

# Women's Security and Rights in a Changing Region Dubrovnik, Croatia, 12 – 15 December 2005

## **1. Background and Context**

Security Council Resolution 1325 (SCR 1325) on Women, Peace and Security (2000), represents an important achievement for women and women's organizations in placing gender and women's rights as a priority in all efforts focused on conflict prevention and resolution, peace-building, peace-keeping, as well as rehabilitation and reconstruction.

Under its ongoing project in Kosovo, in 2004 UNIFEM supported a group of women leaders from the Balkans region to convene to review and discuss SCR 1325 and to brainstorm on opportunities to advocate for advancing its implementation. As a follow up to that a regional working group was formed, composed of two representatives from each of the countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, FYR Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, Kosovo). An eRoom was activated to facilitate exchange of information and ideas among the working group that supported preparation of a workshop on SCR 1325 held in October 2004 in Sarajevo, led by the NGO "Zene Zenama" for participants of the regional working group. The workshop contributed to increased knowledge on the resolution and its relevance to women in the region.

In December 2005, UNIFEM supported an informal consultation in Dubrovnik, Croatia, "Women's Security and Rights in a Changing Region", requested by women activists in politics and the civil society sector from seven Balkan countries – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, FYR Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro and Kosovo. The meeting was held in the context of the on-going peace process in the Balkan region and accession negotiations to the EU, and addressed the need for informal exchange of views on these current political developments.

### **Objectives of the consultation**

- To provide an opportunity for informal exchange of views on recent and upcoming political developments – to discuss the current security situation in the region, the on-going peace process as well as access to the EU
- To facilitate the establishment of collaboration between women activists in the region and to increase women involvement in regional peace programmes and negotiations

## **2. Key Points from Country Presentations**

Serbia – country overview, regional situation, international context

- High rate of unemployment and issues of public expenditure contribute to women being pushed back to traditional gender roles
- The state is in need of reform – corruption a problem, no constitution, legislation need to conform to international standards
- Important to think about what will happen when the status of Kosovo has been decided, the problems in the region and in Kosovo will not disappear
- Serbia is a potential EU candidate country, and before entering the EU Serbia has to adopt certain legislation protecting women and women's rights. Some mechanisms and legislation protecting women are already in place
- Many Serbians are negative to the EU and the prospect of joining, but ought to regard the integration process as an opportunity towards change. According to a poll, 90 % of Serbians found own personal standards the most important issue
- Serbia is in a fragile state and the situation of women might grow worse instead of better
- Society and politics are directed towards patriarchal and conservative values – but women's situation will hopefully improve from now onwards
- Serbian representatives stressed that no women have been part of public negotiation teams, and that it is necessary to make channels that enable women to run states without copying macho styles

#### Croatia – country overview, regional situation, international context

- Most widely discussed issue is the capturing of General Gotovina
- The Pension System is not working
- Economic situation is worsening – health reforms put more burdens on patients, unemployment rate higher (60% are women). Despite positive legislation on gender equality issues women have been pushed back to traditional family roles of a mother and cook
- The ruling party is conservative and the Catholic Church is strong, worrying to one of the Croatian representatives
- Judiciary not functioning – poor protection of human rights
- No development programs – social rights are not in focus
- Haag important issue
- Strained (?) relations with BiH – construction of highway postponed
- Official negotiations with the EU has recently started, the public has no information about what has been discussed so far, ought to discuss more about the euro integration process, what are the gains and losses?
- Status of Kosovo not discussed (in public?)
- What impact will the EU integration process have on women and women's issues?

#### Kosovo – country overview, regional situation, international context

- Difficult economic situation – high rate of unemployment, gender and age discrimination when applying for job
- Integration of minorities need to be regulated according to international standards
- Status of Kosovo, Montenegro and BiH all important issues to the region
- Other important issues: democratization, international trade, collaboration needed to tackle organized crime, trafficking and to unify the approach towards minority rights in the region
- *Main issue – status of Kosovo*, ought to be the main issue for the whole region
- Lack of women's participation in decision-making procedures, including negotiations on status of Kosovo. One representative underlined that women have expressed their wish to take part in the status negotiations, and not only in discussions specifically concerning women's issues
- UNMIK seems to lack interest to include women in important decision-making processes
- Women from the region need to come together and explore channels how to take active part in discussions and political decision-making processes in the region
- UN Resolution 1325 has not been implemented in Kosovo – need to put on international agenda in order to be discussed

#### Bosnia and Herzegovina – country overview, regional situation, international context

- The new Constitution is a priority issue, transfer of the authority from entities to the state – negotiations about the state of BiH without women represented. All political parties sent representatives to the negotiations, but only men
- Gender equality legislation exists but is not well implemented
- Unemployment and poverty are current problems, and corruption and crime are flourishing. Women and middle-aged people face discrimination in relation to employment. Girls' education is becoming endangered due to poverty. Many young educated people want to leave the country
- Single mothers and refugees have a difficult time supporting themselves and their families, due to lack of sufficient education
- Women are predominantly supporting the idea of a united BiH with national authority over the entities. The political situation in the region is somewhat turbulent – if Kosovo is granted independence, the Republic of Srpska will probably want to be independent from BiH

#### Macedonia – country overview, regional situation, international context

- Difficult economic situation – no development programs, orientation towards trade, no production, and high unemployment rates
- Organized crime and corruption need to be tackled on regional and international levels

- Macedonia has introduced new gender equality legislation, and several mechanisms have been established to ensure gender equality. Implementation need to be improved, and – women are still predominantly absent in decision-making processes
- Macedonia is a EU candidate country, and harmonization of legislation is in process of implementation. Polls show that Macedonian citizens are positive to integration into the EU
- Status of Kosovo is important for all countries in the region. Macedonia and Greece are debating over visa system

### Montenegro – country overview, regional situation, international context

- Priority issue is the status of Montenegro in relation to Serbia
- Difficult economic situation. Collaboration with neighbouring countries important in issues of trade, refugees and returnees
- Montenegro is a potential EU candidate country and mechanisms for the transition have been established (laws and regulations have to adjust to EU standards)
- Gender equality issues are not given a priority, but a Gender Equality Act is in the process of being ratified by the Parliament

### Common Issues

- The economic situation is difficult in the whole region. Unemployment rates are high (in Croatia 60% of unemployed are women) and women are being pushed back to traditional gender roles of mother and cook. In Kosovo and BiH, women and the middle-aged are facing discrimination in relation to employment
- In the whole region, women are being left out of important decision-making processes that greatly influence the future state of the Balkan region, such as the negotiations on the status of Kosovo and the state of BiH
- The prospect of future membership of the EU has generated legislation to ensure gender equality in the region, but implementation need to be improved
- Organized crime, trafficking, refugee issues and corruption need to be tackled on regional and international levels

### **3. Concluding Remarks and Next Steps**

- A representative from Kosovo reminds about the SCR 1325 – why is it not being implemented?
- All participants want to continue with informal meetings, at least one representative think that formal meetings would be better

- Establish how often the group wants to meet in the future, what topics to discuss, who to invite (e.g. representatives of minority groups, representatives from IMF, World Bank)
- Establish some form of regular channels of communication, continue to exchange information and opinions. Maybe designing a regional declaration (a Balkan Declaration), similar to the Beijing Declaration, could be helpful?