

HEAD OF PRESENCE'S REMARKS AT HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY IN ALBANIA

1 November 2021

I welcome you all to the high-level national conference on “Women, peace and security in Albania”. The Presence has organized this event together with our fundamental long-standing excellent partners - the UN Women and Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. I would like to thank them wholeheartedly for our fruitful co-operation that goes even beyond today's event.

This conference marks the 21st anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, on Women, Peace, and Security. A landmark anniversary, which was part of a very substantive exchange with my OSCE colleagues from the region during the regional heads of missions meeting that was chaired by the Secretary General Helga Schmidt and took place in Belgrade just few days ago, last week.

Among other things, this resolution called for increased representation of women at all decision-making levels, especially in matters of peace and security, and encouraged a gendered perspective to peace agreements, all to remind us that women *suffer adversely from conflicts*. As I mentioned to the participants in a recent OSCE event on “Sustainable peace and stability through inclusive approaches to security sector governance”, as well as in an op-ed published in July, humanity has an eternal debt towards women in the field of security.

From the specific perspective of WPS as Presence in Albania we pay great attention to gender mainstreaming and in particular to Women, Peace and Security agenda. In that context, together with partner organizations, such as UN Women and again the Dutch Embassy, we contributed to the co-ordination of efforts that resulted in the adoption of the first ever Women, Peace and Security Action Plan of Albania implemented 2018-2020 and in the preparation of the next action plan.

The Presence's engagement to support Albania's National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 has shown that civil society is crucial for promoting and advancing the national WPS action plans, especially when it comes to their practical implementation – ranging from the measures related to access to justice, identification, victim protection, rehabilitation, measures addressing positive action to promote women in leadership positions in the country's peace missions abroad, law enforcement at home, and policy making on WPS both at home and internationally. Involvement of civil society is crucial not only when setting the national WPS agenda and shaping policy; its role becomes more and more important when it comes to monitoring and holding state actors accountable for it.

In particular, women rights organizations play an important role in co-ordinating concerted efforts to advance the country's Women Peace and Security agenda through networking for advocacy and lobbying, as the experience of the Albanian Network on Women, Peace and Security has clearly shown.

Since the approval of its Action Plan, Albania has made significant progress to ensure gender balance in the security sector. The personal commitment and expertise of high-level officials in ministries and institutions continue to be an important driving force in this respect. While this can be considered a key success factor, better institutionalization of gender inclusiveness remains of paramount importance for further improving gender equality in the security sector.

Out of the OSCE's 57 participating States, as of late 2020, at least 42 currently have some form of a National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security. Albania adopted its own in 2018, as you know better than me, and since then it has shown a strong commitment towards gender equality: it has already achieved a better score than the EU-28 average for women in positions of power, with 70% of ministerial positions occupied by women in the new Government lately formed. Women in Albania also represent 17% of the state military personnel, and 14.3% of the State Police. Equally commendable, Madame Manushaqe Shehu was the first woman to be promoted to Major General in June 2016, while since last year Albania has also a woman ranked as a first director in the State Police Force.

Furthermore, Women, Peace and Security was one of the priorities of Albanian OSCE Chairpersonship in 2020. Albania continues to prioritize it during its upcoming tenure as a member of the United Nations Security Council. I believe that this creates a new momentum to discuss how we can strengthen our efforts to implement the Women, Peace and Security agenda nationally, as well as internationally.

The Presence, with the support of the Secretariat in Vienna, continues to stand fully committed in supporting Albania with expertise and co-ordination on UNSCR 1325, including through its National Action Plan.

I encourage you to see this event as a platform for the government, national and international stakeholders, for the Assembly of course, civil society and other stakeholders, to discuss the achievements and challenges of the first Inter-institutional Action Plan based on the monitoring process and to set the new milestones in this agenda. Peace and security challenges posed to women will be partially addressed if this is seen only as the government's responsibility. We must take a whole-of-society approach. Investing in diversity and equality will be more than repaid in terms of increasing trust and introducing change.

I would be eager to see today's discussions advance with a view to a joint vision for the future of Women, Peace and Security agenda in this beautiful country.

We remain a dedicated partner in your efforts.

I wish you all a productive and mutually beneficial exchange of views and perspectives. Thank you very much! Faleminderit shumë!