



CONCEPT NOTE

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT FOR A PEACEFUL BALKANS AND EUROPEAN FUTURE

REGIONAL CONFERENCE

Tirana, Albania, 26 October 2019

1. Background and Rationale

Peace and security in the Western Balkans continue to be threatened by weak democratic institutions, rule of law, corruption, low economic growth, ethnic division and distrust, recent geopolitical challenges, non-resolution of normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia and delays in European and Euroatlantic integration of countries in the region. The ongoing fragile peace is having negative effects on the agenda of gender equality, leaving women in sidelines of decision making and peacebuilding processes in the region.

The current situation in women's status in the Western Balkans looks discouraging because the gender equality is far from being real. The role of local women remains undervalued and marginalized, which is intolerable. Deep gender inequality continues to shape the public life while civil society organizations suffer from insufficient support. Today, women are mostly given a space in parliaments or local assemblies, thanks to quota, which is not a real empowerment while serves as appeasing to public conscious about gender balance. Despite the recent progress made globally, women in the Western Balkans continue to face severe barriers in their way towards empowerment and gender equality. The nature of barriers are not only those that women face everywhere in the world but also the barriers resulting from the post-conflict context of the region, where male dominated politics considers that power is reserved to them.

RWLSEE considers that women's empowerment and gender equality helps create a foundation for long-term growth and peaceful, just and inclusive societies. Time has come for power to women and strives to ensure gender power balance, where women and men decides equally and together for a future, namely for a gender inclusive future. We maintain that investing in women's empowerment and gender equality is a strategic priority for a better future for all, for a peaceful, democratic, stable and prosperous countries and the region. Women are strategic potential to maximize the human capital for the development, not only because they are a half of population, but also because they pursue the concept of peace and governance oriented to citizen's interest and not to their personal interest, which make an essential difference from men. This is why, the goal of strengthening participation of women in decision making implies having gender equality in government and public administration and to have women take



up leadership responsibilities for ensuring a better future, while having citizens and particularly youth hopeful for the future in their countries, instead of searching for their future somewhere abroad.

To respond to the lack of real progress on the empowerment of women and to the persistent instability in the region, the RWLSEE and the UNWomen provide a platform to women to raise their voice and share the vision about concerns, challenges, prospects and way out of the current situation in the region, from the perspective of European integration.

Since its creation thirteen years ago, the RWL SEE has been bringing together women in leadership positions, in government and civil society, from across the Western Balkans to advocate and lobby for gender equality, women empowerment in decision making, and women's meaningful participation in addressing security challenges at local, national and regional levels. This mission remains as relevant today as it was at the time of the Lobby's creation. Today, the RWLSEE can be considered as a most reliable regional actor in promoting and implementing the WPS agenda in the Western Balkans.

The RWLSEE platform, part of which is this activity, is carried out within the framework of the UNWomen and Swedish Government/SIDA supported project "Women's political empowerment, participation in and contribution to peace and security processes in the Western Balkans, phase III". The activity contributes to the implementation of the women peace and security agenda (WPS), UNSCR 1325 and others, UNWomen Generation Equality Agenda, Sustainable Development Goals 2030 and other UN and EU instruments for gender equality.

A special opportunity to accelerate WPS agenda and meaningful participation of women in peacebuilding and democratic state building in the Western Balkan countries comes from upcoming historic anniversaries; the 20th anniversaries of the Resolutions 1325 and the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform are Motivation. Hence, we anticipate an increased readiness of governments and international organizations and political will to put in action the commitments taken for significant advancement of gender equality and comprehensive empowerment of women.

2. Activity

In these challenging times for peace and prosperity in the Western Balkans and delays in European integration, investing in empowerment of women is one of strategic directions which can help maximize human resources in building a just, peaceful, prosperous and democratic future. Despite the fact that the current situation in the region has discouraging in regard to gender equality, women have shown sufficient strength to strive and engage in building a gender inclusive peaceful future.



REGIONAL WOMEN'S LOBBY for PEACE SECURITY and JUSTICE in SOUTHEAST EUROPE -- RWLSEE (<http://rwlsee.org/>)

With the goal of strengthening women's participation and putting women at the heart of leadership of decision making, peacebuilding and European integration, the Regional Women's Lobby in South East Europe (RWLSEE) and UN Women, with support of Swedish Government, are organizing the regional conference entitled **"Women's empowerment for a peaceful Balkans and European Future."**

The Conference will address the issues of empowerment of women in the Western Balkans, expansion of their participation in political decision making, peacebuilding, peace processes, justice, dialogue and reconciliation and European integration processes of their countries through regional cooperation.

Having in mind that ensuring equality between women and men remains 'unfinished business', the Conference will address challenges and prospects on women's empowerment in decision making and peacebuilding with focus in increasing the women's participation at the peace negotiating tables. It will discuss how regional cooperation among women can help them and the region, in overcoming current challenges including fragile peace and security, weak rule of law, weak economy and problems with emigration of youth to western countries, due to lack of hope at home.

A special focus will be given to the Brussels dialogue as a key contribution to peace and stability in the region, ways of overcoming two years stalemate in dialogue, ensuring women's participation at negotiating table and ensuring a durable and gender inclusive outcome. This will also serve as an opportunity for participants to strategize on how to increase women's participation and contribution to the track 1 talks, as well as how to continue their mediation at the local level.

The Conference will bring up the issue of equal access to justice for women as most vulnerable category. The discussions will address how to establish accountable and gender inclusive justice institutions and gain confidence in them, consolidate transitional justice to redressing the victims that recognizes their dignity as citizens and as human beings, establish international justice for women victims of conflict related sexual violence and, applying facilitation/mediation as a tool to enhance women's equal access to justice.

The Conference will also look at how European integration can be done for women and with women, through discussing the EU's efforts to promote gender equality as part of EU enlargement policy, and how aspirant countries of the region respond to EU reforms for accession and standards for gender equality.

New ideas, experience sharing, and innovative initiatives will be fostering synergies for the benefit of the women across the borders in the region, as well as, common goals of consolidating peacebuilding and European integration of all six countries in Western Balkans. Special focus will be to the Brussels dialogue on normalization of relations between two parties, increasing women's participation in negotiating table

and ensuring that the outcome will contribute to peace and stability in the region and respect gender inclusiveness. The Conference will also address issues of gender inequality in justice and transitional justice and delays in establishing international justice for women survivors of conflict related sexual violence, mediation as a tool for access to justice, as key pillars for reconciliation and peacebuilding in our region of a troubled past.

The recommendations will offer concrete policies and actions to be tabled to national, regional and international authorities and other stakeholders, in order to achieve the identified goals. Discussions on implementation of the recommendations are likely bring up barriers for women in their road to gender equality. Among the key barriers are: patriarchal mentality and stereotyping, lack of security, discrimination in access to justice/transitional justice, uncertain economic prosperity, continued violence against women, as well as lack of sufficient support mechanisms, which make up major ingredients of peace and development.

3. Objectives

The key objectives of the Conference are:

- Accelerated empowerment of women as key drivers of peace, justice, stability, prosperity and European and Euroatlantic integration
- Ensuring that women are at the decision-making table when issues of peace, justice and security are being discussed, and gender equality/women's empowerment is addressed, for a just and inclusive society
- Regional cooperation between women politicians, parliamentarians, government officials, civil society from the Western Balkans solidified based on dialogue and trust building, through sharing ideas and experience and good practices of cooperation in the region
- Preventing conflict and reducing tensions in "hot spots" of insecurity in the region, especially relations between Kosovo and Serbia in the EU facilitated Dialogue, by sharing information, helping mobilize them to address concerns, and supporting them raise issues of direct interest to them. Working with women from different ethnicities together will support trust, reconciliation and inclusive society
- EU accession process is encouraged, awareness raised for speeding up European reforms in each country, and the concept of EU integration for women with women is better grasped
- Bringing to the attention of those who oversee national and international policy making and decision making, Brussels dialogue authorities, the importance of addressing gender inclusive peace processes, justice/transitional justice, economic development, security, and other social concerns



REGIONAL WOMEN'S LOBBY for PEACE SECURITY and JUSTICE in SOUTHEAST EUROPE -- RWLSEE (<http://rwlsee.org/>)

The project supports interventions at the regional level. In the longer term the project aims to help consolidate peace and stability, normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia, and to reduce the fears and concerns of women from different ethnic communities by involving them directly in peacebuilding and decision making.

4. Participants, Location and Time

The Conference will bring together women leaders from the region, politicians, parliamentarians, civil society activists, government officials, RWLSEE Steering Committee members from focus countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, members of the RWLSEE branch in Albania, UN Women and the Embassy of Sweden in Kosovo.

The Conference will take place on 26 October 2019, in Grand Hotel Spa, Tirana, Albania