

OSCE's Annual Security Review Conference (ASRC) 2017

Women's inclusion in conflict prevention and resolution in the OSCE area:**Assessing bottlenecks and potential for progress****The state of play**

- As a starting point, I'd like to place *the topic of women's inclusion in the broader discussion about inclusivity, political pluralism and quality of peace processes*. As we have been able to observe through our work in the different regions CMI operates in, a key challenge for long-term stability and meaningful conflict resolution processes pertains to the difficult task of accommodating and harnessing diversity of political views. We prefer like-minded people. Political discourse in most of the transition or peace processes we support tends to be captured by binary, nationalist positioning that marginalize voices that do not fit the mainstream. Peace processes commonly coincide and interlink with wider political transition and state building processes that need to address this challenge. *Broad-based inclusion of different segments of society thus becomes an absolute necessity in this context*, not a mere "ticking the box" exercise.
- *Including more women at all stages of peace efforts is not only the "right" thing to do, but the "smart" thing to do*. Over the past decade, we have come to appreciate how the inclusion of women and their interests in peacemaking is not only pivotal from the standpoint of equal rights, but necessary for a qualitative transition process in the short and long term.
 - Peace processes offer decisive moments when the rules of the political game can be rewritten. Women's inclusion at these critical junctures can pave the way for democratization and more just and equitable societies in the longer term.
 - Empirical evidence shows how women tend to bring in new viewpoints and narratives that are critical to broader population, and widen the scope for potential solutions in conflict prevention and resolution.
 - Women, just like men, play a range of diverse roles in peace and conflict; including those of potential spoilers which can only be addressed if brought onboard.
 - Involving society at large significantly increases the legitimacy of a peace or transition process and its outcomes. Without the active participation of different groups, including women, a substantial part of society may refuse to accept a peace deal, endorse a given reform agenda or participate in its implementation.
- By now, this appreciation has been *consolidated in a strong normative framework at both global and regional level*. The eight resolutions on Women, Peace and Security that constitute the global policy framework to promote and protect the rights of women in conflict and post-conflict situations have become part of our normal lexicon and reflected in OSCE's policy priorities. Over sixty countries have national action plans (NAPs) that mandate inclusion of women in peace and security related processes – and nearly half of these are in the OSCE area.
- *While this normative progress is important and commendable, in itself it has not changed the state of play in conflict-affected countries*. The reality is that women, continue to be excluded from the peace processes that determine the future of their countries; and their potential agency to strengthen more effective conflict prevention and resolution efforts in the OSCE area remains untapped. This may not be surprising, as the norms have translated to limited action. There may be rhetorical commitment to women's inclusion, but it is often not backed

with technical or financial support. As it has been said; serendipity, not systematization, still drives interventions.

- The OSCE has played a central role in realizing the normative leaps on recognizing the fundamental links between women's inclusion, peace and security. As a key instrument for early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation in the region, the OSCE has an exceptional position and leverage to shape the praxis on the ground.

Identifying bottlenecks for progress

For the purposes of our discussion today, I'd like to draw attention to three factors that we see hampering progress on the ground in the OSCE area.

- 1) *The continued exclusion of women in peace processes is a reflection of women's exclusion in politics and society more broadly.*
 - We cannot expect to make progress on women's inclusion on peace and security if women continue to be marginalized in politics and society. The political landscape in the OSCE member states well demonstrates this: For example, Armenia with a total of 9% women in parliament is together with Georgia (11.3%) and Ukraine (12,1%) at the bottom rung in terms of women's representation in parliament.
 - On a positive note, the past two decades have witnessed significant strides in women's overall political representation in the OSCE area. Women's share in parliaments has increased from 15% in year 2000 to over 25% by 2015. This also provides an encouraging example how the OSCE's and its member states' determined efforts to address the gap have made a difference.
 - But an improvement in numbers does not necessarily mean substantive influence, and often masks a reality that limits women's political engagement to tokenistic or symbolic gestures. Women representatives are commonly used as mere "window dressing", or their role confined to specific themes such as education or social affairs. Many factors embedded to the structure and culture of political institutions, including gender stereotyping, informal discriminatory practices, and patronage systems, prevent women leaders from converting their seats into policy-making influence.
 - As empirical studies highlight, the benefits of women's participation in conflict resolution are only fully realized when there is quality participation and the opportunity for influence. In the OSCE region, there is not yet evidence of increased influence by women over formal decision-making on peace and security – despite all normative commitments and women's active involvement in civil society. It is thus imperative to step up efforts with political parties, electoral processes, local politics and parliaments to increase women's substantive influence in politics, including on matters concerning peace and security.
- 2) *Our actions are conditioned by a limited understanding of "peace" and of "process".* Implicitly, we often hold on to the prevailing idea of the negotiating table as the sole place where peace is determined and shaped. The heavy concentration on "Track 1" activities tends to close opportunities for peacemaking; and may even complicate the achievement of more sustainable peace. By widening our understanding of what is required for "peace", and what "process" may entail, also lets us to leverage more informal yet immensely important peace efforts advanced at local level.
 - The settlement processes around the Transdniestrian conflict, around Nagorno-Karabakh and even the peace process in and around Ukraine are a case in point. Very little is discussed in the official formats while communication and consultation with

the wider public remains minimal. In all of these processes, there is a need to reduce reliance on the negotiating table only. It is crucial to be engaged in preparatory work at multiple levels to adjust for unexpected shifts in conflict dynamics or to prepare society for an eventual agreement. It is also noteworthy that women's work across the divide - particularly in the South Caucasus has been one of the few things that have effectively functioned in the process of building bridges across the divides but without getting the glory of the spotlight or feeding to wider efforts. The prevailing understanding continues to view women's peacebuilding efforts in civil society as something marginal and not politically relevant.

- While women's inclusion in formal political structures is lagging behind, we are witnessing a feminization of the civil society sector in the region. Ukraine is a telling example, where up to 80% of all civil society actors engaged on peace-related activities are women. But such peace building activities are commonly perceived as "less political" and distant from the "real politics" – activities conducted largely by men. Notwithstanding their marginal recognition, women activists involved in civil society still face significant forms of gendered violence and harassment for their work in conflict zones, frequently portrayed as bad mothers or women with "a bad reputation".
- Altogether, applying a gendered lens to peace and conflict also reveals deeper power dynamics at play. A gender lens goes beyond simplistic divisions of "gender issues"; of between male and female; to examine the power relationships between socially constructed gender roles and processes that shape the way we understand human agency and political legitimacy; and conceptualize peace, conflict and security.

3) *Resources matter.* We cannot expect to make progress without real financial and political backing. The Global Study on 1325 noted how concrete support to programmes and processes remains abysmally low, constituting a mere 2 percent of all peace and security related funding.¹ The same challenge applies to the OSCE. This was also a key conclusion of OSCE's own review that examined 27 of its member states' National Action Plans on 1325 in 2014. Across the board, both human and financial resources made available to implementing the WPS agenda were perceived to be inadequate. The study also indicated a number of other gaps that curtail the impact of NAPs in many countries, including insufficient engagement with civil society, low capacity in regional and local institutions, poor coordination between government ministries and lack of proper monitoring and accountability mechanisms. It is important to recognize that real progress on Women, Peace and Security agenda cannot be made without clear political prioritization, and reflected in the allocation of budget and necessary resources.

Moving forward

In light of the above, there are several steps to consider when revising strategies on how to ensure inclusion – and in particular women's inclusion – for the benefit of what often are fatigued and constrained peace processes. It is important to recognize how the Soviet system relied on a strong ideological construct which made speaking about different views and diverging opinions unwelcome. Today, most contexts in the region clearly illustrate this legacy: the notion of diversity and plurality of political ideas is politically charged, and many are not ready to acknowledge this as a reality. As a result, individuals and groups outside the mainstream discourse often cannot, or do not wish to, be included in dialogue on peace, as their views are commonly met with aggression or dismissal. In this

¹ Coomaswamy Radhika. (2015) *Preventing conflict, transforming justice, securing the peace: A global study on the implementation of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1325*. New York, UN Women.

context and to make real progress on the women, peace and security agenda, we should also nuance our understanding of *women as political actors*, and *deepen recognition of their diverse roles in peace and conflict*.

I would like to put forward three suggestions for how we could strengthen existing efforts and women's role in conflict resolution in the OSCE: *The importance of first, walking the talk; second, looking beyond the negotiating table; and third, of finding allies*.

- 1) *It is high time for action*. We need to take a critical look at how funding to peace and security is allocated; and how our efforts and processes are structured. The principle of “walking the talk” is not only about backing words with resources, but also about practicing what is preached. The OSCE and its partners have an important role in leading by example and by upholding gender parity in its nominations on peace and security, including on mediation teams in particular processes.
- 2) *There is immense need and value of looking beyond the negotiating table*. First and foremost, there is a dire need to understand peace processes in the region more broadly; not as quick deal-making exercises that take place behind closed doors. They should rather be viewed as unique opportunities to transform societies; unique opportunities for political leaders to accompany their countries through a transition or state-building process; putting the political and social pieces of the puzzle together to build a national identity and a vision for their countries. Dealing with political and social diversity is essential in this process. This understanding would also bring nuance to the way we conceptualize women's inclusion therein. Attention to women's inclusion often revolve around increasing the number of women at the negotiating table. These efforts are important, but should not fixate on numbers: playing a role in the process does not necessarily require a seat at the table. Looking beyond the table often reveals a range of alternative avenues to support women's substantive engagement and leverage their existing efforts in civil society. Activities such as national-level polling, discussion forums or informal meetings with women's groups, together with enhancement of strategic advocacy and influencing skills, have been effectively used in many contexts to channel women's substantive concerns into formal talks and fostering a more broad-based legitimacy for the process. Empirical case studies also show how innovative practices have facilitated gains for women's political influence in conflict and transition settings. Successful approaches have commonly entailed spotting strategic actors; finding ways to build their capacity; and reinforcing their relationships with other stakeholders.
- 3) *No one actor can do this alone*. Considering the limitations that state-focused strategies have in ensuring that all relevant actors are included in processes, strategies need to be focused at connecting informal and formal efforts. The complementarity of actors and actions is key. For instance, involving non-governmental organisations that have the capacity to build bridges and help track one peacebuilding initiatives to listen to the communities who live in the areas affected by the conflict can have a significant value-added in complementing formal efforts. The emergence of networks of women mediators such as the Nordic Women Mediators can provide equally helpful pools of expertise and influence to partner with. We should strive to create broad-based partnerships that draw on specific strengths of different actors.

The OSCE's makeup and purpose make it a unique forum in which to advance the role of women in conflict resolution. It is particularly well placed to push the envelope towards *politically nuanced, context-specific and locally-driven solutions* – rather than simply relying on global prescriptions.

Our discussion today demonstrates OSCE's commitment to this effort, and provides a unique opportunity to advance exactly that.