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REGIONAL FORUM: PROMOTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS AND TURKEY

“INTEGRATED POLICIES, INCLUSIVE PARTNERSHIPS”

SKOPJE, 27-28 NOVEMBER 2018

This report was prepared by the Regional Programme “Ending Violence against Women in the Western Balkans and Turkey: Implementing Norms, Changing Minds.”

It was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the Regional Programme and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

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Under the auspices of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia and on the occasion of the campaign 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, the Regional Forum, aimed at taking stock of the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), saw a plethora of actors and partners come together for a regional exchange. Representatives of different levels of government and civil society from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey created a discussion on efforts invested so far to combat violence against women (VAW) and domestic violence, challenges and opportunities, as well as ways forward.

CONTEXT OF THE FORUM

Building on the momentum created by the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), the European Commission and UN Women launched the three-year programme “Implementing Norms, Changing Minds” (February 2017- January 2020) aiming at ending gender based discrimination and violence against women, with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged groups of women in Turkey and the Western Balkans – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Kosovo¹ and Serbia.

More specifically, “Implementing Norms, Changing Minds” aims at creating enabling legislation and policy, in line with international standards on eliminating violence against women and all forms of discrimination, thus promoting favorable social norms and attitudes to advocate for gender equality and prevent discrimination and violence against women. This will serve to empower women and girls who have experienced discrimination or violence, including those from disadvantaged groups, to advocate for and have access to available, quality services.

The primary method of implementation is through partnerships with civil society organizations, and more specifically women’s organizations, to:

- Support the development of a civil society which is participating actively in the public debate on democracy, human rights, social inclusion and the rule of law, and have the capacity to influence policy and decision-making processes in relation to gender equality and ending violence against women
- Support dialogue between civil societies within the region and with governments to enhance mutual understanding and cooperation, knowledge sharing and networking
- Build the capacity of service providers on the provisions and standards of the Istanbul Convention
- Mobilize communities to promote favorable social norms towards gender equality

The first Regional Forum was organized as part of the three-year UN Women Programme “Ending violence against women: Implementing norms, changing minds” which aims to end gender-based discrimination and violence against women in the region of the Western Balkans and Turkey.

Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey have all ratified the Istanbul Convention, Turkey being the first country on the 14th of March 2012 and North Macedonia the last one, on the 23rd of March 2018. Kosovo is neither in the position to ratify CEDAW nor a State Party to the Istanbul Convention, but is included in the territory where the Convention can — and should — be applicable.

1. All references to Kosovo on this document shall be understood to be in full compliance with UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).



The Regional Forum was convened by the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, the European Union, the Council of Europe and UN Women in partnership with the European Women's Lobby.

The topics for discussion during the Forum included the gendered understanding of violence against women, progress and challenges in implementation of the Istanbul Convention, prevention, integrated policies and data collection, civil society perspectives on multi-stakeholder cooperation and good practices in building partnerships.

Although normative frameworks on ending gender-based discrimination and violence against women and girls have been adopted in all countries in the region (either prior to ratification or following it), gaps remain in the legislative framework in regard to the failure to recognize all forms of violence against women, as well as failure to adopt a holistic approach that addresses structural causes of violence against women. Moreover, there is still a lack of effective remedies to address all forms of violence against women, owing either to the absence of

specific programmes or to a lack of implementation of legal provisions. The inability to ensure accountability and redress for victims leads to discriminatory treatment of victims, and to failure in protecting them.

In this regard, the Government of North Macedonia, the EC and UN Women, and Council of Europe (CoE) support the convening of a regional forum on the implementation progress of the Istanbul Convention. This lies within the broader commitments on gender equality and ending violence against women in the Western Balkans and Turkey, with a view to accelerate implementation and facilitating dialogue among key stakeholders, and across the region.

The overall objective of the regional forum was to outline progress on the implementation of CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention, so as to push this agenda forward by developing concrete proposals for action at national and regional levels. It will also aim to foster spaces for exchange and interaction amongst national governments, regional institutions and civil society organizations.

OPENING OF THE FORUM

The participants were welcomed by **Gizem Yarbil Gurol**, Communication and Advocacy Specialist from UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, who introduced the forum as co-convened by UN Women, the Government of North Macedonia and Council of Europe, in partnership with European Women's Lobby. Ms. Yarbil Gurol stressed how the Forum is meant to promote the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, putting together a rich and diverse agenda, which should serve as a platform for exchange of experience and knowledge.

Opening remarks were made by several officials, including **H.E. Zoran Zaev**, the Prime Minister of the Republic of North Macedonia, who began by saying that the regional forum serves as an inspiration and a platform for creating standards for the entire region on ending VAW and domestic violence. These strategies must focus on prevention and not merely address the consequences of violence, and they have to include men. Mr. Zaev went on to emphasize that the Istanbul Convention is not a solution in itself that will end violence, but only a tool that keeps us alert and helps us identify and prevent all forms of violence.

He cited statistics from reports on violence against women, such as the report published by the World Health Organization, which indicates that about 1 in 3 women worldwide have experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetime. According to a recent study conducted by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), in the 12 months prior to the study, as many as 13 million women experienced physical violence. Mr. Zaev added that we have a long journey ahead of us and that the ratification of the Convention needs to be followed by concrete actions in order to implement all the provisions. The FRA reports that every fifth woman is a victim of cyber violence, which brings us to new, covert forms of violence that make women feel intimidated and cause them to avoid places, situations, processes and career choices out of fear from violence or sexual assault. If those who perpetrate violence are not aware that by committing violence, they are limiting women's potential, then the community needs to take responsibility.



“Harassment or violence in any form, towards women and girls, is NOT attractive, is NOT masculine or manly, and is NOT acceptable.”

H.E. Zoran Zaev, Prime Minister of the Republic of North Macedonia

Mr. Zaev stressed that the Istanbul Convention is only “a starting point – a framework that needs to be filled in with creative solutions”, and that a high level of commitment is expected from participants from North Macedonia, especially in terms of the new Action Plan on the implementation of the Istanbul Convention 2018-2023. He concluded by saying that the government aims to support women’s organizations and approaches that include men and do not judge anyone’s contribution. He shared his hopes that the next Forum would demonstrate a reduction in incidences of violence and cyber bullying, as well as changes to the perception of male identity as being violent.



The EU considers approaches such as grassroots activism and engaging men and boys to change stereotypes and minds. Working with young men and boys is a best bet to fight violence, and education has a vital role to play. The ratification of the Istanbul Convention and Action Plan for its implementation in North Macedonia, the new law on protection from domestic violence, and crisis centers established for victims of domestic and sexual violence are all steps forward on the path of accession and reform. Mr. Žbogar concluded by stressing that Europe is a place where all women and men live free of violence and sexism in free societies.

On behalf of UN Women, **Alia El-Yassir**, Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (ECARO), thanked the Government of North Macedonia for hosting the Regional Forum eleven months after ratifying the Istanbul Convention. She also thanked the European Union for partnering with UN Women ECARO, and the Council of Europe for providing stewardship of the Istanbul Convention. Ms. El-Yassir noted that the regional forum takes place on the occasion of 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, a campaign that kicked off in UN Women offices across the globe.

The next speaker at the opening remarks was **H.E. Samuel Žbogar**, Head of the Delegation of the European Union in the North Macedonia, who started off by mentioning some statistics on the prevalence of VAW in the Balkans. He pointed out that 20-40% of women in the Balkans suffer from physical violence, and 50% suffer from psychological violence. VAW remains highly underreported, and every fifth or third woman in the surroundings could be a victim of gender-based violence (GBV). This major regional project, which is now at the advanced stage of implementation, is illustrative of the EU’s commitment to ending violence against women. Due to the positive results in program-participating countries, the European Commission is looking into extending the program.

“Violence against women and girls is preventable. Several strategies are already showing success. They include engaging men and boys and changing the stereotypes within households and communities.”

H.E. Samuel Žbogar, Head of the Delegation of the European Union.

She further emphasized that achieving the 2030 agenda is not possible if half of the population is discriminated against. The statistics on prevalence of violence show that globally 35% of women have experienced violence, but this number does not even capture sexual harassment online and other covert forms of violence.

UN Women supports the efforts of national governments, CSOs and other stakeholders to fight against GBV, leaving no one behind and putting human dignity at the center of all work. These efforts strive to take into account intersectional issues and multiple discrimination faced by survivors of violence. The regional program on ending violence against women is a key milestone for UN Women in this region as it aims at building an enabling legislative and policy environment to combat VAW and domestic violence, promoting favorable social norms that push for zero tolerance towards VAW and domestic violence, and improving access to quality services for all women and girls, including those coming from disadvantaged groups.



“No single institution can deal with violence against women alone. UN Women is committed to foster dialogue and actions through which civil society groups can engage with government representatives and regional institutions to end violence against women.”

Alia El-Yassir, UN Women Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia.

Ms. El-Yassir further noted that the Istanbul Convention is the first legally binding instrument on VAW in Europe and a significant milestone in itself, but ratification of this treaty is not enough. Governments should change their norms and allocate resources to effectively eradicate VAW. For instance, in some countries, measures to punish perpetrators of VAW and domestic violence are still missing. She reminded the participants of the re-emergence of patriarchal attitudes in the region and stressed that no woman can deal with violence alone, which is why State parties need to implement comprehensive and coordinated policies including institutions and CSOs. Concerted action needs to acknowledge the efforts of CSOs, whose relationship with

state institutions is essential in terms of mutual support and efficiency. It must be acknowledged that multisectoral mechanisms have been mostly established by CSOs and women's organizations and are integral in terms of their network, outreach and innovation to include all women and girls. This program is currently gathering over 50 civil society organizations. Ms. El-Yassir concluded by inviting all stakeholders to take part in the national and regional reviews of the Beijing Platform for Action towards its 25th anniversary. The reviews will help take stock of what has been achieved since 1995, and they will culminate in 2020 at the global review.

KEYNOTE ADDRESSES

After a short break featuring a [video](#) showcasing stories of regional partners and beneficiaries of the program, the next session introduced several keynote speakers.

First of the key note speakers was **Mila Carovska**, Minister of Labor and Social Policy of North Macedonia, who pointed out that the Government of North Macedonia



Ms. Carovska noted that the government is facing a difficult period regarding the implementation of all the normative standards recently introduced, and the realization of the measures in the Action Plan will demonstrate the ability of the government to push for the harmonization of laws with the Convention. One of the plans has been to regenerate all CSOs' resources and government-run shelters that had been out of operation; as a result, three regional centers have been opened for victims of domestic violence and sexual violence, one of them being for victims of rape. The Minister concluded by saying that the relevant institutions will aim at hearing the perspective of each woman in the country, and they will not close their eyes to violence.

showed that the ratification of the Istanbul Convention can be very swift, but experience in the region shows that implementation is not consistent. It is evident that the Head of the Government of North Macedonia has given invaluable support to the process of ratification of the Convention and putting in place legislation that helps apply its provisions.

“The Government has adopted an Action Plan for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention in the period of 2018-2020. The working group that will draft the Law for ending gender-based violence has already been established. We are joining forces with the Ministry of Justice to work on the amendments in the Penal Code.”

Mila Carovska, Minister of Labour and Social Policy of the Republic of North Macedonia.

The following keynote address came from **Daniele Cangemi**, Head of the Human Dignity and Gender Equality Department, Council of Europe (CoE). Mr. Cangemi thanked the Government of North Macedonia for the hospitality, UN Women and EU for the cooperation with Council of Europe, and the participants of the Forum for their commitment to ending violence against women. He further went on to emphasize that the Istanbul Convention, as a milestone treaty, is a tool to achieve gender equality; it speaks of the gendered nature of violence – women are subjected to violence because they are women, and this violence affects women disproportionately.



“The need to create and nurture partnerships in order to put an end to violence against women is enshrined in the Istanbul Convention. When they join forces, law enforcement agencies, the judiciary, civil society organizations, service providers, health services, child protection agencies and other relevant partners can achieve better results and provide a safety net for victims and survivors.”

Daniele Cangemi, Head of the Human Dignity and Gender Equality Department of the Council of Europe.

The Council of Europe puts at governments' and CSOs' disposal the know-hows and mechanisms to make progress towards SDG 5. The CoE's Gender Equality Strategy was developed in cooperation with partners and is implemented through bilateral and regional projects. Mr. Cangemi further pointed out that the Istanbul Convention does not seek to abolish the difference between men and women, but the fact is that stereotypes and customs favor men over women which makes it all the more difficult to women to disclose violence.

The Istanbul Convention is one of the most important standards Europe has produced. It has been ratified by 23 States, and 12 more have signed it, including the EU. Having in mind the recent backlash against the aims of the Istanbul Convention and alarmed by narratives about what the Convention represents and by slogans becoming subject to political rhetoric, Mr. Cangemi stressed that we need to make sure that the messages of the Istanbul Convention are not distorted by any misinterpretation. “It is gender-based violence that destroys families,” Mr. Cangemi emphasized, “not the Istanbul Convention.” For the purpose of dispelling misconceptions, CoE published a paper explaining the main aims of the Convention. By signing and ratifying the Istanbul Convention, countries

are obliged to put forward policies to end VAW and to adjust their legal and policy framework, whereas effective response requires concerted action involving institutions, NGOs, stakeholders at all levels, including drawing national plans of action. He concluded by saying that CSOs overwhelmingly provide services for victims of violence, and they are at the heart of protection and prevention. In the GREVIO report it is clear that they should get support for their efforts.

The last key note speaker was **Asha Allen**, Policy and Campaigns Officer, European Women's Lobby (EWL). Ms. Allen started off by saying that the EWL is an umbrella association gathering 2000 civil society organizations that welcome the regional program and its objectives. She further stressed that EWL is participating in an environment of solidarity, parity, and equal partnership in order to build comprehensive mechanisms for cooperation. Collaboration among governments and CSOs and regional institutions such as the EU, CoE and others is essential. CEDAW, Istanbul Convention and general recommendations have been landmarks in the fight against male violence against women and girls and in the protection of survivors, persecution of perpetrators, and development of integrated policies.



“We urge our institutional partners, regional and national, to hear the voices of women from across the Western Balkans and Turkey today; foster partnerships, foster relationships and let’s work together to eradicate violence against women and girls.”

Asha Allen, Policy and Campaigns Officer of the European Women’s Lobby.

EWL’s participation in the regional program so far has been in the form of a comprehensive report to analyze the achievements and challenges in the implementation of the Istanbul Convention from the point of view of civil societies in the region. Ms. Allen presented the findings as follows:

- Violence has been considered a private issue, but this has significantly changed due to women’s movements and political changes in the region
- Progress in Kosovo and Turkey is especially evident due to the adoption of strategies and action plans
- Legal frameworks in the countries in the region have been harmonized to some extent to the Istanbul Convention
- Data collection is crucial to understanding violence against women as a phenomenon
- Opening of crisis centers in North Macedonia is a sign of good practice as are the multisectoral protocols

Some of the challenges Ms. Allen stressed include lack of focus and recognition of intimate partner violence and sexual violence, particularly among marginalized groups of women such as Roma women, migrant women and women with disabilities. Some challenges that are cross-cutting in all countries include lack of recognition of how

structural forces contribute to VAW, meaning that VAW is caused by societal imbalances of power between men and women; gender-neutral legislation on protection from violence; lack of gender-disaggregation in data collection; and insufficient service provision and state funding.

Finally, Ms. Allen offered some recommendations for ending VAW in the region, such as the fact that women CSOs need more funding; she noted that independent feminist organizations with years of proven experience should be funded directly and sustainably. Otherwise women are prevented from receiving support from these organizations. Social change can take time, and achieving gender equality can be done only through parity, mutual respect and solidarity. She stressed that EWL is here to listen to the voices of women across the region and to foster partnerships and cooperation with them. She thanked those who contributed to the report, noting that not all are present at the forum, but they spared their time for consultations in the process of drafting the report. She concluded her address by stressing how important it is to reach out to networks in order to make sure they are part of the process of implementation of the Istanbul Convention, and make sure that women exercise their full human rights. “We are half of humanity,” she noted. “We deserve full human rights.”

SETTING THE STAGE

Advancement of women's human rights with a special focus on gendered understanding of violence and discrimination: From the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention)

The purpose of this session was to review the historical timeline of women's human rights, take a closer look at the international framework that underlies the global gender equality agenda, and emphasize the importance of taking a gendered approach to violence and discrimination.

The first speaker in this session was **Feride Acar**, Chair of GREVIO and Member of CEDAW Committee, who has experience in monitoring the implementation of both CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention. Ms. Acar started her intervention by reminding the participants that the Istanbul Convention did not just drop from the sky, but rather is part and parcel of the international mechanisms

structure for the protection of women's rights. Other mechanisms have moved the agenda forward and contributed to the women's rights structure, such as the UN Declaration on Elimination of Violence Against Women, Beijing platform, and SDG 5, which are political documents that do not have the same legally binding obligation but are equally important. Furthermore, Ms. Acar mentioned several other instruments that address the same issues - Recommendation 19 and 35 of the CEDAW Committee, which move the agenda on GBV against women. Recommendation 19, passed by the Committee in 1992, impacted the development of many tools and specifically the Istanbul Convention. Recommendation 35, which was adopted in 2017 by CEDAW committee and states that GBV against women is a principle of customary international law, was impacted by the Istanbul Convention and pushed the requirements of CEDAW provisions to become much more detailed. She reiterated that all of these belong to soft law measures and are not legally binding.



From left to right: Feride Acar, Chair of GREVIO and Member of CEDAW Committee, Yakin Erturk, former UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women and Stephanie Futter-Orel, Executive Manager of WAVE Network (Women Against Violence Europe).

However, Ms. Acar gave some examples of how State and regional courts can give additional value to UN soft law. Recently, the Spanish Supreme Court ruled that General Recommendations by CEDAW are binding by law – these standards are being established around Europe through the use of non-binding mechanisms. In addition to that, case law by the European Court for Human Rights is using decisions of the CEDAW Committee in passing judgments, and in other parts of the world two regional mechanisms - Maputo Protocol and Belem do Para Convention - set the same standards.

Ms. Acar went on to talk about the CEDAW Convention, stressing how this convention was ratified by 189 states, and those that have not ratified it, did so out of idiosyncratic or religious reasons. CEDAW is a global legal instrument and part of international law, and observers of CEDAW have looked at it as a bill of rights for women. This treaty puts forward universal standards for individual human beings, men and women, demanding substantive equality, especially equality of results, not simply equality of opportunities. State parties are obliged to refer to it and are accountable for the actions of everyone on their territory. Ms. Acar stressed that CEDAW is an impatient convention – it does not accept an excuse of delaying measures, whereas special temporary measures are to be considered as accelerating gender equality and should not be considered discriminatory. CEDAW uses a rights-based approach to discrimination, meaning that it is not only a criminal matter, but also a rights violation. One of the main contributions of CEDAW is that it openly states that some cultural elements are restricting full realization of women's human rights. The implementation of CEDAW is monitored by the CEDAW Committee, comprised of 23 members, and Bulgaria has recently joined for a four-year term.

Ms. Acar pointed out that CEDAW does not include any provision that refers openly to GBV and VAW for political reasons, as this Convention was adopted in the 1970s. In 1992, the CEDAW General Recommendation 19 declared VAW as a form of discrimination of women, and VAW was accepted by the CEDAW Committee as part and parcel of all provisions of CEDAW.

When it comes to the Istanbul Convention, Ms. Acar reminded the participants about the significance of this treaty, putting emphasis on the historical imbalance of power that leads to discrimination against women and results in violence. The list of forms of violence from the Convention needs to be taken very seriously by State parties in terms of aligning their legislative norms. She highlighted that this is a victim-centered, gender-

sensitive Convention and can be applied in peace and conflict situations, also putting focus on women who face intersectional discrimination and who are at particular risk of being subjected to violence.

The GREVIO body of experts is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, after which the Committee of the Parties to the Convention transmits the recommendations of GREVIO to State parties. GREVIO has so far completed the evaluation procedure for Austria, Monaco, Albania, Denmark, Montenegro and Turkey. Monitoring is currently being done in Portugal and Sweden.

Ms. Acar further provided some information on the new interface between CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention, which is CEDAW General Recommendation 35 on gender-based violence against women, adopted in 2017. The main contribution of this Recommendation is the prohibition of GBV and VAW as a principle of customary international law – unofficial law that is understood and accepted by all, established in practice, and widely practiced by states out of a sense of obligation. This means that even states that have not ratified the Convention are obliged to prevent VAW, which is an important evolution in how states address VAW. General Recommendation 35 recognizes digital space as a space where violence happens, and globalization, environmental protection, migration, and reproductive rights are also part of this Recommendation.

Ms. Acar concluded that now there is a clear and strong consensus on the fundamental principles on protection of women's rights and combating VAW. The framework does not consist of isolated instruments functioning on their own – although some say there are too many mechanisms to report on – if we understand the consistency of all instruments and the way norms are harmonized. The Istanbul Convention complements CEDAW but also moves it forward; face-to-face interaction and collaboration of instruments under the UN, CoE and other organizations work together. The UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women is planning to bring monitoring mechanisms together so that there is more direct harmonization and communication between norms and practices of committees, and in May next year another meeting under the CoE will take place to spur communication between different mechanisms for protection of women's rights. The Istanbul Convention does not stand alone; it strengthens the standards and the norms, and now we need to focus on implementation, implementation, implementation.

The next speaker, **Yakin Erturk**, former UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, is a proponent of feminist politics but, as she pointed out in her speech,

she prefers to play the devil's advocate role. She started off by saying that VAW is a latecomer to the UN; however, it stands at the center of human rights work today. VAW has become a very viable entry point, and it has transformed approaches, mindsets, and institutions. States have moved from taking negative measures to positive measures, non-state actor violence is included, and criminal justice practice has been transformed by including different forms of violence (such as marital rape). It has been a vehicle of mass mobilization; women's movements have been really triggered by VAW, yet violence is ever present. All countries, even those that have excelled in gender equality, still face challenges in combating VAW.

The genealogy of gender norms has seen equality, development and peace to be inaugurated into the gender agenda. In 1979 the principles were codified into law – CEDAW. International law is the site and outcome of global power politics; therefore, every legal piece of work reflects the dynamics of power relations, but still, international law has become the site of promotion of women's rights. From the 1970s we have witnessed a more intense engagement from women's movements, which is why law making cannot disregard feminist movements. All results are due to the inclusion of women in processes and the result of fostering relationships between women's organizations and regional and UN instruments. Normative and policy landscape was influenced by women's movements. When we look at CEDAW, negotiated in the '70s when the global women's movement was not as strong, VAW was disregarded as private issue. Istanbul Convention is a treaty that rectified that. Istanbul Convention is definitely a step forward compared to CEDAW, as it has taken on the issue of unequal gender relationship.

Nowadays, Ms. Erturk explained, the SDGs and the 2030 agenda have placed a particular focus on power imbalances and refraining from references to national conditions, but there is still a long way to go. General Recommendation 35 is a good instrument because it surpasses some of the problems of the Istanbul Convention, starting from terminology – gender-based violence against women and structural oppression faced in private and public spheres. It places a particular focus on gender-based violence against women resulting from acts or omissions of State or non-State actors, acting territorially or extraterritorially, including extraterritorial military action of States, which is critical in issues of conflict and peace, considering the fact that those countries promoting gender equality are also those selling arms. CEDAW Committee addressed this as well in a report from 2016 – states promoting gender equality are exporting gender inequality. Importantly, General Recommendation 35 is also the only instrument that mentions patriarchy. As Ms. Erturk noted, "When you

talk about gender equality, how can you do it without talking about patriarchy?"

Ms. Erturk emphasized that, when we speak about gender mainstreaming, we should be careful, because what we should be doing is changing the mainstream and not copy-pasting gender into mainstream processes. Gender mainstreaming has undermined the emancipatory aspirations of women's empowerment advocacy and it has resulted in women's issues becoming depoliticized. VAW has been largely associated with culture and customs that lead to a dichotomy of women who have finished their emancipation and those that haven't. For instance, national machinery in the Netherlands says Dutch women have completed their emancipation and that the problem is with migrant communities.

When it comes to the women, peace and security agenda there are new elements of discussions. There are some drawbacks with the Security Council Resolution 1325 – continued violence is not recognized, as the Security Council says conflict is where violence is acute, and in the state of peace there is no violence. There is no reference of general disarmament and increase in military spending. Security Council reference to sexual violence enforces the victimization of women and normalizes it with other atrocities experienced. One of the most important drawbacks is the total silence when it comes to the intersectionality of violence, power, nationalism, and military policies. For instance, Colombia has been fairly successful in recognizing the multiple experiences of women and LGBT communities, but misogyny and power dynamics are hampering the implementation of the Colombian peace agreements.

Ms. Erturk reminded the participants to be vigilant; we don't want to stop the implementation of human rights instruments because they have certain shortcomings, but we need to accept the dynamics of different interests. The international agenda poses risks – the very nature of how international instruments come about and the risk of coaptation of gender equality norms leads to depolitization of primary concerns. The opportunities that are available include the fact that, for instance, Resolution 1325 mobilized and empowered women's groups – they are able to speak out about issues (e.g. Northern Ireland issue where UK constantly rejected the definition of conflict). Another opportunity is forming alliances across issues and borders, like at the regional forum where participants gathered across borders thanks to the Istanbul Convention. Gatherings such as this one – where women and like-minded men, responsible for implementation, advocacy and activism – must continue to be organized for successful implementation. Another opportunity lays in resource mobilization – thanks to UN agencies

there is funding for women's movements. International instruments represent a set of supranational monitoring and enforcing mechanisms where states have the political will to set the authority of these instruments. Political will is not something that can be taken for granted in today's world, noted Ms. Erturk, adding that despite all these developments, VAW is still so rampant. Eliminating VAW requires gender equality, which requires fundamental change in how a society is organized, in distribution of resources and power across institutions. This is the major challenge in implementation, so Ms. Erturk invited all the participants to push the door all the way open. Equality is a difficult term to be accepted, but we have to insist that equality is a norm, not an option.

Ms. Erturk told an example from her recent visit to Jordan where in a meeting a Sharia law male professor talked about equality as the norm. One of the participants at this meeting, a woman, said equality means sameness, and added that we should insist on justice. Sharia law professor replied that in a world where inequality prevails, justice will just put you at the mercy of those deciding.

Ms. Erturk concluded by comparing states' commitments to human rights to the 1970s, where today's national security agenda and dedication to the war on terror have replaced human rights demands. There has been a general rise in right wing politics, as seen in the most recent elections in Sweden, which resulted in political gains for the nationalist party. It also happens that national leaders are challenging human rights instruments – the Bulgarian leader stated that the Istanbul Convention is unconstitutional. Gender studies programs are being shut down. Ms. Erturk proposed as ways forward to focus on extraterritoriality of human rights violations, linking the different instruments and agendas to reinforce their transformative capacity and insist that all human rights are based on equality and non-discrimination, and that states have an obligation to eliminate inequality.

The third speaker of the "Setting the stage" session was **Stephanie Futter-Orel**, Executive Manager of WAVE Network (Women Against Violence Europe). Ms. Futter-Orel reiterated the importance of taking a gendered approach to tackling VAW, reflecting on the fact that VAW has to do with historical imbalances of power between men and women, and that adopting legislation cannot tackle this issue on its own without effective implementation. She further mentioned the impact of the Istanbul Convention on legal practice and an interplay of legal tools, exemplified by the fact that the ECHR has made references to it in 14 cases.

WAVE brings forward an CSO perspective, gathering 142 CSOs in 46 countries, and legal tools such as the Istanbul Convention have given the WAVE network powerful legal

resources and helped them to develop sufficient resources to provide services. However, not all CSOs are this privileged. On the other hand, States must do their due diligence – not only reacting to violence but using positive measures as well. Currently, many states are implementing measures to combat domestic violence, but the Istanbul Convention refers to many other forms of violence against women. The Article 22 of the Convention stipulates standards for specialist services, funding, geographical availability and accessibility for hard-to-reach groups. Women's specialist services are some of the most important lifesavers, and they save governments billions. In the UK, a study showed that every pound invested in specialist services brings 5-6 pounds of social value back to the society.

Ms. Futter-Orel explained how WAVE takes stock of the implementation of the Istanbul Convention by reporting on specialist services. The 2016 report showed, among others, the following results:

- Regarding the standard of one bed space per 10,000 inhabitants - from 43 European countries, only 7 countries meet the standard
- Out of 26,951 shelters – 70% are in EU countries
- SOS line is a crucial entry point to report violence – 76% of European countries have the SOS line, and 69% fulfill the criteria of 24-hour availability and free of charge
- Rape crisis centers – 85% currently available (out of 4000) are located in the EU, and 15% in non-EU countries

Ms. Futter-Orel further made a reference to a couple of cases where ECHR showed national courts were in breach of the Istanbul Convention – such as the case of *E.S. and Other vs. Slovakia*, regarding the sexual abuse of a daughter by her step father and violation of Article 3 (inhumane treatment). Slovakian court could not demand that he leaves the premises, and only after 2 years of proceedings he was convicted. ECHR court found justice was delayed and, as Ms. Futter-Orel added, justice delayed is justice denied. The other case was *Branko Tomasic and Others vs. Croatia*, in which the ECHR held there had been a violation of Article 2 of the Convention (right to life) as the Croatian government failed to implement fully the compulsory psychiatric treatment of a man sentenced to prison for domestic violence, who, after being released from prison, killed his wife, their child and himself.

Ms. Futter-Orel emphasized that we have to take stock of what already happened and learn from this so that we can deal with cases in the future. She mentioned a piece of good practice coming from the UK called domestic violence review, which sets forth a conference of different actors in cases of femicide where everyone involved in the case sits down to discuss what went wrong.

SESSION 1: THE 4PS OF THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION

This session aimed to introduce the four pillars of the Istanbul Convention – prevention of all forms of VAW; protection against all forms of VAW; prosecution of those accused of committing acts of VAW; and, going beyond criminal law and proceedings, integrated policies. The speaker at this panel was **Jasminka Dzumhur**, Human Rights Ombudsperson of Bosnia and Herzegovina, who stressed the importance of the fourth P, integrated policies, because it also relates to partnerships with civil society. Efforts by government institutions to end VAW only account for half of all efforts in the field without including the efforts of partners such as individuals, religious communities, and non-governmental organizations. In addition to that, Ms. Dzumhur also introduced a fifth P, which stands for participation, meaning the participation of victims of VAW in developing policies and norms.

Ms. Dzumhur went on to point out several issues regarding the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, which, in the words of Ms. Dzumhur, should not be any more binding than CEDAW, just for targeting one form of discrimination – violence. One of the issues she mentioned is the reactive vs. proactive approach to combating VAW. A reactive approach implies proceedings in relation to Article 29 of the Istanbul Convention (civil lawsuits and remedies, as opposed to criminal procedures). In civil lawsuits the victim is at the center, whereas in criminal proceedings the perpetrator is in focus. This shows a shift in State accountability; however, it should not impede the government to prosecute perpetrators in criminal courts.

Ms. Dzumhur also raised the issue of whether VAW should be defined as a special criminal act or included as part of other criminal acts. In Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), the subject of protection (of women or any other member of the household) should not be addressed through a separate criminal act, but through other articles and through the law on gender equality. Prosecution is inefficient in BiH because the Criminal Code stipulates a lesser sentence for domestic violence than for inflicting light or heavy physical injuries, which is why defense lawyers choose charges of domestic violence by default in order to get off with a monetary fine or conditional release. Ms. Dzumhur also mentioned articles of the BiH criminal law that pertain to endangering an individual's safety and making threats. These acts are happening more and more online, which is why there is currently an initiative of the CSO Center for Women's Rights and the Association of Women Judges in BiH to change the Criminal Code of the Federation of BiH so as to include online harassment as a criminal act.



Jasminka Dzumhur, Human Rights Ombudsperson of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Similarly, more emphasis should be put on the interpretation and implementation of Article 29 of the Istanbul Convention, Paragraph 2, which pertains to civil remedies against State authorities that have failed in their duty to take the necessary preventive or protective measures within the scope of their powers. This means, Ms. Dzumhur explained, relevant ministers would be held accountable for any failure to protect victims.

Ms. Dzumhur further turned to the concept of protection and the practice in BiH. As it happens in this country, the society seems to have more empathy for the perpetrator of domestic violence, since according to the protection measures, the perpetrator is to be taken out of the home. The alternative is to place the victim in a shelter. Sustainability of shelters in BiH is a burning issue, considering their multidisciplinary character, economic viability and financial support. Capacities of CSOs running shelters are continuous and consistent regardless of the amount of services provided. The issue of financial support to shelters in BiH is yet to be resolved, as there is no single model, and the process will depend on how the costs of shelters for women victims of violence and other residential institutions will be balanced, as well as on availability of state funding.

Other issues related to protection, stressed by Ms. Dzumhur, include free legal aid in BiH, which is accessible only to those victims with a lower economic status, and proceedings in cases of domestic violence that take a long time, where victims are advised to file for a divorce rather than go through a criminal proceeding, especially in cases of physical violence.

Ms. Dzumhur reflected further on prevention, especially the role of media in reporting on cases in a sensationalist manner, without sensitivity to human suffering. Religious communities have a role to play as well due to the position of women that they tend to advocate for, which tends to be based heavily on patriarchal norms. The education sector is vital as well; in BiH for instance, boys and girls with disabilities are segregated in schools. Human rights education should be mandatory in schools, together with education on discrimination and access to information, especially for marginalized groups.

When it comes to integrated policies, Ms. Dzumhur mentioned partnership with civil society, the issue of translation and dissemination of the recommendations of UN bodies, UPR and Council of Europe bodies, which are not widely available to citizens because of the language barrier. Lastly, Ms. Dzumhur stressed the importance of data collection, as data are indicators of both good and bad results.

SESSION 2: REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION: PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

The aim of this session was to provide a regional overview of the implementation process of the Istanbul Convention. Speakers represented governments and civil society organizations to ensure that different approaches and perspectives are provided when it comes to international obligations.

This session was chaired by **Genoveva Tisheva**, Director of the Women's Rights Training Institute for Young Lawyers from Eastern Europe and member of the Network of Independent Legal Experts on Gender Equality to the European Commission. Ms. Tisheva introduced the speakers and brought up the issue of transposing the human rights standards from international instruments into national legislation in Bulgaria. She then opened the floor for regional perspectives on this and other issues.



Session on the regional implementation of the Istanbul Convention: Progress and challenges. Chaired by Genoveva Tisheva, Director of the Women's Rights Training Institute for Young Lawyers from Eastern Europe and member of the Network of Independent Legal Experts on Gender Equality to the European Commission.

The first panelist was **Merita Xhafaj**, General Director of Social Policies of the Ministry of Health and Social Policies of Albania. Ms. Xhafaj started by congratulating the organizers for convening the Regional Forum and choosing the campaign 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence as a backdrop for this event. She further mentioned that Albania was the second country to ratify the Istanbul Convention, and the government has been working to harmonize national legislation with the Convention. For several years now, Albania has been putting efforts in achieving gender equality and combating violence. Pillar 2 in the country's 2016-2020 Strategy refers to measures for combating domestic violence and improving the legislative framework, as well as harmonization of the regulations with the EU *acquis communautaire*. After the Convention entered into force in 2014, Albania began the process of reporting. In 2016, the government submitted the report to the Council of Europe, and in 2017, the final report was published together with the comments by the State. Ms. Xhafaj emphasized how the government had a very constructive dialogue on domestic violence issues. In total, 18 recommendations issued by the GREVIO expert body have been adopted, and with the support by UN Women, an action plan was developed to apply these recommendations through the National Council for Gender Equality.

The Law on Measures against Violence in Family Relations was amended and adopted by the Parliament in July 2018, and it included protection measures in cases of intimate partner violence. Some of the measures include the issuance of a restraining order within 48 hours from the moment violence was reported, free legal aid, increased security, procedural deadlines when it comes to issuing protection measures, and free forensic services in cases of violence.

Ms. Xhafaj mentioned that the Ministry of Health and Social Policies in Albania is currently making a joint platform for protection of victims within the first 48 hours. Out of the total number of 61 local self-government units, 39 communities have an increased level of protection, and the government is also working in parallel on prevention. Administrative data collection has improved, reported Ms. Xhafaj, especially in terms of data referring to the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator and age disaggregation. She emphasized the importance of good partnership with the civil society, without which the work on combating VAW wouldn't be as successful.

Lastly, Ms. Xhafaj stressed the importance of continuity of this project and similar ones. One of the major issues countries in the region are faced with, according to Ms. Xhafaj, is limited financial mechanisms to completely implement all the recommendations issued by CEDAW

and the Istanbul Convention. Therefore, it is crucial that the support continues to civil society organizations through projects like this one, as well as to institutions, in order to improve the quality of services. Western Balkan countries are key to stability, and they should not only cooperate during conferences, but continuously, and Ms. Xhafaj noted she is a member of the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network. She concluded by saying that all women at the Regional Forum do not have only one role to play, but one of their roles is also in peace building and stability in the region and beyond.

The next panelist was **Gokce Bahar Ozturk**, Investigating Judge at the Victims' Rights Department within the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Turkey. Ms. Ozturk started off by talking about legislative changes in Turkey. The legislation provides for certain measures, but they are usually applied too late, when the case of violence is already quite severe. A report issued in 2017 and available online pointed out to issues regarding support to women victims of violence; depending on their location, they repeatedly report violence due to lack of sustainable measures. If women experience violence repeatedly, they are advised to rather turn to the Center for Social Services or the SOS helpline because it has been evident that police officers, predominately men, do not take domestic violence seriously, but try to de-escalate the situation by advising the woman to listen to the husband. Ms. Ozturk went on to say that victims do not feel safe in Turkey. In the phase of evidence collection, the relationship between the doctor and the patient is crucial, meaning it matters whether the doctor is a woman or a man. Issues pertaining to access to justice include victim's safety during trial, attitudes of judges and prosecutors, their poor knowledge about protection laws and the Istanbul Convention, and the duration of court proceedings. Through conversations with victims, it is clear that they often do not use all the legal aid available to them.

One practice that Ms. Ozturk mentioned is used in Turkey is collaboration with UNICEF and their Justice for Children program, where statements from women victims of violence are taken in specialized child-friendly rooms that exist in 60 courts across the country. Further improvement of legislation includes a draft law on women's rights and its harmonization with the EU directives. Judges and prosecutors are constantly going through trainings on provisions of the Istanbul Convention and other human rights treaties. The number of specialized rooms for giving statements increased three times, and positive results are already showing. From January 2019 the Ministry will start with trainings again as will a twinning project with the government of Spain on improving support to victims and increasing capacities of the Ministry of Interior.

Aleksandra Petric, Director of CSO United Women Banja Luka from Bosnia and Herzegovina, was the next panelist who talked about the implementation of the Istanbul Convention in BiH. She started by reflecting how BiH was among the first countries to ratify the Convention, followed by a framework strategy for the implementation of the Convention, which was not an obligation in itself, but it was sign of political will to work on its implementation.

Before the Convention was ratified, in BiH there were already many instruments for protection from violence and discrimination, such as the Law on gender equality, Criminal Codes at the state and entity level, and specialized laws on protection from domestic violence, as well as strategies to combat violence, adopted at different levels. However, legislation is not harmonized within the country, a country of 3,5 million people and 4 Criminal Codes. In one part of the country, domestic violence is considered a criminal act, and in another part, it is considered a criminal act and a misdemeanor offence. This is an obvious impediment to a consistent implementation of the Istanbul Convention. One example of good practice is that the Criminal Code of Republika Srpska is almost completely harmonized with the Istanbul Convention.

Some of the challenges that Ms. Petric presented include a lack of political will to recognize international standards as priorities at all levels of government. Domestic violence is characterized as a minor social issue. Data collection remains a challenge as well, as there is no centralized data collection system, making it almost impossible to develop policies and legislation based on actual situation in the field. Protection system in BiH does not have a unique approach – trainings are based on causes and consequences of violence, without going into the core issues, so these acts remain to be seen as private, rather than public. Specialist services are regulated in one entity in BiH, where 70% of funding for shelters is provided from the entity government, and 30% from the municipal budget. Not all municipalities have a budget for this, so now a more centralized solution is being developed.

When it comes to access to justice, Ms. Petric emphasized the economic census barrier for victims of violence. In addition to that, through monitoring of court proceedings, CSOs have concluded that 40% of reported cases of domestic violence are being processed as misdemeanor offences. Seeking compensation through civil courts is inaccessible for many victims, as they are in most cases not capable to navigate such procedures on their own.

Lastly, Ms. Petric mentioned the process of alternative reporting to GREVIO, supported through the regional program, and said the emphasis was on gathering smaller CSOs to respond to the questionnaire that BiH will be receiving in 2019.

The next speaker was **Biljana Stepanov**, President of the Board of SOS Network Vojvodina from Serbia. Ms. Stepanov began by reminding the participants of several murders of women that happened in 2016 in Serbia, which spurred amendments to the law on police and introduction of protection measures. In 2017 the government adopted the Law on protection from domestic violence. Serbia submitted the State report to GREVIO in 2017, and a coalition of CSOs made an alternative report highlighting the following challenges:

- When speaking about prevention, stereotypes and prejudice still persist towards victims. The principle of due diligence is not applied.
- During procedures of cases, focus is on the duties and obligations of the institutions; the victim is not at the center.
- There is still no centralized data collection method, as prescribed by Law, but police, prosecutor's office and courts all collect their own data which is not public. CSOs are trying to make their data relevant and publicly available, as well as comparable to those from the institutions
- Specialist services do not include a national helpline. Funds were made available to establish an SOS helpline, but it was never established. A network of 26 organizations is providing this service already and has the capacity to be the service that the government can outsource.
- There are 7 rape centers in Vojvodina, established thanks to the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women. The centers are established within hospitals and they offer health and social services.
- A challenge that remains still is the Law on Free Legal Aid, which does not allow CSOs to provide this service, so it is yet to be seen how women's organizations will find their place when it comes to provision of free legal aid.

On behalf of Montenegro, the participants heard from **Nada Drobnjak**, Head of Parliamentary Committee for Gender Equality, Montenegro. Ms. Drobnjak spoke about the process of ratification of the Istanbul Convention by Montenegro. First, the government of Montenegro confirmed the Convention in 2013. In the period between the confirmation and actual ratification, relevant institutions were trying to determine what legislation would be needed to be further harmonized with the Convention upon ratification, and in cooperation with CSOs, a set of indicators was developed on how to measure the implementation of the Istanbul Convention.

Ms. Drobnjak reminded the participants that VAW is a consequence of centuries of men holding positions of power. Montenegro has a relatively good legislative framework. There are urgent measures to prevent child marriage, and all forms of violence listed in the Istanbul Convention are recognized in Montenegro legislation, including rape. Relevant ministries are led by the work of the Parliamentary Committee so that the Committee does not have to act in forms of amendments to the laws.

What is important, noted Ms. Drobnjak, is to educate the citizens and to share information with them. Women's parliament is a mechanism started by the President of the Supreme Court. When GREVIO issued its recommendations, the Supreme Court held a session in which it was confirmed that domestic violence acts are being punished at higher rates than they were previously. Training of police is showing positive results, and victims are treated better with the police than any other institution. In the Action plan to implement the Resolution 1325, it was stated that no work on peace and security can be done while one part of the population remains unsafe in their own homes.

The GREVIO report for Montenegro highlighted the following issues:

- Governments must work in a more urgent manner in order to provide protection for victims more quickly.
- Representatives of all institutions have to go through training on anti-discrimination.
- More efforts should be invested in working with the media.
- Crisis centers for victims of rape and sexual violence are missing.
- Sustainable financial support to CSOs that have been providing services is necessary.
- There is no centralized data collection approach.
- In a study done by UNDP and financed by the EU, 4 out of 10 women in Montenegro has experienced some form of violence and every fourth respondent found an excuse to tolerate violence.

The last speaker in this session was **Jovana Trenchevska**, State Secretary of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, North Macedonia. Ms. Trenchevska began by saying that seven years had passed since the signing of the Istanbul Convention by North Macedonia until it was finally ratified in December 2017 and entered into force on 1st July 2018. From that moment, the government of North Macedonia was obliged to implement the provisions from this treaty. Zero tolerance towards violence is something that the government is promoting, but for an effective

implementation of the Istanbul Convention it is imperative for all actors to assume part of the responsibility.

Since the Convention entered into force, the operationalization of the ratification was done through concrete measures such as the adoption of the Action plan in October 2017. The focus of the government will be on three objectives – harmonization of the national legislation with the Istanbul Convention, the establishment of general and specialist support services, and the prevention of gender-based violence and domestic violence. All activities will be done in the time frame of 2018-2023, after which the government of North Macedonia is supposed to submit the first report to GREVIO.

In the process of adopting the Action plan, the government has put an obligation on all relevant ministries to produce their own operational plans and publish them on their websites for the public to be informed and for everyone to be able to track what has been achieved.

Following ratification, in 2018 three centers for victims of sexual violence were opened in Skopje at the gynecological departments in Tetovo and Kumanovo. The law on social protection was amended to allow for outside-residential institutional sheltering of victims of trafficking and sexual violence. Since 2018 there have been two such victims placed. The next step is to work on determining the cost of such service. Another important fact mentioned by Ms. Trenchevska is that there is a budget in place for 2019 allocated for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention. While North Macedonia might be the last in the region to ratify, this means the country can learn from the experiences of other countries. GREVIO, as an expert body, is expected to contribute to the improvement of the legislation and policy with regard to VAW and domestic violence.

Regional cooperation is also of utmost importance through exchange of good practices. Gender equality institutions in North Macedonia are also part of the Regional Coordination Body functioning from Bosnia and Herzegovina and gathering gender institutional mechanisms from the region.

Discussion

Aurela Bozo, from CSO Civic Initiative from Albania, commented that CSOs use international standards as tools to monitor the implementation of the Convention. Currently, 48 organizations are included in a monitoring network. Members of this network have provided feedback on the improvement of national legislation. When it comes to free legal aid, they managed to refer court decisions to concrete articles of the Istanbul Convention.

The network also managed to have judges in Albanian courts review violent conduct when deciding custody over children in divorce cases and when issuing rights to visit or supervised visit through thorough risk assessment.

Jasminka Susmel, a representative of the Balkan Region, reflected on the existence of the regional coordination board – Western Balkan Countries, and Albania and Turkey are to join. By signing the Sarajevo Declaration in 2005, an umbrella regional network Union of Associations (Balkan Region) was established working on gender equality and strongly promoting the Istanbul Convention.

Biljana Stepanov added that the Strategy for combating domestic violence in Serbia expired in 2015, and there is also no Action plan. UN Women is urged to push for these issues to move forward and put policies in place for further actions.

Merita Xhafaj added that Albanian institutions are currently under screening, and GREVIO recommendations have to be taken seriously in terms of setting up proper standards in the countries in the region. The Ministry for European Integration prepared a platform to monitor adherence to international conventions. An inter-institutional action plan was made with local governments, agencies for statistics and CSOs in order to implement the GREVIO recommendations. The action plan is a live document, and through gender-responsive budgeting, financial means for its implementation are there as well. Lastly, she mentioned how important it is for all these processes, including the Regional Forum, to be properly reported on in the media.

Aleksandra Petric pointed out that CSOs in BiH prepared a baseline analysis on how domestic violence needs to be harmonized with the Istanbul Convention, and that the Strategy on implementation of the Convention was adopted and is public.

SESSION 3: TILL IT HAPPENS TO YOU: PREVENTION AS PART OF 4PS

This session has a focus on the prevention of violence against women in the region by examining previous and current preventive efforts, identifying challenges to prevention, and making recommendations for future efforts. As effective prevention requires multi-sectoral coordination and response, this session also discussed integrated policies and monitoring and reporting, with a particular focus on support provided to CSOs to take part in activities to prevent violence against women.

The first speaker was **Gertjana Hasalla**, Project Coordinator, CSO Woman Forum Elbasan, Albania, with 27 years of experience in ending VAW in Albania. Ms. Hasalla put a

focus on the work with communities and engaging youth. As part of their work in the regional program they have realized 25 forums with 525 participants. A main challenge in engaging with boys and men is that they see these activities as tailored for women, and they don't see the need for them to be there. The work is done through local coordinators - change agents for communities. Particularly in rural areas, prevention work is done with religious leaders from four different communities. Transforming gender stereotypes is done through discussions with youth using innovative approaches, first explaining to them the concepts and enabling them to engage. Techniques include simple ways and words, using videos, games, etc. Engaging men and boys means meeting people in person, traveling to rural areas, and talking to residents.



The next speaker in this session was **Beti Pejeva**, President of the Educational Humanitarian Organization, in North Macedonia. For the past 16 years the organization has been providing free legal assistance to women and girls. The Ministry of Justice has authorized this CSO to provide services such as free legal assistance to strengthen the position of women in society.

Working with service providers on expanding their perception of VAW and domestic violence is essential, and sending out the message to communities should also include preventive measures such as engaging with experts. The message that service providers are sending out is also very important, and this multi-sectorial cooperation shows that procedures can be simplified and gaps in the system can be bridged. The Istanbul Convention recommends multi-sectoral cooperation, which is why it is important to push for it.

When working with minorities, language barriers and the approach are important to consider in order for women to have adequate access to legal assistance. Ms. Pejeva stressed that while it's important to prevent GBV by involving boys and men, not only boys are gender insensitive; girls as well have a lot of prejudice. The way they work with them is through publishing competitions in creative videos and encouraging men to participate as well.

Goran Kusevija, the Deputy Minister at the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, Montenegro, spoke about prevention by working with 17 multidisciplinary teams and a small number of people involved in response to domestic violence. Some of the challenges after ratification of the Convention include general support services, and for the moment the analysis of costs is being carried out. Also, to work on this issue, service providers are required to take a professional exam. SOS helpline is also something mentioned in the GREVIO report, a recommendation that is currently being addressed in order to provide a sustainable solution.

The next speaker was **Celile Ozlem Tuncak**, Ombudsperson, Ombudsman Institution, Republic of Turkey. Ms. Tuncak mentioned how VAW is a problem in the whole region, but if approached from several disciplines, it can be tackled. Turkey was one of the first countries to ratify the Convention, after which the government adopted a law on preventing violence against women. As mentioned by other participants in order to fight VAW and work with perpetrators we need to increase public awareness, strengthen the private sector, and target all groups of the population.

One recommendation from Ms. Tuncak and the Ombudsperson Institution to ministries is to empower women and ensure a higher representation of women in decision-making. In addition, CSOs need to help develop public awareness. In relation to the legal framework, in Turkey there are national action plans aiming at reducing violence against women, but the collection of data is still an issue.

The next speaker was **Everold Hosein**, UN Women Communication Consultant, who spoke about communication for behavioral impact. Mr. Hosein stressed that everything being done under the 4th P is directed at behavioral outcomes. His presentation was framed by a fundamental question related to combatting VAW – why is it that people know the right thing to do, but don't act? Knowing about an issue and understanding what needs to be done to eradicate it is different from doing it; enabling action requires a different set of behaviours that need to be inspired.

He further introduced the idea of integrated marketing communication for behavioral impact in health and social development (IMC/COMBI), a methodology for institutions and organizations to communicate to their target groups in a way that will make them change their behavior.

Lastly, **Vlora Nushi** from the UN Women office in Kosovo presented what is being done in Kosovo when it comes to prevention of VAW and domestic violence.

Ms. Nushi began by saying that although Kosovo at this stage cannot ratify the Istanbul Convention, state institutions and civil society are committed to working together on the implementation of the Strategy against Domestic Violence (2016-2020), which is in line with CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention.

Besides the Strategy against Domestic Violence, as part of the EVAW regional program, CSOs are engaged to increase awareness about the Istanbul Convention, and one of the implementing partners, Lawyers Association Norma, has published a legal education guide fully in line with the Convention and CEDAW. NORMA is working with other CSOs, including organizations from remote areas, to increase the knowledge of the Istanbul Convention and strengthen advocacy skills to lobby for implementation.

Moreover, the shelters supported by the EVAW regional program have published a manual on services for survivors of violence in line with Essential Services Package. Currently, the staff members of all shelters are being trained based on this manual.

Recently, UN Women, in coordination with CSOs, Women's Caucus and legal experts, have supported an amendment to the Criminal Code to include sentencing and descriptions of other forms of violence, such as psychological and emotional violence, against members in a domestic relationship. The amendment of the Code was approved the Friday before the Regional Forum and aligned with standards set in the Istanbul Convention, especially regarding the definitions of various forms of violence against women and domestic violence.

In order to support strengthening the dialogue between CSOs and Institutions, UN Women is also working closely with the Ministry of Justice through the office of the Deputy Minister of Justice, who is has also been appointed as the National Coordinator, to establish the first database for cases of GBV and domestic violence, including data from all institutions such as police, judiciary, shelters, health services, etc. The database is being piloted in the one of the municipalities where there is a strong coordination mechanism, involving all members of the mechanism.

Since 2011, supported by UN Women, 7 Coordination Mechanisms (CM) for protection against Violence have been established in 7 municipalities in Kosovo. The role of CM is to provide multi-sectoral services and ensure that the chain of services is followed and that survivors receive adequate services. The CM is composed of all relevant institutions involved in the response, under the leadership of municipality administration. Those CM are identified as the best practices in the strategy against VAW, and the same modality will be replicated in all 32 other municipalities. Since the CSOs, police and shelters are members of the CM, they play a key role in prevention and protection.

As an example, in relation to prevention, during the 16 Days campaign, police and shelters are conducting interactive discussions with youth in high schools in municipalities and rural areas in order to increase awareness about VAW. UN Women Office has established the Security and Gender Group composed of CSOs, UN agencies, Agency for Gender Equality, EU, USAID, OSCE, KFOR, etc. Among other activities during the year, during the 16 Days campaign they coordinate and organize joint activities at the central and local level; at the moment, more than 100 activities are currently taking place.

DAY 2 – 28 NOVEMBER 2018



SESSION 4: A HOLISTIC RESPONSE TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: INTEGRATED POLICIES AND DATA COLLECTION

This session was aimed at identifying challenges and making recommendations in adopting and implementing statewide-integrated policies that are effective, coordinated, and comprehensive in that they encompass all relevant measures to prevent and combat all forms of VAW.

The session was chaired by **Zita Gurmai**, Member of the CoE Parliamentary Assembly Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, who started off by saying that political momentum and coordinated efforts are crucial in order to make changes in the field of ending VAW. She invited the session panelists to speak and all other participants to tweet and post on Facebook so as to bring as much attention as possible to these issues.

The first panelist was **Ljiljana Loncar**, Adviser to the Deputy Prime-Minister, President of the Coordinating Body for Gender Equality, who stressed the importance of having leaders in this field working together, as well as the inclusion of more young girls and boys and more men. Serbia submitted the first state report on the implementation of the Istanbul Convention. The work of the Coordinating Body for Gender Equality has revealed

a lack of awareness on the content of the Istanbul Convention. A major issue that persists in Serbia is the lack of comparable data within the ministries.

The state report helped identify the following key points, among others:

- Identification of stakeholders – state authorities, CSOs and independent bodies are not the only stakeholders; stakeholders include everyone, society as a whole, including young girls and boys forming their attitudes as to what is acceptable. These groups should have a clear understanding of the standards of the Convention.
- Cultural violence is something the society is faced with, as there is no border between peace and war. The ever-changing environment we live in needs fast responsive measures.
- Every second woman in Serbia has been exposed to some form of violence. Psychological violence is even more widespread, but there is no data on that. Guidance and support are needed, but ownership is important. Once the major stakeholders have ownership then they also have power.

- Monitoring and evaluation – Serbia is receiving an evaluation visit by the GREVIO committee in February 2019. The process will be helpful to assess the failures, identify lessons learnt, and replicate good practices.

The next speaker was **Ebru Hanbay**, Member of the Foundation for Women's Solidarity, Women's Studies Association, and CSO Forum CEDAW Executive Committee, Turkey. Ms. Hanbay began by asking what is actually meant by integrated policies, what their implementation implies, what structure they should take, and whether institutions are organizing training and raising awareness. She noted that the spirit of the Istanbul Convention is very important for all these questions.

Some of the challenges with implementation in Turkey are as follows:

- The police are continuously trained, but since they often rotate positions in their job, they move on to the next position; instead, they should be referred to adequate posts where their training will be well used.
- Integrated policies should take stock of all stakeholders, paying due diligence to the 5 principles mentioned in the Istanbul Convention. Politicians, when ratifying conventions and adopting laws, can show only nominal commitment, but they should also order the priorities. Violence against women is seen through the prism of preserving the family, even if it leads to women being murdered. In Turkey there is a law on protection from domestic violence, but judges' priorities are preserving families and preventing divorces. It is extremely important that those in the system of protection consider women as individual beings.
- There is a law on safe houses, but there are no women in local governments where decisions are made. It is of utmost importance to work on women's empowerment in politics.
- Data on violence is collected by institutions, and there has also been a prevalence study. The study showed that every third woman has been subjected to physical violence, and every second has survived psychological violence. These data have additionally triggered the women's movement in Turkey.
- In Turkey there is also a national plan on the implementation of the Istanbul Convention.
- Victims' private information is often placed in the public.
- Gender discrimination in education is also evident when it comes to education of girls, as an important factor in prevention of VAW.

The presentation by Ms. Hanbay was followed by several interjections. **Gorjana Mircic**, from the Ministry of Justice in Serbia added how the formulation of the Turkish law on protection from violence and family preservation is interesting and asked about child protection, as children are often used as instruments in family disputes and domestic violence trials.

Colleagues from Turkey replied that there is a special law on child protection, but it is not gender sensitive.

Sabiha Husic, from Medica Zenica, BiH, asked whether in Serbia budgets are gender sensitive and whether they are aimed at the implementation of the Istanbul Convention or financial means come predominately from international organizations.

Ljiljana Loncar replied that in Serbia all budgetary users have to have gender responsive budgeting. Every year new budgetary users are being introduced, especially managers, who are creating the budget and monitoring its implementation. Training was done with 900 civil servants and 47 budgetary users, and by 2020 all of them will be using gender sensitive budgets. Integrated response to violence includes all UN agencies and all ministries, added Ms. Loncar.

The next speaker in this panel was **Fatima Becirovic**, Project Coordinator at the Gender Center of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Ms. Becirovic reflected mostly on multisectoral cooperation and administrative data collection. In the past few years in BiH, a lot has been done on creating multi-sectoral teams at the local, cantonal and regional levels. In the Federation of BiH there is a functioning database. There are five shelters; CSOs and one center for social work are operating the SOS helpline, and these data are being registered in the database.

When it comes to multisectoral cooperation, Ms. Becirovic noted that we first have to define and clearly understand the jurisdiction and responsibility of each of the actors in the multisectoral response. It has become evident by working in the field that professionals working in local institutions are not clear on their duties, which is why constant training and meetings with them are needed.

In the last few years, a total of 22 multi-sectoral teams were created or revitalized, together with cantonal coordination bodies. Multisectoral teams are comprised of all relevant actors in the protection system, CSOs, religious community representatives and media. They work together on producing action plans.

A positive practice is that in 20 municipalities, municipal mayors gave their support, but there is not equal interest in all municipalities. In some municipalities the multisectoral

team is formalized and is operational through its action plan and measures to combat domestic violence. In addition to that, it's important to mention that victims do not have equal access to protection services with regard to their location – urban or rural, quality of the services are not the same everywhere as capacities are different as well.

Ms. Becirovic concluded by saying that we all have the responsibility for the adequate and consistent implementation of the Istanbul Convention. In BiH recently there have been talks of licensing of professionals working with victims of domestic violence in the way that professionals working with children in conflict with the law are licensed.

Ivanka Markovic, the President of the Council for Combating Domestic Violence in the Republika Srpska, BiH, contributed to the presentation made by Ms. Becirovic by adding that BiH is a politically and administratively complicated state, where each entity has their own law on protection from domestic violence. On the website of the Ministry of Family, Youth and Sports of Republika Srpska, all data on domestic violence regarded as misdemeanor offence is publicly available, disaggregated by gender and relationship between victim and perpetrator.

Reflecting on what the Ombudsperson of Bosnia and Herzegovina said earlier regarding rethinking the act of domestic violence as a criminal act, Ms. Markovic warned that this would decrease the severity of the act.

Sabiha Husic, director of CSO Medica Zenica from Bosnia and Herzegovina, intervened by saying that the norms set forth in BiH look very good on paper. The biggest burden of services (SOS helplines and shelters), however, is still carried by the CSOs in BiH.

The next speaker was **Ljiljana Raicevic**, President of the Women's Safe House Montenegro, who began by saying that 22 years ago she started as a politician when there was hardly any talk of women's movements in Montenegro. Feminism was like a bomb thrown into a deeply patriarchal environment.

Women's Safe House has thus far provided service to over 10,000 persons. The Safe House has never been funded by the government, because for this organization it would imply a layer of censure.

Ms. Raicevic mentioned an initiative that the Women's Safe House launched, called "Dance on the square," where for the first time they were able to put politicians in the spotlight to send a message against VAW. On Valentine's Day, 17 publicly recognized persons were dancing in the main square to raise awareness about VAW and domestic violence. These messages do not exist in legislation, but they are necessary for women and children in Montenegro.

Ms. Raicevic noted that the community police program was initiated by the Women's Safe House, which was deemed as a good practice. Citizens used the service, and it was seen as a deterrence factor. The Safe House location is public, Ms. Raicevic says. Often, when a woman leaves the shelter, she brings her husband by to show him where she was, so the location gets revealed anyway.

According to the Istanbul Convention, States are obliged to establish crisis centers for victims of rape and sexual violence. Ms. Raicevic mentioned how the Safe House in Montenegro has already been providing this kind of service. New beneficiaries are quickly integrated with the rest of the women in the community. Women who have children out of wedlock is a group that also comes to the Safe House because they are often rejected by their families, stigmatized by the society, and turned away by institutions. These groups should be first in line to receive support.

In Montenegro, data is not centralized, but a piece of good practice includes an operational team where the main actors involved in protection gather to discuss individual cases at the Ministry of Police. It's important to mention that the Safe House is well connected with the education sector. Teachers send their students for internships in the center, and they write school papers and other types of academic work on the topic of violence against women and domestic violence.

The next speaker in this session is **Iris Luarasi**, Director, National Hotline for Women and Girls, Counseling Line for Men. Ms. Luarasi talked about the Chapter 2 of the Istanbul Convention and the need for state-wide coordinated and comprehensive policies.

Most of the countries that have been monitored so far, said Ms. Luarasi, work on integrated policies. Denmark and Albania are often referred to as case studies. In case of Denmark, apart from all the action plans there was no single program to address violence against women as a form of gender-based violence. There is one national action plan on ending domestic violence and violence in intimate relationships - directional violence where both men and women are at equal play. Honor related conflicts were not included with a gender lens, but a cultural one that obscured the type of violence committed. Human and financial resources were recommended to Denmark, as well as objectivity in evaluation of policies.

In Albania, it was found that all stakeholders are included in the consolidated work and networks. CSOs are working on economic empowerment. Training of professionals is done almost exclusively by CSOs. At the policy level, CSOs are represented in the National Council on Gender Equality, which monitors the implementation of policies. The

National Council is tasked with reviewing implementation; evaluation is understood as independent review. During the evaluation it was found that there was a difference in the collection of data on domestic violence and other forms of violence against women. The latter barely paints a picture.

GREVIO pointed to the opportunities of the national coordination body. Data collection should be improved and made more visible by Albanian authorities, and it should clearly identify the number of women victims and gender related killings and the nature of the relationship between the victim and perpetrator.

Systematic administrative data collection is vital; recognizing VAW as GBV gives due regard to differences between women and men and experiences of support services and other institutions. Public policy and decision-making can be improved.

In Denmark, compared Ms. Luarasi, the measures issued did not provide data disaggregated by gender or relationship between victim and perpetrator. GREVIO was prevented from analyzing the judicial work, due to lack of data on information such as details of cases, number of claims for compensation, granting of free legal aid, those who serve sentences and that have been referred to perpetrator programs. This represents an absence of political will and a failure to respond to VAW as a gender phenomenon.

GREVIO remarked that Denmark and societies achieving equality should not allow a non-gendered approach to data collection as it masks the problem. In Balkan countries it is easy to ratify a convention, but also CSOs should also use the Convention to raise standards, pressure the government, and use it as a tool.

The session Chair, Ms. Zita Gurmai, concluded by encouraging all participants to use their time at the Regional Forum to network and keep members of Parliaments informed about the activities done to combat VAW.

The next session presented a report made by the European Women's Lobby in consultations with civil societies in the region: [Civil society perspectives on opportunities and challenges for fostering multi-stakeholder cooperation](#)

Valentina Andrasek, from the European Women's Lobby, presented the [regional report](#) compiled from different reports from the region on the status of the implementation of the Istanbul Convention and CEDAW, as well as the General Recommendations 35, 32 and 33.

Ms. Andrasek mentioned several sections of the report – integrated policies, intimate partner violence, sexual violence, violence against migrant women, and CSOs fighting against violence.

She further talked about the opportunities and challenges in CSOs fighting against violence. Challenges are regional, but opportunities identified are country based; each country did something well which is important for exchange. The Istanbul Convention speaks to the governments, institutions and their willingness and resources. On the other hand, CSOs bring additional support to what states do – monitor, advocate, provide data, write reports, raise public awareness, etc. The findings of the report are summarized as follows:

- No service or continuous work can be provided without money – it's necessary to create clear guidelines for transparency and then provide funds.

- 100% funding for safe houses in BiH is prescribed by legislation, 50% is prescribed for funding for SOS hotlines in Montenegro.
- Donors are reluctant to fund services that are not backed by government institutions.
- One recommendation is to support the opening of services and functioning of existing services.
- In North Macedonia, larger networks participate in policy making. A mechanism is needed include all voices.
- Women's CSOs are often used for data and information but not looked at as partners. CSOs reflect that they talk and talk with institutions without concrete outcomes. Institutions work with CSOs out of obligation, and react with an attitude of "Who are you to criticize?"
- In Albania there is a national mechanism for referring domestic violence cases, but it takes resources and commitment to make it work.

Definitive commitment and the establishment of formal sustainable mechanisms by the governments are needed. Participants writing down recommendations for mechanisms and resources should be employed by governments or regional institutions to ensure the expertise of women's organizations is acknowledged in the implementation of the Convention.



Valentina Andrasek, from the European Women's Lobby, presented the executive summary of the regional report "Integrated Policies – Integrated Approach Mapping of Policies and Legislation on Violence Against Women and the Istanbul Convention in the Western Balkans and Turkey."

Discussion

A question from the audience referred to the situation in Bulgaria and possible ways to put pressure on the government to understand the importance of the Istanbul Convention and the need to ratify it.

Ms. Andrasek replied that in Croatia it has taken a long time to ratify, because of the so-called gender ideology, but the only ideology was to keep women at home and subordinate. There has been a recent publication by CoE to explain what the Istanbul Convention is and what it is not. International pressure is also key.

Jasmina Muric from Serbia commented that through the work of CSOs, which has largely promoted the values of the fight against violence, they have managed to influence the government during the process of the development of the Convention. She noted there was never any need for international pressure; the most important thing was to find strength within the country and arguments for the ratification.

Merita Xhafaj contributed to the discussion by adding that this session is one of the most important, considering the role of the European Women's Lobby in the ratification processes for the Istanbul Convention. One of the conclusions from the Forum could be how much the states helped each other in the process of the implementation of the Convention and GREVIO recommendations. If all provisions were completely implemented by all countries, there would be no more need for the Convention and the monitoring bodies. It is clear that the countries in the region have done a lot of work, and that there is also a lot more to be done. Ms. Xhafaj mentioned that the Regional Forum is an opportunity for states to talk about successes and failures and to include the media. The North Macedonian television stations reported widely about the Forum, and news was disseminated online as well. One of the standards that should be pushed for is centralized and consistent administrative data collection, another is continuous training of frontline professionals, and finally, assessment of CSO cooperation with the government. The support coming from UN Women, Council of Europe and the EU is invaluable to both governments and CSOs in joint efforts to combat VAW and domestic violence.

SESSION 5: GOOD PRACTICES IN BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS WITHIN AND AMONGST KEY STAKEHOLDERS

This session aims at taking stock of multi-agency cooperation, and the focus is on presenting good examples of cooperation among and within the national (and local) authorities and CSOs to promote multi-agency cooperation in the region across the countries.

The chair of this session is **Branka Zigante Zivkovic**, Judge of High Misdemeanor Court of Republic of Croatia. To add to the discussion from above on how to get government buy-in for ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention, Ms. Zivkovic says she insists on using the full name of the Istanbul Convention so that everyone is clear about its contents and reference.

The first speaker was **Natasa Vukovic**, former MP and women's CSO activist, Women's Political Network from Montenegro. She began by saying that it is high time for feminist politicians and civil society sector representatives to unite in the fight against VAW and GBV. Ms. Vukovic clarified that Montenegro is the only country in the region where one is fined with 150 EUR for abusing a woman, but fined EUR 500 for not using gender-sensitive language.



Women politicians in Montenegro have put aside their partisan and ideological differences and committed to changing laws. Working closely with UNDP in Montenegro, women politicians used the professional experience of regional experts, their ideas and experience of persons working with victims on a daily basis, together with political work that they do. They initiated reviews of seven different laws to be further harmonized with the Istanbul Convention (Family law, Law on protection from domestic violence, Criminal Code, Law on police, Law on courts, Law on misdemeanor offences) and these will be included in the government annual plan for 2019.

Ms. Vukovic emphasized that it's very important to include all actors, as there seems to be some clash between CSOs and government, and institutions and politicians, which hinders any further progress. Women politicians can work on formulating amendments to laws with support from everyone else. Women's CSOs are extremely important because women tend to turn to them much more than institutions, which means that institutions do not have the right approach. Licensing CSOs is an issue that can lead to regulating the relationship between CSOs and government and eliminating any doubt in CSOs' expertise.

A positive example would be to establish a regional network of women politicians to exchange experience, put a stop to retrograde processes, and avoid similar mistakes. Politicians have an important role in regional gatherings, and it is high time that feminists from CSOs and international organizations unite, put differences aside and work together in the interest of victims.

The next speaker was **Olga Martin Gonzalez**, Gender Coordinator at DG NEAR, European Commission. Gender equality has been a key principle of the EU ever since the Treaty of Rome introduced the principle of equal pay for men and women in 1957. DG NEAR is strongly committed to move ahead on gender equality, women's, and girl's empowerment. Gender equality is included in the enlargement policy, the EU includes gender equality as a prerequisite for accession. Candidate countries are expected to comply with the related EU acquis. The 2018 Western Balkan strategy pointed out that equality between women and men must also be ensured and domestic violence tackled.

DG NEAR is supporting partners in delivering on their commitments to gender equality, in line also with the Gender Action Plan II, 2016-2020, (GAP), adopted in 2015. The implementation and report of the GAP is mandatory for the EU and EU Member States. The GAP includes gender mainstreaming as one of the three specific approaches to be implemented in the programming

of development initiatives, together with political and policy dialogue and the promotion of specific actions for gender equality and women's and girls' rights. The GAP aims to ensure effective delivery on EU commitments to gender equality and increased accountability by defining expected results and tracking resources. The GAP covers three thematic pillars: 1/ Ensuring girls' and women's physical and psychological integrity (selected as priority by all Western Balkan countries). 2/ Promoting the social and economic rights/empowerment of girls and women. 3/ Strengthening girls' and women's voice and participation. Also one horizontal: Shifting the institutional culture to more effectively deliver on EU commitments.

Ms. Martin Gonzalez emphasized that DG NEAR is putting efforts in gender mainstreaming into all actions, including the political dialogues and programmes funded through the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) and the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), ensuring that the minimum standards of performance of the GAP are followed, such as the use of OECD/DAC Gender equality policy marker 0 always justified, gender analysis done for all priority sectors to inform all actions and sex-disaggregated data used throughout the project and programme cycle and programming. According to the GAP II, the 85% of all new actions should score DAC code -gender equality policy marker- 1 or 2 by 2020. Regarding the importance of collection accurate data in order to better inform and monitor several policy areas, the EU is supporting the European Institute for Gender Equality in the introduction of the EU Index of Gender Equality in Western Balkans and Turkey, being Serbia the first non-European beneficiary to develop the Gender Equality Index.

Ms. Martin Gonzalez concluded that the regional program implemented by UNWOMEN contributes to the achievement of gender equality and EU decided to extend the program to have a bigger impact on results. Having said that, she stressed that is necessary to move in a new phase where the focus has to be on effective implementation of the Istanbul Convention and the role of the CSOs in this program, and any program that is funded by the EU, is key. The importance of working jointly and learn from each other and the need to engage boys and men in order to change their mentality and question their masculinity was also raised.

The next speaker was **Maja Balshikjevska**, Project Coordinator at Health Education and Research Association (HERA), North Macedonia. Ms. Balshikjevska explained how this association is a technical support to the government, helping to establish quality services. The government of North Macedonia adopted the action plan; earlier at the conference there was word of making a

mechanism to calculate costs of specialized services from two perspectives – the aspect of minimum standards and the financial breakdown for the organizations and the government's annual budget projection. This analysis considered several services: SOS helpline, counseling centers for victims, counseling for perpetrators and crisis center for victims of rape. The Ministry for Social Policy should now have enough data to move forward.

For over 5 years, HERA has been running the First Family Center in Skopje, which is the only, and first of its kind, specialized counseling center in North Macedonia. Through specialized programs for work based on psychotherapy, services are provided to victims of domestic violence, perpetrators of domestic violence, children affected by domestic violence as direct victims or testimonies, as well as other family members that help in the counseling process. Counseling is provided by a professional team of psychotherapists; one psychotherapist works individually with one client for 3 to 4 initial sessions, and then group therapy starts with a team of two psychotherapists. The counseling can be voluntary (at the request of the clients), or it can be mandatory, upon pronounced measure by the Court as part of the sentence of a perpetrator of domestic violence.

The program of the center is officially approved by the Ministry of Labor and Social Work, and it meets the standards and operational procedures for performing these kinds of services. Psychological support and counseling are provided according three separate programs for each target group (women, children and perpetrators). In line with the standards of the center, the survivor and the perpetrator must undergo counseling sessions at different times, in different rooms and by different therapist teams.

The Family Center has a team of 9 psychotherapists, 1 social worker, 1 psychologist, 1 legal advisor and 1 volunteer, who provide the following services:

- Psychosocial support to women and children victims of DV: psychosocial support, counseling, psychotherapy, individual and group therapy, legal advice, play and art therapy, social rights counseling, accompaniment to state institutions and organization, socialization and trauma recovery;
- Psychosocial treatment of perpetrators of DV: counseling and PTSD treatment, individual and group therapy.

The service is established with support by the City of Skopje (local self-government) and Komercijalna Banka (private sector). The services have been expanded in more municipalities as a result of the support provided by UN Women.

Ivanka Markovic asked about the profiles of persons who work with perpetrators, and Ms. Balshikjevska replied that a nationwide training was done previously by international experts, resulting in 10 professionals getting certificates according to the methodology developed by Prof. Ajdukovic. Criteria for certificates were 500 hours of work in psychotherapy, knowledge of gender-based violence, and experience working with perpetrators. Ms. Zivkovic added that in Croatia profiles can include psychologists, social workers and social pedagogues.

The next speaker was **Svetlana Selakovic**, Assistant Secretary for Demography and Gender Equality, Provincial Secretariat for Social Policy, Demography and Gender Equality in Serbia.

Ms. Selakovic began by saying that Vojvodina has 2 million inhabitants and 45 municipalities. Since 2002 there has been work on gender equality in Serbia together in partnership with the civil society sector. There is excellent cooperation with the network for combating violence and the institute for gender equality mostly deals with women from rural areas and rural associations. The Secretariat deals with institutions and provides funds for shelters, SOS helplines, a network of SOS helplines, and seven centers for women victims of sexual violence. Apart from the Coordination Body at the state level, there is also an inter-sectoral committee at the level of the regional government. The committee is monitoring the implementation of the Secretariat's programs and the next report will be available in December 2018. From the perspective of the institution, the Secretariat has done a lot, and also thanks to the support of UN Women.

Ms. Selakovic mentioned that Secretariat staff has gone through extensive training in gender responsive budgeting, and the regional government has been assessed positively for gender sensitivity. Gender responsive budgeting is applied by all secretariats, having in mind that in Vojvodina there are 28 nations and a lot of different languages. The Secretariat does translation and works with marginalized women and national minorities, and is a part of an integrated program for training of professionals to work with women survivors of violence, especially women with disabilities, Roma women, etc. Experience and legislation from Zrenjanin and Somobor were used as models for the legislation on domestic violence in North Macedonia.

The next speaker was **Radmila Zigic**, Director of Foundation Lara from Bijeljina, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Ms. Zigic stressed that the proper legislation exists in BiH, but it's not implemented consistently, which is a situation affecting the victims is the worst kind of way. All specialist services in BiH are run by CSOs, which are well connected through networks, and most of them are members of the Safe Network.

Women's organizations are those in BiH that carry out prevention campaigns, demanding changes because they have access to women and the best insight into the situation in the field. CSOs are also an important element in establishing and coordinating multisectoral cooperation in local communities and setting standards for multisectoral response, together with entity gender centers. However, minimum standards are called that for a reason – countries should invest maximum efforts in protecting victims.

Discussion

Mirjana Lukac, Director of the Gender Center Republika Srpska, BiH, added several points on the efforts invested by gender mechanisms in curtailing domestic violence and VAW in BiH, and added that more space should have been given to institutions to present their work on the implementation of the Istanbul Convention as well.

Aleksandra Petric added that the Republika Srpska government is funding shelters in that entity, but municipalities are not adhering to their part of the commitment prescribed by the law, so there is an initiative to transfer the entire responsibility to the level of entity government. Governments are responsible for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, but CSOs are there for the victims.

The head of the Council for Combating Domestic Violence in Serbia intervened to say that the 11 representatives from Serbia are at the Forum and they came as a team. The police represent the first frontline institution that reacts to cases of violence and issues protection measures, with zero tolerance. In the last years, says the Head of Council, 4,000 cases were filed to court and 21,000 protection measures were issued. There are sanctions in place for police departments and officials not complying with the law.

Participant from North Macedonia intervened to add a few points on the major current weaknesses that are being addressed through the regional program in cooperation

with UN Women, which will also contribute to consistent data collection, inviting participants who had experience with data collection to exchange information.

Josko Mandic, from the Agency for Gender Equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina, raised a point on the established Regional coordination mechanism in Balkan countries. Albanian institutions are to join until the end of the year. Mr. Mandic added that a form of regional cooperation already exists and in order to achieve sustainability, the support of all institutional mechanisms in the region is crucial.

Alia El-Yassir, Regional Director of UN Women Europe and Central Asia, made a final address to the participants, thanking them for contributing to the regional exchange and emphasizing that the conversations had at the Forum need to be continued. "We need to build on that," she stated. "We need to make sure that partnerships are inclusive."

Concluding Summary

The three-year UN Women programme "Implementing Norms, Changing Minds" seeks to strengthen women's organizations' capacity to hold governments accountable, advocate for effective implementation, and monitor prevention of and response to violence against women. The programme also addresses structural causes of gender inequality – and one of its most pervasive expressions, violence against women – through a transformation of gender discriminatory stereotypes, perceptions and beliefs. Lastly, protection, prevention and response to violence against women is closely interlinked with the availability of and access to comprehensive, multi-sectorial services for survivors of violence.

The Regional Forum "Integrated Policies, Inclusive Partnerships" brought together representatives from the governmental and regional institutions with civil society in order to engage in a dialogue about violence against women and girls, implementation of the Istanbul Convention and CEDAW, and cooperation between all concerned stakeholders in implementation and monitoring of legislation and policies against violence against women. The objectives of the Forum were, on the one hand, to take stock of achievements, challenges, good practices, cooperation and generally share experience and, on the other hand, to identify and define clear ways to enhance the cooperation between civil society organisations and other stakeholders. This includes a functioning mechanism of cooperation, both national and regional.



During the Forum, different voices were heard, from representatives of national and regional institutions to civil society organisations. Participants presented and evaluated progress and achievements in the different countries in the region with regards to the implementation of the Istanbul Convention. Most agreed that there have been significant achievements, as the mapping analysis also indicated, but also acknowledged that there is for drastic improvements. In most countries, laws and regulations are effective on paper, but not necessarily in implementation. Traditional patriarchal attitudes still colour the response from officials and even service providers. With the exception of Turkey and North Macedonia, women's civil society organisations provide the majority of services, and even where they are not in charge of most service provision, they speak from the position of women survivors of violence and represent the voices of women that the IC and national legislation are designed to protect. Therefore, it was important that the Forum provided space for taking stock of cooperation between national governments, civil society organizations, and regional institutions in implementing and monitoring IC implementation.

Some examples of good practices of cooperation could be found in the region, such as consultation process with the women's CSOs in Albania or the emergence of a similar process in North Macedonia. The presentations given at the Forum also confirmed what the mapping analysis already found – there is not enough cooperation between governments and civil society, and an equal partnership has not been achieved. This is most evident in funding of women's CSOs from the state, which exists only in some countries and only partially for provision of services, and not for the core work, particularly the advocacy work of women's CSOs. Women's CSOs are treated as a point of outsourcing services and not as equal partners, but even these services are not fully funded.

While there have been many achievements in the Western Balkans and Turkey in the development of a strong legislative framework, the practical response to violence against women remains fraught with many challenges, including gender discriminatory stereotypes, a lack of understanding of the structural causes of VAW, and a widespread focus on preserving the family at the cost of protection of women's individual rights to live free of violence. To successfully address these issues, the involvement of women's CSOs is key.



FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The 2019 Regional Forum will integrate good practices and lessons learnt from the 2018 event. Based on a consultative process following the forum, including an open-response participant satisfaction survey, preparations and organization for the 2019 Regional Forum will be informed by several key insights.

Participant feedback demonstrated a need for discussion on concrete opportunities for common initiatives at country level and within the region. As the time to develop such initiatives at the forum is limited, the 2019 forum will be preceded by a series of meetings, both among programme-implementing partners and country level stakeholders, in order to contribute concrete suggestions for cooperation and partnership at the 2019 event.

Programme level preparation

Throughout 2019, implementing partners of the 'Implementing Norms, Changing Minds' programme will participate in a series of consultations to take stock of the situation of the 4Ps in the region, address new developments, identify opportunities for multi-stakeholder cooperation, and participate in a knowledge exchange of good practices and lessons learnt. These partner consultations will also serve as an opportunity to narrow the agenda and objectives of the forum and to contribute a clearer and more united set of goals for its outcome.

Country level preparation

In order to make the best use of the limited time during the forum, preparatory meetings at country level will be organized in order to take stock of implementation and discuss opportunities for multi-stakeholder cooperation and coordination. Preparatory meetings will include all relevant stakeholders, including representatives of CSOs, government, human rights institutions, and others. Conclusions, recommendations, and findings from these preparatory meetings should be brought to the forum as each country's contribution to the dialogue.

Format

The design of the 2019 forum will provide more space for interactivity among participants and encourage dialogue among participants from different sectors and countries. Results from the 2018 participant survey showed that while the forum topics addressed by speakers were relevant and useful, participants would prefer more time for discussion and interactive participation. Based on this feedback, the 2019 forum will limit plenary sessions and instead integrate interactive activities, such as thematic workshops and small working group discussions.

ANNEX I

YOUTUBE: REGIONAL FORUM ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION



<https://youtu.be/OQY9idQhIZ8>

ANNEX II

REGIONAL FORUM: PROMOTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS AND TURKEY

“INTEGRATED POLICIES, INCLUSIVE PARTNERSHIPS”

SKOPJE, 27-28 NOVEMBER 2018

HOTEL HOLIDAY INN, MILLENNIUM I CONFERENCE ROOM

DAY 1 – 27 NOVEMBER 2018

SETTING THE SCENARIO: HOLISTIC APPROACHES TO COMBATING GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Time	Activity
8:45 – 9:30	Registration, coffee
9:30 – 10.00	<p>Opening of the Forum</p> <p>Welcome remarks by H.E. Mr Zoran Zaev, Prime Minister</p> <p>Welcome remarks by H.E. Samuel Žbogar, Head of the Delegation of the European Union</p> <p>Welcome remarks by Alia El-Yassir, Regional Director Europe and Central Asia Regional Office UN Women (ECARO)</p> <p>Master of Ceremony, Gizem Yarbil Gurol, Communication and Advocacy Specialist UN Women ECARO</p>
10.00 – 10.45	<p>Keynote address</p> <p>Mila Carovska, Minister of Labor and Social Policy, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy</p> <p>Daniele Cangemi, Head of the Human Dignity and Gender Equality Department, Council of Europe</p> <p>Asha Allen, Policy and Campaigns Officer, European Women’s Lobby</p>
10.45 – 11.30	<p>Setting the stage: Advancement of women’s human rights with a special focus on gendered understanding of violence and discrimination: From the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention)</p> <p>This session reviews the historical timeline of women’s human rights, takes a closer look at the international framework that underlies the global gender equality agenda, and emphasizes the importance of taking a gendered approach to violence and discrimination.</p> <p><i>Panellists:</i></p> <p>Prof. Dr. Feride Acar, Chair of GREVIO and Member of CEDAW Committee</p> <p>Prof. Yakın Ertürk, Former UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women (2003-2009)</p> <p>Stephanie Futter-Orel, Executive Manager, WAVE Network (Women Against Violence Europe)</p>

Time	Activity
11:30 – 12:00	<p>Session 1: The 4Ps of the Istanbul Convention</p> <p>One of the strengths of the Istanbul Convention is its comprehensive 4P approach: Prevention, protection, prosecution and (integrated) policies. This session will provide a general understanding of the 4Ps and set the foundation for more focused discussion in upcoming sessions.</p> <p>Dr. Jasminka Džumhur, Human Rights Ombudsperson, Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina</p>
12:00 – 13:30	Lunch
13:30 – 15:30	<p>Session 2: Regional implementation of the Istanbul Convention: Progress and challenges</p> <p>This session will provide a regional overview of the implementation process of the Istanbul Convention. Speakers will include governmental and civil societal representatives to ensure that different approaches and perspectives are provided when it comes to international obligations.</p> <p><i>Chair:</i> Genoveva Tisheva, Director of the Women's Human Rights Training Institute (WHRTI) for young lawyers from Eastern Europe; Member of the Coordinating Committee of Social Watch Coalition; Member of the Network of Independent Legal Experts on Gender Equality to the European Commission</p> <p><i>Panellists:</i> Merita Xhafaj, General Director of Social Policies, Ministry of Health and Social Policies, Albania Gokce Bahar Ozturk, Victim's Rights Department (Investigating Judge) Ministry of Justice, Government of the Republic of Turkey Aleksandra Petrić, Director of CSO United Women Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina Biljana Stepanov, President of the Board, SOS Network Vojvodina, Serbia MP Nada Drobniak, Head of Parliamentary Committee for Gender Equality, former Head of Gender Equality Office in the Government of Montenegro Jovana Trenchevska, State Secretary, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Republic of North Macedonia</p>
15.30 – 15.45	Coffee break
15:45 – 17:00	<p>Session 3: Till it happens to you: Prevention as part of 4Ps</p> <p>This session will focus on the prevention of violence against women in the region by examining previous and current preventive efforts, identifying challenges to prevention, and making recommendations for future efforts. As effective prevention requires multi-sectoral coordination and response, this session will also discuss integrated policies and monitoring and reporting, with a particular focus on support provided to CSOs to take part in activities to prevent violence against women.</p> <p><i>Chair:</i> UN Women</p> <p><i>Panellists:</i> Gertjana Hasalla, Project Coordinator, CSO Woman Forum Elbasan, Albania Beti Pejeva, President, Educational Humanitarian Organization, Republic of North Macedonia Goran Kusevija, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, Montenegro Celile Ozlem Tuncak, Ombudsperson, Ombudsman Institution, Republic of Turkey Dr. Everold Hosein, Communication for Behavioural Impact Expert</p>
Group photo	

DAY 2 – 28 NOVEMBER 2018

Time	Activity
9:00 – 11:00	<p>Session 4: A Holistic Response to Violence against Women: Integrated Policies and Data Collection</p> <p>Ending violence against women is neither the responsibility of one actor nor it can be achieved with the efforts of one actor; it requires the coordinated efforts of all governmental, civil-societal, national, international, and regional actors. This session will identify challenges and make recommendations in adopting and implementing state-wide “integrated policies” that are effective, coordinated, and comprehensive in that they encompass all relevant measures to prevent and combat all forms of violence against women.</p> <p><i>Chair:</i> Zita Gurmai, Member of the CoE Parliamentary Assembly Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination</p> <p><i>Panellists:</i> Ljiljana Loncar, Adviser to the Deputy Prime-Minister, President of the Coordinating Body for Gender Equality Ebru Hanbay, Member of Foundation for Women’s Solidarity, Women’s Studies Association, and CSO Forum CEDAW Executive Committee, Turkey Fatima Bećirović, Project Coordinator, Gender Centre of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina Ljiljana Raicevic, President, Women’s Safe House, Montenegro Iris Luruasi, Director, National Hotline for Women and Girls, Counseling Line for Men and Boys, Albania</p>
11:00 – 11:30	Coffee break
11:30 – 12:00	<p>Civil society perspectives on opportunities and challenges for fostering multi-stakeholder cooperation by EWL</p> <p>Valentina Andrasek, European Women’s Lobby</p>
12:00 – 13:30	Lunch
13:30 – 15:30	<p>Session 5: Good practices in building partnerships within and amongst key stakeholders at country level</p> <p>As outlined in the previous sessions, the Istanbul Convention promotes multi-agency cooperation. The aim of this session is to present good examples of cooperation among and within the national (and local) authorities and CSOs to promote multi-agency cooperation in the region and across countries.</p> <p><i>Chair:</i> Branka Zigante Zivkovic, Judge of High Misdemeanor Court of Republic of Croatia</p> <p><i>Panellists:</i> Olga Martín González, Gender Equality, Centre of Thematic Expertise Rule of Law/Fundamental Rights, Democracy, Directorate-General for Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiation Natasa Vukovic, Women’s Political Network, former MP and CSO activist, Montenegro Maja Balshikjevska, Project Coordinator, Health Education and Research Association, Communication for Behavioural Impact Expert Svetlana Selaković, Assistant Secretary for Demography and Gender Equality, Provincial Secretariat for Social Policy, Demography and Gender Equality, Serbia Radmila Zigic, Director of CSO Lara Bijeljina, Bosnia and Herzegovina Prof. Dr. Vesna Ratkovic, GREVIO member, Montenegro</p>
15:30 – 15:35	Closing remarks

ANNEX III

REGIONAL FORUM: PROMOTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS AND TURKEY

“INTEGRATED POLICIES, INCLUSIVE PARTNERSHIPS”

SKOPJE, 27-28 NOVEMBER 2018

HOTEL HOLIDAY INN, MILLENNIUM I CONFERENCE ROOM

Speaker Bios



Zoran Zaev

Prime Minister

Welcome remarks

Born in Strumica, Prime Minister Zoran Zaev started his professional career in the business sector, where he rapidly rose to managerial positions. With a strong academic background in economics, Prime Minister Zaev served on the boards of several banks, companies, and public enterprises. In 2005, Prime Minister Zaev was elected as mayor of Strumica and became the youngest mayor in the country. He served as mayor through 2016, during which time the city of Strumica experienced strong economic growth and development. Prime Minister Zaev also earned a reputation for transparent and anti-corrupt leadership. He was elected as Prime Minister in May 2017. Prime Minister Zaev holds a master's degree in Monetary Economics and Finance from the Skopje University „St. Cyril and Methodius“.



Samuel Žbogar

Head of Delegation, European Union, Republic of North Macedonia

Welcome remarks

Slovenian diplomat who is currently serving as the EU Ambassador to North Macedonia. Mr. Žbogar has previously served as the Slovenian ambassador to the United States of America and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia.



Alia El-Yassir

UN Women Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia and Representative to Turkey

Welcome remarks

Alia El-Yassir has been working with UNIFEM/UN Women since 1997, and currently serves as the Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia and representative to Turkey. She previously worked as the UN Women Special Representative in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), managing a complex portfolio of programmes and projects, as well as supporting the UNCT and HCT on establishing coordination mechanisms for tackling gender equality and women's empowerment issues. She is part of the UNDG roster of gender experts and has supported other UNCTs in this capacity. Before joining UN Women, she briefly worked with UNDP and was engaged in the education field. In addition to volunteering with a number of women's and human rights NGOs, she has worked on educational media for children. Alia El-Yassir graduated from McGill University in Montreal and pursued post-graduate studies in Education and Anthropology, with a specialization on Gender Studies at Ben Gurion University of the Negev.

Speaker Bios



Mila Carovska

Minister of Labor and Social Policy, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Republic of North Macedonia

Keynote speaker

Mila Carovska has a strong background in social work. As a social worker, Ms. Carovska worked with the most vulnerable members of the community. She facilitated educational workshops and drama workshops for children housed in institutions. In addition, she worked as a supervisor for drug users and their families and as an adviser for individuals living with HIV/AIDS. Ms. Carovska continued to upgrade her professional career and pursue higher education and training opportunities. She gained managerial experience in dozens of projects in the sphere of social policy on topics such as domestic violence, sexual rights, and the education of vulnerable groups. Prior to her position as Minister of Labor and Social Policy, Ms. Carovska was a Special Advisor in the Cabinet of the Minister of Labor and Social Policy, Frosina Remenski.



Daniele Cangemi

Head of the Human Dignity and Gender Equality Department, Council of Europe

Keynote speaker

Mr. Cangemi is the Head of the Human Dignity and Gender Equality Department at the Directorate General of Democracy of the Council of Europe. In this position, he supervises the Council of Europe work in the areas of gender equality, violence against women and trafficking in human beings. Notable bodies under his responsibility include the secretariat of the Gender Equality Commission and the secretariat of the monitoring bodies that oversee the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention) and of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. The Department is also in charge of co-operation and capacity building programmes for member states in these areas.

Prior to this position, he served notably as administrator in the Legal Advice Department, Deputy Head of the Counter-terrorism Task Force, and Head of the Human Rights Law and Policy Division. Mr. Cangemi holds a degree in Political Science from the LUISS University, Rome, and a master's degree from the College of Europe in Bruges.



Asha Allen

Policy and Campaigns Officer, European Women's Lobby

Keynote Speaker

Asha Allen is gender equality expert, feminist activist and researcher who joined the EWL in September 2017 and works as Policy and Campaigns officer, where she coordinates the EWL's advocacy and campaigns regarding the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention, combatting cyber violence against women and strategizing on ensuring a gender perspective within European initiatives on digitalization. She is a published researcher specializing in developing analyses on trafficking in human beings and the sexual exploitation of women and girls across Europe. Previously, she worked as an assistant consultant within the European Parliament Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) and has a proven track record of third sector experience and dedication to combatting gender inequality.

Originally from the UK, Ms. Allen holds a bachelor's degree in History and International Relations and a master's degree in Transnational studies. In 2016, she moved to Brussels to complete a second master's degree in European Studies and has maintained over 10 years' experience in the voluntary sector.

Speaker Bios



Prof. Dr. Feride Acar

Chair, Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO)

Speaker: Setting the stage: Advancement of women's human rights with a special focus on gendered understanding of violence and discrimination: From the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention)

Prof. Dr. Feride Acar is professor emerita of political sociology and gender and women's studies. Currently, she is the President of GREVIO, the monitoring organ of the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention. She is also a member of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) of which she was the Chairperson (2003-2005). Prof. Acar is the author of academic works on women's human rights and gender equality, and has provided consultancy and training to international institutions, governments and civil society organizations.



Prof. Yakın Ertürk

Former UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women

Speaker: Setting the stage: Advancement of women's human rights with a special focus on gendered understanding of violence and discrimination: From the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention)

Yakin Ertürk was the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women (SRVAW) 2003-2009, and until recently Professor of Sociology at Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey. She also undertook numerous international assignments, including as a member of the International Independent Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic by the UNHRC. She is a member of the Board of the Asylum and Migration Research Center in Ankara, and served on the Council of Europe, Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT). Prof. Dr. Ertürk was Project Director for an eleven-country research project on family law and violence against women, which is part of an IDRC-funded law reform advocacy project carried out by Women's Learning Partnership. Her book, Violence without Borders: Paradigm, Policy and Praxis Concerning Violence against Women, was published in 2016 (translated from the original Turkish version published in 2015).



Stephanie Futter-Orel

Executive Manager, WAVE Network (Women Against Violence Europe)

Speaker, Setting the stage: Advancement of women's human rights with a special focus on gendered understanding of violence and discrimination: From the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention)

Stephanie Futter-Orel is passionate about fighting violence against women and has a master's degree in Political Science from the University of Vienna, as well as a master's degree in Development Management from the London School of Economics. Austrian by birth, she has worked for over 7 years in women's specialist organizations dedicated to fighting violence against women. She was responsible for a wide range of direct support services to women who experienced domestic and/or sexual abuse (DA/SA) including e.g. advice and advocacy, shelters, counselling services, representation of survivors in the criminal justice system, helplines, group programmes, awareness raising about DA/SA in the health care sector, prevention work with young people and specialist support services for women with complex needs, trafficked women and those from minority backgrounds.

Speaker Bios



Dr. Jasminka Džumhur

Human Rights Ombudsperson, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Speaker, Session 1: The 4Ps of the Istanbul Convention

Jasminka Džumhur is a Human Rights Ombudsperson of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a holder of PhD degree in law/ Doctor of Juridical Science, and a legal expert who has passed the bar exam and has more than 30 years of experience in the field of judiciary, human rights and international relations. She is currently the Vice-Chairperson of the UN Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families. Previously, she served as the first woman member of the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, serving as the Committee's Vice-Chairperson from 2014-2015. In the course of her work in the UN OHCHR, Dr. Džumhur has monitored implementation of international human rights standards in BiH. She participated in drafting of a series in laws and by-laws, including legislation on gender equality and domestic violence.

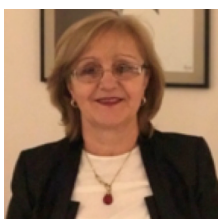


Genoveva Tisheva

Director of the Women's Human Rights Training Institute (WHRTI) for young lawyers from Eastern Europe; Member of the Coordinating Committee of Social Watch Coalition; Member of the Network of Independent Legal Experts on Gender Equality to the European Commission

Chair, Session 2: Regional implementation of the Istanbul Convention: Progress and challenges

Genoveva Tisheva is one of the initiators and authors of the Bulgarian Law on Protection against Domestic Violence 2000 - 2005. The law has been in force since 2005, and Genoveva is among the most active lawyers monitoring its implementation and proposing and endorsing relevant changes to it. Together with colleagues, she and promoted the 2010 change in the law that allocated more funding from the State budget toward projects of women's NGOs for protection of victims of violence. She helped with and organized legal counselling for over 700 women victims of violence in Sofia and other towns in Bulgaria. Being one of the pioneers of gender research in Bulgaria, Genoveva Tisheva started in 1998 with research on privatization, women's socio-economic rights (then known as 'political rights of women'), violence against women, the impact of privatization of goods and services on women and trafficking of Romani women and children.



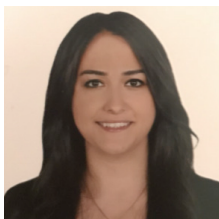
Merita Xhafaj

General Director of Social Policies, Ministry of Health and Social Policies, Albania

Speaker, Session 2: Regional implementation of the Istanbul Convention: Progress and challenges

Mrs. Merita Xhafaj is the General Director of Policies and Development of Health and Social Protection in the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, a position she has held since 2013. She graduated from Tirana University for Finance in 1982 and holds a master's degree in Public Administration from the University of Tirana in collaboration with the University of Nebraska – Lincoln. She has continued to update her skills related to her position through different qualification programs on policymaking in the USA and various EU countries. Mrs. Xhafaj has over 25 years of experience in high level policymaking positions in the public administration sector and more than 5 years of experience in the management of a private company. Her current responsibilities are focused in the field of the gender equality, violence against women and families, the integration of Roma and Egyptians, protection of people with disabilities, child protection, economic aid, social protection, gender-responsive budgeting, and others. For the last three years, she has been team leader for the preparation of the numbers for reports and strategic documents, such as the Beijing +20 report for Albania, CEDAW report, and Istanbul Convention. She serves as Head of Albanian Delegation on dialogue with CEDAW Committee and GREVIO. Mrs. Xhafaj is the representative from Albania of the Mediterranean network of women for peace and security.

Speaker Bios

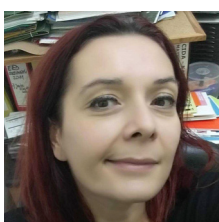


Gokce Bahar Ozturk

Investigating Judge, Victims' Rights Department, Ministry of Justice, Government of the Republic of Turkey

Speaker, Session 2: Regional implementation of the Istanbul Convention: Progress and challenges

Gokce Bahar Ozturk is an investigating judge in the Victims' Rights Department who focuses on the rights of women and refugees. She delivers lectures and trainings on victims' rights at the Justice Academy to trainee judges and prosecutors. Before working as an investigating judge, Ms. Ozturk served as a criminal judge in the criminal court system. Born in Ankara, she graduated from Bilkent University Law Faculty and is currently pursuing her master's degree in criminal law at Çankaya University.



Aleksandra Petrić

Executive Director, CSO United Women Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Speaker, Session 2: Regional implementation of the Istanbul Convention: Progress and challenges

Aleksandra Petrić is a women's human rights activist, with over 20 years of experience in engaging with grassroots CSOs on programs of human rights protection, gender equality, combating violence against women, and youth issues. She has worked as a researcher, analyst, and advisor for CSOs, international aid agencies, and governmental institutions in the countries of the Western Balkan region. Aleksandra regularly contributes in shadow reporting on CEDAW implementation in BiH, with focus the issue of violence against women, and is engaged in preparing the first BiH CSO report to GREVIO. She contributes as a columnist on issues affecting women for online news portal in BiH Radio Sarajevo. Aleksandra holds a master's degree in International Human Rights from the Josef Korbel School of International Studies, University of Denver, USA, and has been with the Foundation United Women Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina since 2003, currently serving as Executive Director.



Biljana Stepanov

Board President, SOS Network Vojvodina, Serbia

Speaker, Session 2: Regional implementation of the Istanbul Convention: Progress and challenges

Biljana Stepanov has been active in the women's movement for over 15 years. She is director of the Center for Support of Women and Board President of SOS Vojvodina Network. She is a specialist for gender-based violence, with extensive experience in design and implementation of gender mainstreaming actions as well as social policies and processes. Ms. Stepanov is a certified trainer in the field of gender-based violence and gender mainstreaming in project/ public policy cycle, in strategic planning, civil society development and women entrepreneurship. She is a member of Team Europe, European Commission Delegation to Serbia for EU policy in the field of human rights, democracy and minorities, and social policy - the network of national experts who specialize in issues related to the European Union. The Network was established in May 2013, after detailed discussions between the Serbian Government Office for European Integration, EU Delegation to Serbia and civil society organizations.

Speaker Bios



MP Nada Drobnjak

Head of Parliamentary Committee for Gender Equality, former Head of Gender Equality Department in the Government of Montenegro

Speaker, Session 2: Regional implementation of the Istanbul Convention: Progress and challenges

Nada Drobnjak served as a councillor in the Municipal Assembly of Podgorica from 2002 to 2006 and was the Head of the Gender Equality Office in the Government of Montenegro from April 2003 until May 2009. Ms. Drobnjak has also been a member of the Parliament of the Republic of Montenegro from 2001 to 2002, and from 2009 to 2012. Her latest mandate started in November 2012. She is currently acting as the President of the Committee for Gender Equality and is a member of the Committee for European Integration and Parliamentary Committee for Stabilization and Association of the Montenegrin Parliament and the European Parliament. Nada Drobnjak is a member of the Regional Women's Lobby for Peace, Security and Justice of South East Europe. She is also a regional contact person for the Gender Equality Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) for the Western Balkans.

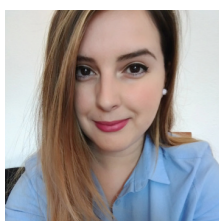


Jovana Trencevska

State Secretary, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Republic of North Macedonia

Speaker, Session 2: Regional implementation of the Istanbul Convention: Progress and challenges

Since 1997, Jovana Trencevska has worked to advance gender equality in North Macedonia. She currently serves as State Secretary in the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy. Previously, she was on position Head of the Unit for gender equality in the Department of Equal Opportunity. Also, she worked as a coordinator for gender equality in the NGO sector before being employed in MLSP. In the course of her professional career, she has continued education and pursued training in the fields of gender equality and discrimination, gender-responsive budgeting, violence against women, human trafficking, harmonization with European legislation, and others. Ms. Trencevska was a member of her country's delegation for defense of the Report on Fulfilling International Conventions Ratified by the North Macedonian Parliament. She is a member of the Advisory Board for Project Implementation Assessment for Gender-Responsible Budgeting in North Macedonia, BiH, Serbia, and Albania. She is the author of several handbooks on gender equality and guides for implementing legal regulations in the anti-discrimination field, and the coauthor of several studies and analyses related to gender equality.



Gertjana Hasalla

Project Coordinator, CSO Woman Forum Elbasan, Albania

Speaker, Session 3: Till it happens to you: Prevention as part of 4Ps

Gertjana Hasalla has been working with the Woman Forum Elbasan since April 2014, firstly as a volunteer. In 2015, she began coordinating projects related to the environment, awareness-raising and media campaigns on domestic violence and gender-based violence prevention. Ms. Hasalla is well-known in the community for the work she is doing to raise awareness on DV and GBV through the Woman Forum Elbasan. In 2016, she was recognized by the Embassy of Sweden in Tirana as a young successful professional from the NGO field, and in 2017, she was chosen by the Embassy of the United States of America in Tirana to be part of the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), a three-week State Department program, to learn more on the Role and Importance of Women NGOs. Ms. Hasalla is skilled in language development, translation, communication, lecturing, and academic writing. She holds a master's degree in Language Interpretation and Translation from the University of Tirana.

Speaker Bios



Beti Pejeva

President, Educational Humanitarian Organization, Republic of North Macedonia

Speaker, Session 3: Till it happens to you: Prevention as part of 4Ps

Beti Pejeva has been promoting women's rights and gender equality for over two decades and has earned a reputation as a strong gender equality advocate and leader of one of the forefront non-governmental organizations in North Macedonia that provides free legal aid services to women survivors of violence. She also works as a consultant and trainer in the areas of gender sensitization, prevention of violence against women and girls, gender-responsive policymaking, gender-responsive budgeting, and integrated approaches to essential services for women and girl victims and survivors of violence. She has been a member of numerous national working groups involved in the preparation of standards, protocols for mutual cooperation, laws and strategic documents regarding protection from VAW. She is an author and co-author of several guides, studies and analyses on topics related to the introduction of standards for specialized service providers for women and girl victims of violence and for the incorporation of gender perspective in local policies and budgeting.

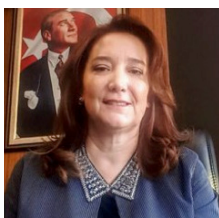


Goran Kusevija

Deputy Minister, Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, Montenegro

Speaker, Session 3: Till it happens to you: Prevention as part of 4Ps

Goran Kusevija graduated from the Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo at the Department of Philosophy and Social Science. He specialized in professional rehabilitation and social therapy at the Faculty of Political Sciences in Belgrade. His professional career began at one of the only institutions in Montenegro that cares for the elderly, infirm, and chronically disabled, where he became head of psychosocial services and assistant director. From 2011 to 2013, Mr. Kusevija served as Director of the Center for Social Work of the Municipalities of Kotor, Tivat and Budva. In January 2013, he was appointed General Director for Social and Child Protection at the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare.



Celile Ozlem Tuncak

Ombudsman, Ombudsman Institution, Turkey

Speaker, Session 3: Till it happens to you: Prevention as part of 4Ps

Celile Ozlem Tuncak began her career as a free-lance lawyer. In 2007, she became lawyer and Head of Legal Department in the Office of PTT Director-in-chief in Bursa between the years. In 2008, she served as Advisor to the Minister in the Ministry of Labour and Social Security. From 2009 to 2014, she served as Advisor to the Minister in the Ministry of Transportation, Maritime Affairs and Communication. She spent time practicing law for the private sector before returning to the public sector. She was elected as the Ombudsman by the Joint Committee of Petitions and Human Rights under Grand National Assembly of Turkey on November 2, 2016.

Speaker Bios



Dr. Everold Hosein

Communication for Behavioural Impact Expert

Speaker, Session 3: Till it happens to you: Prevention as part of 4Ps

Dr. Everold Hosein is an international communication specialist with 40 years of experience in strategic marketing communication, advocacy and public relations, and IEC (information-education-communication) related to social development issues, particularly in public health, sexual and reproductive health (including maternal/child health, family planning and HIV/AIDS prevention), population and development, health promotion, nutrition, early childhood education, juvenile justice, children's welfare and girls education, university education, and agricultural and rural development. He created the Communication for Behavioural Impact, COMBI, method at New York University in 1994. It was adopted by WHO in 2000, and more recently combined with UNICEF's Communication for Development (C4D).



Zita Gurmai

Member of the CoE Parliamentary Assembly Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination

Chair, Session 4: A Holistic Response to Violence against Women: Integrated Policies and Data Collection

Zita Gurmai is a Member of the Hungarian National Assembly, Vice-President of the Hungarian National Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, and member of Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. She previously served as Special Adviser on Gender to European Commissioner for International Cooperation & Development and advised the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan 2016-2020. As a Member of European Parliament, she served as a member of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality. Ms. Gurmai is the President of the Party of European Socialists Women (PES Women) as well as President of the Hungarian Socialist Party Women's Section. She has founded numerous organizations aimed at promoting the inclusion gender equality and women's political participation. Ms. Gurmai holds a Ph.D. in Economics from Karl Marx University of Economic Sciences in Budapest.



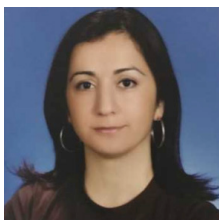
Ljiljana Loncar

Advisor to the Deputy Prime Minister; President, Coordinating Body for Gender Equality, Serbia

Speaker, Session 4: A Holistic Response to Violence against Women: Integrated Policies and Data Collection

Ljiljana Loncar is lawyer by profession with extensive experience in human and minority rights, antidiscrimination and gender issues. Ms. Loncar has been employed by Serbian Protector of Citizens and the Commissioner for Protection of Equality as an Assistant to the Commissioner. Ms. Loncar has extensive experience with different international organizations, cooperating on the on projects concerning gender, human and minority rights, and antidiscrimination. Most recently, Ms. Loncar has contributed to the process of drafting the gender equality law in Serbia and the policy on inequality of women in land ownership in the agriculture sector from the international perspective. In January 2017, Ms. Loncar completed the UN Women specialization on Gender Responsive Budgeting and is finalizing her master's degree in Gender Equality at the University of Belgrade.

Speaker Bios



Ebru Hanbay

Member of Foundation for Women's Solidarity, Women's Studies Association, and CSO Forum CEDAW Executive Committee, Turkey

Speaker, Session 4: A Holistic Response to Violence against Women: Integrated Policies and Data Collection

Ebru Hanbay Çakir was born in 1974 in Malatya, Turkey. She holds a bachelor's degree in Social Anthropology and Ethnology from Ankara University and a master's degree in Social Anthropology from Hacettepe University. Since 1998, she has taken part in various studies and projects aimed at building and strengthening capacity of various NGOs, mainly those working on gender equality, gender-based violence/discrimination and women's rights. Ms. Hanbay has extensive working experience in these fields with international organizations, public institutions, local governments, non-governmental organizations and the Academy. She is a member and volunteer within various women's NGOs and continues to work on advocacy to promote women's rights, combat violence against women and ensure gender equality.

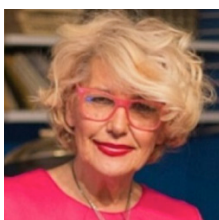


Fatima Bećirović

Project Coordinator, Gender Centre of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Speaker, Session 4: A Holistic Response to Violence against Women: Integrated Policies and Data Collection

Fatima Bećirović has worked in the field of gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence for over fifteen years. Prior to her position at the Gender Centre of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ms. Bećirović worked as a social worker for Vive Žene, an NGO that provides services and assistance to victims of domestic and gender-based violence. She has completed numerous training programs related to working with both victims and perpetrators of domestic violence and gender-based violence and has served as a lecturer on issues related to domestic violence. Ms. Bećirović holds a master's degree in Social Work from the University of Banja Luka.

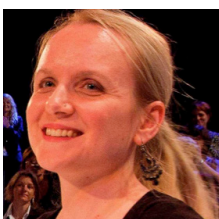


Ljiljana Raičević

President, Women's Safe House

Speaker, Session 4: A Holistic Response to Violence against Women: Integrated Policies and Data Collection

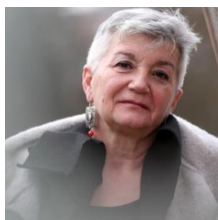
Ljiljana Raičević is a human rights and women's rights activist in Serbia and Montenegro. She was the 2006 laureate of Amnesty International's Ginetta Sagan Fund Award. She created Montenegro's SOS LINE, the first NGO in the country which served women by providing resources for women in abusive relationships. After noticing that the women calling the SOS LINE needed additional assistance, such a safe place to stay, as well as medical, psychological, and legal assistance, Ms. Raičević established the Women's Safe House, the first shelter in Montenegro for victims of domestic violence. With the Safe House, she successfully lobbied the Parliament of Montenegro for the adoption of a witness protection law. In addition to working with victims of domestic violence and human trafficking, Ms. Raičević educates police and state authorities on these issues.



Valentina Andrasek

Valentina Andrašek is the Project Manager for the European Women's Lobby project "Regional Forum for the Promotion and Monitoring progress of the Implementation of the Istanbul Convention in six Western Balkan countries and Turkey." For the past 18 years, she has been working for the Autonomous Women's House Zagreb (since 2007 as the executive director) on the issue of violence against women. She has also worked in the field as a counsellor, researcher, project coordinator, media campaigner, lobbyist and fundraiser.

Speaker Bios



Branka Zigante Zivkovic

Judge of High Misdemeanor Court of Republic of Croatia

Chair, Session 5: Good practices in building partnerships within and amongst key stakeholders at country level

Branka Zigante Zivkovic has been practicing law for over 30 years. She was born in Sarajevo but has spent most of her professional life in Zagreb. She graduated from law school in Zagreb, where she passed the bar exam and public notary exam. She currently serves as a judge on the High Misdemeanor Court in the area of public order and security. Ms. Zigante Zivkovic is a recognized expert on violence against women. As an educator in the Judicial Academy, she gives lectures on the Istanbul Convention. In addition, she has led many intersectoral efforts to strengthen the State's response to violence against women and domestic violence, and she currently serves as the president (in abdication) of the National Team to prevent violence against women. She has also worked to protect the rights of children, asylum-seekers, and LGBT individuals.



Olga Martin Gonzalez

Gender Equality, Centre of Thematic Expertise Rule of Law/Fundamental Rights, Democracy, Directorate-General for Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiation

Welcome remarks

Olga Martin Gonzalez works as Gender Coordinator of the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) in Brussels. In this role, she coordinates gender equality issues in NEAR and particularly provides technical advice and support to the EU Delegations from Western Balkans and Turkey. Prior to that, she worked more than 10 years as a gender specialist in development and humanitarian settings mostly in West and Southern Africa, with NGOs, Regional and Governmental Institutions and International Organizations.



Nataša Vuković

Representative of Women's Political Network of Montenegro

Speaker, Session 5: Good practices in building partnerships within and amongst key stakeholders at country level

Nataša Vuković has worked as a psychologist for over 30 years. Since 1991, she has been permanently employed at the General Hospital Bijelo Polje in the Psychiatric Department and in the Health Center Bijelo Polje at the Center for Mental Health. Among other areas, she specializes in identifying and assisting victims of trafficking, providing psychological support for victims of domestic violence and peer violence, as well as providing support and assistance for women victims of all forms of violence. Ms. Vuković also serves as a gender equality trainer for UNDP in Montenegro and has served as a permanent court expert since 2005. Previously, she was a Member of Parliament in Montenegro from 2009 to 2011.

Speaker Bios



Maja Balshikjevska

Project Coordinator, Health Education and Research Association, Republic of North Macedonia

Speaker, Session 5: Good practices in building partnerships within and amongst key stakeholders at country level

Maja Balshikjevska started working in HERA in October 2013 as a social worker/manager of the First Family Center of the City of Skopje. After three years of work in the Family Center, in September 2016, she was transferred to HERA's Executive Office, where she assumed the position of coordinator of the project "Building cross-sectoral cooperation for dealing with children victims of violence". In addition, she works on projects related to gender-based violence and women's and children's rights. She was born in Skopje and graduated in 2007 from the Institute for Social Work and Social Policy at the Faculty of Philosophy. She furthered her education as a postgraduate law student at the Study Center for Social Work in the University of Zagreb. In 2011 she received her master's degree and became a specialist for psychosocial approach in social work.



Svetlana Selaković

Assistant Secretary for Demography and Gender Equality, Serbia

Speaker, Session 5: Good practices in building partnerships within and amongst key stakeholders at country level

Svetlana Selaković graduated with a law degree from the University of Novi Sad, after which she passed the bar exam. She worked as an expert associate for the municipality of Novi Sad before starting her own law firm, where she spent much of her professional career. From 2005 - 2007, Ms. Selaković served as mayor of the South Bačka Administrative District. Before her position at the Provincial Secretariat for Social Policy, Demography and Gender Equality, she served as Deputy Director of the Republic Fund for Pension and Disability Insurance.



Radmila Žigić

Director of CSO Lara Bijeljina, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Speaker, Session 5: Good practices in building partnerships within and amongst key stakeholders at country level

Since 1998, Radmila Žigić has been involved in planning, research and management in Organization of Women "Lara" (now Foundation) in Bijeljina. For the past four years, she has served as coordinator for a project that brings together 12 organizations throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina to foster women's involvement in peace-building and transitional justice. For 20 years, Ms. Žigić has also worked in journalism and media, mostly notably in the positions of editor-in-chief and deputy editor-in-chief. Ms. Žigić has been deeply involved in research and analysis related to gender equality in media, women's political participation, and gender-responsive budgeting. She is the author of several guidelines and papers on gender mainstreaming, gender-responsive budgeting, and violence against women.



Prof. Dr. Vesna Ratković

Member of GREVIO, Professor of Criminal Law

Speaker, Session 5: Good practices in building partnerships within and amongst key stakeholders at country level

Prof. Dr. Vesna Ratković has over 37 years of progressive experience in justice, human rights, public administration and penitentiary system in Montenegro. She has been a member of GREVIO since 2015. She holds a PhD in Criminal Law and serves as a professor in the Law Faculty at the University of the Mediterranean, where she teaches courses on criminal law, human rights, and organized crime. Prior to this, she held the position of Director of Directorate for Anticorruption Activities within the Ministry of Justice. Prof. Dr. Ratković is a lecturer at the Human Resources Management Agency of Montenegro, the Center for Education of Judges and Prosecutors, the Police Academy, and Regional School for Public Administration. She is the author of numerous academic publications on criminal law, anti-corruption, and human rights.

