

## WOMEN IN INTERNATIONAL NEGOTIATIONS: SWEDISH EXPERIENCE

<sup>1</sup>LILIA A. KHASANOVA, <sup>2</sup>ADEL I. ABDULLIN

*Kazan Federal University, 18 Kremlyovskaya street, Kazan 420008, Russia*

*Email: <sup>1</sup>hasanovalaz@stud.kpfu.ru, <sup>2</sup>info@prescopus.com*

**Abstract.** Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security reaches 20 years mark in 2020. Since 2000 a lot has been done, however participation of women in formal peace processes remains extremely limited. According to report of the Secretary General on Women, Peace and Security Agenda of 2018. Low percent (4%) of military peacekeepers is also evident, caused by different levels of women inclusion in peace processes around the world. This article investigates Sweden as one of the well-known champions in gender equality. We try to find roots of Swedish feminism in the political and social history of the country and take a closer look on implementation of "feminist foreign policy" proclaimed by Swedish ministry of foreign affairs in 2014. Using empirical results, we also explain functions of Swedish Women Mediation network stating an example for other developed countries.

**Key words:** Security Council Resolution, Peace and Security Agenda, Swedish feminism

### 1 Introduction

2020 will be an important year to mark the results of the efforts of international community achieved in Women, Peace and Security Agenda. 2020 marks 20 years after Security Council's Resolution 1325, 25 years after Beijing declaration and 5 years after Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. All those documents are benchmarks of recognition by international community of importance of meaningful participation of women in conflict resolution and prevention. The international legal framework is there, supposedly having behind the will of the states to change the narratives towards women's participation in international negotiations and ensure inclusive peace processes.

In traditional understanding of international law, every international agreement is believed to be formed and sustained through the will of states (Valeev & Kurdukov, 2010; Aggestam & Towns, 2019). In the meantime, it is usually only one of the first steps to change the mindset and get true acknowledgement. The ideal world is not in treaties but in practice, however treaties are essential beginning and driving force. That is the reason why recently adopted Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (2017) is so remarkable. It does not eliminate nuclear weapons as a matter of fact, however it declares commitment of majority of states to work towards elimination of nuclear weapons.

Analyzing the latest Security Council Meeting on Women, Peace and Security Agenda (October 25, 2018), it is evident that nobody is pushing for the new legislative framework, resolutions in this regard. What Secretary General and other particular members are seeking is action. Today, the main question is – HOW to make this agenda work?

Character of diplomacy and peace negotiations intimately linked to gender and practices of inclusion and exclusion of men, women, non-binary and transgender individuals in peace talks. There is convincing evidence that gender equality is directly linked to peace and thus enhancing meaningful participation of women in conflict prevention and management is fundamental to sustaining peace (Krause et al, 2018). Inclusion of women guarantees durability and sustainability of comprehensive peace agreements (Waylen, 2014). Feminist institutionalist theory has proven that participation of women is useful to unpack the "black box" of peace negotiation (Gelb, 1989). Nowadays, women have "proven" their strengths by rebuilding communities in Colombia; keeping dialogue alive in Guinea Bissau; contributing to negotiations between armed actors in Central African Republic and Mali; having negotiated local ceasefires, mediated the creating of civilian safe zones and coordinated humanitarian and relief initiatives in Syria and Yemen.

There is no need for more evidence of the benefits of women's participation. Women should be able to participate as mediators and negotiators simply because it is their right. As it was stated

before, success has already been achieved in some parts of the world. We are in this article looking closely to an example of Sweden to crystalize the most successful practices on ensuring meaningful participation of women in international peace negotiations.

### 2 Methods

Current research combines theoretical and empirical methods. The results are based on the analysis of literature on gender studies, international peace negotiations as well as context analysis of Swedish national acts and policy reviews.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of Swedish Women Mediation Network and other women diplomats working in Sweden and abroad.

### 3 Results And Discussion

We examine the case of Sweden for several reasons. Firstly, since 1980s up until today, Sweden has been viewed as the nation in which equality has proceeded further than in any other Western country (Handbook on Swedish feminist foreign policy, 2018, 138). Secondly, in October 2014 Sweden was the first country in the world to launch a feminist foreign policy, which means applying systematic gender equality perspective throughout the whole foreign policy agenda. Swedish society takes as a matter of fact that gender equality contributes and sustains peace around the world as well as secures stronger economic growth, better health and social security for all.

The roots of Swedish feminism go back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when challenging perception of women's role in a society was discussed in particular circles with several exceptional women raising their voices. In the 1800s, women in Sweden gained the right to attend school, equal inheritance rights, and the right to conduct business in their own names. Women were formally awarded equal rights as male citizens only in 1921 and were first allowed into the Foreign Service career in 1948. It is interesting that feminism was incorporated into the structure and ideas of political parties in the absence of an organized liberation movement. Indeed, militant feminism was unacceptable in a consensus-oriented society. In 1989 Joyce Gelb called Sweden "a feminist country without feminists", claiming that cultural and theoretical feminism have never become a strong force in Sweden. Instead, gender equality was somehow logical result of equality between social classes. Of course, women organizations were vital for the development of such movement, but mostly using soft power - through capacity building and organizational support to women who want to join politics. The government had economic interest in sexual equality as well, which led to a first 1976 antisex discrimination act and 1979 Act on Equality Between Men and Women. It created an equality ombudsman and called to increase representation of women in public bodies. In the mid-1980s, the Rikstag (parliament) already included 39% female representation, while Stockholm City Council had 33%. 21<sup>st</sup> century gave a rise to women organizations and activism. In 2014 Sweden's Feminist Initiative became the first feminist political party to win a mandate in the European parliament. Currently, since the inception of Global Gender Gap Index by World Economic Forum in 2006, Sweden has never appeared lower than the fifth place. Finally, as it was stated before, in 2014 Sweden proclaimed "feminist foreign policy".

Therefore, Swedish feminism as it is historically was not result of aggressive women movements but rather through economically oriented labor organizations and unions. Even today, handbook on Swedish feminist foreign policy notes the one of the most important results of gender equality is social and economic development (The Swedish Government Offices' regulations and rules of procedure for the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2017, 103). However today the gender equality agenda, women's rights and more than 50 women organizations are quite active in sustaining the efforts and eliminating inequality gap completely.

Swedish Foreign Policy functions on clear 3 “R”s as starting points: rights, representation and resources that are based on Reality.

There are several factors that make Swedish feminist foreign policy more than just a concept. Firstly, leadership for the policy is clear and mainstreamed throughout all parts of the Foreign Ministry by means of continuous reference to the policy in official statements, speeches, social media, clear prioritization of such issues during official visits and concrete decisions. Secondly, despite being launched top-down, feminist foreign policy has been developed in consultations with the entire Swedish Foreign Service as well as civil society and academia (The Swedish Government Offices’ regulations and rules of procedure for the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2017, 34). Such inclusive method creates feeling of ownership and leads to joint responsibility for the effectivity of the policies. Thirdly, gender equality perspective is incorporated into ongoing operations and included into general Swedish Foreign Service’s operation plan, rules of procedure of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Nye, 2005), its budgeting. Finally, new institutions such as Swedish Women Mediation Network were established to support women diplomats (Eisvandi et al, 2015: García-Santillán, 2019).

It is important to state that “feminist foreign policy” is not only about meaningful political participation of Swedish women in diplomacy, but also adherence to principles of such concept. Margot Wallström - the foreign minister of Sweden announced: “striving toward gender equality is not only a goal in itself but also a precondition for achieving our wider foreign, development, and security-policy objectives”. What is more fascinating is that behind those declarations, she has proved her commitment with putting actual policies into place despite internal resistance and reputational risks. It was quite a scandalous ending of arms contract with Saudi Arabia which admittedly has been violating women rights. She asked a question: how could providing arms to a country that subjugates women fit with the idea of “feminist foreign policy”? The contract was over, despite all the criticism than was based on the forecasts about economic losses that Sweden will experience. However, Swedish foreign minister preaches and practices the concept of “smart power” as articulated by the American political scientist Joseph Nye (Swedish Women Mediation Network Handbook, 2018). By investing in global-scale problems and international development of particular regions, the country will benefit at the end. Unfortunately, today, with double standards leading the way, most of the Western leaders preach importance of human rights and international development while being silent on those issues as soon as immediate economic interests and political alliances are at stake.

On the international arena, Sweden has made the women, peace and security agenda (UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions) a main priority for its time on the UN Security Council. As a non-permanent member and a Chair of the UN Security Council in 2017-2018 Sweden did tremendous lobbying of women, peace and security agenda into each and every adopted Security Council Resolution. According to report of the Secretary General (October 2018), all outcome documents (written reports, verbal briefings and presidential statements) of five Security Council field missions undertaken in 2017 contained references to women, peace and security, either in written mission reports (Lake Chad Basin S/2017/403, Ethiopia S/2017/757) or in briefings by mission leads and co-leads. In 2017, references to women, peace and security were made for the first time in history in 100% of the Security Council’s presidential statements on crisis situations (The Swedish Government Offices’ regulations and rules of procedure for the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2017, 67). In July and August 2018, Sweden achieved gender parity among those providing briefings to the Council for the first time.<sup>1</sup>

Sweden alongside with Uruguay was leading the Security Council’s Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security that help meetings on Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Iraq,

Mali, Yemen and the Lake Chad Basin and helped to improve the quality situation analysis, concerns and priorities in each case.

Swedish Women Mediation Network established on 2015 is one among several other such networks<sup>2</sup> that work to support their members, as well as work towards empowerment of women conflict regions. Four pillars that the network is functioning on was identified:

1. Capacity building. The Network is focused on supporting women on the ground through socio-economic support, thematic trainings on women empowerment in conflict areas. Preventative diplomacy is one of the most important pillars, when empowering of local women is preferable than participation of members of Network in peace processes. Various mentorship programs are launched in countries around the world, towards capacity building as well as creation of safe spaces for women to talk and share experiences.
2. Direct support of peace processes. Despite of setting the goal to build the maximum capacity on the ground, members of such networks, by the request from local governments, sometimes directly participate in facilitating peace processes, post-conflict peacebuilding and reconciliation. Political, technical and financial support has been provided by Sweden in the past 5 years to peace processes in Colombia, Mali, Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia.
3. Policy and advocacy work by Members. Women diplomats make conflict analysis and share their experience and view on national and international platforms. Through its advocacy work in the past 5 years, Sweden has contributed to other countries drawing up and implementing national action plans for women, peace and security, including in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iraq, Canada, Myanmar, the Czech Republic and Sudan.
4. Strengthening the network and collaboration with others. It is important to be on one page with other colleagues from other Networks in order to support local women. Some connections are made between the continents, while it would be quite effective to connect to regional. As an example, if the Libyan colleagues contact Swedish network, FemWise as African based network would join the process as well.

Reaching and sustaining peace is not a one-day process and such process presumes long-term commitments. However, first results can be seen on the ground: successful Colombian peace process, participation of women in negotiations in Mali, as well as substantive help and support for women in Syria and Afghanistan. What is important for such networks is to keep being acknowledged on international level by highest authorities and keep working in close collaboration with UN Secretary General’s Office. Seeing results on the ground after long-term work as well as being able to respond promptly to key events in the world (as it was with Somalian coup) is important for such Mediation Networks. Strengthening collaborations between networks themselves, as well as connections between networks and local governments can provide needed flexibility and coordination in actions.

#### 4 Summary

There is convincing evidence that enhancing meaningful participation of women in conflict prevention and management is fundamental to sustaining peace. Recent cases in Columbia, Central African Republic, Mali and Syria show some improvements in this regard. However, there are still numerous obstacles for inclusion of women in negotiations. Sometimes they are invited at the end of the peace process when comprehensive peace treaty is ready, sometimes they are not given voting power etc.

<sup>1</sup> Note: of the 20 people providing briefings to the Security Council in July, 11 were women and 9 were men.

<sup>2</sup> Note: there is also African Network of Women in Conflict Prevention and Peace Mediation, Commonwealth Women Mediators Network and Mediterranean Women Mediators Network

Swedish feminism as it is historically was not result of aggressive women movements but rather through economically oriented labor organizations and unions, supported afterwards by women organizations which were more of an empowering social institute than lobbying power (Lukashuk, 2008).

Based on normative analysis, it appears that Swedish feminist foreign policy is quite effective on both national and international arenas. Swedish membership in Security Council boosted inclusion of women, peace and security agenda into each and every resolution adopted.

Based on interviews conducted, it was identified that Swedish Women Mediation Network functions of four pillars: capacity building, direct support of peace processes, policy and advocacy actions, strengthening international networks. All these tasks are primarily external. The strengthening on international cooperation through joint projects and financial support for capacity building projects could help to develop confidence of women in fragile post-conflict societies around the world.

## 5 Conclusions

Nowadays, the comprehensive international legal framework on inclusion of women in international peace talks exists. This is complimented by data on durability and sustainability of comprehensive peace agreements when women are involved. However there needs to be shift in action.

The outlook on Swedish political history, society and mentality leads us to a conclusion that there are direct economic interests involved when granting women equal rights. Indeed, equal social opportunities means more people are working hard to build a state that reflects interests of population. More than that, women organizations play vital informative and empowering role even without hostile advocacy for women rights. Such soft power might be more effective in terms of capacity-building in most of the states today.

Swedish feminist foreign policy is a new level of inclusion of women rights into national and international narrative. Swedish membership in Security Council showed that there is no pushback if some country is constantly reminding and insisting on consideration and inclusion of women, peace and security agenda in resolutions, presidential statements and other documents. More than that, establishment of women mediation networks becomes a worldwide practice. In the developing countries, such networks are primarily working on internal capacity building and international connections. In developed countries, those networks are facilitating peace processes as well as empowering women in fragile post- conflict environment.

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