

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE "WOMEN IN FOREIGN POLICY II"

Video address: "The role of women in times of crisis"

Skopje, 14 October 2022

Distinguished Ministers,
Dear colleagues and friends,

It is my great honour and pleasure to be part of the "Women in foreign policy" International conference held in Skopje these couple of days, and I would like to thank you for the opportunity to contribute to an important subject – "The role of women in times of crisis".

"Crisis" is a word we started using too often. Today's troubling times in the world, have immense negative impact on our societies – in terms of our financial and economic challenges, the usage of energy as a weapon, the shaken security on the European continent. And, all of these elements impact equally both men and women, so the response must be a joint one – both men and women working together, on equal terms in creating possibilities and opportunities for a better, safer future.

The crisis in Ukraine is an urgent reminder of the relevance of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, which calls for the meaningful inclusion of women in all areas of peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Simply put – without the involvement of women, sustainable peace and security cannot be achieved.

None of the rights women enjoy today were just given, they were fought for and they have to be protected. Women cannot influence the development of society and conflict prevention, if they are not active actors in them.

When we talk about gender equality, we mean the full integration of women and men, and the use of all available skills and talents of women in the armed forces, as well as their contribution to the decision-making process.

In the period since the adoption of UN Resolution 1325 - Women, peace and security, we have learned why it is important to promote gender equality and implement a gender perspective in the military and defence sector in North Macedonia.

Today, I stand proud of what we have achieved in the past period. The Ministry of Defence has become a leader in gender equality policies in North Macedonia, and gender perspective is integrated in the strategic documents of the Ministry of Defence and the Army.

I am also happy to say that we are not only taking institutional and national steps and measures to integrate gender perspective, but we are fostering actions on a regional level. I will mention that we have a ten-year permanent regional cooperation for gender integration and signed declaration on support for gender equality in security sector reform in the Western Balkans.

In fact, the responsibility for the integration of gender perspectives and ultimately gender equality lies with everyone. Changing mind-sets and changing traditional norms that marginalize women is not only women's responsibility, it is absolutely a collective responsibility.

Commitments to gender equality in the military and defence sector require a change in institutional culture and in the way defence contributes to society as a whole. It is an exceptional value of modern democracies which know that with the full, inclusive involvement of women in defence, not only as a figure, but also in the work process and in appropriate positions, including leadership positions - managerial and decision-making positions, we gain another great capacity.

I was appointed Minister of Defence in a sensitive period, in a difficult time for the continent, a time in which what we thought was impossible to happen in Europe in the 21st century, became our reality - a military invasion of a sovereign and independent state, followed by suffering and loss of human lives.

The war in Ukraine and my appointment as Minister of Defence coincided with making and facing difficult decisions. Those difficult decisions led to a hybrid attack aimed directly at me, triggering an avalanche of negative comments that ranged from my expertise to the way I look or dress.

But, I firmly believe that women who want to be successful in politics must be ready to fight for their rights and must be ready for all kinds of attacks. Therefore, we must fight against all forms of injustice, inequality and any kind of violence, we should be hard workers and to believe in ourselves. Thankfully, we women know how to be diplomatic and pragmatic and can overcome difficult challenges.

A society where women and girls are not respected, valued or given equal opportunities for growth and development, is a society incapable to progress. The more we invest in gender equality, the more we will enable future generations to inherit a society in which stereotypes and systemic barriers are reduced, and opportunities for everyone to enjoy equal rights in every sphere of life are increased.

As my career has confirmed so far, one of the most important ingredient for a woman to succeed is to be surrounded by examples, to be determined and inspired. That is why we need more female role models to encourage young girls and women in our countries and around the world.

Thank you for your attention.