Environmental Affairs for arranging this year's OSCE Economic and Environmental Dimension Implementation Meeting.

Let me also thank Secretary General Schmid and all delegations for being with us today. It is truly an honor to address this meeting today.

The large number of women in this room and in today's panels illustrate how women's ownership of enhancing the peace and stability in the OSCE region is getting stronger.

Yet let me address all my fellow male persons in this room; We should remember that promotion of gender equality and inclusiveness is about you too. Men and boys in all their diversity are also needed for this task. Working for gender equality also builds prosperous and cohesive societies, but everyone needs to participate in that work.

Distinguished participants,

The Purpose of the OSCE Economic and Environmental Implementation Meeting is to look at the achievements of the OSCE and think of possible ways forward.

This discussion could not have taken place in a timelier manner. Currently, the pressing need for women's economic participation and empowerment manifests itself in many ways.

Russia's illegal war of aggression on Ukraine does not only violate all the key principles of the European security order, but has also a grave impact on the humanitarian situation in Ukraine.

The devastating impact of Russia's war is felt most acutely in Ukraine, but it undermines the security of the whole OSCE area. Its ripple effects are experienced globally. Furthermore we know that crises, such as conflicts and disasters, hits girls and women the hardest. This is also the case in Russia's war of choice, where women and girls endure the most of it.

This underlines the urgent need for concrete action. It is difficult to imagine a better platform to take on this problem than the OSCE.

With its broad mandate based on three dimensions of comprehensive security, and the OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality, the OSCE has the necessary tools at its disposal to strengthen gender equality.

We all know that gender equality has been a contested topic in the OSCE in recent years. The OSCE's Gender Action Plan soon turns 20 years, and is in dire need of an update.

Still, the OSCE can do a lot within its current mandate. Existing decisions on women's economic participation, as well as Women, Peace and Security, allow us to respond to the most urgent issues. Commitments of the OSCE reflect the great importance of promoting full, equal and meaningful participation of women in all phases of the conflict cycle, in anti-corruption activities and in combatting climate change.

Now it is the right time to ponder how to utilize this mandate in the best possible manner. One emerging opportunity is digitalization. Despite the promise that it entails, we need to acknowledge the existing gender digital divide. It could hamper our efforts to create a more inclusive and secure future.

Today, women are underrepresented in the tech field and innovations throughout the OSCE area. This means that our online services, platforms, and others are not free of structural inequality and biases.

Therefore, we must expand access to digital infrastructure for women and girls in vulnerable situations and support digital competences of all women and girls. Without adequate digital skills, there is a risk that women will end up in even more vulnerable positions.

The OSCE is well placed to tackle these issues cross-dimensionally. Representative of Freedom of Media, Special Representative for Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings, and Transnational Threats Department, among others, are already looking at different aspects of gender security in online environments.

The Economic and Environmental Dimension activities could strengthen this comprehensive approach. Including women and their perspectives better in the tech field and innovations would contribute to our efforts to bridge the gender digital divide.

The outcome would be more resilient and inclusive economies, safer online environments, and better access to digital services. It would also contribute to ending violence against women and girls in all their diversity not only on the internet, but also in the physical world.

In closing, I would like to refer to the OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality.

In this document, the participating states have recognized that equal rights of women and men and the protection of their human rights are essential to security and stability in the OSCE region.

We have recent proof of this from Finland. When we assessed the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the state of gender equality in Finland, we noticed that while there have been gendered impacts of the crisis, the equality of the Finnish society mitigated the effects.

Finland ranks high in international equality comparisons. Structures that promote gender equality assumingly have influenced the treatment of the crisis. For example, the high employment rate of Finnish women by European standards probably contributed to the decision to keep kindergartens and schools open.

At the same time comprehensive and a high-quality early childhood education system made it possible for parents, and especially mothers, to work during the corona period. Gender equality is often taken for granted in Finland. However, it requires continuous work, especially in times of crisis.

Thus, it is almost needless to say, that empowering women in the economic sphere is not a weapon aimed at one or another OSCE participating state. It is a tool to enhance the security of all of us.

Thank you for your attention.