

Tournai, 21 March 2024

Excellencies, Ambassadors, Generals, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen in your titles, ranks and capacities,

After three very rich panels, it falls to me, as Director of the Centre for Security and Defence Studies, to conclude this day of exchanges and to highlight a few practical points.

Since the adoption of Resolution 1325 by the UN Security Council on 31 October 2000, small but important steps have been taken to advance gender equality and women's rights. The adoption of Resolution 2467 on sexual violence in conflict, adopted in 2019, has made it possible to put in place a framework to better protect women in conflicts, at least in theory.

These resolutions recognise the particular impact of conflict on women and girls of all ages. They confirm the essential role that women play in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, as well as in peacemaking and peacebuilding.

Noting that, despite the progress made, further efforts are required to **operationalise** the implementation of the WPS agenda, this seminar aimed to focus on concrete case studies and to favour bottom-up approaches conducive to the establishment of a more lasting peace and more sustainable economic development. We will need to draw lessons from this in order to move forward.

The interests and concerns of women and girls of all ages are still far too little taken into account in conflict prevention and resolution. We have to recognise that it is still very difficult to transform existing political frameworks and mechanisms with a view to genuinely empowering women and fully integrating the gender dimension into peace and security.

### **Is the "Women, Peace and Security" agenda still relevant, 24 years after the adoption of Resolution 1325?**

The WPS agenda, which in fact consists of a set of 10 resolutions, is an initiative that seeks to include women in peace processes, combat sexual violence in times of conflict and ensure better representation of women in security-related decision-making.

The EU, like NATO, regularly examines this Agenda in the light of past and present conflicts in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, Afghanistan, Sudan, Nigeria, Ukraine, the Palestinian territories and elsewhere.

The attention paid by these organisations to the WPS agenda shows that, despite the slow pace and obstacles to its implementation, it remains at the heart of international concerns about peace and security. I would like to highlight the efforts made by the United Nations to document systematically and as objectively as possible the use of sexual violence against women, as we have seen recently in Gaza and Ukraine.

It seems to me that the "Women, Peace and Security" agenda remains fully relevant because of its importance in promoting gender equality, women's participation and the protection of

women's rights, particularly in conflict zones. Its application remains essential to guarantee sustainable and inclusive security for all. That's a first point I want to make!

### How can we promote the "Women, Peace and Security" agenda?

To promote and operationalise the WPS agenda, we need to consider five key steps: **awareness-raising**, **integration** into policies and programmes, **capacity-building**, **data collection** and monitoring, but first and foremost the effective **participation** of women.

This is where the second point to bear in mind comes in: implementing this agenda requires a **continuous, synchronised and coordinated commitment** on the part of all the stakeholders concerned. Nothing can be taken for granted, especially when it comes to gender equality!

### What obstacles should we expect?

The implementation of concrete programmes to promote and protect the rights of women in armed conflict, to encourage their participation in conflict prevention and resolution, and to consolidate peace must overcome several obstacles that have been clearly identified after a quarter of a century of experience, namely culture and social norms, lack of funding, gender-based violence, limited access to education and resources, as well as lack of recognition and support.

Overcoming these obstacles requires a **sustained commitment** from governments, international organisations, civil society and local communities to promote gender equality, combat violence against women and ensure their full participation in the processes of building peace and security. This is the third point to highlight.

### How can the WPS agenda be operationalised and implemented?

The operationalisation of the WPS agenda within the framework of the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy can only be achieved by integrating the agenda's principles and objectives into EU operations and missions. The key points to consider are:

1. **Gender mainstreaming**: ensuring that EU-led operations and missions take into account the **real needs** and **perspectives** of women, ensuring that they are the actual beneficiaries of these initiatives.
2. **Inclusive participation and training**: it is essential to encourage the participation of women in EU operations and missions. We must also ensure that they receive adequate training to enable them to occupy a position with real decision-making power and thus make a significant contribution to key processes.
3. **Preventing and responding to gender-based violence**: effective measures must be put in place to prevent gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict contexts and to respond to it in practical ways, both symbolically and physically.
4. **Dialogue and partnerships**: from the outset, the aim should be to involve civil society organisations and other relevant actors in the implementation of the WPS agenda to ensure a collaborative and inclusive approach where trust and mutual respect are key. This means defining projects together, on an equal footing, prioritising them and

defining objectives and indicators, with a particular focus on impact and benefits for local populations.

By integrating these elements into the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy, the operationalisation of the WPS agenda can and should contribute to enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of the European Union's security initiatives.

***Which approaches should be favoured: bottom-up and/or top-down?***

The bottom-up approach emphasises the involvement of local players, communities and women themselves in designing initiatives. In contrast, the top-down approach focuses on institutional structures and decision-making processes at the political level to develop national and regional plans. By combining these approaches, a more comprehensive agenda can be developed by integrating local perspectives and institutional policies. It has to be said that, since the adoption of Resolution 1325, it is mainly the second approach, which is the easiest, particularly for donors, that has been favoured. It seems to me that the emphasis should be placed on the first approach in order to change gear in terms of implementation.

**The integrated or 3D+ approach, a tool favoured by Belgium**

Developing the "Women, Peace and Security" agenda as part of an integrated 3D+ approach (Diplomacy, Defence, Development, Peacekeeping) involves coordinating efforts in these four areas to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in conflict and post-conflict contexts. Here's how we see each aspect contributing to the agenda:

- a. **Diplomacy:** Diplomacy makes it possible to integrate gender issues into peace negotiations and international agreements, by ensuring that women are represented in decision-making processes at all levels and at every stage of the process. Diplomatic initiatives can support women's active participation in peace talks and conflict resolution.
- b. **Defence:** In the field of defence, the WPS agenda can be implemented through the integration of a gender perspective into military operations and the training of armed forces to prevent and respond appropriately to gender-based violence. It is essential to ensure the protection of women's rights in conflict situations and to guarantee their inclusion in security structures.
- c. **Development:** The development component aims to strengthen women's economic empowerment, improve access to health and education services and promote equal opportunities. Development programmes must be designed to meet the specific needs of women affected by conflict and to promote their resilience and reconstruction.
- d. **Peacekeeping:** In the context of peacekeeping, the WPS agenda encourages the deployment of female contingents to strengthen peacekeeping missions and better meet the needs of local populations, particularly women and girls. It is crucial to ensure that peacekeeping forces are trained and made aware of gender issues and gender-based violence.

By integrating these dimensions into a coherent and coordinated approach, the EU can strengthen its commitment to gender equality and the promotion of women's rights in conflict and security contexts.

At this point, I would like to stress three major principles that must absolutely guide any WPS agenda, namely the 3 'I's: integration, inclusiveness and integrity.

The first principle, *integration*, refers to the promotion of gender equality and the integration of the gender dimension into EU programmes, trainings and operations.

The second principle, *inclusiveness*, advocates the equal participation of men and women within the European framework, in matters falling within the competence of the Commission, the Council and the Member States.

The third principle, *integrity*, recognises that it is high time to ensure fair and equal treatment of women and men throughout the EU. It requires all members, both civilian and military, to observe the principles of gender equality. This is no small challenge!

Finally, if I may, I'd like to make a few recommendations.

Ladies, don't try to act like men, to behave like men, to show that you're better, more efficient, more... Just be yourself!

Gentlemen, have the wisdom to accept differences, know how to step aside and dare to delegate. At least, consider women as partners, collaborators, human beings with whom you interact on an equal footing and, above all, whom you treat fairly.

Only leadership focused on the objectives to be achieved, the effects to be generated and mutual respect can be the guideline of our actions and policies.

Listening, hearing and solving the problems identified, far from dogmatism, while honestly seeking to avoid the pitfalls of stereotypes and cognitive biases; these open attitudes must guide our actions and behaviour.

Alongside the grand principles, the speeches and the reports that put forward the same elements, the same observations, the same failings and the same arguments over and over again, let's dare to change the paradigm! Let's take a bottom-up approach. Top-down approaches are necessary, but we have to recognise that they lead nowhere and only work at snail's pace. On the contrary, let's start from the ground up, with the people who are most involved, those who are experiencing the situations that need to change.

It's time for action!

Thank you for your attention.