

Concept Note

International Seminar “Promoting Women's Meaningful Participation in Peace Operations”

Lisbon, CCB, 23 June 2021

Introduction

The Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU/Ministry of National Defence will host a seminar to highlight the need for the effective promotion of women’s meaningful participation in missions and operations, which is key in positively influencing and transforming peace and security.

The event will focus on how the EU and NATO can lead by example in assuring women’s full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership in all missions and operations led by these two organizations.

Context

Gender equality, the full enjoyment of all human rights by women and girls and their empowerment are at the core of European and Euro-Atlantic values and are enshrined within national and EU legal and political frameworks.

2020 was an important milestone for gender equality and women’s rights as we have celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women, and the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

Last year, the EU approved its Gender Equality Strategy (2020-2025) and the Commission adopted a Joint Communication on the new Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Action 2021–2025 (GAP III). Referring to the objectives enshrined in these documents, High Representative/Vice-President, Josep Borrell, stated that “The participation and leadership of women and girls is essential for democracy, justice, peace, security, prosperity and a greener planet.”

2020 was also a year marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, which unleashed havoc globally and exacerbated existing inequalities. Women represent 70% of the healthcare and social workforce globally, being at the frontlines of the fight against the pandemic. This has reinforced the common understanding that women contribute decisively and visibly to addressing this crisis, as they continue to do in many different crises. Regrettably, despite their key role, women are still underrepresented in decision-making.

We are living in an era where broad approaches to security are necessary, mobilising military but also civilian assets to address the full spectrum of threats. Quoting NATO SG “we need strong militaries, but also strong, resilient societies”. To achieve this goal, we need the participation of women, as they represent 50% of the world population.

A crucial step in the promotion of gender equality is to grant women full access to participation in all spheres of public life and at all levels of decision-making. Specifically, women play an important role in addressing instability, fragility, conflicts, climate change, hybrid threats, natural and man-made disasters, forced displacement and health pandemics, contributing to more inclusive responses.

However, despite the commitment of international and regional organisations and member states to assure the meaningful and equal participation of women in peace operations, the increase in numbers continues to be slow and women remain starkly underrepresented, particularly in operational and leadership roles.

In this seminar, we will elaborate on how to eliminate the barriers that prevent women from pursuing and accessing different positions in peace missions and operations and on how to better understand the way they enhance the mission's operational effectiveness. We will also look at the challenges posed to women's participation in missions addressing cyber and hybrid threats, as well as at the expected impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the overall efforts of the EU and NATO member states in promoting women's participation in operations.

These topics will be addressed from three different perspectives: i) engaging with leadership; ii) experts working at the operational and tactical level ("boots on the ground"); and iii) collaborating with academia.

We aim at further deepening and strengthening multilateral cooperation and efforts to promote women's participation in peace operations, because "It is the right and the smart thing to do".