



Joint Statement
by the Chairperson of the OSCE MenEngage Network
Ambassador Andrej Benedejčič
at the 1178th Meeting of the Permanent Council
on the occasion of the International Women's Day
Vienna, 8 March 2018

Mr. Chairperson,

I am addressing the Permanent Council in my capacity as Chair of the OSCE MenEngage Network. This network was launched at the OSCE in 2012 with the aim to raise awareness of the key role and contribution of men in promoting women's rights and empowerment, as well as ending gender-based violence and discrimination. I am therefore pleased to be also speaking on behalf of the United Kingdom, Sweden and Iceland, as previous OSCE MenEngage Chairmanships, and of Austria, Finland, Kazakhstan and Turkey, as initiators of the OSCE-Wide Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. I am equally glad that this statement is supported by Albania, Andorra, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Monaco, Mongolia, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland, Ukraine and the United States of America.

Mr. Chairperson,

Today we mark the International Women's Day. Its original aim was to promote equal rights for women, including the right to vote, and it has been observed for over 100 years now. In this period of time a lot has been achieved, also in the area of women's political participation. Still, important challenges remain. According to last year's report by the World Economic Forum, it will take another 100 years to close the global gender gap if current trends remain unchanged. This represents a clear call to action. While celebrating all the accomplishments to date, we should also use March 8 to remind ourselves that more needs to be done. We therefore commend the Italian OSCE Chairmanship for putting this topic on the agenda of the Permanent Council and thank Ambassador Verveer for her statement. We also thank her and Ambassador Azzoni for their kind words in support of the OSCE MenEngage Network.

In the OSCE we are well positioned to do more. The Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality from 2004 provides a comprehensive set of tools to promote gender equality, as an essential component of comprehensive security. This valuable document recognizes the need to appropriately reflect a gender perspective in the activities conducted by the OSCE. It also encourages participating States to take all the necessary measures to encourage gender awareness-raising and to promote full and equal participation of women and men in society.

Looking at the Secretary General's 2016 Annual Progress Report, which was presented last September, we can see that a lot of progress has been made, but more remains to be done. This does not apply only to a higher representation of women at senior management

positions in the OSCE executive structures, but also to the organization's activities. For example, out of 378 projects that included gender mainstreaming elements in 2016, only 14% had gender equality as a principal objective. The level of such projects is particularly low in the politico-military, as well as in the economic and environmental dimensions.

The politico-military dimension also remains one of the major realms where we need to face and overcome equality gaps, particularly with regard to recruitment and promotion of female candidates. While we are currently witnessing a raised awareness of the importance of empowering women to contribute fully and equally to conflict prevention, crisis management, conflict resolution and peace-building efforts, the proportion of women participating in peace processes continues to remain very low. As pointed out in the lessons learned of the September 2016 OSCE National Action Plan Academy held in Vienna, far too often, gender equality remains an "add-on issue", rather than being mainstreamed into all phases of the conflict cycle. The responsibility to address this situation lies both with the participating States and our Organization as a whole.

We should also remember that gender equality is not only important for more effective security processes, but is also a key driver of economic growth. This is why gender perspective has to be even better integrated into programs and activities of the second dimension as well. Moreover, although the human dimension is most successful in gender mainstreaming in the OSCE, additional efforts are needed to ensure that all projects in this dimension are fully gender mainstreamed, rather than focusing only on gender balance in participation. Much more needs to be done also with regard to the persistence of violence against women and girls in the OSCE area, which causes severe societal and economic costs, on top of human suffering and physical harm. We, therefore, regret that the ministerial draft decision on preventing and combating violence against women could not reach consensus and stand ready to continue discussions on how we can step up our efforts and strengthen the OSCE's response in this regard.

Mr. Chairperson,

The remaining challenges in the implementation of our existing commitments should also serve as a reminder of the key and complementary role of men in achieving gender equality. Men can support the voice and leadership of women, act as role models to other men and boys and speak out against violence against women and girls. They can also engage in overcoming traditional gender roles, including by championing equal parental roles in family life and sharing care and other responsibilities. In short, they can crucially contribute to breaking down of the existing barriers and stereotypes. In this connection, we welcome the MenEngage Expert Meeting, organized by the OSCE last November. We also underline the importance of initiatives such as the International Gender Champions, recently joined by the Secretary General, and the UN Women's HeForShe campaign, since they not only raise awareness, but also mobilize leadership involvement.

Finally, we would like to strongly welcome the decision of the Italian OSCE Chairmanship to mainstream the gender perspective into all of its activities this year. Gender equality is a cross-cutting issue and it should be treated that way. We would also like to highlight the important role of the OSCE executive structures in promoting gender equality and, in particular, the work of the Gender Section under the able leadership of Ms. Amarsanaa Darisuren, the Senior Adviser on Gender Issues.

Thank you.