

Gender in Power

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THE GENDER DIMENSION OF CONFLICTS

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The article covers the issues of conflict, gender, and – more broadly – a “gender lens” in conflict analysis. It touches upon feminist concepts of peace as well as goes in depth into the gender dimension of security. Applications of the author’s conclusion include the study of the “Russian World” and the role of gender inequalities in it.

Gender as a Crosscutting Issue of Policy Analysis

For a systematic understanding of the issues related to and ways of overcoming crises, it is important to consider gender as a crosscutting component. This is consonant with what is referred to as gender mainstreaming. This term is used to describe assessment of the “implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies, or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programmes in political, economic, and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.” This is the definition offered by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)¹.

Promotion of the principle of equal rights and opportunities for women and men in Ukraine

is no longer a prerogative of international agencies and NGOs only. The national gender policy is becoming more precisely outlined, comprehensive, and recognised year by year. The Law on Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men, adopted in 2005, laid the foundations of the national gender policy. Its development in the following years was not always consistent and not always delivered effective outcomes, but it is no longer possible to rewind the progress in this area.

However, it is important to keep in mind that the gender component is not only a matter of the number of women and men participating in an event, nor only addressing practical needs of women to match their traditional gender roles. All of this is very important, but gender as a crosscutting issue is much deeper imprinted in the life of the society through values, indirect effects, and consequences. The gender dimension of political process is inseparable from the aspect of power. This becomes evident in the context of violent conflicts.

¹ Coordination of the Policies and Activities of the Specialized Agencies and Other Bodies of the United Nations System, United Nations Economic and Social Council, 1997
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/pdf/ECOSOCAC1997.2.PDF>.

Conflict Is a Destroyer and Conflict Is a Creator

A conflict has its own life cycle. It occurs, reaches its emotional, even violent climax, subsides, disappears, and often reappears again. The life cycle of a military conflict can be virtually divided into three phases – pre-violent, violent, and post-violent –, which separate the onset and ceasefire.

For many people, a conflict is often seen as the evil, with its other negative connotations. However, it is also important to consider that a conflict always opens “a window of opportunities”, which should be used in order that the conflict results in not only destruction, but also creation of a new reality.

Response to a conflict at its different phases may only be effective when this response is more differentiated depending on the sex, social groups, etc. This enhances both the



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action and the results. Our intention is to try to suggest certain dimensions of conflict at its different stages, taking into account the gender dimension as one of the categories of individualisation.

Conflict through the “Gender Lens

“Gender lens”² usually means the capacity to see in any phenomenon, project, programme,

or artefact differences between the situation for women and men, and determine whether these differences result in inequality.

The gender component is also an integral part of the factors predetermining early signs of conflict, and therefore its prevention. The gap in life expectancy between women and men in Ukraine before the war was almost 13 years, varying in different regions of the country. For instance, in Donetsk region the gap was 21 years, although demographers believe that after the threshold of 10 years is exceeded, changes in the society may become unmanageable. The physiological difference in life expectancy between men and women is only three to five years. The other factors are socially rooted, and therefore they can be attenuated by using social leverage.

The feminist concept of the culture of peace requires broad social changes in individual cultural values. The gender perspective of the culture of peace, when considering peace in its various manifestations based on these concepts, applies the “gender lens”. This contributes to seeing the different roles and relationships of men and women in peace- and non-peace building, as well as the impact of gender-based structures on them³. This may also be of use for those who wish to change this world to make it more peaceful, tolerant, and friendly to men and women, consciously moving in this direction.

The gender dimension within this text assumes a thorough examination of social phenomena through the lens of gender equality or inequality, namely: the equal legal status of men and women, their equal opportunities to achieve it, their equality before the law, respect for the dignity of men and women. Conflict will be considered at three tentative phases – prior to the “hot”

² Women Rising, “Impact Alpha” [<http://impactalpha.com/category/gender-lens/>].

³ The Gendered Society, “Harvard Educational Review”, 71(1) [http://hepg.org/her-home/issues/harvard-educational-review-volume-72-issue-1/herbooknote/the-gendered-society_70].

phase, the “hot” phase, the “conflict-affected” phase. Gender dimensions of security and peace are conventionally subdivided into sub-dimensions. They are seen through the lens of gender analysis concepts.

In order to have a better understanding of women and men in a particular public sphere, when conducting the analysis it is important to understand and be able to apply certain concepts and notions. It should be noted that the concepts and notions in this field are relatively new, therefore unsettled and sometimes contradictory. For the purpose of measuring security and peace, the following concepts can be applied to carry out gender analysis in general and that of a policy in particular:

- gender threats;
- gender-based discrimination;
- gender needs of women, girls, men, boys;
- parity participation of women and men in the social life in various fields and at different levels;
- differentiated access to and control of resources of women and men;
- impact of gender and institutional changes.

The gender aspects of security are seen through security threats, gender-based discrimination, gender needs of women, girls, men, boys. The gender dimension of peace is seen through the balanced participation of women and men in the social life in different areas and at different levels, differentiated access to and control of resources of women and men, gender impact, and institutional changes.

Examples of the gender dimensions of security and peace, based on analysis of the situation in Ukraine and the countries of the region impacted by the conflicts, which were initiated or supported by Russia or likely to be impacted, were presented during the Women’s Peace Dialogue Platform meeting⁴. It should be noted that these trends are also observed in Russia, which thus threatens its own society as well.

One of the most powerful factors of conflict escalation out of the gender dimensions is, in our opinion, the intensification of anti-gender movements with a comprehensive approach to the destruction of gender policy. It should be noted that this indicator is common for all the three phases and manifests itself in all countries of the region. The difference is in the power of local resistance to this factor and the degree of its consideration by politicians and the government. Anti-gender movements have developed in the context of the general concept of the “Russian world”, the manifestations of which often boil down solely to protecting the Russian-speaking population outside Russia. The conflict of value interpretations could not get around such an important topic as equal rights and opportunities for women and men, parity participation in all processes of social transformation, equal access to resources, etc.

In Ukraine, this factor especially intensified in 2010, when President V. Yanukovych came into office. In June-July 2010, the highest institutions of the state – the president, the prime minister, the prosecutor general, MPs – started being “bombarded” with numerous letters, the contents of which boiled down to

⁴ The Women’s Dialogue (WD) project was conceived in 2014 as a safe space for women civil society leaders from Ukraine and the Russian Federation to start a dialogue towards mutual understanding and a respectful peace. The overall objective of the Women’s Dialogue project continues to be the promotion of the full implementation of the UN SC Resolution 1325 and its subsequent resolutions, in keeping with the broader vision of women’s participation in peacebuilding and maintenance that is the Women’s Peace and Security Agenda. The initial round of the Women’s Dialogue project led to a second round in 2016, expanded to include women peace leaders from several more countries across Eastern and Southern Europe and the Central Asia region, allowing it to address multiple conflict contexts.

the only thesis: “Gender policy and juvenile justice kill the nation, so they need to be got rid of as adverse phenomena.”⁵

The letters were the first step. Their content changed over time – from scaring to requesting, in particular, that the parliament abolish the Law on Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men, and later – the provisions of the Constitution as well. Letters to MPs initiated the political will to raise the issue. Some MPs were actively doing that, seemingly “at the request of the public”. They received support from other structures, groups, organisations of the “Russian world”. One of them was the “Parental Committee” positioned as an NGO, but actually being a network of groups supported by the Moscow Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church.

This time is also characterised by the establishment of a wide range of ChONGOs (Church-organised NGOs) – organisations that call themselves independent NGOs, though not being such. They are nothing but channels communicating messages of the church, in this case – the Moscow Patriarchate. These organisations must be distinguished from religious NGOs, which do not hide their origins, activities, and relations with religious organisations. The establishment of the “Parental Committee” as an umbrella organisation bringing together the abovementioned organisations and their fight against gender policy and juvenile

justice, the organisation of a long-lasting, targeted, costly campaign against gender policy and juvenile justice as manifestations of democratic values – this is an incomplete list of the facts that are not evidence of preparing the war when viewed in isolation from the context, but seen together with other facts, they appear to be aimed at undermining positions of both the civil society and the state in general, as well as directly impacting people as individual ideology carriers.

In Ukraine, the mentioned efforts faced a high level of resistance on the part of the civil society. It was in response to such calls that women’s and gender-oriented NGOs and individual experts set up the Gender Strategic Platform⁶ in 2011 for the purpose of regularly monitoring the situation, evaluating it, and making recommendations – above all for themselves, but also to develop advocacy efforts aimed at the state and international organisations. In our view, this largely weakened the outcomes of the massive campaign and thereby, among other factors, helped Ukraine avoid “falling into the abyss” prepared for it in 2014.

A review of the situation in other countries of the region, including Georgia and Moldova, has shown that ignoring the potentially negative impact of this factor led to increased trends of the society’s clericalisation in these countries⁷ and going back to patriarchal trends in general⁸.

⁵ Recognising a need for a permanent forum for conflict mediation, resolution, and prevention in the region, the participants of the second round of the Women’s Dialogue established the Women’s Peace Dialogue Platform (RWDP). The RWDP will also provide a pool of 1325-competent and constituency-based women ready for service at peace negotiation tables. The Women’s Peace Dialogue Platform will moreover boost women’s solidarity in the region by amplifying partnership and cooperation among women’s organisations, thereby counteracting the demise of the women’s movement, which poses a direct threat to the region’s democratic base.

У Рівненській обласній раді науковці висловили свій протест проти впровадження гендерної політики та ювенальної юстиції в Україні, 7 March 2012, [<http://sovest.dnepro.org/2012/4449.html#more-4449>].

Відкритий лист «Про стратегію боротьби з дискримінацією в Україні», 14 September 2011, [<http://sovest.dnepro.org/2011/3780.html#more-3780>].

По інституту семьи ударят гендером, “Pravrodkom.ru”, 9 December 2010, [<http://pravrodkom.ru/2010/12/09/po-institutu-semi-udaryat-genderom/>].

⁶ Гендерна стратегічна платформа (Gender Strategic Platform) [<https://www.facebook.com/genderstrategicplatform/>].

Why Gender Policy?

Democratic values include a much wider range of phenomena. Gender equality is an important “line” between liberal and conservative values, because gender inequality authorises legalisation of control over half of the society (women) in order to easier control the society as a whole. Gender inequality deprives men of their right to choose as well, because it also legalises the right of men to turn into cannon fodder.

Equality and non-discrimination are fundamental to a partner society and unacceptable for a domination-based one. Why were equal rights for women and men the first ones to be attacked? Because everyone has gender experience. People may for a long time or even all through their lifetime have no experience of relations with other ethnic groups, other religions, etc., but everybody has the experience of women and men relationships. It has accumulated the longest-standing practices of both discrimination and non-discrimination. Intended so or not, “this bastion” is the first and the last barricade.

On the other hand, by analogy with Russia, the authors of the campaign against gender policy considered that to be “the weakest link”, because its weakening or complete elimination would be important for the next steps in this area. It should be noted that the steps were undertaken not only in the form of attacks, campaigns among local authorities, educational institutions, and so on. In 2011,

the so-called experiment was held where the university system of the Interior Ministry, following a resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers, decided that the first year of studies would be, as it had been before, held for the category of “cadets”, while the second year – for “conscripts”, which deprived certain categories, especially women, of the opportunity to study. Submission of draft laws that violate women’s rights (anti-abortion legislation⁹, restricted access to certain professions, etc.) strengthened the attacks of ChONGOs with the governmental component. Civil society, medical doctors stood up in defence of rights and did not allow approving the anti-abortion law.

Low participation of women in diplomacy, international organisations, negotiations, sexist organisational political culture is not favouring advancement of women in politics. The words of that time Prime Minister Mykola Azarov that “carrying out reform in Ukraine is not a woman’s matter”¹⁰ became known far beyond the country. Ukrainian activists used the courts to fight sexist statements¹¹. Although they did not win the case in court, the lawsuit pointed to the presence of forces that oppose the attempts to turn the democratic process.

If we consider a conflict as the opening of a “window of opportunity”, particularly for women during a “hot” conflict, it usually does not imply a radical change in attitude to the role of women in society. It is rather a reflection of the patriarchal attitude to

⁷ Грузинский Патриарх Илия и его 14 тысяч крестников (Georgian Patriarch Ilia and His 14 Thousand Godchildren), “Pravmir”, 21 December 2012, [<http://www.pravmir.ru/patriarx-gruzii-stal-krestnym-otcom-14-tysyach-detj-iz-mnogodetnyx-semej/>]

⁸ M. Corso, Georgia: Gender Roles Beginning to Blur, “EurasiaNet.org”, 6 January 2014, [<http://www.eurasianet.org/node/67914>].

⁹ Draft law 5199-VI on 06.09.2012 Draft Law on Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine regarding the prohibition of abortion (abortion) [http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb2/webproc4_2?id=&pf3516=10170&skl=7].

¹⁰ Azarov: Carrying out Reform Is Not a Woman’s Matter, “Human Rights in Ukraine”, 20 March 2010, [<http://khpg.org/index.php?id=1269043679>].

¹¹ Ukrainian Women vs. Azarov, “Human Rights in Ukraine”, 6 April 2010, [<http://khpg.org/en/index.php?id=1270551304>].

people – men and women – and using women in hard times, when there is a need for more human resources. However, with the presence of a strong civil society, this activation in times of violent conflicts, and taking into account trends of the “post-violent” period, it is possible to focus efforts on preventing decreased participation of women in all social spheres and at all levels after the exacerbation is over.

The conflict period in Ukraine manifested all efforts of civil society in this area were not empty. Small steps, low visible resistance created a platform for other opportunities. Ukraine adopted the National Action Plan in support of UNSCR 1325 and in June 2016, the Ministry of Defence amended and expanded the list of combat jobs open to women in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. In response to the steady increase of women in the military, the Ministry of Defence was upgrading military infrastructure, rebuilding military barracks, and creating an environment suitable for service women¹².

Currently, 20% of new patrol police officers are women, 15% of the leadership of the National Patrol Police are women as well¹³.

The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine adopted a resolution on the inclusion of gender equality issues within the competence of the Vice Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine Ivanna Klymush-Tsintsadze¹⁴. It increased the level of coordination of gender policy in Ukraine and made one more step to guarantee non-repetition of the situation in the pre-conflict time.

These and similar facts should be considered in more detail and comprehensively, but today we already see that the gender approach to security issues is not a formal response to demands of international organisations and donors. This is an important factor, and ignoring it can have serious consequences.

How can this kind of indicators be practically applied? In the context of increasing tensions during the so-called pre-violent stages of a conflict, all actors have the opportunity to influence certain components more actively. An early warning system of conflict prevention, as a minimum, should notify of conflict escalation at early stages, but in reality, it is usually limited to knowing where to streamline people when escalation of violence starts. Application of the suggested security and peace gender dimension system makes it possible to reduce the negative trends or stop them completely, while developing other strategies to enhance preventive trends against conflicts and promote the society’s sustainable development strategies.

Olena Suslova is a human rights, gender activist and researcher with more than 20 years of experience. She has worked in Ukraine as well as countries of the former Soviet Union as a short-term expert and trainer on gender, peace culture, conflict resolution, etc. She founded an NGO, the Women’s Information Consultative Center, in 1995. She published about 50 books, research articles, and manuals on gender issues.

¹² Joint Efforts Needed to Implement Ukraine’s Women, Peace and Security Agenda, Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, 21 September 2016, [<http://www.mil.gov.ua/en/gender-issues-in-security-sector/joint-efforts-needed-to-implement-ukraines-women-peace-and-security-agenda.html>].

¹³ Letter of the Department of Patrol Police on information inquiry 556/41/4/02-2016 on 07.11.2016

¹⁴ Vice Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration to Supervise Gender Equality Policy Issues, Press Service of Vice Prime Minister of Ukraine, 3 March 2017, [http://www.kmu.gov.ua/control/en/publish/article?art_id=249792322&cat_id=244314975].