



INTERVIEW WITH JAMILA SEFTAOU I

“Gender mainstreaming”

Gaining a foothold in OSCE policy and practice

Gender equality is essential to the OSCE’s security mandate, since stability and sustainable development are not possible without the presence, participation and advancement of women, says Jamila Seftaoui, Senior Adviser on Gender Issues in the Office of the OSCE Secretary General. A German national with Mediterranean roots, she has had extensive experience leading projects in several countries in Africa, Asia and Europe as a gender and public health specialist with the German Technical Co-operation agency GTZ and the UN Population Fund. Patricia Sutter, Editor of the OSCE Magazine, recently spoke with Ms. Seftaoui to find out how the Gender Section has been meeting the challenges of mainstreaming gender aspects across all dimensions of the Organization’s work.

Patricia Sutter: Every year, the Secretary General issues an evaluation report on the implementation of the OSCE’s 2004 Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality. What role does this comprehensive review play in your work?

Jamila Seftaoui: The Secretary General’s evaluation report is an important monitoring and reporting instrument. Every part of the OSCE contributes to it, so the participating States are provided with an accurate picture of how the Organization and its different structures have been progressing in implementing the priorities of the Action Plan.

The report’s analysis is debated at the Permanent Council, and the outcome of this debate guides the Gender Section and the rest of the OSCE for the coming year. In a way, the report also serves as the basis for dialogue, monitoring and sharing of tasks among the Gender Section and field operations, units in the Secretariat and OSCE institutions, such as the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

And of course, the Action Plan lays the framework for all our action. To put it in a nutshell, the Gender Section’s mandate is to assist the Organization and the participating States to translate this plan into reality. We respond best to this commitment when we involve all sectors. **So, how does a small team with limited resources tackle the daunting task of promoting a genuinely gender-inclusive culture in the world’s largest regional security organization?**

One could say that our mantra has been: “Achieve more with less”. The first thing my staff and I did when I joined the OSCE in November 2007 was to think strategically and cost effectively and to set ourselves clear goals. Our priority

was to expand the scope of our thinking about gender beyond a mere counting of numbers of men and women in the different units.

We decided to reshape our programme around a few specific themes, looking, for example, at the role of gender in migration, policing, environment and violence. We knew that, among the three OSCE dimensions, the third — or human — dimension was where gender activities were largely concentrated, mostly in the sphere of women's rights. So we chose to adopt the thematic approach in areas where gender had been least addressed. This meant devoting special attention to the politico-military and economic and environmental fields — the first and second dimensions of security.

We also assigned priority to activities that we felt could easily be replicated or adapted elsewhere and which were likely to have a catalytic effect. We wanted to move away from fragmented initiatives with low impact. And, finally, when we saw that there was scope for identifying good practices that had been tried and tested in various parts of the world, we took advantage of the opportunity to facilitate the documentation and exchange of these practices, and we targeted audiences that would benefit most from them.

What are some of the results that you have seen since adopting this approach?

It has been heartening to see that many of the field operations, Secretariat units and OSCE institutions are now better equipped to look at their core activities from a gender perspective. Border management, the combating of terrorism and policing are just some of the areas that are opening themselves up to gender needs assessment; this is the first task in gender mainstreaming. We've been providing our colleagues with advice and tools, and several units now have their own action plans and indicators to enable them to track progress independently.

Vienna, 8 June. Focal points for gender issues play a crucial role in promoting the gender agenda in the field, in OSCE institutions and in the Secretariat.

We have also identified community policing as an area in which we can achieve tangible results. Policing can be made more gender-responsive by increasing the number of female recruits in police forces. Now, we all know that many countries cannot achieve this goal overnight, but it does not mean that they cannot carry out other parallel measures with almost immediate positive results. As the OSCE Office in Baku found out (see story on page 14), a simple gender needs assessment, which looks at specific security threats to women and men and facilitates interaction with women, greatly improves the way police forces see their work.

An example of a relatively small project with a potentially high impact is the one that resulted in our new publication showcasing good practices designed to prevent and combat violence against women. Already, we have been seeing keen interest in this resource among practitioners. This proves that it makes good sense to harness the global reservoir of lessons learned and share them with parts of the OSCE region that are only just now coming to grips with the phenomenon of violence against women.

Why is a security organization such as the OSCE concerned with violence against women?

Let me pose a question in response: How can an organization whose membership has unanimously subscribed to a solemn pledge to achieve gender equality and combat violence against women waver in its commitments at a time when the incidence of this devastating human rights abuse has hardly changed, if at all, over the past five years?

And, let's be clear: We should never subscribe to the belief that domestic violence is a matter that victims should deal with privately, nor should we think it's the business of humanitarian organizations. Violence against women has nothing in common with a natural disaster. It is



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a clear demonstration of historically established inequality between men and women. When participating States committed themselves to combating violence against women — whether perpetuated by the State or by individuals, whether in times of war or in times of peace — they sent a strong signal that they were ready to come together, roll up their sleeves and tackle this problem which is a stumbling block to stability and prosperity in many societies in the OSCE area.

In early April, the French chairmanship of the Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC) invited you to speak on the topic of gender and security. What was the significance of this invitation?

I had been invited specifically to report on a round table meeting that the Gender Section organized in March 2009 on the value of engaging women in peace processes and in military and security matters. It was the first time the Senior Adviser for Gender Issues had ever addressed this body, so I considered it rather encouraging. A concrete result was that the current and next FSC Chairmanships are quite open to holding other sessions to discuss linkages between gender and security matters.

Some delegations later asked how they could help advance the gender agenda. I suggested that opportunities for engagement could take a number of forms: Firstly, they could acknowledge that there is no such thing as “hard” and “soft” issues if the security of civilians and communities is at stake; secondly, they could keep sight of gender aspects during FSC debates and decision-making, whether these concern arms control, military reform, demining or the disposal of noxious substances; and thirdly, they could tap into our expertise whenever they needed guidance in their efforts to fulfil gender-related commitments.

What other breakthroughs do you find yourself wishing you could achieve?

That would be quite a list! But if I had to name one, it would be that I would like to see a number of the OSCE values, which attracted me to join the Organization in the first place, reflected in its gender profile. I have in mind especially the stark imbalance between the proportions of men and women who are managing the OSCE’s programmes and steering its vision. Currently, just 19 per cent of senior management positions are filled by women. This does not do justice to the lofty values we stand for such as inclusiveness and democratic governance.

Those of us in the OSCE and from participating States who are involved in recruiting or nominating staff should do more to increase the proportion of women at higher levels. Participating States play a crucial role in this respect. They should task the Secretary General and hiring

units with ensuring that the proportion of senior managers of either sex recruited does not exceed 70 per cent. The participating States should also commit themselves to this goal whenever they nominate national candidates for senior posts under “secondment” arrangements.

This is not about having to accept a female candidate over a better-qualified male candidate or compromising on quality. Rather, it means expanding the pool of qualified female applicants so that we can have a more balanced representation between the sexes.

Speaking of gender balance, the Secretary General’s most recent evaluation report on the Action Plan recommended engaging more men in gender work. As the co-ordinator of the network of about 40 gender focal points in the OSCE and its institutions, have you noticed any progress on that front?

It’s important that gender issues not be considered synonymous with “women’s issues”, to be tackled only by women. I can report that this particular recommendation is starting to bear fruit: More men are now serving as gender focal points.

The gender team has also been trying to ensure that the focal points acquire a better appreciation of the potential role of men as advocates for gender equality. This year, we scheduled our meeting of focal points in June, to coincide with a symposium on violence against women. One of our speakers was Todd Minerson, who heads the highly successful White Ribbon Campaign — men working to combat men’s violence against women — and the focal points were able to exchange views directly with him.

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Gender matters in the OSCE

is a comprehensive CD tool kit with concise and user-friendly material that presents basic gender concepts and illustrates gender mainstreaming methods and practical examples.

The CD is aimed at helping OSCE staff and senior managers to be more effective in addressing the needs of men and women throughout the whole process of implementing activities in all dimensions of comprehensive security. It is divided into five sections:

- Introduction to gender issues and definitions
- Gender mainstreaming
- Gender matters in the OSCE
- Gender at work
- Resources

Through video spots, representatives of participating States and OSCE officials share their views concerning various aspects of promoting gender equality. *Prepared by the OSCE Gender Section*

