

## **REGIONAL WOMEN'S LOBBY FOR PEACE, SECURITY AND JUSTICE IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE (RWL SEE)**

### **PRESS RELEASE ON UPDATED RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE RWLSEE ROUNDTABLES HELD IN GRACANICA, NOVO BRDO AND ŠTERPCE**

Prishtina, 11 December 2015

This Press release is about the dialogue among women of different ethnic communities in Kosovo and women from the region of Western Balkans, which was held in Gracanica and Novo Brdo on 21st and 22nd July 2015 and later on in Štrpce on 11 December 2015. It is an updated information since it includes recommendations for all three municipalities different from the press release of 10 August 2015 which referred to the meetings in two municipalities.

The three meetings provided forum for discussion and recommendations on the issues of women empowerment in local level, particularly of Albanian and Serb women, the ways of increasing interethnic understandings and exchange of experiences on EU integration.

The meetings focused specifically on Brussels dialogue and implementation of agreements, where through first hand briefings and discussions, women could share views on this important process and on what role women can play in helping effective implementation of these agreements that benefits all citizens of Kosova.

This project of RWLSEE was supported by UN Women and the Finnish Embassy in Kosovo, to which RWLSEE expresses high gratitude for their support and participation to these important meetings. Also, our thanks goes to the Mayor of Novo Brdo and

Founded in 2006, the *Regional Women's Lobby for Peace, Security and Justice in Southeast Europe* (RWL SEE) brings together women politicians and activists from the region who are committed to the goals of deepening human security, promoting women's rights and participation in decision-making processes and breaking barriers of ethno-centric politics. The Lobby has a total of 23 members from the 7 different countries of the region: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia.

The RWL's activities focus on lobbying and advocacy at the national, regional and international levels through meetings with politicians, seminars, roundtables, international conferences, press releases and other actions. The RWL SEE is open to requests for information, media inquiries and expertise and advice on a wide range of issues related to Women, Peace and Security in SEE.

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Gracanica Municipal Assembly Chairwomen for their hospitality and participation, and to all women participants from the two municipalities and from Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia.

Following the debate and discussions the following recommendations are presented:

**Recommendations:**

- ✓ Dialogue between women of different ethnicities and countries should be supported by national governments and international organizations, in order for women voice to be heard on relevant issues that affect women, interethnic harmony and democracy in countries in the region
- ✓ Women should increase engagement in dialogue for relevant topics and particularly on women and interethnic issues because it is a way of increasing mutual understanding and building common ground for the agenda on women and ethnic, social and institutional reintegration.
- ✓ Further empowerment of women in political, economic and social life is necessary to ensure equal participation and representation of women in central and local institutions.
- ✓ Increasing the women participation in political parties is one of main conditions for women empowerment in political decision making in local and central level
- ✓ Women must be active and ready to take responsibilities in all levels and sectors of public life, regardless barriers of different nature because self-confidence and pro-activity leads to a greater inclusion of women in decision making levels and peace process. Women are a strategic asset that should be given equal opportunity to contribute for democracy, development and peacebuilding.
- ✓ The women representation at local governance leadership is poor in general. At the level of mayors of municipal directorates there are almost no women. In the three municipalities where the meetings were held, participants expressed deep concerns on lacking access and chances to assume decision making positions. This situation has to change in favor of gender balance, through inclusion of women at the decision making levels of municipalities throughout the country as well as the countries in the region.

- ✓ There should be more support offered to women at local levels in relevant areas including:
  - Economy
  - Politics
  - Social life
  - Property issues
  - Domestic violence, etc.
- ✓ Women should support women in any efforts of advancing the status of women, act united against phenomena that affect women, especially domestic violence issue and issues of family laws and life-long partnership
- ✓ Women participants support the Brussels dialogue and calls for speeding up implementation of reached Agreements, in order to establish normalization of situation and integration of Serbs in the Kosova institutions, as well as, support normalization of relations between Kosova and Serbia with EU facilitation because it contributes for peace and stability in the region and speeds up European integration for Kosovo and all countries in region
- ✓ Ensure transparency and more information about Brussel Agreement particularly at municipal levels. The RWLSEE roundtables are providing a good model for this purpose while allowing to learn from other countries experiences in reintegration of minorities after the conflict.
- ✓ Women participants highly value the role of the RWLSEE as a unique women organization of regional dimension and they call for more regional cooperation among women, based on RWL model. Exchange of experiences among women throughout the region would contribute in learning how to make inroads in empowering women and democracy for all.

### **Specific recommendations for all three municipalities**

- ✓ Support for women in decision making levels at municipal levels in politics, economy and safety areas. Lacking of women in high level positions in decision making is a real concern. Most women are in gender equality committees.
- ✓ Support for women during the electoral campaigns. Quota assures women participation and inclusion in municipal assembly, however competition for better quality can be assured during campaigns
- ✓ Support for more integration of Kosovo Serbs through inclusion in public and social life as well as employment in all areas of public and private sector

- ✓ Increase the employment opportunities for women. Low number of employed women, even lower number of businesses led by women
- ✓ Support for a good education system is necessary for creating core values on how to live together and progress in the future
- ✓ Minority language rights to be respected, learning languages of majority and minorities helps integration and interethnic harmony
- ✓ Encourage women to overcome the problem of lacking will or interest of women to involve in politics or to become an entrepreneur
- ✓ Solution is required for medical employees and others from former parallel structures who remained unemployed after the reintegration into the Kosovo institutions
- ✓ The problem of budgeting especially regarding health and education on municipal level must be resolved
- ✓ Resolving the property issues remaining unresolved since 1999
- ✓ Support for women NGOs who work for women, democracy and multiethnic projects
- ✓ Encourage private companies to employ Kosovo Serbs
- ✓ Ensure the women inclusion and gender balance in the Association of Serb majority municipalities
- ✓ Remove the parallel structures in municipalities to ensure rule of law democracy and full integration of Kosovo Serbs in the Kosovo system