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## The Women's Role In Armed Conflicts<sup>1</sup>

*The Case of the Stability Pact Gender Task Force*

*Do Women Play a Special Role in Conflict Prevention, Crisis Management and Post-Conflict Rehabilitation?*

In the South-eastern part of Europe, this is not an academic question. We can answer it in a very concrete way by analysing the role of women throughout all three phases of the conflicts in the today's Stability Pact region: pre-war, war and post-war.

All the countries of today's Stability Pact region are countries in transition. Transition is just one form of globalization. War is just one form of postponed and disfigured implementation of transition - the most brutal, inhuman and destructive way.

When transition started picking up momentum in the mid-1980s, in post-Tito's Yugoslavia, the tired communist elite gave up, admitting that the Yugoslav League of Communists did not have any acceptable answer to the challenges of globalization. New political actors came onto the scene.

In Serbia (with the autonomies of Vojvodina and Kosovo ruined) and in Montenegro, former communists who had become nationalists, came to power. In Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia, central and right wing, mostly nationalist parties or party coalitions were democratically elected and started the difficult process of transition.

All over the world, transition is essentially a huge redistribution of political power and wealth within each nation as well as between nations. The trend is undisputed. The rich and the mighty are becoming richer and mightier, the poor and the powerless are becoming poorer and more powerless.

In some cases, like the Balkans, transition became at the same time a savage attempt to newly partition state territories and even newly distribute populations. Aggressive nationalist civil wars were simply the handiest of tools for this redistribution.

Transition has taken on different patterns in the Stability Pact region. Slovenia dealt with its transition through a slow gradual reform process, Hungary was subject to a form of shock therapy, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania and Macedonia are going through "stop and go" shock therapy. In Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia and Vojvodina, "ethnic" wars have masked a very brutal and distorted transition. Warlords and organized criminals became the main profiteers in this process.

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<sup>1</sup> This article reflects the personal opinions of the author and not those of the Stability Pact Gender Task Force.

Whatever the pattern of transition, it is obvious that transition is hostile to human capital. In all the countries of today's Stability Pact region, women were just this: human capital. They had been rather well educated, usually employed on a full-time basis and economically independent, made their own decisions on family planning,<sup>2</sup> and in addition carried out 90 per cent of the responsibility for their households and children. And now suddenly they were supposed to play fake roles by being "queens of the home" and "mothers of the nation".

Through the first multiparty elections in all the countries of this region women were practically excluded from political decision-making bodies. At best they became objects of ultra-conservative exclusively male politics, at worst, victims of the wars, led by aggressive, conservative, nationalist and exclusively male politics.

Table 1

*Percentage of Women in Parliaments and in Governments in Some Countries of the South-Eastern European Region*

Country	Women's Right to Vote	Best % of Women in Parliam.	% of Women Elected 1990/1	% of Women Elected 1992/4	% of Women Elected 1996/8	% of Women Elected 1999	% of Women Ministers 1999
Albania	1920	1974-33,2	3,6	5,7		6,4	11,11
Bulgaria	1944	1981-21,8	12,9	13,3		10,8	0
Hungary	1958	1980-30,1	7,3	11,4	8,3	8,3	8
Romania	1946	1985-34,4	3,6	4,1	7,3	7,3	0
Slovenia	1943/6	1982-26	11	14	7,8	7,8	0
Croatia	1945	1982-17	4,4	5,8	7,8	7,8	?
BiH	1945	1982-23	5	3	26	26	0
Serbia	1945		3	?	?	5,5	5,5
Vojvodina	1945						
Montenegro	1945		3	?	?	?	0

Source: Documentation of the CEE Network for Gender Issues and Inter-Parliamentary Union's publications 1995-1999

Before the transition and wars, the majority of women reacted very similarly to men. Frightened to death they would have to take personal responsibility for their own lives and for very complex communities, which real freedom inevitably brings with it, in most cases they opted for the easier solution. During the periods of growing unemployment and poverty as well as being confronted by all forms of discriminations they either developed private strategies of survival or became followers of the new and "neo"-nationalist leaders. The collective working class identity and conformist behaviour of the

2 The exception to this rule was Romania, where abortion was illegal.

socialist period were easily transformed into a collective ideology and conformist acceptance of the only right nation - "my nation".

Mainstream political culture did not change a bit. It remained based on autocratic leadership, on exclusion of the other, on state-induced and unlawful political and/or armed violence. The first solution - private strategies of survival - meant that the majority of women withdrew to their private lives, the second put them on the bandwagon drawn by a fiery nationalist horse. Both ended up with a hangover from "ethnic" wars without victors.

Women in general are not better than men. The majority can be brainwashed and sucked into extremist ideologies. Milošević's most ardent supporters were the well-to-do women of his establishment. They were ironically named the "Movement of Fur Coats to Protect the Winter".

Even certain civil society women's groups, primarily established to save their sons from the dangers of the war, have been susceptible to manipulations. The group "Fortress of Love" in Croatia is a well-known case in point. Some women in the wars were also informally as well as officially leading war-mongers (Mirjana Marković, Biljana Plavsić). Some women were soldiers in regular armies and in militias. Some were war profiteers. However, the majority of women remained powerless civilians.

In the modern wars at the end of the last millennium, it was ten times more dangerous to be a civilian than to be a soldier.<sup>3</sup> The main roles assigned to the women in a war are the role of keeping every day life moving along and the role of the victim: victim of rape, victim of "collateral damage", refugee, displaced person, widow. Women suffer through war in a different way than men. This is why women tend to be more realistic. This is why they are quicker to reject war as a solution, why they are quicker to understand that reconciliation is the only way to the normalization of every day life. This is why they have less trouble forgiving and forgetting. This is why some women become the most ardent pacifists, this is why they are the first to opt for peace agreements. This is why they are also the first to start the process of reconciliation.

As survivors of war strife and atrocities, many women are qualified to take on the leadership of societies after a conflict. Instead, they are so often marginalized once again.

*The Question Is: Why and How Must This Be Changed and Who Will Be Able to Do It?*

In the written history of humanity, women have never been organized as a separate self-conscious political subject.

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3 Cf. FAFO and NUPI Conference: "From Marginalization to Integration of Women in Peace Building", Recommendation for Policy and Practice, draft version of the report, Oslo, Norway, January 2001.

During the French Revolution, they were explicitly forbidden to ask for equal citizenship. The penalty for this request was death by the guillotine (Olympe de Gouges).

In socialist revolutions, women were asked to participate, but only as disciplined soldiers, as comrades in the class struggle. Revolutionaries did proclaim equality between men and women but the whole communist "avant-garde" was very macho and autocratic. Women were explicitly forbidden to join forces in any kind of independent organization. The penalty for mere allusion to such an attempt was incarceration and death in one or another kind of a Gulag.

After Tito's death and before the outbreak of war, in Yugoslavia (Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia), a minority of women began to band together in independent civil society organizations and in new women's movements. At the end of the 1980s, these groups began asking for political and personal rights for women. They were closely associated with the new civil society movements that spoke for human and civil rights, disarmament and demilitarization of society, the rights of homosexuals, and environmental protection. After the first multiparty elections these new, democratic, modern women movements were totally marginalized. Newborn, mostly nationalist political parties came to power with a new political agenda, the agenda of "ethnic" wars. On this agenda there was no place for modern gender equality policies. Women's movements from different Yugoslav republics endeavoured jointly to prevent the wars by trying to win public support in civil society. These attempts were never given serious support by international mainstream politics and they never picked up any real momentum within their own nations; all of them failed.

Many new women's civil society groups were born in war times, especially in Kosovo, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Serbia, Vojvodina, Montenegro and Albania. They came out as a moral protest against the war (for example, the "Women in Black" in Serbia who attempted to stop the war and to punish war criminals, the Anti-War Campaign in Zagreb and the Centre for Anti-War Action in Belgrade). They were created out of the need for women's self-help, to assist the victims of armed conflicts, and as a women's response to the breakdown of the state social welfare system under conditions of state terror or war (Biser's International Women's Initiative, Medica Zenica, Women from the Una River, all in Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Throughout the wars in the states born of the former Yugoslavia, all these women's groups remained active and well connected in informal but effective networks. Moreover, they learned how to network with women's movements all over the world, and to use the opportunities available to get the support of international governmental organizations in coping with some of the effects of these wars. In this manner, at the 1995 Beijing UN Conference on Women, rape during war became a crime against humanity under international law,

and in the Beijing Platform for Action for the first time a chapter was included on the role of women in armed conflict prevention and resolution.

Nevertheless, neither in international mainstream politics nor in the public opinion of their own countries were these women's groups given any attention or recognition as possible actors for peace and democratic change.

The Stability Pact as an international initiative for rebuilding peace, and bringing democracy, human rights, prosperity and safety to this region, did not come completely out of the blue, but after a decade of armed violence.

The Dayton Agreement did not solve the problems of the democratic coexistence of the three nations - Serbs, Croats and Muslims - in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It merely stopped their armed struggle. The NATO bombing did not solve the problem of Serbs and Albanians coexisting and living together peacefully in Kosovo. It merely stopped the persecution of Albanians in Kosovo. The bombing did not solve the issue of the Serbian minority or the Roma people in Kosovo nor the issue of the Albanians in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, let alone the entire Balkans. The armed conflicts in Macedonia recently showed the complexity of the Albanian national question to its full extent. Neither the NATO bombing nor the subsequent peace agreement solved the problems in Yugoslavia. The process of its disintegration continues: The Kosovo problem is "frozen" under an international protectorate, Montenegro continues to try to secede, in Vojvodina separatists tensions are mounting. Transition by war proved the most profitable path for those who could hide their greed and power hunger behind a pretext of unsolved national questions.

The authors of the Dayton Agreement did not see women as potential actors for peace, reconciliation, and democratization.<sup>4</sup>

International mainstream politics was too busy dealing with the national big bosses of the war conflicts. In the countries where there was armed conflict, which were destroyed by the wars, where rule of law was not well-established, where the media were restricted and where warlords held power, there was no way to make these women's groups visible.

*Is It Realistic at all to Consider Women as a Potential Politically Active Group, Willing and Capable of Developing Itself into a Political Force and Consciously Preventing the Repetition of Misusing Transition to Wage Ethnic Wars?*

As early as 1994, the Party of European Socialists in the European Parliament understood that newly born social democratic parties in the countries of transition need assistance in building truly democratic programmatic profiles and organizational structures. So they established a small foundation, the

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4 Cf. Analysis of the Gender Aspects of the Dayton Peace Agreement: Kvinna till Kvinna, presented at the Beijing +5 UN Conference, New York 2000.

European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity and within it a special women's working group in order to share the good social democratic tradition of supporting gender equality as one of the crucial values of social democratic politics.

In 1998, this working group was transformed into the Central and Eastern European (CEE) Network for Gender Issues, an electronic network with its seat in Budapest that links all social democratic women's groups in Central and Eastern Europe as well as many civil society women's groups working for women's human rights.<sup>5</sup> This Network, in co-operation with the Norwegian Labour Party's women's organization, the Norwegian Labour Women, adapted a Norwegian training module called "Women Can Do It" to the needs of the social democratic women in Central and Eastern Europe. In 1998-1999, the CEE Network for Gender Issues started systematic training of social democratic women leaders and their allies in civil society. The work of this Network was crucial for the development of gender equality awareness and for the enactment of the first quota regulations in the party statutes of some social democratic parties in the CEE region. Even before the establishment of the Stability Pact, the Network had already begun to have an influence in the Stability Pact region on the programmes and statutes of the social democratic parties in Slovenia, in Croatia, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This was very important because women's civil society groups working for gender equality and peace gained their first allies in political power structures. However, until the late nineties all these allies were rather weak opposition parties.

On the level of the international mainstream politics in the Balkans, the potential of women, organized in civil society, to promote democracy and peace was first discovered by the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Nationalist leaders of all the three sides were constantly undermining the most important decisions of the Dayton Agreement. In both open and hidden ways, they blocked the return of refugees and the internally displaced, the joint governance of ethnically mixed cities as well as the normal functioning of elected legislative and executive bodies. Only women, organized in civil society, were courageous enough to show an open interest in peace, reconciliation, democratization and the normalization of every day life.

Once discovered by influential internationals who wanted the Dayton Agreement to become a success (US Ambassador Swanee Hunt to Vienna, US Ambassador Robert L. Barry, Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Elisabeth Rasmussen, Deputy Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina), these women's groups started to get substantial and systematic support from the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, not only for their work with the victims of armed conflicts, but also in their at-

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5 Further information on the CEE Network for Gender Issues at the website of the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity: [www.europeanforum.net/gender\\_issues/index.htm](http://www.europeanforum.net/gender_issues/index.htm).

tempts to make women become a political power. Thus, the programme "Women in Politics" was started.

Joint efforts of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, women's NGOs and a few strong women politicians from different political parties persuaded international actors to accept the enactment of the first quota rule in the Provisional Electoral Law for the Bosnia and Herzegovina elections of 1998. Suddenly instead of the three to five per cent women in the Parliaments of the Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 26 per cent of Parliamentarians were women. This was enough to demonstrate what they would be able to reach if they gained equal rights, but it was not enough to really change mainstream politics.

The OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina "Women in Politics" programme (headed by Mary Ann Rukavina) began systematic co-operation with the CEE Network for Gender Issues. The goal was to make this first women's breakthrough into mainstream politics sustainable, to offer the necessary insight into the problems of gender equality to these new women politicians and to give them training in the skills required in modern democratic politics. When the Stability Pact was established, again there was no formal place for women in its structures. There was a vague perception that there was one and only one real gender equality problem that should be tackled within the Stability Pact: the problem of trafficking in women and children.

However, when the Stability Pact initiative was launched, women of this region were prepared to reject their role as objects and victims of aggressive, nationalist, exclusively male politics. They were also strong enough to refuse to be reduced to the role of solely being the victims of trafficking, this time by the male-dominated international politics.

Upon the initiative of Ambassador Barry and women from Bosnia and Herzegovina and with the help of the CEE Network for Gender Issues, an appeal was started and within a week signed by over 150 very different women's NGO groups from twelve countries in the Stability Pact region. In this appeal, women openly asked to be stakeholders and equal partners in the international community and their own national governments to rebuild peace, good neighbourly relations, prosperity and safety in their countries and region.

A day before the Stability Pact Summit, the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina invited the representatives of the signatories of this women's appeal to take part in a conference and a press conference. On this occasion, Bodo Hombach, Special Co-ordinator of the Stability Pact, met with a delegation of the women's conference. He promised to support their demands within the framework of the Stability Pact. He even agreed to their demand that a woman be nominated as a chair of the Stability Pact Working Table I (Democratization and Human Rights). Despite his sincere efforts, this never materialized.

It required a great deal of lobbying and a number of additional efforts, before the women of the Stability Pact region got the green light to establish the Stability Pact Gender Task Force.

The second difficult battle was on the mandate of this new Task Force. While international women politicians for gender equality proposed mainstreaming gender equality in the work of all three Stability Pact Working Tables, male leaders of the Stability Pact - as has already been mentioned - were focused on merely one issue: trafficking in women and children.

However, the Stability Pact Gender Task Force was very different from all other task forces in Working Table I. It had emerged from the various democratic women's groups from civil society in all the countries of the region. Its programme was based on national and regional assessment of the most urgent needs of the women in this region.

The Stability Pact Gender Task Force rejected the mainstreaming approach - i.e. to incorporate gender equality into prevailing thought as well as strengthening the inclusion of women in political concepts and practice - the moment there were no women's "streams" in the Stability Pact countries. How was one to mainstream without a stream? There were no strong nation-wide gender equality movements, neither strong nor numerous women politicians in political decision-making bodies and nearly no governmental and parliamentary bodies for equal opportunity policies. Who would then be able to do the mainstreaming?

The Gender Task Force also rejected dealing with the trafficking issue. Not because the issue is not a significant problem, but to avoid once again reducing the role of women in the Stability Pact region to that of victims, this time through international mainstream politics.

The Gender Task Force started to deal with the synergy resulting from the multifarious activities and positions of women in the trade unions, in the media, in governments, in all political parties, in Parliaments as well as in international non-governmental and governmental organizations. It systematically uses the exchange of best practices in the region and in the worldwide women's movement. Its four regional projects in 2000 and 2001 are strongly focused on one single issue: political empowerment of women.

OSCE support, first from its Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and then its Secretariat in Vienna, was of crucial importance for the establishment of the Stability Pact Gender Task Force. The OSCE has offered constant logistic support to the Gender Task Force, which works under its auspices. However, in developing its strategy, the Gender Task Force is independent. The fact that it reaches so many women in the Stability Pact region is due to the enormous amount of voluntary work conducted by thousands of women activists jointly implementing Stability Pact Gender Task Force regional projects in their countries. They are connected in *ad hoc* national networks of women's groups and governmental bodies for promotion of gender equality.

From the outset (it was formally established in November 1999), the Stability Pact Gender Task Force was based on two pillars - one governmental and one consisting of NGOs in eleven countries of the region. It also has an informal Advisory Board, and from May 2000, an information office, the Gender Task Force Clearinghouse in Sarajevo, with one full-time staff member managing activities. The second professional staff member, who works half-time for the Gender Task Force, holds the position of chair, and is based at the CEE Network for Gender Issues Office in Budapest.

### *Results*

The women leaders of the Gender Task Force knew exactly what they wanted: not only to help women to enter male politics, but to change its values, priorities, and the rules of the game. Instead of the politics of hatred and exclusion, the politics of consensus, respect for differences, and inclusion were to come to the fore. Instead of the politics of so-called big issues, the politics of small issues of social and gender equality in everyday life were to be dealt with. Instead of the politics of big autocratic leaders, transparent, responsible politics with clear and respected democratic procedures were to be on the agenda.

They knew that these were ambitious goals and that they could reach them only if they based them on the most recent international binding documents on gender equality, if they were to cross all borders, build women's solidarity and enter into politics through the main door, as a well-organized and strong group. *Indeed, these women made the decision to become a specific political force.*

The overview of the results of the Gender Task Force's most important regional project - "Women Can Do It" - shows how they made their first steps in the right direction (see Table 2).

However, these facts and figures do not tell the most important things: Where before there were dispersed women's NGOs and small, separated women's political party organizations, today we have nation- and region-wide women's networks with a clear perception of a common goal. Where in the past national mechanisms for gender equality were either very weak or even non-existent, today we are making formidable efforts to build them up and extend them as well as giving them a strong gender equality mandate. Where in the past there was disgust with politics, cynicism and apathy, we now have a new vision of democratic politics, optimism and action.

Table 2

Facts and Figures about SP GTF Women Can Do It Project 2000-2001  
(Presented at the SP GTF Regular regional meeting in Sarajevo, February 11, 2001)

Country	Type of Elections	Project Type	ToT Seminars	Trainers Trained	Local Training/Campaigns	Trained Politicians Activists	Geographic Outreach	Activist Outreach to Voters	Media Outreach to Voters	Results-Elected Women	Notes
Albania	Local	WCDI	1	40	40 1 National Media Campaign	1080	Whole country		Nation-wide	Trend reversed, going up	Impossible to get formal data
Montenegro	Local	WCDI	3	75	2	41			Nation-wide		Ongoing project
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Local	WCDI	3	65	175	3258	Whole country		Nation-wide	From 5.3% to 18.2% From 27% to 19%	Open lists Closed/ open lists 40% of elected women were trained
	National	WCDI	1		15 1 National Media Campaign	300	Whole country Whole country				
Croatia	Local	WCDI WVCDI	3	51	4	100			Nation-wide		Ongoing project
Macedonia	Local	WCDI	1	60	120	2400	Whole country	36 000	Nation-wide	From 105 to 165 counc. From 0 to 3 female mayors	Impossible to get official data
		WVCDI	1	70	1 National Media Campaign						

Romania	National	WVCDI	2	28	26		26 out of 40 districts	720	Nation-wide	From 6% to 9%	
					28 Press Conference		Whole country				
Serbia/ Vojvodina	Local	WCDI	1	27	56	960	DOS governed localities		Nation-wide	Impossible to get formal data on locally elected women	
	Provincial										
	Federal	WVCDI			3	970	Whole country	460 000			From 5.2% to 11%
	Presidential	WVCDI		65	Interactive Media Campaigns			390			
	National				4 Media Campaigns		Whole country				
Recapitulation		6 WCDI 6 WVCDI		481	483 Local Trainings 11 Media campaigns	8139 women politicians 970 activists		497 110		From average 7% of female MPs SP trend goes up to 12%	

WCDI = Women Can Do It; WVCDI= Women Voters Can Do It; ToT= Train the Trainer training

*Schematic Recapitulation of the Role of the Women in Times of Transition in the Stability Pact Region*

From the mid-1980s till today, the Balkans has experienced all phases of war.

*Preparatory phase of the armed conflicts 1986-1991:*

- downturn in economic development;
- mounting social tensions;
- destabilization of former predominant political players;
- formation of new mainstream political leaders by transformation of development impasse and social tensions into ethnic exclusion and hate;
- massive abuse of mass media to persuade people of all nations to accept war as a solution;
- exploitation of the Serb national minority to eliminate the rule of law and to dissolve the legal state authorities in Kosovo, Vojvodina, Montenegro, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- hidden low scale arming of future adversaries in the armed conflict, who had not been armed previously.

*The role of the women in the pre-war phase:*

- The majority withdraw into their private lives or are sucked into the new mainstream politics.
- A minority becomes organized in new women's movements, first for political and personal rights of women, disarmament and demilitarization, as well as - before the outbreak of wars - becoming active in the prevention of armed conflicts. These groups remain marginalized in their own nations and never receive serious support from mainstream international politics.

*The war phase:*

- The attempt to exploit the multinational army to prevent peaceful separation of Slovenia fails, thus the "Serbianization" of the Yugoslav People's Army is begun.
- Underground fighters (criminals, paramilitary mercenaries) are sent to start armed conflicts in Croatia. The Yugoslav People's Army is exploited as an occupational army.
- The same model is used in Bosnia and Herzegovina combined with the fact that the now purely Serb Yugoslav People's Army has already occupied it.

- Classical territorial wars, sold to the domestic and international public as inter-ethnic civil wars, ravage Croatia as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1992-1995.
- NATO bombs Republika Srpska.
- In November 1995, the Dayton Peace Agreement is signed.

*The role of women during the war phase:*

- The majority of the women become victims of war atrocities and its economic spillover effects.
- Former women's peace movements become actors in providing humanitarian aid and international justice to the victims of wars.
- The UN Conference on Women in Beijing proclaims rape in war as crime against humanity, as well as devoting a chapter in the Beijing Platform for Action to the necessity of an active role for women in the prevention and resolution of armed conflicts.
- Women begin to organize within some political parties (mostly social democratic and centrist ones) and within trade unions. First quota regulations are established in the statutes of political parties (in Slovenia, Croatia as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina).
- International mainstream politics completely ignore a possible women's role in the formulation and implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement.

*The post(?) -war phase:*

- Serbian crackdown on the Kosovo Liberation Army/UCK (1999);
- NATO bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1999);
- Stability Pact Initiative (July 1999);
- Peace Agreement with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1999);
- Albanian terrorism against the Serbian minority in Kosovo (1999 till today);
- gradual democratic takeover of the political leadership by the more democratic political parties: Djukanović in Montenegro, Račan's coalition in Croatia, the Democratic Opposition in Serbia and Vojvodina, Rugova's victory in local elections in Kosovo (2000);
- shaky implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement in Bosnia and Herzegovina; slow growth of the parties supporting a multi-ethnic and territorially integrated Bosnia and Herzegovina; unexpected renewal of the extreme nationalist parties of Serbs and Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- Albanian minority extremists' armed rebellion in Macedonia (March 2001).

*The role of the women in the post-war phase:*

- permanent efforts to instil real equality into mainstream politics with clear perception of how to change it;
- first enactment of the quota rule in the Provisional Electoral Law in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1998, 26 per cent of the Members of Parliament are women; 30 per cent quota rule on open lists enacted in the Permanent Bosnia and Herzegovina Electoral Law, 18 per cent women elected on local and entities' levels; national equality machinery established at state and entities levels;
- creation of the Stability Pact Gender Task Force, focusing on political empowerment of women;
- women receive 21 per cent of the seats in Croatian post-Tudjman Parliament and also receive the posts of deputy prime minister and three ministers; national state equality mechanism is upgraded;
- crucial role of organized democratic women's movement in Serbia and Vojvodina in ousting Milošević, twelve per cent (previously five per cent) women elected in Serbian national Parliament, many more women in important positions in executive in Vojvodina and Serbia;
- positive spillover effect in the perception of possible women's role in Kosovo: gender equality department in the OSCE Mission in Kosovo (OMIK), 30 per cent quota rule enacted for the first free local elections in Kosovo; eight per cent of women elected to the posts of local councillors on open lists;
- organized efforts to ensure that better prepared women get elected to the future Parliaments of Albania, Macedonia, and to local governments in Croatia; begin of the parity campaign in Slovenia;
- organized women's struggle in Macedonia to be included as equal partners in the political solution to the crises before it becomes too late.

With the support of the OSCE, for the first time ever, the actors of mainstream international politics gave the women of South-eastern Europe a small chance to devise strategies and implement a plan for their own political empowerment.

*The Future?*

The Stability Pact Gender Task Force pays a high price for its originality and stubbornness in maintaining regional women's groups' ownership of their projects: no institutional stability, no guaranteed future. Its first results are not irreversible. The Gender Task Force must take a new step in its development and needs stronger, more reliable, long-term support from the international community. It requires small, but very professional regional centres for

the development of concrete gender equality policies as well as national offices in all countries of the region. The continuation and upgrading of the "Women Can Do It" training modules for all present and up-and-coming women politicians are just as indispensable as the enlargement of its focus on the issues of the economic empowerment of women and their systematic participation in building peace, safety and security in their countries and in the region.

Women of the twelve countries transformed the Stability Pact into their new window of opportunity. With the support of the OSCE, they invented and put in place a new international institution to work for them: the Stability Pact Gender Task Force.

Democratic Europe and international democratic mainstream politics will have to find one way or the other to stabilize and develop the explosive South-eastern part of Europe. After their experience with the Stability Pact, there is a realistic hope that women of this region will find a way to persuade the international community to take them seriously as equal stakeholders and real partners in any of their future endeavours for peace, democratization and prosperity in this region.