



REGIONAL WOMEN's LOBBY for PEACE SECURITY and JUSTICE in SEE (<http://rwlsee.org/>)

Impact Stories: The Power of Women's Influence in the Western Balkans

Empowering Women and Peacebuilding in the Western Balkans in Action: Edita Tahiri (Kosovo), Memnuna Zvizdic (BiH), Flora Macula (Kosovo), Sonja Biserko (Serbia), Nada Drobnjak (Montenegro), Irina Pockova (North Macedonia), Melita Mulic (Croatia), Edlira Cepani (Albania)

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May 2026 Skopje Regional Peace Dialogue Initiatives

In May 22-23, 2026, women leaders, peacebuilders, civil society representatives and international actors gathered in Skopje for the Regional Dialogue Conference “Translating Peace Agreements into Reality: Women Drive Sustainable Peace in the Western Balkans and the regional local peacebuilding conference “From Inclusive Processes to Inclusive Peace: Local Women Promoting Peace Agreements, Ownership and Inclusive Participation.” Beyond the formal discussions and recommendations, the conference brought together remarkable women whose experiences, leadership and commitment continue to shape peacebuilding across the region: Edita Tahiri, Chair of RWLSEE; Flora Macula, RWLSEE Steering Committee Member, Kosovo; Sonja Biserko, RWLSEE Steering Committee Member, Serbia; Memnuna (Nuna) Zvizdic, RWLSEE Steering Committee Member, BiH; Nada Drobnjak, RWLSEE Steering Committee Member, Montenegro; Irina Pockova, RWLSEE Steering Committee Member, North Macedonia, Melita Mulić, RWLSEE Member Croatia and Edlira Cepani, RWLSEE Member, Albania. Their stories reflect different paths, perspectives and generations, but they share a common belief that sustainable peace requires women's meaningful participation, leadership, cooperation and a voice in the decisions that shape their communities and the region.

1. Edita's leadership journey began with being a leader of independence of her country Kosovo. it has since expanded through a variety of roles in government and formal peace negotiations, known as the only women peace negotiator in international peace negotiations and Chief Negotiator in the region of the Western Balkans. Her focus lies in gender equality and women's empowerment in politics, decision making, leadership in peace, security, justice and stability processes in the post-conflict Western Balkans. She is the leader of the RWLSEE and its founder together with other women leaders.

"I'm proud to see outcomes in our region where women's empowerment is progressing in parliaments and governments but not yet in formal peace negotiating tables," she says, recalling this project that helped making history establishing formal linkage between informal and formal peace processes, namely between the RWLSEE's regional peacebuilding dialogue platform (track 2 peace process) and the Brussels Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia (track 1 peace process).

Her passion is achieving full gender equal political power sharing and women leadership to prevail for a better, peaceful and secure world.

Tahiri also recalls: When women from across Southeast Europe began coming together to build the Regional Women's Lobby for Peace, Security and Justice, the region was still carrying the deep divisions and consequences of the conflicts of the 1990s. For more than twenty years, RWLSEE, t has become that space /a platform through which women continue to challenge gender inequality and the idea that peace should be negotiated only by men, particularly in light of the weak results of such peace processes.

For more than two decades through RWLSEE, Dr. Edita Tahiri has worked to ensure that women are not left outside the political decision-making processes that shape peace and the future of the Western Balkans.

*Dr. Edita Tahiri, RWLSEE Chair, Former Deputy
Primeminister and Chief Negotiator, Kosovo*



As Chair of the Regional Women's Lobby for Peace, Security and Justice in Southeast Europe (RWLSEE), she and other women leaders helped build a regional platform where women from politics, civil society and local communities can come together across borders to sustain dialogue and advance peacebuilding. Today, it is a highly respected regional organization.

In follow up and building on previous achievements, the May 2026 Regional Dialogue Conference in Skopje became an important moment in that effort. Women parliamentarians from Kosovo and Serbia, together with women leaders, civil society representatives and experts from across the

Western Balkans, came together to discuss how to move peace agreements from paper to implementation and how to ensure women's equal participation in the process.

Edita claims: "Peace does not come by papers and men, but by implementation and women." Agreements can establish commitments, but they do not by themselves change the lives of people who continue to live with the consequences of unresolved political and social divisions. For her, implementation was central to the peace agreements she reached with Serbia, through EU facilitation over seven years. She argues that we must work harder to ensure that women are part of the governing and decision-making process, not only as observers or advisers, but as participants with influence over the decisions being made.

Therefore, for Tahiri, the significance went beyond the two-day meeting. The Conference helped establish a formal link between the women-led regional dialogue facilitated by RWLSEE and the official Brussels Dialogue. Following her diplomatic engagement with the EU Facilitator of the Dialogue, Peter Sorensen, the Conference marked an important step toward the establishment of a Women's Advisory Platform connected to the Brussels Dialogue.

Tahiri described this as a historic achievement: a first formal connection between the official peace process and a women-led regional peacebuilding platform that has sustained dialogue among women across the region for more than two decades.

For someone who has spent years calling for women to have a place in formal peace processes, the significance of that connection is deeply personal. It represents an effort to turn a long-standing demand, women's meaningful participation into an actual mechanism through which women can influence peacebuilding.

This is also where Edita sees the future of women's leadership. Peace cannot be owned only by negotiators and institutions; it must also be understood and supported by citizens and communities. Women's proximity to communities, she argues, gives them a particular perspective on human security and on everyday realities that determine whether peace is actually felt by citizens. The Conference therefore emphasized stronger connections between formal and informal peace processes, greater local ownership, and stronger cooperation among women across the region.

For her, the sustainability of RWLSEE lies not only in maintaining the regional network built over the past two decades, but in ensuring that its experience, relationships and leadership continue to benefit future generations, while emphasizing that financial support is key to its continued operation and to achieving the changes needed to move from fragile peace to lasting peace in the Western Balkans.

After years of standing in leadership at the intersection of formal politics, peace processes and women-led peacebuilding platforms, **Edita's work points to an outstanding conviction: peace is not sustainable when half of society is missing from the process of building a brighter, more peaceful future. She insists that women cannot wait another decade for gender equality to become a reality.**

2. Flora, a leader in gender equality, women's empowerment and the WPS Agenda, and a founder of the RWLSEE together with other women leaders, has, in her capacity as a Head of UNIFEM and later UN Women, worked with dedication and a shared belief that women needed not only to participate in discussions about peace, but also to have their own regional space to build dialogue, cooperation and influence. Flora Macula, who has worked tirelessly for women's rights, equality and justice since 1999, has also played an important role in sustaining this regional platform. For Flora, her story raises a simple but powerful question: what can women build when they choose cooperation across borders, even when challenges and history make that cooperation difficult?

For Flora, the significance of RWLSEE is not only in the number of women it has brought together, but in the relationships and trust built across political and historical divisions. She has seen how women from Kosovo, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Serbia, Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and across the region were able to create a shared space around peace, security and regional cooperation despite different political and historical experiences.

At the May 2026 Regional Dialogue Conference in Skopje, Flora reflected on this journey and the unique role RWLSEE has played in sustaining regional dialogue. She also brought the discussion back to the people whose peace processes are ultimately meant to serve. Speaking about the implementation of peace agreements, she emphasized that sustainable peace cannot be built only through politicians. Civil society organizations are often closest to citizens and understand their



needs and concerns. Women's organizations, in particular, can serve as a bridge between institutions and communities, combining direct engagement with citizens, services, advocacy and accountability.

*Flora Macula, RWLSEE Steering Committee
Member, Kosovo; Chief of Staff, Priministers Office*

She recalls, "The Skopje Conference brought this legacy into a new phase. Women from across the region contributed to ways forward as how to strengthen their participation in formal peace processes, connect regional and local initiatives, build public ownership of peace agreements and ensure that women's voices influence decisions that affect their communities. For Flora, this also points to the future of the movement: regional cooperation must continue to create space for new generations of women to contribute, lead and shape the peace agenda.

Flora states, that the next chapter is about ensuring that the trust built among women over the past two decades does not remain a legacy of the past, but becomes a foundation for younger women, stronger communities and a more inclusive and sustainable peace.

3. Sonja, a leader in human rights and women’s empowerment, was one of the few consistent voices defending the oppressed during the wars in the Western Balkans in the 1990s. For Sonja Biserko, regional cooperation is not simply about bringing people together in the same room. It is about making dialogue possible when political circumstances make it difficult.

As a member of the Regional Women’s Lobby for Peace, Security and Justice in Southeast Europe from Serbia, Sonja Biserko has been part of a regional network that brings women together across political and historical divisions. The Skopje Regional Dialogue Conference provided another opportunity to strengthen that space for dialogue while asking a more difficult question: how can women move from advocating for peace to having concrete influence over how peace is implemented?! The Conference came at a time when the implementation of the 2023 Brussels Peace Agreement and Ohrid Implementation Annex remained stalled, and women continued to be underrepresented in formal peace processes. Participants emphasized that sustainable peace requires women’s meaningful participation, stronger regional cooperation and links between formal peace processes and the communities affected by them.

*Sonja Biserko, RWLSEE SC Member, Serbia;
Executive Director, Helsinki Committee for
Human Rights*



For Sonja, this meant looking beyond calls for inclusion and focusing on what could make women’s participation possible in practice. She emphasized the need to identify concrete mechanisms that would bring women’s voices closer to formal peace processes and strengthen the connection between official negotiations and the regional women-led initiatives working alongside them.

For Sonja, the value of the initiative was also in looking beyond the immediate political context and asking how women’s regional cooperation can remain relevant as circumstances change. In her closing remarks, she highlighted the importance of the Conference in shaping a renewed regional agenda for RWLSEE and adapting its work to the evolving regional and international context, while continuing to promote peace, dialogue and women’s leadership.

The discussions reinforced an important lesson: regional cooperation does not happen automatically. It needs spaces where women can exchange experiences, challenge assumptions and continue working together despite political differences. Participants specifically called for stronger solidarity among women through cross-border cooperation, exchange of experience, joint advocacy and mutual support.

Sonja states that renewing the regional agenda is therefore not about abandoning the foundations built over the years, but about making sure that RWLSEE continues to respond to a changing political

and international environment while keeping peace, dialogue and women's leadership at its centre. Moreover, continuing this work means ensuring that dialogue remains possible and that women remain part of shaping what comes next.

The Skopje initiative therefore strengthened more than a conversation. It contributed to a regional platform through which women can continue to connect, advocate and keep peace and dialogue on the agenda, even when formal political processes face obstacles.

Her passion for lasting peace and gender equality is rooted in her belief: "Keeping Dialogue Open When Politics Divides."

4. Memnuna, a long-standing leader in civil society, carries the belief that "women must help women for the world to be peaceful and better." She argues that "peace agreements cannot become meaningful simply because they are signed but rather become meaningful when people and communities understand their relevance, support and participate in their implementation, and see their benefits in their everyday lives."

Memnuna (Nuna) Zvizdic is a founder and Steering Committee Member of the Regional Women's Lobby from Bosnia and Herzegovina. She brought this perspective to the Skopje Regional Dialogue Conference, where she moderated a discussion on one of the foundations of sustainable peace: legitimacy. For her, peace agreements need more than political commitment, they need the understanding, trust and ownership of the people they are meant to serve. Her message was clear: sustainable peace requires citizen ownership. When communities are excluded from peace processes, agreements risk remaining distant political commitments rather than becoming part of people's everyday reality. The Conference explored how women can help build public trust and confidence in peace processes and how peace agreements can become more connected to the needs and experiences of communities.

*Memnuna Zvizdic, RWLSEE SC Member, BiH
Former Director of NGO "Zene Zenama"*



This focus was particularly important because the Conference did not look at peace implementation only through national institutions or formal negotiations. Participants emphasized that local communities, civil society and minority groups must have a meaningful role in implementation. Women working directly with communities were recognized as important actors because they understand local needs and can help build trust, dialogue and social cohesion.

Nuna's perspective reflects the experience of a region where peace is not an abstract concept. It is something communities experience, negotiate and live with every day. That is why she emphasizes the importance of ensuring that citizens have a voice in how peace processes develop and are implemented.

For Nuna, the initiative created an opportunity to connect regional discussions about peace agreements with the realities of citizens. It reinforced the idea that women's contribution to peacebuilding is not limited to political representation: women can also act as bridges between institutions and communities.

This perspective is central to the wider work of RWLSEE. The Conference recommendations called for peacebuilding to be understood as a bottom-up process, based on local ownership and the active involvement of women, youth, community and municipal actors.

Nuna's experience illustrates why this connection matters: women are not only participants in political processes, but often the people helping communities navigate the consequences of those processes. When women bring the concerns of communities into regional conversations, peace becomes more than a political commitment; it becomes something that people can understand, participate in and claim as their own.

For her, strengthening women's role in peacebuilding therefore also means strengthening the connection between regional decisions and the people those decisions are meant to serve.

Her long-standing dedication to peace and women's empowerment rests on her belief: "Making Peace Matters First to Communities and Then to the Entire World."

5. Nada, a leader in parliamentary and political efforts to advance gender equality and the WPS agenda.

Nada Drobnjak, as a member of the Steering Committee of the Regional Women’s Lobby for Peace, Security and Justice in Southeast Europe, has worked hard to strengthen women’s participation in public life and regional cooperation. Yet, one message from the Skopje Conference stood out clearly: lasting peace requires stronger connections between experienced women leaders and younger generations.

As an effective moderator, she argued that “peacebuilding is not only about agreements and institutions, but also about people, relationships, and the transfer of knowledge from one generation to another.”

Nada inspired innovative, forward-looking discussions among women from politics, civil society, local communities and international organizations to reflect on the challenges of implementing peace agreements and women’s role in peace processes. It is worth highlighting that participants repeatedly emphasized that peacebuilding cannot remain limited to formal negotiations; it must



also include the regional voices of women involved in Track 2 peace processes, as demonstrated by the conference itself. The importance of involving local communities, women’s organizations and young people was also strongly emphasized.

*Nada Drobnjak, RWLSEE SC Member, Montenegro;
Former MP, Former Head, Parliamentary
Commission for Gender Equality*

Nada recalls that “one of the important outcomes was the recognition that women leaders have a responsibility not only to advocate for peace, but also to support and mentor younger women who will continue this work in the future.”

The discussions in Skopje reinforced the importance of regional cooperation among women and youth in overcoming the legacies of the past, building trust and strengthening reconciliation, and highlighted mentoring as a way to strengthen local communities, build trust and ensure that younger women become active participants in dialogue and decision-making processes.

Her passion for empowering women and advancing peacebuilding as an unstoppable process rests in her belief: “Passing Leadership Forward Is Necessary.”

She believes that investing in women’s leadership and youth engagement is essential for sustainable peace in the Western Balkans. By connecting experience with new perspectives and encouraging women to support one another, regional initiatives can help ensure that peacebuilding remains inclusive, locally grounded and responsive to the needs of future generations.

6. **Irina**, RWLSEE Steering Committee Member from North Macedonia, believes that peacebuilding cannot succeed if it remains disconnected from the communities that experience the consequences of political tensions and divisions.

As a member of the RWLSEE Steering Committee from North Macedonia, she has been part of a regional network working to ensure that women's experiences and perspectives are reflected in discussions about peace, security and cooperation.

The May 2026 Regional Dialogue Conference in Skopje gave Irina an opportunity to bring this perspective directly into the regional discussion. As moderator of the panel on local women building peace and supporting the implementation of the 2023 Brussels Agreement, she helped bring together women working at community level from Kosovo, Serbia and Montenegro. Their experiences highlighted a central message: peace agreements may be negotiated at the political level, but their implementation is ultimately felt by people in their everyday lives.

Opening the discussion, in her capacity as a host, Irina emphasized the importance of making peace

implementation processes more inclusive and locally driven. She pointed to a gap that is often overlooked: discussions on peace take place mainly at central and political levels, while women living in communities directly affected by tensions and divisions hold valuable firsthand knowledge about what works, what creates trust and what remains unresolved.



Irina Pockova, RWLSEE SC Member, North Macedonia; Member (Former President), Women's Chapter of SDSM political party of Sv. Nikole

The panel demonstrated the value of bringing these experiences into regional dialogue. Women participants spoke about community engagement, interethnic cooperation, compromise, resilience and the importance of civil society in creating space for dialogue and social change. Their experiences reinforced the idea that sustainable peace cannot be achieved through political agreements alone; communities, and particularly women, must have a meaningful role in shaping and implementing peace.

For Irina, this is also about changing how women's participation is understood. Women should not be seen only as people who support the implementation of decisions made elsewhere. Their knowledge of communities and their ability to build relationships across social and political divides make them important actors in peacebuilding and decision-making.

The Skopje initiative strengthened this approach by connecting women working at local level with regional political dialogue and by turning their experiences into recommendations for policymakers

and decision-makers. It also reinforced the importance of linking formal peace processes with local and women-led initiatives.

For Irina, the lasting value of such regional cooperation lies in creating a space where local experiences can travel beyond individual communities and influence wider peacebuilding efforts. By bringing women together, sharing their knowledge and connecting local realities with regional discussions, the initiative contributes to a more inclusive understanding of peace and to a stronger foundation for sustainable peace in the Western Balkans.

Her commitment to inclusive and locally grounded peacebuilding rests on her belief: “Sustainable Peace Begins in Communities, and Women Must Have a Meaningful Role in Shaping It.”

7. Melita, an experienced politician, diplomat and peacebuilder, and a member of the RWLSEE, brings a perspective shaped by years of engagement in politics, diplomacy and peacebuilding.

Melita recalls that the initiative offered a space for reflection on the broader global context, noting the growing challenges facing democratic values, human rights and international norms. She argues that peace agreements and international commitments should not be open to selective interpretation but should be clearly understood and implemented.

Drawing from Croatia’s experience with electoral quotas and gender representation mechanisms, she believes that women’s participation is not only a matter of numbers, but also of bringing different perspectives and values into political leadership, decision-making, diplomacy and peace



processes. Melita Mulić, RWLSEE Member, professional diplomat and former Member of Parliament of Croatia, emphasized that meaningful representation can help ensure that women’s perspectives become part of the political and peacebuilding processes that shape societies.

Melita Mulic, RWLSEE Member, Croatia, Advisor to the President, Former MP, Croatia

Her belief in meaningful women’s participation rests on a simple conviction: “Women’s Representation Is Not Only About Numbers, but About Bringing Different Perspectives and Values to Leadership and Peacebuilding.”

8. Edlira, a leader in civil society and peacebuilding, brings a strong commitment to inclusion, participation and gender equality in decision-making.

RWLSEE Member and National Coordinator of “Equality in Decision Making” in Albania, Edlira Cepani during the Skopje Conference reflected on the legacy of conflict and the importance of



speaking openly about peace and reconciliation. She emphasized that “silence can no longer be an option when addressing the challenges facing societies in the region.”

*Edlira Cepani RWLSEE Member, Albania
National Coordinator “Equality in Decision
Making” Civil society leader*

Cepani highlighted that inclusiveness is a key ingredient of legitimate and sustainable peace processes. She argued that transparency, participation and dialogue between citizens and policymakers are essential for building trust and ensuring meaningful ownership of peace agreements.

Her work is also deeply rooted in advancing gender equality in decision-making. As National Coordinator of “Equality in Decision Making” in Albania, she continues to advocate for women’s meaningful participation, with a strong belief that greater equality is achievable and that efforts must continue until it becomes a reality.

Her dedication to gender equality and women’s participation rests on her belief: “Equality in Decision-Making Is Achievable, and We Must Never Stop Until It Becomes a Reality.”

Regional Dialogue Conference, Skopje, May 22-23, 2026

