

# ADVANCING WOMEN'S POLITICAL RIGHTS IN BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA: Making a Difference Early in the Peace Process (A Case Study)

Tanya L. Domi

At the height of nationalism prior to the 1992 Bosnian war in the Former Yugoslavia the percentage of women elected to public office had fallen to an all-time low. In this period, the traditional role of women was repeatedly reinforced through the ethnocentric lens of state-controlled mass media, which distorted their roles in family, faith and work. By 1990 in Bosnia, women holding elected office represented a mere one percent of parliamentary bodies. In the first election following the Dayton Peace Agreement in September 1996, women's participation fell below two percent, with the women's party not securing a single seat in any of the three parliamentary bodies conceived by Dayton.

The absence of women within Dayton's governance structures was an obstacle to the peace and democratization processes on two levels. Although women comprise nearly 60 percent of the population in Bosnia today, their nearly total absence in any elected representation obviated the need for their inclusion in governance, an essential step in democracy building. The fact that the same men who had made the war were immediately elected and appointed to government positions permitted the war to be continued by other means. By 1997 women, who had largely been unengaged in war and wartime profiteering, were now seen as the best hope for a sea change in peace implementation. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), responsible for oversight and conduct of elections, came to believe after endless discussions with nationalistic and obstructive elected officials that women potentially could be more constructive participants across ethnic and political party lines. It was the moment to bring new players into the political process.

In recognition of these factors, key steps were taken by the OSCE in partnership with Bosnian women activists to secure a significant role for women in elected office, most notably through the introduction of a quota for women candidates.

These steps were applied at the national level in 1998 by putting women on closed party list ballots and subsequently, at the local level in the municipal elections in 2000, on an open party list ballot. Women now hold 18 percent of offices (as of November 2000) in the parliamentary bodies, cantonal and municipal level governments. Women office holders in Bosnia, even in the nascent conditions of postwar democratic development, are earning a reputation as constructive political leaders who can work across ethnic lines.

In this paper, I examine the OSCE's effort to increase women's role in government, including the history of women in politics in the Former Yugoslavia; the development of OSCE policy on women candidates for office and recent reversals; modifications that resulted from changes to election rules and regulations; early results of the application of this policy; current impact of the policy; and recommendations for the future.

## History of Women in Politics in Former Yugoslavia

I became involved in the effort to advance women's political representation in Bosnia-Herzegovina as a policy advisor to the OSCE Head of Mission and as the Mission's Spokesperson and Director of Press and Public Information during the period 1998-2000.

Working as a public affairs advocate at the Sarajevo Summit in 1999, I overheard a remark made by a woman from Eastern Europe<sup>1</sup> that vividly encapsulated the terrible consequences of nationalism in Eastern Europe. During a summit press conference, she said that when the Berlin Wall came down, pieces of it fell on the backs of women of Eastern and Central Europe. The point

<sup>1</sup> Remarks made by an unnamed participant from Southeast Europe during a press conference at the Sarajevo Summit, Bosnia-Herzegovina, July 1999. These remarks were made in the presence of the author.

of her remarks was to describe the consequences of war and nationalism and women's subsequent exclusion from nearly all aspects of public life in the Former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. Women's exclusion from public life at the end of the Twentieth century would not be the first time in Yugoslav history that ethnicity not only trumped sex—it trumped every other political factor in the later years of the Social Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) before its demise.

In 1974, Marshall Tito established parity between ethnic groups in the last version of the constitution during his tenure. Viewed as the weakest constitution during the Tito years, the 1974 document reflected ethnic considerations as the overriding factor. As a consequence, it eliminated direct political representation and redirected such representation through self-management economic work groups. This constitutional change directly diminished women's participation in elected government because fewer women worked in factories, and bypassing such possibilities of representation by anyone outside of these economic structures were limited.<sup>2</sup>

To no one's surprise, when the Dayton Peace Accords were negotiated in November 1995 (led by U.S. diplomat Richard Holbrooke), the Americans worked out the agreement in partnership with the nationalistic male representatives of the Former Yugoslavia, effectively leaving Bosnian women out of the process. The Accords have only one significant reference to a prohibition to sex discrimination contained within the constitution (Annex 4).<sup>3</sup> Despite horrific mass rapes, estimated somewhere between 20,000 to 30,000 depending on the source (these rapes were legally documented by Jadranka Cigelj and Nusreta Sivac, both lawyers and victims themselves), no consideration of gender was deemed relevant to the peace process.<sup>4</sup> As former U.S. Ambassador Swanee Hunt wrote in the May/June 2001 *Foreign Policy*: "...Bosnian women were not invited to participate in the Dayton talks, although during the war 40 women's associations remained organized and operating, across ethnic lines (the government had fallen completely apart in spring 1992)."<sup>5</sup>

The omission of women at Dayton and in other

similar peace-making situations is increasingly recognized in academic and policy literature as a practice that must change for peace agreements and the democratization process to take hold. Yet women had felt the effects of the war in other ways, too. Not only in documented mass rapes (now defined as war crimes cases before the Hague Tribunal), but also through those who were killed or were forced to flee their homes, and in many cases their country, due to ethnic cleansing.

#### *Nationalism Eliminates Women's Political Participation*

Following the 1990 elections across Eastern Europe, women simply disappeared from political life. This is a phenomenon particularly characteristic of the region, although the overthrow of authoritarian regimes in other areas of the world has not kept pace with women's political mobilization in social movements and civil society. But in the former Yugoslavia, their decline coincided with the rise of ethnic nationalism. As Croatian journalist Slavenka Drakulic described it:

When the changes began in Yugoslavia in 1989, women were in the streets along with men, demonstrating, meeting, holding flags and banners, shouting, singing and voting. But when it came to direct participation in power, they disappeared, became invisible again.<sup>6</sup>

During the period of rising radical nationalism that swept through the Former Yugoslavia, political parties based upon ethnic agendas urged women to assume more traditional roles as wives and mothers. Party rhetoric broke with then long-established Communist ideology of ethnic unity and equality of women. The political landscape was shifting to a much more conservative ground based upon traditional religious and cultural values. A telling example of this was the policy of the nationalistic Croat Democratic Union's (HDZ) party (which became the dominant Croat party in Bosnia) that "promised subsidies for women with more than three children" and "expressed their concern for overworked mothers."<sup>7</sup> HDZ established a very close relationship with the Roman Catholic Church and quickly reversed the Communist policy of providing women access to legal abortions in November 1991. These anti-woman policies were more dramatically manifested in new constitutions drawn up in Catholic dominated Slovenia and Croatia that ultimately banned abortions, a reversal

<sup>2</sup> Jancar, Barbara Wolfe, *Women Under Communism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 91-92.

<sup>3</sup> The Dayton Peace Accords, General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, U.S. Department of State, p. 26.

<sup>4</sup> Minow, Martha, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness* (Boston: Beacon Press), pp. 6-7.

<sup>5</sup> Hunt, Swanee and Cristina Posa, "Women Waging Peace," May/June 2001, <http://www.foreignpolicy.com>, 29 May 2001.

<sup>6</sup> Drakulic, Slavenka, "Women in the New Democracy in the Former Yugoslavia," *Gender Politics and Post-Communism*, Nanette Funk and Madga Mueller, eds. (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 123.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

of public health policy. Women attempted to fight these dramatic legal reversals, but their efforts only met with failure.<sup>8</sup>

The nationalism that swept the successor states of the Former Yugoslavia served as an initial impetus for increased women's political activism. They formed non-partisan democratic alliances in an attempt to block anti-woman initiatives by Slovene and Croat nationalistic elements in 1990. Women joined more liberal or leftist political parties and declared candidacies for office. In Serbia, feminists and former Communist Party members were initially more successful in defeating anti-woman legislation and policies. They formed three structures to advance women's interests in the face of nationalism—the Women's Party (Zest), the first all-woman political party ever in the history of Yugoslavia; a Women's Lobby was established to coordinate the activities of women representing different parties; and a “Women's Preliminary Parliament” was founded as an institution to advance women's political, civil, economic and social rights before elected and legal structures.<sup>9</sup> Although these efforts provided mechanisms to advance political activism, ultimately, women's organizing was essentially transcended and marginalized as election results did not advance women's interests and a decade of war was soon to follow.

In the SFRY, women achieved about a 30-32 percent representation in the national legislature throughout the Tito Communist years. These are considerably higher numbers than women's elected representation in Western Europe or North America during the 1970s-1980s. Women also had a continual, albeit smaller presence within the CPY, about 16 percent—the lowest in the Communist Bloc in 1972, but much larger than the parties achieved after the fall of Communism. Women were vigorously engaged at the local level, but at higher levels had negligible representation and lacked political influence. During the 1970s no women held any post within the Central Committee of the CPY. Thus, women lacked access to the most powerful positions of authority and influence, despite their levels of participation.<sup>10</sup> It is against this historical backdrop that the OSCE assumed responsibilities for the conduct and supervision of elections under the Dayton Peace Accords, Annex 3.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Milic, Andjelka, “Women and Nationalism in the Former Yugoslavia,” *Gender Politics and Post-Communism*, N. Funk and M. Mueller (eds.), p. 114.

<sup>10</sup> Jancar, pp. 89-94.

<sup>11</sup> The General Framework Agreement for Peace, Annex 3, Elections.

## The Minority Gender Rules Instituted by the OSCE

The results of the first national elections in Bosnia in September 1996 were abysmal for women. Less than two percent of women were elected throughout the country—regardless of entity, electoral body, or ethnicity. Women were simply not relevant to the process and during this period up through 1998 little attention was paid to women's issues, their status, political rights and their future within the peace process by international organizations mandated to implement the Dayton Agreement. Not surprisingly, there were also very few senior women policy-makers in all the international organizations present on the ground in 1995 and 1996 in Bosnia. A particularly telling indicator in 1996 was the overwhelming lack of women in senior positions at the Office of the High Representative (OHR), the highest authority in Bosnia for implementation of the civilian aspects of the peace agreement. Only one woman held a high position at the OHR as the Deputy High Representative for Human Rights.<sup>12</sup> This absence significantly contributed to the lack of attention paid to the status of concerns of Bosnian women. Only one woman has headed an implementing international agency since the signing of Dayton—Elisabeth Rehn, a Finnish politician, who took over the UN Mission to Bosnia in 1998-1999, after serving in the region as the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights from 1995 to 1998.<sup>13</sup>

This situation began to change in 1997 when the OSCE Mission to BiH developed a “Women in Politics” program within its Democratization Department “in order to boost women's participation in the legal, economic, and political sectors of Bosnia.”<sup>14</sup> Led and developed by Norwegian civil society advocates in charge of the OSCE's department, the Women in Politics program became a cornerstone of its democratization activities in Bosnia. The program was designed to foster women's advocacy, networking, education, and cross-entity exchange from the grassroots level up to the highest echelons of entity and national government. This program broke new ground in Bosnia and throughout the region, establishing itself as the model for

<sup>12</sup> Peggy Hicks was the Deputy High Representative for Human Rights at the Office of the High Representative from 1996-1997.

<sup>13</sup> Elisabeth Rehn, Swedish People's Party, Presidential Election 2000, <http://virtual.finland.fi/elections/president2000/rehn.html>, 20 August 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Women in Politics Fact Sheet, Municipal Elections 2000, OSCE Mission to Bosnia.

expanding women's political participation throughout Southeast Europe.

The change that made the most significant difference for Bosnian women with political aspirations was a man—in the appearance of Ambassador Robert Barry, a retired U.S. Foreign Service Officer, who assumed the duties as head of the OSCE Mission in January 1998.

*Enacting Gender Minority Quotas—A Strategic Calculation*

The Chief of the OSCE Mission served in dual capacities that include the Chairmanship of the Provisional Election Commission (PEC), arguably then the second most politically powerful position in the International Community in Bosnia, next to that of the High Representative. Barry immediately went to work to level the playing field on the PEC by replacing a number of the nationalists who represented the entity governments and the hard-line, ethno-centric political parties on the PEC. The purge of the radical Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) from political leadership in the Republika Srpska (RS) government by Biljana Plavsic (presently indicted for war crimes), then-President of the Serb entity, also ameliorated the nationalistic tensions within the PEC.

Ambassador Barry expanded the PEC membership and for the first time included civic organizers, like Zlatko Dizdarevic, a journalist and his cousin Srdjan, the head of the Helsinki Human Rights Committee in Bosnia. Another highly regarded member was Mustafa Bisic, the Sarajevo Cantonal Prosecutor and Senka Nozica, a practicing human rights attorney based in Sarajevo, who happened to be a Croat. Nozica, a formidable advocate and feminist, became a presidential candidate in Bosnia on the Republican Party ticket in the 1998 elections.

Nozica proposed a quota rule to Barry suggesting a 30 percent minority-gender representation that was evenly distributed in the first nine places on a closed, party list ballot, for the 1998 National elections. Barry describes the thinking of the PEC and his goals at the time:

Of course, the Mission had an active women in politics program already and so getting women on the ballot was already on our minds. As we prepared the rules and regulations for the 1998 elections, we were trying to find ways of breaking out of the mold of nationalism. One way of getting new faces in parliament was to try to promote women. But without a quota, it probably could not be achieved. At that point there were about two percent women elected. We were discussing quotas a lot then, for example, national quotas to promote multi-ethnicity. But this

was rejected as unworkable. However, the idea of a quota for women was practical.<sup>15</sup>

Under Bosnia's then-closed ballot system, if a party wins, the top portion of the list will virtually always gain seats, thus insuring that women in the top slots would automatically gain electoral mandates. The rule required parties to include women on their lists in order to be permitted to register for the elections, an effective enforcement mechanism.

After Senka Nozica secured Ambassador Barry's support to advance the quota within the PEC, she went to work to secure the legal standards in consultation with the Human Rights Department of the OSCE. Knowing that she would face opposition from the nationalists on the PEC, she worked through individual relationships within the Commission. As she describes the adoption of the rule:

There was a significant amount of resistance by national members of the PEC, but there was also individual support too. However, being well prepared [for the session], we had done a quality analysis and made huge efforts to convince the members. Ultimately, [the rule] was unanimously adopted.<sup>16</sup>

The gender minority rule changed the political map overnight. For example, women's representation went from one elected representative in the BiH House of Representatives to 11 out of 42 members. Women achieved a combined 26 percent representation in the three parliaments established at Dayton, jumping from two percent in 1996. The results were immediate and tangible.<sup>17</sup>

Later Barry reflected on his role as Chairman of the PEC and on the leadership of Senka Nozica and the OSCE women policy-makers in getting the PEC to adopt the gender minority rules that changed Bosnia's political map:

It (the gender minority rule) had been raised with me in advance by our own staff, and I was sympathetic, but the actual proposal came from Senka at a meeting of the PEC. Much of the credit has got to go to dynamic women in the Mission.<sup>18</sup>

The OSCE women staff members played a critical role during the enactment of the rule. The implementation of the rule and follow-up with elected women officials and public affairs strategies that advocated for Bosnian women's visibility in the

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Ambassador Robert Barry, by the author, January 27, 2001.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Senka Nozica, by the author, February 2, 2001.

<sup>17</sup> OSCE Fact Sheet on Women in Politics, Municipal Elections 2000.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Ambassador Robert Barry, by the author, January 27, 2001.

media depended on these staff members who played key roles in implementing the minority gender rule in Bosnia.<sup>19</sup>

#### *Extending Gender Minority Rules*

The OSCE was ideally situated to advance the interests of political gender equity following the 1998 elections. With 26 percent women elected to the Bosnian parliamentary bodies, there were women politicians to work with and assist in developing sorely needed skills. OSCE worked to advance women's interests within the democratically modeled political parties and provided training programs to boost their roles in becoming effective parliamentarians. But before the municipal elections were to be conducted, the OSCE, in partnership with the OHR, was mandated to draft a permanent election law, required for Bosnia's admission to the Council of Europe. OSCE activists, along with Senka Nozica and other women activists and politicians, were determined that a gender provision would be included within it.

### **Gender Minority Rule Included in the Draft Election Law**

During 1999, the International Community, principally led by the OSCE, was charged with drafting a new election law for adoption by the BiH National parliament. A French Judge, François Froment-Meurice (who had been appointed by former High Representative Carlos Westendorp), chaired the drafting effort, in collaboration with international and national experts. The experts determined that the greater transparency provided by an open ballot system would permit voters to select individual candidates for the first time in a Former Yugoslav state. As the OSCE openly acknowledged, including women politicians

<sup>19</sup> Elisabeth Rasmusson was the Head of Democratization, Elizabeth Hume was the PEC Legal Counsel, and Mary Ann Rukavina was the Women in Politics Program Director at the time the rules were enacted. Sonja Lokar, a Slovenian activist, became chair of the Stability Pact's Gender Task Force, following the Stability Pact Summit held in Sarajevo in July 1999. Additionally, in 1998, the OSCE Mission to Bosnia's Director of Elections, the Director of Human Rights, the Director of Media Affairs, were all women, resulting in more than half of the Mission's department heads were women from Europe and North America in the time period referenced. The author served as Executive Assistant to Barry. Beyond Barry himself, all senior policy-makers within the Mission who had direct or indirect influence on adopting the gender minority rule were women who were strong advocates of the program's goals. The high level of women participating in leadership positions of the Mission added both to the credibility and the effect of these efforts.

themselves, the introduction of the open list system for the 2000 municipal elections would present a challenge for women candidates. Would voters choose women on an open ballot? Many women feared they would not and again the idea of being left out and disappearing from the political scene was a concern shared by some internationals and Bosnian women.<sup>20</sup> The women were successful in requiring that women be placed equally on the open lists within the election law drafts, over the objections of Froment-Meurice, the chair, who believed it was unconstitutional. A group of Bosnian women activists lobbied him during a meeting to discuss the matter, urging the adoption of a gender quota within the law, but were ultimately unsuccessful on the quota itself. They were successful, however, in requiring the equal distribution of women on the list. Senka Nozic describes the lobbying effort:

At the beginning of the drafting process we had the information that some members of the commission were not in favor of the gender rule. However, after the meeting with the Chairman, we convinced them with the arguments that this rule is good for the political life of Bosnia-Herzegovina. [The basis for adopting the rule] involved minorities who were deprived of their rights within political life and in this case these were women.<sup>21</sup>

Ironically enough, the French government has since adopted a gender quota within its own electoral system—a system that Froment-Meurice had openly criticized in conversations with internationals that were working on the draft law, although he did not share his views with the Bosnian women who were lobbying him.<sup>22</sup> The quota rule was included in the draft law, but that would not have been possible without the continued pressure by Ambassador Barry on Froment-Meurice, and the critical presence of Elizabeth Hume, the lead attorney drafting the law, and more importantly, the lobbying by the Bosnian women themselves. The Government of Bosnia-Herzegovina adopted the election law in fall 2001, after both the OHR and the OSCE exerted tremendous pressure and considerable diplomatic capital, conditioning Bosnia's admittance to the Council of Europe, based upon the law's adoption.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Senka Nozica, by the author, February 2, 2001.

<sup>22</sup> Daley, Suzanne, "France Looks for More Women in Politics," *The New York Times*, February 4, 2001.

## Getting Ready for Municipal Elections 2000

In 1999 the OSCE, in partnership with the Norwegian government, launched the "Women Can Do It" multi-ethnic training program to prepare women to run for office at the municipal level. "The Women Can Do It" seminars were explicitly intended to maximize the opportunities of women candidates to be elected in Bosnia's next round of municipal elections (in 2000).<sup>23</sup>

Originally developed by the Norwegian Labour Party in the late 1980s and successfully exported to a number of countries, including Macedonia and Estonia, the program's objectives in Eastern and Central Europe were to increase women's visibility and participation in politics. This program proved cost-effective and led to the training of more than 3,000 women, using the "train the trainer approach." The ultimate goal was to develop women's political skills, local capacity and sustainability. This program was launched more than six months in advance of the April 2000 Bosnian municipal elections.<sup>24</sup>

The program continued its activities into 2000, which included strategy sessions with women activists, politicians, and members of parliament from both entities, union leaders and non-governmental organizations. Parliamentary exchange visits to Slovenia and an effort to review the Bosnian government's implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action was monitored by the women and used as an organizing effort, across party and ethnic lines. Women were proving to be constructive players within the political process.

In keeping with the electoral reform efforts included in the draft election law, the Provisional Election Commission (PEC) opted for an open list party system for the April 2000 municipal elections; directing the political parties to include "at least one-third of their candidates were women, and that they be evenly distributed throughout the list."<sup>25</sup>

Electoral reforms to open party lists for voters posed a quandary for women, who had made significant gains under the closed list system with a mandatory quota. Now women would have to compete, head to head, fully visible by name and encourage voters to select them against others.

While the program never carried out a systematic evaluation of its effectiveness, it did produce more than 6,917 women candidates, one-

third of the total party lists in the April 2000 polls. Despite concerns that the voters would not select women—in fact, 590 women were elected to office, or 18 percent of the total of local officials, unprecedented in Bosnian history.<sup>26</sup> However, out of nearly 145 municipalities, only six women were elected mayor or president of the municipal assemblies.

### *What Did the Citizens of Bosnia Think About Women in Politics?*

If there were any doubts about whether Bosnians would chose women for office or expressed concerns by members of the international community), an opinion poll conducted in June 1999 by the OSCE seemed to bely those concerns. (The survey was conducted in a total of 100 municipalities throughout Bosnia with a total of 1,050 citizens. For a sample size of n=1000, the margin of error is +/- 4 percent.)<sup>27</sup>

The public overwhelmingly supported the increased role of women in politics, both in elective and executive positions. The survey's executive summary makes the public's views quite clear:

The survey illustrated that there is broad support for women's political activism—guaranteed representation in elected offices and appointments to executive positions. The data also clearly illustrates that the Bosnian public overwhelmingly supports women's political participation. In short, the survey demonstrates that many citizens of Bosnia feel that women are underrepresented in Bosnian politics and that more needs to be done to address women's interests.<sup>28</sup>

### *The 1999 Poll on Electoral Attitudes Towards Women in Politics*

Maura Brueger, an American political consultant, who has specialized in women's elective politics both in the U.S. and abroad, concluded from the poll's results that the overwhelming positive public opinion about women in politics in Bosnia was one of the most strikingly positive opportunities of potential for women to make tangible political gains early in a transitional democracy. She also concluded that the results presented ample opportunity for opposition parties to make gains at the ballot box.<sup>29</sup> One of the most interesting aspects of the poll was the belief that women could more effectively represent voters

<sup>23</sup> OSCE Mission to Bosnia Press Release dated November 23, 1999.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Mary Ann Rukavina, conducted by the author, March 2001.

<sup>25</sup> Women in Politics Fact Sheet, Municipal Elections 2000.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Gabriella Danza, the OSCE Mission to Bosnia Deputy Director of Democratization and Asemina Vukovic, Women in Local Governance Project Manager, by the author in Sarajevo, May 29, 2001.

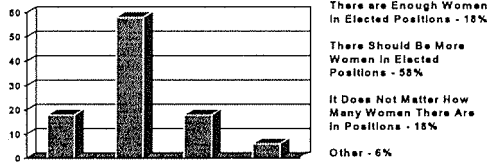
<sup>27</sup> Executive Summary, The Role of Women in BiH Politics Survey OSCE Permanent Election Law Information Campaign, July 15, 1999.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Maura Brueger, consultant to the OSCE by the author, February 11, 2001.

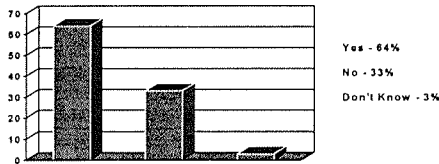
Which statement best reflects your views on the number of women in elected positions?

1



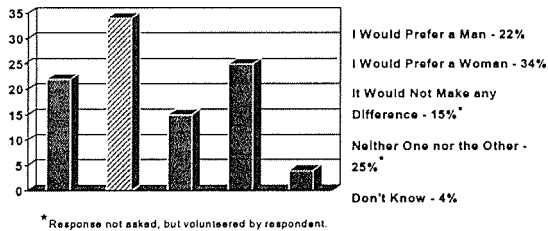
After elections, should parties be required to appoint a certain percentage of women to government positions?

2



Imagine that you are voting for a candidate of another nationality or ethnicity, would it make a difference if the candidate were a man or woman?

3



when crossing ethnic boundary lines as elected officials (see figure 3). Both men and women supported increased participation of women in elective office and in executive positions (see figures 1,2.)

Despite such positive numbers no political party “primed the pump” of the poll and increased the numbers of women candidates. This lost opportunity is an indicator of not only the nascent democratic development of the political parties, but also the embedded level of sexism within the culture, according to Yamila Milovic, a Sarajevo journalist: “Women are just not considered as powerful politicians in their own right who could bring new opportunities for leadership in the established political parties.”<sup>30</sup>

### Consequences of the Gender Minority Rule

The most immediate consequence of the minority gender rule is that women have returned to political life in Bosnia after more than a decade of absence. After women garnered 18 percent representation in the local elections, they went on to attain the same levels within the Federation and Serb entity parliaments. The one area of slippage in women’s representation occurred in the National Parliament where it decreased from the previous 26 percent in 1998 to seven percent in 2000.<sup>31</sup> This was a precipitous drop and is viewed once again by Senka Nozica as an indicator that the parties did not take women seriously in the national elections. However, by 2001, five years since the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords, women have finally returned to political life, with percentages of representation that lead all countries in Southeast Europe and stand as a model to other countries that are rebuilding from war and experiencing political transitions.<sup>32</sup>

### Stability Pact and the Gender Task Force

The achievements by Bosnian women politicians and the significant investments in women and democratization made by the OSCE Mission through 1999, made Bosnian women actors and the OSCE ideally situated to advance women’s regional concerns when the Stability Pact was launched in Sarajevo in July 1999. Many Bosnian nationals and Ambassador Barry viewed the launching of the Pact as an opportunity to advance Bosnia-Herzegovina’s gender minority rule and equal distribution within an open party list to other states in Southeast Europe.

<sup>30</sup> Interview of Yamila Milovic, by the author, January 30, 2001.

<sup>31</sup> “Women Can Do it Project” description, Gender Task Force, 29 May 2001.

<sup>32</sup> OSCE Gender Task Force Fact Sheet 2000.

During the Summit, Bodo Hombach, the German Chair agreed to meet with a group of women representatives from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Slovenia, Romania, Serbia, Vojvodina, Montenegro, Hungary, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania, which was organized through the intense lobbying efforts of the OSCE in Bosnia.<sup>33</sup> Summit organizers did not permit civil society activists to attend the summit, consequently, OSCE staff purloined press credentials for the group, thereby furtively facilitating their entrance into the summit location.

During the meeting, the women handed Hombach an appeal, signed by 100 prominent women from 10 different countries and representing all ethnicities across Southeastern Europe, outlining their demands. They included naming a woman chairperson of the democratization and human rights table of the Stability Pact. Hombach began by welcoming the women's initiative, noting that in their cooperation across borders and between all ethnicities of Southeast Europe, coupled with their mutual trust, they had already achieved one aspect of the Pact—to build regional cooperation<sup>34</sup>—the ultimate goal. Although Hombach declared during the meeting that no work plans on the Pact would exclude the discussion of women and gender equality issues, a woman was not appointed Chairperson or co-chair of Democratization and Human Rights (Table I), the area of greatest importance to these activists. Consequently, the women decided not to wait and, with active support from Barry and the OSCE, launched the Gender Task Force (GTF), which later secured an retroactive “endorsement” from the Pact.

The initial priority of the Gender Task Force was to make “political participation of women in Southeast Europe the priority issue for the Task Force members in 2000-2001 with elections expected in every country”<sup>35</sup> in the region during this period. They focused on exporting Bosnia's minority gender “equal distribution” party list method to all states in the process of adopting new elections laws. Under the OSCE's auspices, the minority gender rule was adopted in Kosovo for its 2000 local elections, resulting in 8 percent representation.<sup>36</sup>

Senka Nozica described the significance of the Stability Pact and Bosnia's role:

The role of women from Bosnia at the Stability Pact was a crucial one in forming the group of women from the region. Together we signed a joint declaration statement about the need for greater involvement of women in the political life in the region. The example of Bosnia is, in any event, a pretty good one for solving this problem [of women's political equity] in the other countries in the region.<sup>37</sup>

One woman from Bosnia did become the Stability Pact's Co-Chair for the regional security table in the first round. Former Bosnian Ambassador to the OSCE and State Minister for European Integration, Bisera Turkovic, a Bosniak and a well-known diplomat from Bosnia, took an active role in advancing women's rights either directly through policy-making or simply by being at the table. An experienced diplomat, Turkovic served as independent Bosnia's first Ambassador to Croatia during the Bosnian War in 1992-95. Turkovic emphasized the importance of the Stability Pact for women of Southeast Europe:

The Gender Task Force is increasingly influential within the processes of the Stability Pact. It has contributed to the promotion of women candidates in the electoral processes of some countries in the region. It will deepen its efforts to promote and achieve the advancement of women, to give another perspective to the Stability Pact, and in that respect, it should work closely with other sectors within the Stability Pact that deal with economic, security and democratization issues.<sup>38</sup>

Turkovic views the Pact as an opportunity to advance women's interests into other fields, including women's economic rights and soft security issues involving trafficking of human beings, which has now become a major issue in the region. The Stability Pact more importantly has provided funds and a formal mechanism for organizing women from around the region, which is a key element in advancing multi-ethnic concerns in a region that has been wracked by war.<sup>39</sup>

Since the establishment of a Gender Task Force Clearinghouse (originally housed in Sarajevo, now based in Zagreb), it has coordinated electoral participation of women's groups by extending “Women Can Do It” training programs to Albania, Romania, Macedonia, Montenegro (FRY) and Croatia, Bulgaria and Hungary. It has held several meetings with representatives from all countries of Southeast Europe and shares updates on the gender institutionalization within government structures. It has brought women parliamentary members from Southeastern European countries together repeatedly to share experiences and strategies. Additionally, a constructive move in 2000 resulted

<sup>33</sup> OSCE Press Release dated July 29, 1999.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> OSCE Mission to Kosovo, Central Election Commission, Rules 4.2 and 9.10, Municipal Elections 2000, <http://www.osce.org/kosovo>, 31 May 2001.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Senka Nozica, by the author, February 2, 2001.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Minister Bisera Turkovic, by the author, February 9, 2001.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.



in a working agreement of cooperation between the GTF and the Trafficking Task Force—a multi-tiered policy issue now overwhelming the region on several fronts.<sup>40</sup>

While the GTF has advanced women's political representation, engaged the governments of the region in instilling greater awareness by lawmakers and executives, it has not effectively enhanced the media visibility of women in the region, one of its primary goals.<sup>41</sup> This may not be entirely attributable to the GTF, but may also reflect the entrenched sexism within most of the nationalistic media; and has not been up through this point effectively balanced out by a more professional and independent press throughout the region. According to Yamila Milovic, most media outlets do not take the issue of women in politics seriously: "The media do not take the issue seriously...like most of society, the media pays lip service to it, but gets very little done unless the issue is pushed by organizations and NGOs."<sup>42</sup>

## Final Recommendations

From my experiences as a public policy advisor in Bosnia to an international organization and in six years of observing Bosnian politics closely, I offer the following policy recommendations:

*1. Increase the number of women in executive positions in the Bosnian Political Parties and Government Ministries.* There is a clear regional pattern of limited participation of women in key political and government positions; an apparent gap that must be bridged. Women in the political parties need to focus on organizing within party structures to leverage the leadership for key policy posts upon winning at the ballot box. Women ministers carry the burden to scout for other qualified women to fill executive posts. This can be accomplished through political party networking and through networking within professional associations. Lord Ashdown, the newly arrived High Representative in Bosnia, has thus far been silent on the status and importance of women in politics. Nonetheless, the High Representative's immediate goals of a multi-ethnic and ethical government can be realized through his sustained

support and advocacy for women in key leadership positions. Women's presence in the moderate "Alliance for Changes" in Bosnia has led to a moderating influence and bears out the polling data from 1999 (recently released international polling data are silent on this question). Azra Hadziahmetovic, the effective Bosnian State Minister for Foreign Trade and Economics is an illustrative example, among others.

*2. Integrate gender policy mechanisms throughout governments to advance women's issues in policy and law-making.* Gender Commissions within parliamentary bodies and "gender centers" within the Bosnian entity-level governments, should not be set aside to atrophy, but should be politically exploited to advance women's issues throughout all sectors of government policy and law-making. A priority should include an initial gender filter or lens, through which all laws are drafted and which reflects Council of Europe standards, which are based on the European Convention on Human Rights, among other legal conventions. This effort should continue in a robust manner supported by the OHR. The Finnish government and the UN High Commissioner's Office for Human Rights (UNHCHR) deserve acknowledgement for their leadership and significant efforts and funding in this area.

*3. Reduce economic discrimination and enfranchise women's economic rights.* Unless women are able to support themselves and their families, the international community's objectives of refugee return and creating political stability in Bosnia is not attainable, nor sustainable. Women face economic discrimination, which is aided and abetted by formal and informal government policies and laws. All labor laws in Bosnia-Herzegovina should be harmonized with European standards that prohibit discrimination against women.<sup>43</sup> Women should be targeted for jobs programs designed to enable women single heads of households to enter the workforce. USAID, UNIFEM, Oxfam and the STAR Network have engaged in small-business training for women. These efforts should be expanded to incorporate injections of cash into locally owned women's business, similar to successful micro-loan programs for women throughout Asia and Africa.

<sup>40</sup> Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, Gender Task Force, office of the Chair, Agreement on Cooperation between the Gender Task Force and the Trafficking Task Force, October 21, 2000, <http://www.stabilitypact.org>, 20 August 2002.

<sup>41</sup> Special Co-ordinator of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, "Gender Issues," <http://www.stabilitypact.org>, August 20, 2002.

<sup>42</sup> Interview of Yamila Milovic by the author, January 30, 2001.

<sup>43</sup> OSCE Mission to Bosnia-Herzegovina, *Employment Discrimination in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Human Rights Department*, June 1999, pp. 9-10.

4. *Prioritize activities to reduce trafficking at the epicenter: Bosnia-Herzegovina.* The phenomenon of trafficking of human beings is a trans-regional problem with Bosnia as a hub. This has become a major issue in Southeast Europe that crosses national borders, ethnicity, igniting women's groups and politicians as a transcendent unifying issue. "National Action Plans" facilitated by the Stability Pact's Trafficking Task Force must be implemented by participating governments, who must work in partnership with law enforcement agencies and NGOs throughout Bosnia and the region. Additionally, the international community is part of the trafficking problem in Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>44</sup> The OHR, the UN, led by the High Commissioner's Office for Human Rights, OSCE and NATO must continue to pressure for implementation and enforcement of a credible "zero tolerance" standard of conduct for its personnel and follow-through on violations of such policies. Trafficking of human beings is a soft security issue that crosses several sectors: gender and human rights, economics, corruption of government authorities and black-marketing activities. The UNHCHR has taken the lead on this issue in Bosnia and has worked effectively with the national governments, international agencies and NGOs to fight this modern day phenomenon throughout the region.

5. *Institute effective public information campaigns on gender issues throughout Southeast Europe and provide media training for women politicians and civil society actors.* The lack of women's media visibility in the region is apparent and undermines efforts put forward by supportive governments or programs sponsored by the OSCE, the Gender Task Force, among others. In a globalized media age, a void of positive women's media images marginalizes women's status and role in society. If women are not seen through the lenses of television cameras and heard on radio throughout the Balkans, they simply do not exist in the "serious manner" of male public figures. Sustained public information campaigns on women's roles in political and civil life of all the countries of Southeast Europe are critically needed at this time. A concurrent component of this effort must include media training for women politicians and NGOs. Likewise, Balkan journalists and media houses in general traditionally focus on the powerbrokers and omit coverage of "back bencher" politicians and non-state actors, where women are currently situated. Journalists also need to be educated on the

importance of covering new actors in transitional democracies and how this coverage can spark a sorely needed debate as the region approaches a series of elections in five states.

6. *Sustained, long-term development of non-governmental organizations is of critical importance to the viability of transitional democracies in Southeast Europe.* The OSCE through its field missions, and its Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, USAID and the Council of Europe, NGO funding activities must be maintained and extended throughout the region. A vibrant civil society is sorely needed the counterbalance the imbalance of nationalistic political power. Continued funding and support over the next decade is warranted and necessary.

## Conclusion

The international community, initially led by former OSCE Head of Mission to Bosnia, Ambassador Robert Barry, has provided early support for returning women to political life and exporting those efforts throughout Southeast Europe. As rebuilding efforts continue, following a decade of war, this moment presents a rare opportunity for the women of the region to capitalize on these initial efforts. To continue progress, the international community, along with state governments, should move forward in an aggressive and sustained fashion towards realizing the principles that outline women's rights under various UN conventions on women rights, including civil and political, social, economic and cultural rights. Significant areas also remain to be implemented under the obligations of the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as fighting the scourge of human trafficking. In carrying out this effort, the international community can assist in reshaping a self-sustaining democratic system that affirms women and can effectively replace the dispirited and oppressive legacy of communism and ethnic nationalism.

### *Bridging the Gap*

OSCE's focus and the Gender Task Force's primary orientation have been directed to advance women's political representation. While this effort is important, if not critical, advancing women's issues through the media and bridging women's NGOs' initiatives to government policies and law-making are necessary components to create a vibrant civil society predicated on democratic

<sup>44</sup> Tanya Domi, "UN Prostitution Scandal," *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, <http://www.iwpr.net>, July 20, 2001.

## THE HARRIMAN REVIEW

principles. It is time to shift the focus, while maintaining the efforts to advance women's political representation.

Many Bosnian women have pointed out that huge gaps exist between NGOs and government authorities. International actors must understand the ramifications of these gaps and act to bridge them through sustained funding. Committed political will accompanied with the necessary funding by the international community to these nascent civil society actors and groups is necessary to realize the creation of a civil society that can effectively counterbalance a historical political actor dominance in Bosnia and throughout the region.

To flourish, a democracy requires political stability and economic opportunity. Nothing is more important to a sustainable democracy than a healthy economy. A jobs program, targeting women in Southeast Europe, especially those who now are single heads of households as a consequence of war, is a key vehicle for realizing women's equity. There is nothing more oppressive or deleterious to democracy than the yoke of poverty. The advancement of women's rights in Southeast Europe is an opportunity for the international community to choose a path towards increased political stability and a sustainable, vibrant democratic society. It is an opportunity that should not be overlooked as countless negotiations and deal brokering continues between nationalistic, hard-line politicians and the international

community. Perhaps this time, following a decade of war, empowered women will demand and the international community will support women's rightful place at the deal-brokering tables. With women leaders at the table, perhaps the region has a second chance.

*Tanya L. Domi is the former Spokesperson and Director of Press and Public Information at the OSCE Mission to Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1996-2000. She is a M.A. candidate in Human Rights Studies at Columbia University.*

*The author would like to thank Dr. Jane Jaquette, Occidental College, and Dr. J. Ann Tickner, University of Southern California, for their instrumental assistance in supporting the author's efforts in researching and writing this essay. This essay was presented at a conference at USC in February 2001 as part of a wider project funded by the Ford Foundation, designed to strengthen connections between the emerging scholarly research field of gender and international relations and the activist and policy communities. Lastly, the author would like to thank Yamila Milovic, a Sarajevo radio journalist, for her critical and invaluable support, both professionally and personally, during my research for this work. As the result of Yamila's contribution, the essay speaks much more authentically from the perspective of Bosnian women activists.*