



## Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

### Workshop “Towards a Strategy for Reconciliation in the OSCE Area”

Vienna, 18 December

Panel 1: Reconciliation and Convergence – Building the foundation for a security community

*Contribution by Sonja Licht,  
President, Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence*

#### **The Role of Women and Civil Society in Building a New Security Community**

“Half of the population in the OSCE region is female. Translated into OSCE language this means: *women make up half of the Security Community*. The OSCE and its participating States have through a number of politically binding documents pledged to protect women from violence and war, to recognize their special needs, to empower them to participate in the political and public life of our societies on equal footing with men, to ensure their equal opportunities in the economic sphere...After eight years of exploring the best ways and practices of how to translate commitments into policies and activities, it is time for the OSCE to take stock of these experiences, including failures, and feed the results into the development of a more structured approach.”<sup>1</sup> (Italics SL)

In a recent media interview, the head of UN Women Michelle Bachelet expressed her frustration and discontent that the women of Tahrir Square had disappeared from the political scene of Egypt as soon as the protest movement against the authoritarian regime had ended. The same story applies to Poland where women were massively active in building up the Solidarność movement – and were even crucial for keeping it alive when, after the military coup, almost all its leaders ended up in prison. However, after the victory of the ‘democratic revolution’ very few women remained active in political life, and the Polish women’s movement, for example, could not stop a very restrictive law on the right to abortion a few years later. In fact, all post-socialist countries faced similar situations – women showing determination and courage when fighting the authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, but then not managing to enter the male-controlled world of political and security decision-making. At the second Belgrade Security Forum Ms Alaa Murabit, founder and president of the Voice of Libyan Women described that during the

---

<sup>1</sup> The OSCE Secretary General’s *Annual Evaluation Report on the Implementation of the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality*, 25 October 2012

revolution women for the first time literally run the cities while men were fighting, and these new duties and responsibilities affected the gender roles in the society. However, after men returned home women did not get recognition for their new role and do not take part in the decision-making process any longer. So similar to what happened in the US, UK and many other countries during and after WWII.

In the countries of the former Yugoslavia, women have faced another distinctive experience, combined with the wave of ‘male democracies’ that characterized the beginning of the transition processes throughout the post-socialist societies– the break-up of the country and the bloody civil strife that accompanied it. Women, and in particular those that were involved in an emerging civil society, have played an outstanding role in the efforts to prevent conflict. They formed the majority in the first anti-war initiatives and movements, organized numerous anti-war protests, and were among the first to start dealing with the consequences of the conflicts – by organizing humanitarian help to refugees, support networks for victims (especially women and children), and by raising awareness among the population about the terrible price of the war and the war crimes committed against civilians. The women in the Balkans were no exception. For example, in the aftermath of the Armenian-Azerbaijan conflict women activists were the only ones daring to maintain some cross boarder communication, and even managed to facilitate exchange of bodies among families of the victims.

The conflicts in the Balkans proved once again that apart of being among the most afflicted victims of wars, women can also be very important actors of peace and reconciliation. However, their potential to build bridges even during the conflict among the communities belonging to different sides of the divide, and especially in its aftermath, was not considered enough when it came to approaching the process of reconciliation and rebuilding confidence among the newly established separate states and societies. Women organizations remained active in communicating with each other, in advocating for the necessity to face the responsibilities for atrocities, crimes and ethnic cleansing. “Thanks to the efforts made by the women’s civil society organizations, not only in the Balkans, rape in war was declared a war crime and crime against humanity.”<sup>2</sup>But after the war ended those same organizations, and women in general were left aside by state structures dealing with the reform of the security sector and did not even get involved in confidence building measures built within various forms of regional cooperation.

Admittedly, the first such mechanism – the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe – included the creation of a Gender Task Force that played a very important role in bringing together women civic and political activists from the whole region. This gender perspective, however, was not mainstreamed enough into other activities, especially those dealing with various forms of security cooperation. It is also true that women organizations themselves were quite often reluctant to develop full-fledged relationships with some of these mechanisms, out of fear that the state-run processes would compromise their independence.

---

<sup>2</sup> Natasa Petrovic, Introduction, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in Serbia – on Women, Peace and Security, Recommendations for drafting the National Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in Serbia, Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence, Belgrade 2010, p. 12

The UN Security Council Resolution, unanimously adopted on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2000 marked a real breakthrough for the recognition of women's role in peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction. "The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 spurred or additionally encouraged many women and men throughout the world to speak out in a different manner about violence against women and children in war but also in peacetime. However, the Resolution has achieved much more than that. In conjunction with three subsequent resolutions (Resolution 1820, Resolution 1888 and Resolution 1889) it sparked of a global debate on the role of women with respect to the changing approach to security, the role of women in the establishment of a new security paradigm."<sup>3</sup>

The Resolution 1325 created a new beginning for the recognition of the fact that "women make up half of the Security Community" as it is stated in the OSCE Secretary General's Annual Report. However, the overt and covert opposition for the implementation of this resolution is still very much present among both decision makers and security expert. How could otherwise be explained that although the resolution is legally binding for all UN member states requiring no additional ratification, twelve years after it was adopted less than 40 countries adopted National Action Plans (NAP) for the implementation of the Resolution? At the first sight the situation in the Balkans is much better: almost all countries of the Western Balkans adopted such plans. This can be explained by the fact that both the organizations such as OSCE, UN Women, UNDP and NATO and women organizations understood the special importance of such a process for this post-conflict region as well as the necessity of creation of regional instruments for the implementation of the Resolution 1325. Hence several regional meetings were held between 2006 and 2012. However, the readiness and will to accept women as part and parcel of the security community, and especially to include a higher percentage of women into the security sector governance are still very weak.

The role of OSCE in the start-up phase of the implementation of the Resolution 1325 was of particular importance since it deals with governments and non-governmental organizations simultaneously, has a very outstanding role in the entire security sector reform and a great potential in bringing all the stakeholders around the same table. It also has the potential and resources to foster regional cooperation in this field. In the case of Serbia the OSCE mission in Serbia was a crucial supporter of the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence (BFPE) and the Ministry of Defense in the preparation of the NAP. BFPE, a civil society organization and the Ministry built a strong partnership that included many other stakeholders: the Ministry of Interior, as well as representatives of other governmental institutions, the Parliament, numerous civil society organizations and experts. Thus, some of the groundwork for a new security community has been born. The NAP was adopted at the end of 2010, almost all the instruments created during 2011, including the Parliament's decision to form the Monitoring Body for the oversight of the whole process. Elections in 2012 slowed down many processes in the country, including this one, thus it is now a new challenge for all who participated in the broad and really inclusive preparation of the NAP to make sure it will become part of Serbia's security sector governance and daily practice.

---

<sup>3</sup> Sonja Licht, Foreword, *ibid*, p. 5

International organizations such as the OSCE, the UN Development Programme, UN Women and NATO, are all not only involved in security sector reforms but also in the strengthening of confidence building processes and reconciliation, including the strengthening of human security throughout the region. Their work in the region, in particular in the context of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, could and should contribute even more to encouraging an intensive dialogue among the various actors from the security sector, parliaments, and civil society. Through a thorough dialogue and cooperation they could develop the necessary confidence among all these actors within each country and region wide and contribute to a lasting stability and security in the Balkans.

It is important to stress once again, that civil society initiatives focused on reconciliation and building a genuine Balkan security community requires an ongoing support of all these and other international organizations. Civil society actors remain the most daring and outspoken in reconciliatory efforts – to mention only RECOM and the Igman Initiative, as the two most well known Balkan regional projects. It is also important to underline that civil society invests a huge energy not only in facing but also in overcoming the past. This is often, as in the case of women, easier recognized on the rhetorical level than in practice, and this is even truer when we talk about activities and their role in the field of security governance than about reconciliation. I would use this exceptional opportunity to mention only two programmes that my organization, the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence is involved in, as an example what civil society actors are doing in the region.

BFPE organizes in partnership with two other civil society organizations the Belgrade Center for Security Policies and the European Movement of Serbia the Belgrade Security Forum. After two sessions in 2011 and 2012 it is already recognized by our numerous partners – the OSCE Mission in Serbia included – as a major venue for debates about the most important security challenges in the Balkans and beyond. The most important outcome of these gatherings so far is that we managed to attract due to very high quality debates a broad range of substantial stakeholders engaged in security issues and international relations. For example, in 2012 Belgrade was a place where numerous global, European and regional security and foreign policy issues were discussed with the participation of 90 discussants, 20 young researchers and more than 400 Serbian, regional and worldwide state officials, academics and experts from scientific and research institutes, civil society representatives, parliamentarians and journalists. Thus, three civil society organizations are providing a new forum for regional cooperation as well and a platform for designing a Balkan security community. Only through open and sincere debates about the most serious problems our region and the world are faced with we may get a chance to become part of the solution and not remain for ever an item on the list of problems.

The second initiative I would like to mention is the Regional Academy for Democracy (RAD). BFPE initiated this project in partnership with all the Schools of Political Studies from the Western Balkans. All of us belong to the Network of Political Schools operating under the auspices of the Council of Europe, and we all work on education and capacity building of men and women involved in different fields of public life in our countries.

After years of successful cooperation within the Balkan part of the Network we decided to make a step further and design a new program that would further contribute to regional cooperation in the Western Balkans in the fields of democracy, human rights, justice and institution building through building the capacities of next-generation political leadership. During three years RAD should improve the knowledge of 150 regional political leaders on the rule of law, human and minority rights, justice and security sector reform, combating organized crime and corruption, social inclusion and gender equality. RAD is seen as an instrument that will contribute to the strengthening of exchange between national decision-makers and their peers in the region, as well as with prominent international experts and political figures. We hope that it will play a role in improving political culture on the national and regional level, and help to develop political consensus on the necessity of regional cooperation in the areas crucial for sustainable democracy and citizen rights protection.