

## **Empowering Women in Policymaking and Gender Mainstreaming the Normalization Process**

Peace is more than just the absence of conflict. It involves creating conditions for sustainable coexistence through dialogue, understanding, and mutual respect. In post-conflict regions like the Western Balkans, normalizing relations is essential to achieving long-term peace. A crucial aspect of this process is gender mainstreaming—the integration of gender perspectives into policymaking and conflict resolution. Women play a pivotal role in building peace, and their inclusion ensures that these processes address the needs of the entire population. This is not simply about adding women to negotiations but about rethinking how peace processes are designed and implemented, with a focus on post-conflict reconciliation and human rights.

These were some of the broader conclusions from a roundtable discussion organized by the Council for Inclusive Governance (CIG) in cooperation with the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) in Tirana, Albania, on September 26, 2024. The event brought together the head of UNMIK, former and current members of parliaments of Kosovo and Serbia, and representatives from civil society. Held under the Chatham House Rule, this report summarizes the overall discussion and does not necessarily reflect the views of individual participants, CIG, or UNMIK.

The term “normalization” opened the discussion, with participants offering diverse interpretations. For some, it meant transforming “opponents” into partners, while another viewed it as potentially imposing societal changes. Successful normalization was seen as a process that fosters trust between governments and societies and builds narratives that support a better future between Kosovo and Serbia.

A central theme of the discussion was the advocacy for gender mainstreaming in the dialogue. One speaker highlighted the importance of involving women, citing a successful past negotiation led by a woman negotiator. However, some speakers expressed frustration over the ongoing marginalization of women in political decision-making, reflecting broader reluctance to share power.

The gender discussion fostered a sense of unity among women from both societies, showing potential cooperation on issues like gender equality and women’s rights. However, a speaker noted that women often faced intimidation and demotivation when entering politics. While women’s representation had increased, participants agreed that their power in decision-making remains limited. Simply meeting qualitative targets is not enough; women’s voices must be genuinely heard.

Concerns were raised about the lack of progress in the dialogue, with calls for more pressure on both governments. A participant was sceptical about the pace of normalization, believing it would take “more than two decades to see real progress.” The difference between political and societal normalization was also highlighted, emphasising that true normalization must occur at the societal level, not just among political elites. There was broad agreement on the role of civil

society in bridging this gap, advocating for a bottom-up approach which public engagement and reconciliation efforts.

In conclusion, participants agreed on the need for a comprehensive and inclusive approach to normalization, focusing on gender mainstreaming and societal engagement. Addressing structural challenges and empowering women can bring Kosovo and Serbia closer to sustainable peace, supported by sincere political will and a genuine commitment to reconciliation.

## Roundtable Recommendations

These recommendations, based on broad support by the participants, aim to empower women within political parties and integrate gender perspective in the normalization process between Kosovo and Serbia.

1. **Voluntary commitments:** Political parties should adopt gender equality commitments in their founding documents, political platforms, and specific policies, aiming for 40 to 50 percent women representation by 2030. These quotas should be reflected in central and local leadership structures, mayoral candidates, and in party engagements.
2. **Senior campaign positions:** Political parties should engage women in senior campaign positions. Election campaigns can bring visibility and build political power. More women should manage polling stations—an overwhelming majority of polling managers are men now—and monitor elections.
3. **Electoral quotas:** Political parties should introduce a voluntary 40 percent quota in electoral lists and ensure gender safeguards in the ranking order at the top of the list.
4. **Equal representation:** Political parties should offer women party members equal opportunities to speak on behalf of the party on a broad range of issues and receive fair broadcasting time, especially during elections campaigns.
5. **Gender inclusive policies:** Political parties should include gender in both party and government policies, prioritizing laws that effect women more.
6. **Gender democratization fund:** Parliaments and governments should establish a gender fund available to parties that meet agreed criteria.
7. **Convert representation into power:** Political parties should offer more opportunities for women to run for high positions.
8. **Integrate gender perspective:** The Brussels dialogues should assess how the process and agreements affect men and women to make sure that one gender is not disproportionately affected negatively or positively. Given that the dialogue has been ‘men’s business,’ more women should be represented at all levels.
9. **Empower parliaments in normalization process:** The parliaments and various parliamentary committees should engage more in both formal and informal initiatives, such as this roundtable, to support the normalization process. The parliaments should also support normalization through various domestic initiatives.
10. **Empower Civil Society in Reconciliation Efforts:** The normalization process should not be confined just governments. Civil society in both Kosovo and Serbia should be given a larger role in advancing normalization, particularly in areas such as reconciliation, education, and cultural cooperation.
11. **Establish a friendship initiative:** The aim would be to convert ideas into action, address legacy challenges, draw experiences from other conflicts, inform and shape the debate, destigmatize friendship across ethnic lines, and serve as a third party facilitator.
12. **Facilitate intraparty efforts to implement the recommendations.**

## Participants

**Caroline Ziadeh**, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, United Nations Mission in Kosovo

**Mimoza Ahmetaj**, Vice President, Democratic Party of Kosovo

**Gresa Baftiu**, Associate, Council for Inclusive Governance

**Myrvete Badivuku Pantina**, Professor, University of Pristina

**Venera Cocaj**, PhD Candidate at London School of Economics

**Gordana Comic**, Former Minister for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue of Serbia

**Lavinia Cupello**, Gender Affairs Advisor, United Nations Mission in Kosovo

**Oumou Diawara**, Gender Adviser, Chief Gender Affairs Unit, United Nations Mission in Kosovo

**Natasa Gacesa**, International Secretary, Socialist Party of Serbia

**Shpetim Gashi**, Vice President, Council for Inclusive Governance

**Dukagjin Gorani**, Journalist and Former Member of Parliament of Kosovo

**Lutfi Haziri**, Vice President, Democratic League of Kosovo

**Diellza Kukaj**, President, Women's Forum, Alliance for the Future of Kosovo

**Petar Miletic**, Former Member of Parliament of Kosovo

**Arbenita Mjekiqi**, Project Coordinator, Gender Equality Facility, UN Women Kosovo

**Paul Mecklenburg**, Head of UN office in Belgrade, Senior Political Officer

**Arjeta Mehmeti Krasniqi**, Special Assistant, Office of SRSG, United Nations Mission in Kosovo

**Adlije Muzaqi**, Team Assistant, Office of SRSG, United Nations Mission in Kosovo

**Carolina Muzzillo**, Political Affairs Officer, United Nations Mission in Kosovo

**Igor Novakovic**, Senior Associate, Council for Inclusive Governance

**Anna Oreg**, Member of Parliament of Serbia, Alliance of Free Citizens

**Zoran Ostojic**, Journalist; Former Member of Parliament of Serbia

**Zenun Pajaziti**, Member of Presidency, Democratic Party of Kosovo

**Snezana Paunovic**, Deputy Speaker of Parliament of Serbia, Socialist Party of Serbia

**Dejan Radenkovic**, Former Member of Parliament of Serbia, Socialist Party of Serbia

**Sanda Raskovic Ivic**, Former Member of Parliament of Serbia, People's Party

**Alex Roinishvili Grigorev**, President, Council for Inclusive Governance

**Bojana Selakovic**, Coordinator, National Convention on European Union

**Biljana Stojkovic**, Chair, Together