



Presentation of Gender Balance Report

2 July 2014

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Walburga Habsburg Douglas (MP, Sweden), OSCE PA Vice-President*

President Krivokapic, colleagues,

It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to speak with you about the subject of gender equality. That our discussion occurs within the framework of the plenary session reflects the particular emphasis the Parliamentary Assembly places on this subject. I deeply regret that our Special Representative on Gender Issues, Dr. Hedy Fry, could not be with us, but I look forward to seeing her at our next meeting in Geneva.

I am here today not only in my capacity as Vice-President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, but as a member of the Swedish Parliament, whose female representation rate of 44.7% is fourth highest in the world. I am proud to be part of a society which so explicitly recognizes the importance, indeed the necessity, of women's participation in public, economic, and political life. The vibrancy of Sweden's culture, the dynamism of its economy, and the guarantee of safety enjoyed by all its citizens is engendered by the empowerment of its women. As UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon has famously stated: we can never reach 100 percent of our potential if we exclude 50 percent of our people.

It was in recognition of this fundamental truth that the OSCE produced its Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality in 2004. Building upon decades of work in international fora that established norms and principles to combat the marginalization of women, the plan identified six key areas for participating States to focus their efforts. Since then, the Secretary General has released yearly Action Plan assessment reports, reiterating the need for participating States to maintain a proactive approach to gender equality.

Our Parliamentary Assembly has contributed immensely to this prioritization: every one of our declarations since 1992 has included gender-specific language, and we have produced many relevant resolutions seeking to encourage participating States to expand upon their commitments

in this realm. I applaud this track record, and happily note its continuance in several resolutions on the docket this year.

In addition to these efforts, Dr. Fry works tirelessly to report on the gender situation in the OSCE region and keep the issue of gender equality at the forefront of our organization's agenda. Since 2001, as part of the Special Representative's mandate, the PA has produced a Gender Balance report whose contents cast a critical eye on the OSCE and evaluates the degree to which we have been able to abide by our own directives. In Dr. Fry's absence, I will present this year's findings.

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So, what has transpired since our last report in Istanbul? Unfortunately, the progress toward gender parity within the OSCE governmental structures has stagnated and, in some areas, regressed from one year ago. The OSCE maintains a total staff of 2,430, of which 46 percent are women. This number obscures, however, the underrepresentation of women in management positions – a figure which stands at 30 percent, a 4 percent decline from 2012. So while women are approaching nearly half of the OSCE's total workforce, they remain largely confined to the general service staff and lower-tier positions. Within the Secretariat and Institutions, for example, women hold only 36 percent of management jobs. In the field operations, that number is a mere 32 percent. Among the seconded staff of the OSCE, 37 percent of posts are occupied by women. The on-going dearth of women in upper-tier positions is exemplified by the Office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), where 10 of 13 P+ positions belong to men.

While these numbers remain below expectations, there are some encouraging signs. The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) saw the number of females in its P+ category rise from 46 to 52 percent. The Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM) continues to be a bulwark of gender balance with 80 percent of P+ posts held by women, a 23 percent increase from 2012. And the appointment of Astrid Thors to head Office of the High Commission on National Minorities in August of 2013 was a welcomed development given that institution's gender imbalance.

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In our Parliamentary Assembly there is a similarly problematic gender disparity, but cause for optimism as well. As of February of this year, women represent 32 percent of our MPs. While on the surface this is discouraging, it should be noted that this figure is a 5 per cent increase from 2011, when we passed a resolution on improving women's representation at the OSCE PA. I am pleased to report that the PA's efforts to reduce the national delegations comprised solely of men has also borne fruit; since 2009's introduction of a sub-clause to rule 1 stating that national Delegations should have both genders represented, the number of delegations in compliance has steadily increased. I hope the momentum in both of these dimensions will continue.

Figures within the Assembly's leadership are notably positive. Of our nine Vice-Presidents, 4 are female. In the General Committee, 5 of 9 officer posts are currently held by women. This amounts to 45 percent representation of women in the Bureau – a praiseworthy number that should serve as an example to the rest of our organization.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

Two weeks ago I had the opportunity to present at the OSCE-Asian Partners for Cooperation conference in Tokyo. I noted that despite the sincere efforts of the OSCE, issues of security, inequality, and exclusion continue to disproportionately impact women in our region. Thus, while I have just presented an overview of gender representation within the structures of our organization, let us not confine our discussion to this facet alone.

In this, and the subsequent gender lunch I will be hosting, I am interested in hearing your perspective of the myriad of challenges faced by women in the OSCE region, including, but not limited to: reproductive health, trafficking and exploitation, vulnerability in economic crisis, and sexual violence in war, just to name a few. On this last topic, I would like to highlight the diligence of our British colleagues, who hosted an impressive summit in London earlier this month. Their collective efforts to eradicate this heinous crime may serve as a template for action in other dimensions.

Finally, I would like to conclude with what I stated in Tokyo: rhetoric alone is not enough to remedy the problems we seek to redress. Words are merely a starting point. It is imperative that they are accompanied by a sincere political push and sustained support. We should bear this in mind when discussing the means by which to tackle these issues.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to hearing your input.