



# “Women’s Active Participation in Decision Making: Development and Sustainable Peace.”

## 18. Europe and Middle East WFWP Annual Meeting

Tirana, Albania, November 16 - 18, 2018

The annual European WFWP Conference and Workshop was held on the weekend of November 16-18th, in Tirana, Albania, under the title “Women’s Active Participation in Decision Making: Development and Sustainable Peace.” This yearly event is an anticipated opportunity to network, share, reflect and introduce our friends and guests to the ideals and activities of WFWP, as well as make plans together for future projects and advocacy.

This time the conference was preceded by a public event in the offices of Albanian Parliament on the afternoon of November 16, with the title “Women and Nation-building: Dialogue between Legislators and Civil Society”. It was made possible due to the involvement and support of Mrs. Vasilika Hysi, the Vice Chairwoman of the Albanian Parliament, an Ambassador for Peace, who had participated previously in the

European UPF conference in Vienna during our Founder’s visit in April, as well as in the Global Summit in August in Korea. The event in the Parliament Offices was attended by roughly thirty WFWP leaders and guests from abroad. These included a Member of the Ukrainian Parliament, Mrs. Olga Bogomolets, and Mrs. Kholoud El Wattar Kassem, Director of Women Political Leaders Global Forum from Lebanon, seven current or former members of Albanian parliament, and approximately seventy WFWP members and guests from Albania.

Mrs. Hysi, our host, opened the meeting and greeted all participants, making a connection to the International Day of Tolerance. Mrs. Hysi emphasized that it is important for women in politics to transmit peace, avoid hate language and work to eliminate barriers in society. In order to fulfill all political objectives related to women, children, and families,

concrete actions are needed, stated Mrs. Hysi.

Then welcoming remarks were offered by Mrs. Carolyn Handschin, President of WFWP Europe. Mrs. Handschin commended Albania on the achievements related to women’s participation in politics, citing facts from 2017 parliamentary elections - 10% increase in women parliamentarians and 40% candidates for parliament being female. Mrs. Handschin went on to present a new paradigm for nation building, based not only on political decisions, but mainly on the parental role focused on raising a new generation of caring and responsible citizens. In order for young people to respond to higher ideals expressed in Holy Scriptures or secular documents, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, they need to be nourished with the proper understanding of values in their own family. Mothers especially have a crucial role in touching the hearts of children, and bringing out their innate



goodness, pointed out Mrs. Handschin. She then shared about the educational curriculum being developed under the guidance of WFPW Founder, Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, which has as its center the idea of “hyojeong”, or the culture of filial piety towards parents, which creates a base for respect and commitment also in other spheres of life. According to Mrs. Handschin, Albania needs to make efforts to preserve its culture of respect for parents and family values.

The conference continued, dividing into sessions – “Women’s Active Participation in Decision Making, Development and Sustainable Peace.” moderated by Mrs. Manjola Vasmatics, Board Member of WFPW Albania, and “Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society for Peace and Development” skillfully and with care, guided by Mrs. Mitty Tohma, President of WFPW UK. In the first session the speakers were Members of Albanian Parliament, Mrs. Eglantina Gjermeni and Mrs. Elona Gjebrea, former Member of Parliament, Mrs. Mimoza Hajdarmataj, and Mrs. Olga Bogomolets, Member of the Parliament of Ukraine.

Mrs. Gjermeni reiterated on the achievements of women’s movement in bringing equality through influencing the legal framework and policies in Albania. She mentioned current numbers – 50% of the Cabinet and 30% of the Parliament are women. However, as Mrs. Gjermeni stated, it is very vital to consider the quality of women’s contribution, not simply the numbers. Mrs. Mimoza Hajdarmataj, in turn, focused on the necessity of women’s education, because as she said “development and empowerment of women contributes to the development and empowerment of the country”.

Mrs. Olga Bogomolets focused on her motivation to enter politics. In her

case, she as a medical doctor, decided to run for parliament after witnessing death of innocent young people during recent political upheavals in Ukraine. Mrs. Bogomolets has been focused since then on initiatives to support poor families, improving the health system and increasing the life expectancy in the Ukraine.

The presentations were then followed by lively discussion. One of the points raised was the need to support women parliamentarians, who are often not voted into office by other women. “Women don’t like strong women”, as somebody mentioned. MP and former Minister of Defense, Mrs. Mimi Kodheli, expressed that women need to provide proper education for youth, in order to avoid aggression and war, while Mrs. Marilyn Angelucci, President of WFPW Afghanistan, shared about her project of educating women parliamentarians in Afghanistan.

The second session was opened by Mrs. Kholoud Wattar Kassem’s presentation. Mrs. Kassem, as a Lebanese, shared about her difficult path to being heard and influential as a woman. Despite being raised in a very conservative society, she decided to be involved on a public level, in order to speak out against injustice. “If women are neglected, 50% of the problems are neglected” she said. Another speaker, Mrs. Edlira Cepani, Director of Women’s Network for Equality in Decision Making emphasized women’s strength, which according to her lies in their direct experience of dealing with many life problems, and the ability to cooperate and work together. As she expressed, “unity is the solution”. The last speaker, Mrs. Hatixhe Hoxha, former Member of Parliament of Kosovo, called in her speech for concrete actions towards peace.

The parliament session was concluded with appointments of new

Ambassadors for Peace: Mrs. Elona Gjebrea, Mrs. Mimoza Hajdarmataj, and Mrs. Edlira Cepani.

After this very informative and lively discussion, all conference participants headed back to the hotel, enjoying the brightly lit streets of Tirana. In fact, as we learned later, it was the first day that the holiday lights went on.

The main conference officially started with an opening dinner at Hotel Tirana International, which was also the venue for the whole weekend. This time was a chance for a more informal mingling among participants, greetings, and introductions. The President of WFPW Albania welcomed all participants to Tirana, wishing them a fruitful conference, and moderating a short and spontaneous entertainment, which featured a trombone player, Mr. Martinas Oliaka from Russia and Miss. Artina, a music student and CARP member from Albania. Guests were also greeted by Mr. Gani Rroshi and his wife Mrs. Marjeta Rroshi, president of FFWPU and Vice President of WFPW Albania respectively. Welcoming remarks came also from Mrs. Lavdie Ruci, Chairwoman of Tirana Peace Council.

The next morning was composed of two sessions, in which the participants were joined by nearly fifty local guests. The initial portion was moderated by Mrs. M., beginning with greetings from the Vice Mayor of Tirana, Mr. Andi Seferi, who warmly welcomed all guests, and expressed his appreciation for the contribution of women and girls in civil society and local government. As we learned from him, very proudly, the number of women in local governments in Albania is even higher than the number of women in the Parliament.

After the remarks of the Vice Mayor, a video on international activities of



WFPW was shown as an introduction for the new guests. Mrs. Carolyn Handschin then welcomed once again all participants, in the name of WFPW Europe, sharing her presentation on Peace Leadership. She emphasized that peace needs to come from the roots of society, and as such it cannot be forced, but needs to be nurtured and encouraged starting on a personal level. Consequently, women need to realize their leadership role in that process. “Peace is freedom to recognize needs and respond naturally”, she shared, proposing an innovative definition of peace, and setting the tone for the conference. To complement this insightful presentation, Mrs. Marcia de Abreu, President of WFPW Spain, explained the meaning and importance of the conference’s theme, focusing on the issue of equality between men and women. As she stated “women have remained in a position of inequality compared with men partly because their situation, needs, priorities and concerns have not been considered in

current decision-making”. There needs to be complementarity and balance between sexes, in order to allow women to make their vital contribution.

The following session on “Harmony through Integration and Unity in a Diverse Europe” was moderated by Mrs. Brigitte Wada, President of WFPW France. She first introduced the next speaker, Professor Dalila Paulo from Portugal, who shared her perspective on the topic as a psychologist. She emphasized the necessity of win-win approach, where we give up the concept of competition for cooperation and mutual benefit. Next speaker, Ms. Natasha Schellen, Vice-President of WFPW Germany, started her remarks making a reference to recent commemorations of a 100 years anniversary of the end of WWI. Europe has faced many wars, and even though we have had a period of stability, lack of military conflict is not yet a true peace, as there is many underlying conflicts, she said. Trade itself cannot bring peace. We need to

start on a deeper, human level. Ms. Schellen then gave the example of her own international marriage and how it contributes to overcoming existing barriers and prejudices.

The second session “The Dignity of Women and Healthy Families: Preventing Violence”, led by Mrs. Tina Coombs, Special Advisor of WFPW Europe, featured a variety of speakers, each of them bringing a different approach to the topic. Ms. Samantha Streibl, a Speech Contest Winner from UK, spoke passionately about “period poverty”, a struggle of many young women to afford sanitary pads and tampons during their periods, and the necessity for the governments to address this problem. Mrs. Aferdia Prroni, Director for the Human Rights in Democracy Center in Albania shared about the problem of domestic violence in her country and the work her center does to support women who are victims of this inhumanity. Ms. Anisa Berisha, President of World Youth Alliance in Albania, said that her organization’s educational curriculum on human dignity emphasizes the family. “The family is the most basic unit of society and the place where free and responsible citizens are best formed. In order to develop free and just societies, the family must be cultivated and protected in culture and law.” Then Mrs. Heidi Meyr, Marriage Counselor and FFWPU member from Austria shared about the need for a paradigm shift – we need a society where family is valued to the point where economic and social systems are built to protect the family, not a system where family is sacrificed in order to attend to economic needs. She stated that it is not healthy for a family when both parents need to work long hours, leaving their children in the care of public institutions. The last speaker, Ms. Nicole La Hogue, Vice President of WFPW Germany, spoke about the necessity for internal preparation before starting family. The session concluded with the appointment of twenty new Ambassadors for Peace, both from within and outside Albania.

The afternoon was a time for workshops in groups, coordinated by Ms. Natasha Schellen, where participants could choose a session they want to attend. Altogether nine workshops were offered, featuring a variety of topics, ranging from training in public speaking to sharing experience on character education and “energy profiling”, an innovative personal development program. This was a very fruitful session, which gave a chance for more interaction and networking. Participants then had some time for sightseeing in Tirana, enjoying the festive atmosphere of the city, even joining in some of the traditional dancing on the Square.



The evening program resumed after dinner, with a very meaningful “water ceremony” guided by Mrs. Elisabetta Cali, President of WFP Italy, and Ms. Francesca Stabile, also from Italy. Mrs. Cali first reported on recent Centennial Commemoration of Armistice after WWI, organized by WFP in Padua, Italy. The water ceremony, where representatives of various countries poured water to one container, was a symbolic expression of a desire for peace and unity in Europe. Mrs. Handschin then took the floor and introduced to participants the idea of family festivals, and guided all in a toast for healthy families with a glass of holy nectar. All were then encouraged to participate in the Marriage Blessing ceremony when they returned to their own countries—with their husbands. The evening continued with a performance of traditional Albanian dances presented by an invited ensemble. Eventually all participants went out to the floor and joined the dancers, actively experiencing Albanian culture. The day finished with a beautiful and joyful atmosphere.

The Sunday program included two sessions. The first one was moderated

by Mrs. Renate Amesbauer, President of WFP Austria, which featured presentations of an educational curriculum for young women that is being created by WFP Middle East and WFP Europe under the facilitation of Dr. Zoe Bennet, WFP President for the Middle East. Mrs. Marilyn Angelucci, President of WFP Afghanistan, Mrs. Katharina Bauer from WFP Austria, and Mrs. Carolyn Handschin each presented the sections that they had been working on with some youth participation and the audience was asked how it might be improved for their needs. The three themes were: “Becoming the True Me”, “Creating your Dream Family” and “What is My Impact in the World?”

This was later followed by sessions of reports from six regions, moderated by Mrs. Irmgard Mantler, Treasurer of WFP Europe. Reports were presented by Ms. Natascha Schellen, Magda Haugen (President of WFP Germany), Johanna Torenson (President of WFP Norway), Elisabetta Nistri, Brigitte Wada, Olga Vakulinskaya (President of WFP Russia), and Anna Kalmatskaya (President of WFP Ukraine). It

seemed an impossible task to condense the dozens of events and programs into a 10-minute report, yet each managed to give a sense of the quality, the breadth and advances made in each region. Noted too was the blossoming of personal leadership skills among WFP leaders from year to year.

The closing session was a chance to offer gifts to invited international speakers and the WFP organizing team. As expressed by participants, the event was very successful on many levels! Many factors contributed to this, the high level of presentations in the Parliament Offices hall, the variety of speeches during conference sessions, the diverse and balanced program, the warm atmosphere and last but not the least, the hospitality and delicious food from our Albanian hosts. Also recognized was the way that goal-setting at the beginning of each year seemed to guide the accomplishments. Plans were already being made to bring substantial fruits through newly found partnerships and initiatives, as well as to also recharge “our batteries”, so as that we are able to continue the daily work in our nations!!

