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2022 ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSION
IMPLEMENTATION MEETING

Vienna, 15 November 2022

Closing Session

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**The way ahead for the OSCE region –
Enhancing women’s leadership role and their full, equal and meaningful
participation in economic and environmental activities**

Dear Secretary General Helga Schmidt,

Dear copanelists, diplomats, ladies from the business sector, dear all.

I think as long as people talk about this topic, and it is subject to analysis and conferences like this, the problem does still exist. The positive signal that we have achieved our goal is the moment when no one will need to discuss this question anymore. For example, for me, this issue, in everyday work, where I decide, does not exist. Let me tell you a little bit about my experience.

I established my company almost 35 years ago, after my studies, when my country was still part of Yugoslavia. Today, my company is one of the leading IT software producers and system integrators in the country. The position of women in my company, as it can be easily concluded, is very strong — me, for example. I have always held a leading position absolutely equal to the positions of my three male partners. We have never discussed this topic between us and it has always been understood without the need for further explanation.

What I want to highlight is that it does not matter whether we talk about a man or a woman. The candidate's qualifications and willingness to find a place in the collective are more important than gender equality discussions.

As the president of the ICT Chamber of Commerce in North Macedonia I would like to note, there is, however, one problem that the IT industry is facing with the new trends that are inevitably coming like Artificial Intelligence, Deep

Learning, Machine Learning etc. In these areas, that are the future of our sector, the number of girls enrolled at all universities around the world has dropped dramatically. Only 5% of students enrolled in these fields are girls and around 9% of the working professionals are women. If this is the future of our industry, economic power and positions are going to be back in the hands of men. That means that the hard-won gender balance we have now will be dramatically disrupted and women will lose their power and position.

However, I can also proudly say that at this moment, the ICT industry in our country is in a much better position compared to the highly developed European countries and the rest of the world. For example, this year out of 2000 students enrolled at the Faculty for Informatics, more than 40% are women. This may seem insufficient, but we must note that the average ICT industry women in surrounding Bulgaria and Romania are 36%, while the percentage of women in this sector in Europe is 17%. To my surprise, the average in countries like the Netherlands is 8% and Belgium is 37%, while the percentage in the US and Canada is 25-26%.

That means that we have gone far in the positive sense regarding this topic. Here's at least one thing that European countries could learn from us.

On the other hand, for the careers of women in the public sector, I would say that the situation is far from glowing. There are quite a few women, but unfortunately, very few in leadership positions, and very few in top management. So, there is a big difference.

In my country for example, women are under-represented in public office, and they face multiple challenges when attempting to access political decision-making positions. In the 2021 local elections, women were elected to only 2 of 81 mayoral positions. In the current parliament, 49 of the 120 seats (40%) and 4 of the 15 ministers in our government are women.

Regarding this issue, political parties and the political system should take further steps to encourage the participation of women in the electoral process and in internal political decision-making. Most political parties do not have effective internal promotion mechanisms and do not engage their women members in

developing them. Issues related to gender equality and women's rights are under-represented and largely absent in parties' campaigns. Additionally, women are more subjected to offensive language during political campaigns.¹

It is crucial for women in the political world and international organizations to be on the decision-making table when discussing the current global challenges we are facing such as war, health crisis, climate change, biodiversity loss, waste management, pollution etc.

If we go back to the business sector, one recent study² that I read, pointed out that only 7% of CEOs in Fortune 500 companies are women. I would like to ask you all why is that? What can we do to empower women to take on more leadership positions and tackle the issue of gender equality?

What can we do about these issues?

I believe, women should be able to independently recognize and overcome obstacles in the work environment resulting from gender stereotypes and to identify opportunities for their professional development. Women should be :

1. be respected as an absolutely equal part of the team.
2. Offered work flexibility, even during working hours, especially when she returns from maternity leave.
3. There should definitely be no difference in pay and remuneration compared to male counterparts.

Equality can only be achieved if a woman is financially independent, any other theory of equality is unsustainable to me. It is very important for women and young girls to be economically independent, and I believe they will achieve this most easily if they dive into the waters of the ICT industry. By being financially independent, women can then be more involved in greener

¹ <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/9/3/514666.pdf>

² https://equals-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/WP4_D4.1_EQUALS-EU_Colloquium_Report.pdf

technologies and push a more environmentally sustainable agenda through digitalization.

Finally, I would like to salute the multiple initiatives regarding women leadership OSCE is trying to implement and the organisations commitment to promoting and supporting the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions on women, peace and security in the OSCE region.

I would also like to say that I look forward to North Macedonia's chairmanship of the OSCE in 2023, and I strongly believe that with hard work and determination, together, all 57 country members of the organization, we can push a stronger agenda for women's economic prosperity and stability.