



## Information

### News

### Photo and Video

### Vacancies

### Procurement

### Contact

Friday, 5 November 2010

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## Report Establishing the South East Europe Women Police Officers Network presented in Zagreb, Croatia

The presentation of the report *Establishing the South East Europe Women Police Officers Network – Research Findings* took place under the high patronage of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia, Ms. Jadranka Kosor, in Zagreb, Croatia 5 November 2010. The presentation, followed by the roundtable on the position of women in police services in SEE and mechanisms for gender equality was organized by the Croatian Ministry of Interior and UNDP/SEESAC.



The roundtable was opened by the Minister of Interior **Tomislav Karamarko** who stated that 'until recently, the word 'police' conjured up images of bulky men in blue carrying weapons and fighting crime and women were not represented in the profession. But this attitude that police work is an exclusively "male" domain is a thing of the past. In order to be truly democratic, police service must be gender responsive.' According to the Minister 'there are equal expectations from women and men in police service – both are expected to respect the law, are professional, quick and efficient.'

He was seconded by Director of Police **Oliver Grbic**, who noted that expanding the representation of women in the police service would enhance both its efficiency and its social acceptance. 'It is high time to stop using the expression "male profession,"' he said. 'Gender must not be a criterion for work in a profession; the only criterion must be a job well done.'

Women now constitute roughly 14 percent of the Croatian police force, but the Government is working to increase that share. The Women Police Officers Network in SEE was hailed as a helpful initiative in this effort. Ministry officials also welcomed the prospect of learning from regional and European best practices.

Efforts to pursue gender equality in the security services in Southeastern Europe reflect a wider global quest to expand the role of women in peacekeeping and conflict resolution, in line with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. It called for both greater protection of women in armed conflicts and full and equal representation of women in the administration of peace, security and justice, at all levels. "Pursuing these aims is not just a moral imperative," **Louisa Vinton**, the UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Croatia, told the roundtable. "It is fundamentally a very practical step to help countries and their institutions function better."

Croatia is currently striving to expand the participation of women police officers in international peacekeeping missions, according to **Tihana Kozlica**, a police officer from the Department for Peacekeeping Operations in the Directorate for European Integration and International Cooperation. Women peacekeepers are often able to win the trust and confidence of the vulnerable populations they encounter, which are often composed mainly of women and children, she said.

The research on the position of women in the police services of Southeastern Europe was conducted under the auspices of the Southeast Europe Police Chiefs Association (SEPCHA). Covering eight countries, it explored recruitment and admission policies towards women in the police service, education and training, career development, normative regulations, discrimination, and the issue of the establishment of associations as a way to improve quality and efficiency of the police work, as well as to promote gender equality. **Iva Balgac**, an international police cooperation officer and the Croatian member of the WPON noted that understanding the reasons women want to join the police and the obstacles they face in doing their jobs would help improve recruitment and retention.

At the roundtable, a representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs presented the development of the Action plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325; representatives of the Ministry of Interior presented data on women police officers victims of violence and the role of women police officers in combating gender based violence. A representative of the Human rights office of the Government presented the legal and institutional framework related to human rights and gender issues in Croatia.

The event was attended by some 60 participants from government, civil society, and the diplomatic community. The roundtable was organized within the framework of a regional project implemented by SEESAC in cooperation with the South East Europe Police Chiefs Association (SEPCHA) *Support for Gender Mainstreaming in Policing Practice in South Eastern Europe*. The project is financially supported by the UNDP Gender Thematic Trust Fund and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Agenda of the meeting can be downloaded here.

← Back

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