



Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting
Promotion of Gender Balance and Participation of
Women in Political and Public Life
6-7 May 2010
Hofburg, Vienna

ANNOTATED AGENDA

Background

OSCE commitments related to gender equality and women's participation in political and public life have evolved greatly in the 35 years since the adoption of the Helsinki Final Act, when participating States committed themselves to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to sex. As early as in 1991, participating States gathered at the Moscow Meeting on the Human Dimension underscored that "full and true equality between men and women is a fundamental aspect of a just and democratic society based on the rule of law"¹ and affirmed their goal of not only achieving *de jure* but also *de facto* equality. Through another landmark document, the Charter for European Security, adopted at the Istanbul Summit of 1999, participating States reaffirmed the essential role of gender equality for achieving a more peaceful, prosperous and democratic OSCE region, and underlined the need to pursue gender equality objectives both at the level of participating States and within the Organization.²

The 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality further synthesized and consolidated the existing commitments and, among other areas of work, prioritised the objective of ensuring equal opportunity for participation of women in political and public life. In parallel, key international legal instruments and policy documents on non-discrimination based on sex, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights the United Nations Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Beijing Platform for Action, have been adopted³.

¹ Paragraph 40, Document of the Moscow Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, Moscow, 1991. The full text of the Moscow Document of the CSCE can be viewed at the following address http://www.osce.org/documents/odhr/1991/10/13995_en.pdf

² Paragraph 23, Charter of the European Security, Istanbul Summit, 1999. The full text of the Moscow Document of the CSCE can be viewed at the following address http://www.osce.org/documents/mcs/1999/11/4050_en.pdf

³ In 1990, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, a subsidiary body of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, adopted the recommendation to member states to achieve the target of 30 % women in leadership positions in governments, political parties, trade unions, professional and other representative groups by 1995.

While the importance of achievements should not be underestimated, concrete advances in the status of women throughout the OSCE region have been limited. The current OSCE-wide rate of women's representation in parliaments stands at less than 22 percent, while it was just over 15 percent in year 2000. Furthermore, the increase in average figures over the last decade is largely due to significant gains in a limited number of participating States. Progress remains uneven across the region.

The Athens Ministerial Conference, held in December 2009, adopted the Decision on Women's Participation in Political and Public Life, which provides renewed momentum to address these challenges and specific directions for future work in this field. This new commitment underlines the need to address the continued under-representation of women in decision-making structures across the OSCE region and calls on participating States to undertake specific measures to promote gender balance in all legislative, judicial and executive bodies, especially emphasizing the need for gender balance at the decision-making levels.

Focusing on implementation, this Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting will assess achievements, gaps and challenges, while outlining actions for moving forward. Having adopted the right legislation is only one element of what should be a broader strategy encompassing various types of measures. The objective of the meeting is to discuss the role of capacity-building measures and gender-sensitive institutional policies for increasing women's participation in political and public life.

Day 1 **6 May 2010**

15:00 – 16:00 **OPENING SESSION**

16:00 – 18:00 **Session 1: Promoting gender equality in the OSCE region – progress achieved and challenges ahead**

OSCE participating States have committed themselves to giving effect to the principles of gender equality and non-discrimination as enshrined in their constitutions and legislation. In order to promote gender-balance and to increase participation of women in political and public life, additional measures need to be taken to identify and eliminate underlying causes of women's under-representation. Specifically, Athens MC Decision on Women's Participation in Political and Public Life calls on participating States to "consider possible legislative measures, which would facilitate a more balanced participation of women and men in political and public life and especially in decision-making".⁴ Furthermore, as a critical step for ensuring gender balance in traditionally male-dominated professional fields, the Decision calls on participating States "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".⁵

⁴ Paragraph 2, Ministerial Council Decision 7/09, Athens Ministerial Council Meeting, 2 December 2009. The full text of the Decision can be viewed at the following address: http://www.osce.org/documents/cio/2009/12/41865_en.pdf

⁵ Ibid, para. 4.

This first session will offer the opportunity for a broad exchange of views on legal and policy instruments and approaches adopted by participating States to foster balanced participation of women and men in political and public life. The discussion will focus on a range of critical issues such as development of effective gender equality and anti-discrimination laws and building national mechanisms for the advancement of women as well as the adoption and implementation of specific measures to achieve the goal of gender balance in all legislative, judicial and executive bodies, including security services, such as police services.

The following issues could be considered during the discussion:

- What lessons learnt and good practice can be drawn from the implementation of gender equality and anti-discrimination laws and policy instruments?
- What measures have participating States taken to establish effective national mechanisms for the advancement of women and to provide these bodies with adequate financial and human resources?
- What examples of good practice can be identified and promoted in terms of providing real opportunities for women to influence the agendas, institutions and processes of decision-making (moving beyond simply increasing the number of women in different positions)?
- What examples of good practice can be identified and promoted for creating equal opportunities within the security services, including in armed forces (allowing for balanced recruitment, retention and promotion of men and women)?
- How are participating States measuring national-level progress in promoting gender-equality in political and public life?

Day 2

7 May 2010

10:00 – 12:00

Session II: Empowering women as political party members and as elected officials

Political parties can be seen as gatekeepers of women's political participation. According to internationally adopted commitments and standards, the principle of non-discrimination on the basis of gender applies to political parties both in terms of the membership of executive and decision-making bodies and as candidates on the ballot. In addition, internal party pluralism and transparency in decision-making are key factors which influence women's opportunities to gain nomination and support from their parties for elected offices. A wide range of legislative and voluntary measures have been put in place in many OSCE participating States, such as financial assistance and training for women candidates within political parties, gender-sensitive candidate selection and

nomination procedures and setting gender-based targets and quotas for the composition of elected and appointed public bodies.

This session will discuss general trends and challenges in the implementation of measures to promote women's participation in political and public life and examples of good practice at national and local levels.

The following issues could be considered during the discussion:

- Which barriers stand in the way of women taking part in the political process? In particular, are there any legal obstacles to women's equal participation as voters, candidates, or elected leaders?
- If opportunities are equal, are women taking advantage of them, and if not, why not? For example, are rates of illiteracy, unemployment, or poverty higher among women? Are there other political or societal barriers to women's participation?
- What methods can be used to ensure that women are given equal opportunities to compete in elections? What steps should be taken to ensure gender-sensitivity in candidate selection and nomination processes?
- What measures can political parties use to ease burdens of the high costs of campaign financing for women candidates?
- What campaign and outreach techniques can political parties take to promote the electoral prospects of women as candidates?
- What steps should be taken by parties, non-partisan civil society organizations and governmental entities to encourage the greatest possible participation of women as voters? How can parties increase the role of women as political party functionaries, campaign workers as well as candidates?
- What are the lessons learnt in the use of gender-based quotas for candidate lists? What are the successful examples of the use of gender-based quotas resulting in an increased number of women in decision-making bodies? How can results achieved through gender-based quotas be made sustainable?
- What steps can parties take to promote internal democracy and transparency in decision-making?
- What are the effective forms of networking and coalition building for promoting the increased participation and representation of women in political life?
- What are the lessons learnt from the work of women's caucuses in parliaments, institutional and/or informal meetings between MPs, the civil sector and government institutions?

12:00 – 14:00 Lunch

14:00 – 16:00 **Session III: Ensuring gender balance and women’s effective participation in public life**

Women’s participation in public life across the OSCE region faces several challenges, including gender-based stereotypes regarding the role of women in society, and the so-called ‘glass ceiling’ - low numbers of women in leadership positions in the public and private sectors, over-concentration of women in certain professional fields, provision of unequal pay for equal work, and challenges in reconciling professional and private/family lives. In addition, women of immigrant and minority communities often face multiple forms of discrimination in various fields of public life.

This session will discuss recurrent challenges for ensuring gender balance at all levels of public life, and will identify areas where further improvements are necessary in order to create an enabling environment for women to enter and pursue effective careers in the public sphere. Particular issues to be discussed include good practices and effective solutions to gender-based discrimination in the employment sphere, combating gender-based stereotypes in education and the media, and efforts to promote a better reconciliation of professional and private/family responsibilities by women and men.

The following issues could be considered during the session:

- What are the good practices in eliminating gender-based stereotypes and public perceptions which prevent women from reaching their full potential in public life?
- What are the effective strategies for promoting gender equality in the work-place and combating gender-based discrimination in the employment sphere?
- What particular steps should governmental, private sector and civil society organizations take to ensure that women are given fair and appropriate consideration for appointments to senior position, especially in sectors and in organizations where they have historically been under-represented?
- How can employers and employees organizations promote gender-sensitive working environments?
- What measures are taken by participating States to eliminate gender-based stereotypes from education curricula?
- How can journalists, editors and other media professionals contribute to achieving the objective of gender-equality and gender-balance in public life?

- How can participating States encourage the sharing of work and parental responsibilities between women and men so that women can enjoy equal opportunities to participate effectively in political and public life?

16:00 – 16:30 Break

16:30 – 17:30 **CLOSING SESSION**

17:30 Close of Day 2