



The role of women in politics and diplomacy in Southeast Europe

March 2nd, 2021, 4:00 p.m.

Chair

- **Prof. Raul Caruso**
CESPIC Director, "Catholic University Our Lady of Good Counsel"

Speakers

- **Hon. Lia Quartapelle**
Member of the Foreign affairs committee of the Italian Parliament, member of the Advisory Board of "Women in International Security Italy" (WIIS Italy)
- **Ms. Brunilda Paskali**
Advisor of the President of Albania, Former Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Economic Development, Tourism, Trade and Entrepreneurship

On 2 March 2021, the European Centre of Peace Science, Integration and Cooperation (CESPIC), of the "Catholic University Our Lady of Good Counsel" in Tirana (Albania), organised the meeting "The Role of Women in Politics and Diplomacy in Southeast Europe". The event, chaired by Prof. Raul Caruso, was intended to deepen the issues, perspectives and opportunities for women in politics and international relations in Southeast Europe.

On 31 October 2000, the United Nation Security Council adopted Resolution **S/RES/1325** on women, and peace and security. As **Prof. Raul Caruso** recalls, this step marks a turning point on how international relations and conflict theory are perceived. Resolution 1325 addresses the impact of war on women and the importance of women's full and equal participation in conflict resolution, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction. Moreover, it calls for special measures to protect women and girls from conflict-related sexual violence and outlines gender-related responsibilities of the United Nations in different political and programmatic areas.

According to **Hon. Lia Quartapelle**, this step was revolutionary indeed, because it introduced a gender perspective to peace and security issues. She goes on with saying that, conventionally, women have long been regarded as victims in armed conflicts and their role in peacekeeping and eventually peacebuilding has been very limited. S/RES/1325 totally changes the perspective. The idea that there exists a gender approach regarding conflicts and mediation efforts was unprecedented in IR practice and theory. In foreign affairs, the adoption of an inclusive gender perspective allows states to understand conflicts better on the ground and helps to find effective solutions. In the 1990s, the events in the Western Balkans (WB) provided an example on to what extent rape has been used as a weapon in conflict. **Hon. Lia Quartapelle** underlines the fact that the wars in ex-Yugoslavia provided a clear demonstration that women have been targeted in order to define what countries are and to draw lines on people, cultures and ethnicities. Women have been used as a powerful and symbolic tool to show how some groups and states see the world. The violence inflicted on women in conflicts has consequences on how the war is fought and how peace can be built. Despite reforms that have realized major improvements, gender power imbalances within and through peacekeeping and peacebuilding missions continue to pose major challenges. There are many problems connected to amending the effects of the use of violence



against women in a war. After WWII, the issue related to the use of violence against women in conflicts has become increasingly important, especially for those cases when wars are mainly fought against civilians rather than in battlefield. Moreover, as **Hon. Lia Quartapelle** underlines, the question to what extent women can be considered as part to a solution to a conflict shall be addressed. Although women make up half of the population in all countries, only 3% of international mediators in conflict are women. In addition, despite the fact that mediation efforts have so far been led by men, they have not always brought the desired outcomes. In fact, most of mediation efforts have failed. The idea of including women in mediation teams might help in finding solutions also because in general women are not armed parties. They generally bring in mediation teams new ideas and perspectives, which concern more the civilian populations rather than armed gangs. Indeed, the civilian population is the one that has most interests in the conflict to end. Generally, men part of the mediation teams are usually members of the parts in conflict, thus they are ambiguous at best in finding a peaceful solution to the conflict. That is why resolution 1325 is important, because it changes the perspective on how war is fought and how peace is built. After the adoption of the resolution, a lot of initiatives have emerged. Since 2017, she adds, Italy has decided to fund an action plan for implementing resolution 1325. Every year 1 million € are given to different actions that aim at including women in the gender perspective of mediation and tackling conflict. It is worth mentioning that Italy is the biggest Western supplier of troops to the United Nations led efforts in peacebuilding and peacekeeping throughout the world, thus it provides training to female officers in armed forces, who take part in these missions. As part of Italy's efforts to support women participation in peace and security, there is also an initiative that aims at building a network of women mediators for the Mediterranean region. Italy is currently training a couple of women mediators in each nation of the Mediterranean, including Albania. These efforts, she says, strongly rely on the idea that our societies can build peace together and women can make their contribution to the process in an area that is strategic for the interests of Italy, but is also crucial for the future of humanity.

As far as **Ms. Brunilda Paskali** is concerned, empowering women remains a challenge not only for Albania, but also for all Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and the world in a broader sense. In Albania the term "inequalities" usually refers to the right to education and inequalities between boys and girls; to the wage gap between men and women (women are paid 16% less than men); and to the political gap between men and women in politics. However, she acknowledges that Albania has made huge steps forward in the last 20 years. Although women won the right to vote 101 years ago (the same year as the USA), political participation has not been so broad and it is still limited. According to World Economic Forum, Albania is performing well with reference to gender equality. As to the elections in 2017, women make up 29% of the member of the Parliament. This is the highest percentage ever registered in the country.

In 2008, Albania changed the electoral code and introduced the quota system in order to encourage women participation in politics. Political parties have to reserve 30% of electoral list for women. Moreover, one in the first three most important positions should be a woman. Nevertheless, parties usually put women at the end of the lists, which makes it hard for the women candidate to go to the parliament. Even though women organisations have tried to change this situation and address the issue, underrepresentation is still a concern in Albania. Putting women at the end of the lists raises obstacles in reaching the required 30%. Furthermore, **Ms. Brunilda Paskali** notes that the country performs well with reference to women in Municipality Councils. In 2016, before the local elections, it was decided that women and men would be equally represented, so that 50% of the candidates for the municipality councils would be women. Even though participation of women increased, this change it did not bring the desired outcome. In 2015, Albania had 37% of women in municipality councils, and 44% in 2019. Despite the progress made, what matters most, according to her, is that women's voices are being heard. Equality between men and women can only be achieved if men and women hold equal positions. It is not sufficient to be a member of the parliament or a policymaker. Some policies are gender sensitive that is why



women should be in those positions where they can influence decision making and change laws and policies in the parliament, introduce laws on gender equality and serve as role models. It is very important for women to have female role models. An effective female leader inspires, empowers and supports other women to ensure that everyone has equal opportunities to contribute and succeed.

Unfortunately, in Albania and the region a great percentage of women is not interested in politics. In Albania, according to a study conducted by UN Women, 55-57% of women are not interested in politics. Who better than women can make other women interested in politics? What is democracy if 50% of the population is not involved? As it has been mentioned, women make up 50% of the world's population, but they are underrepresented in parliament and municipalities. Of course, it is not only about percentages and quotas, but rather a matter of meritocracy and equal opportunities. As long as women are underrepresented and they face obstacles to equal opportunities, our societies will not make use of their full potential. According to her, this is the direction towards which governments should work. The challenges for women in Albania and Western Balkans are the same as those for women in the world. There are structural problems but also cultural barriers to overcome in order to allow women participation in political and public life.

In the WB, women have held leading positions in their governments and their voices are very powerful across the region. **Hon. Lia Quartapelle** confirms that, female support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans and EU institutions has always been strong. The WB are going through a process of institutional consolidation where not only women, but also young people have a huge role to play. In order to drive and push these processes through the EU agenda of internal politics, young people have to actively contribute to the accession process. For women, reinforcing and building institutions after conflicts and instability, requires a lot of patience and ability to listen to and correct problems. In Italy, she adds, men are driven by their EGO. It is important to work towards what unites us rather than what divide us. The pandemic has made it even more difficult to overcome disunity between political forces, she says. For the first time since the foundation of the Republic, political unity in the Parliament comprises 80% of its members. In this moment, there is a lot of space for politicians to put aside those divisive issues that characterize some political forces. She notes that, usually politicians who are able to unite are women. Moreover, countries that have overcome the virus are ruled by women. In fact, in Western Europe, women-led countries are performing better than those led by men are. This applies to Italy as much as it applies to Albania and the WB where there are difficult decisions to take.

Prof. Raul Caruso stresses the fact that migration flows from the Balkan region raise concerns. Many of these migration flows are made of women and smart girls who choose to go to Italy and Europe for a better life and education. The tendency to migrate is present in the entire region.

Ms. Brunilda Paskali goes on with saying that, unfortunately, there are also cases when well-paid people, who have a good job and work in high-level institutions, choose to leave. They are mostly concerned about the future. The migration flows is affecting also the population, as the medium age has increased from year to year, because the young leave and the elderly remain. It is important to adopt policies that offer quality of life and perspective. If people are not convinced that within 5 years they will not have a better life in the countries where they live, of course migration will always be an option. She stresses that, economic measures can be adopted to financially support young people who want to invest (such as start-ups) and to ease them from taxes or through other economic measures. On the other side, she says, it is important to improve services. Young people choose to educate abroad and they do not consider returning back again. It is important to invest in education and to improve the health services and sector as well. Even if Albania has good doctors, people choose to go abroad because they do not trust the health system. Improving services is one of the ways to make people stay. Of



course, for people it makes a difference if things change within 10 or 20 years' time. That is why they go for a better life and better opportunities abroad.

Politics and IR are also shaped by expectations, as **Prof. Raul Caruso** acknowledges, that actors have about what is going to happen. The election of Kamala Harris as Vice President of the USA will give a powerful push in "setting the example".

A change in leadership means that there will be changes also in policies. **Hon. Lia Quartapelle** recalls that when Margaret Thatcher was elected as Prime Minister (PM) in UK back in the 70s, she was the first female PM of that country but she did not do a female world politics or she did not introduce policies that could be advantageous for British women. This time the USA have a female Vice President, who, according to her, is going to set innovations in many different fields both with reference to internal and foreign policy. The Biden Administration has a completely different agenda than the Trump Administration. The fact that the government is acting quickly in order to tackle the virus and vaccination, the fact that the USA is re-entering many multilateral organizations, the fact that is working a lot in different areas both internally and internationally, can set good policies for women. The pandemic is hitting differently men and women, both in terms of work and domestic non-paid work. Achieving vaccination in the USA will benefit everyone. However, leading by example is not enough. It is important to introduce and implement policies that make the situation better for American women. At the international level, the fact that the Biden Administration has joined the Paris Agreement on climate will help the world to achieve the goals on climate action and will help women in particular because they are more fragile economically and more exposed to uncertainties. Addressing and correcting climate change will benefit and help women across the world.

Women tend to stay away from politics due to gendered roles established at home and in society. When women represent women, **Ms. Brunilda Paskali** says, they tend to come closer to politics rather than when men represented them. Women in politics tend to make policies that benefit all society. Studies show that women tend to do policies and laws that support children and elderly more than men. The US example of the new Vice President sets an example for all women. Gender-sensitive leadership is important for all women. At present, time has come for women to be more represented. Youth plays a very important role too, because they can promote women and girls in political life. Youth tend to push for social changes and improve the society they live in. The involvement of youth will contribute to a better world in the near future. Covid-19 Pandemic exposed structural deficiencies also with reference to domestic violence (dv). According to a study of UN Women, dv has increased in some countries during the pandemic, by going up to even 25% more in comparison to 2019. During the containment measures, women were confined inside homes with their abusive partners or family members. The number of women losing their jobs was higher than that of men. These problems can be solved by putting women in position to help other women. A woman knows better the needs of women. This is of course a process. Albania and the Western Balkans are doing more on women empowerment in parliament and politics.

Prof. Raul Caruso recalls that in the EU there are sceptical Member States about WB joining the Union, as Albania was vetoed again last year.

The prejudice and counterarguments on opening up WB and Albanian membership to EU is a problem of certain Western European Countries, **Hon. Lia Quartapelle** says. It is not a problem of Albania on how it faces up to Europe. Albania does not need to change how to approach EU. Of course, Albania and WB should follow the guidelines in implementing the chapters of *acquis communautaire* and there is indeed space for improvement.



EUROPEAN CENTRE OF PEACE SCIENCE

INTEGRATION AND COOPERATION

However, there is a big block in Europe that should be overcome. Blocking EU accession is selfish and unmotivated. There is no reason for France to oppose the accession process of certain WB countries and no reason for it to be so strong. It is counterproductive and this needs to change within the EU. Convincing all the EU member states that there are more advantages to the accession process than the opposite is still a challenge. The EU has to do its part and correct its mistakes as well.

Joining the EU has been Albania's dream, **Ms. Brunilda Paskali** states. Albania is in Europe, and it is a European country. Geographically and psychologically speaking Albanians feel themselves part of Europe, they share European values as a country and so does the WB area. Joining the EU is Albania's priority so far, despite the problems and challenges that the country faces. The process is long and complex. In addition, Albania needs to further fight corruption and adopt reforms in the judiciary system. Joining the EU will contribute to improve women's situation. Women will benefit and they will be able to give their contribution to the EU. The benefit is mutual for Albania and the EU, **Ms. Brunilda Paskali** concludes.

Relevant documents

- [Security Council resolution 1325](#)