



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

FSC Security Dialogue on “Code of Conduct, with a particular emphasis on the integration of women in armed forces”

20 October 2021

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentleman,

I am delighted to be here today to participate in this FSC Security Dialogue.

The Code of Conduct - unchanged since it entered into force - together with other confidence and security-building measures, has contributed to the transformation of the doctrine, planning, posture and rules of the engagement of OSCE participating States' armed forces.

Its key objective is to govern the role of armed forces in democratic societies.

The respect human rights is a fundamental prerequisite in this regard.

So I thank the Austrian FSC Chair for focusing on the promotion of diversity in the armed forces, including women's integration.

Because as an organization promoting a comprehensive approach to security, we should not only look at politico-military aspects of security when it comes to the armed forces.

As with all other groups and sectors, we also have to do our job in-house, and ensure that human rights and fundamental freedoms of armed forces personnel are fully promoted and protected.

Too often, when we think about human rights and the military, the first thought goes to the responsibilities that armed forces personnel have in terms of complying with international humanitarian law.

This is despite the fact that the recognition of the rights of soldiers is firmly grounded in the code of conduct itself.

That also means ensuring equal rights and opportunities for all.

For women, but also for all socio-economic and educational backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds, and so on.

So that our armed forces embrace all corners of the societies they serve.

So that they can recruit and retain the best - promoting their operational effectiveness, while being wholly representative of our States.

To achieve that, we need a shift in mentality.

Starting at the top, and shared across all ranks.

My recommendation to States is to conduct a careful analysis of their institutional culture, legislation and policies - to actively tackle discriminatory practices and to remove any barriers to the recruitment and aim to include the widest possible diversity of society.

The OSCE is here to help.

This year ODIHR has launched a publication on “Human Rights of Armed Forces Personnel: Compendium of Standards, Good Practices and Recommendations”.

This publication includes a specific section focusing on issues of equality and non-discrimination in the military and puts forward various models and good practices that participating States have applied in order to integrate human rights, and non-discrimination principles into the armed forces.

I would also highlight the OSCE-UNODA Scholarship for Peace and Security training programme, which promotes gender perspectives in the security sector among young professionals. Because awareness raising, guidance and systematic training at all levels is needed to ensure a culture conducive to inclusion.

Being more considerate of diversity and inclusion can also accelerate the Women Peace and Security agenda.

We all know about the Code of Conduct’s voluntary information exchange on UNSCR 1325, which more than 30 participating States respond to each year.

And last year, the Conflict Prevention Centre commissioned an expert to analyse the returns. They showed many good practices across our region which could be drawn upon.

I know many of you were in Sweden recently, for example, where you heard about their excellent work to integrate gender considerations into their conscription model. That ensures gender does not become something that restricts their abilities to recruit or retain personnel, but rather makes sure their defence force is able to benefit from the best available human resources.

We need more of this.

There is also room for more reflection – and I would urge all participating States not to treat the voluntary exchange as another “tick in the box” requirement, but rather as an opportunity for their own analysis, and an opportunity to learn from each other.

I know there is also an ongoing effort among some delegations to promote a reference guide, which would help inform how your Ministries could fulfil their voluntary reporting when it comes to Women, Peace and Security.

I fully welcome this. I hope it will encourage more targeted reporting in future.

That, in turn, will improve our ability to analyse and propose recommendations to you, creating a positive feedback loop.

The Code of Conduct is only as strong as the collective will of its signatories.

It is only as strong as their readiness to be bound and guided by its provisions.

Implementation is the primary responsibility of the participating States.

I would invite all of you to scrutinise how you can use it to promote inclusion and women’s integration.

The OSCE executive structures will remain at your disposal in this endeavour, providing practical assistance and advice, contributing to outreach activities and raising awareness among participating States and Partners for Co-operation alike.

Thank you for your attention.