



## CONCEPT NOTE

### Conference on Gender Equality and Diplomacy:

#### The Role of Ministries of Foreign Affairs in Promoting Gender Equality in the CEI Region

24–25 June 2026

Podgorica, Montenegro

#### **Background**

Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but also a cornerstone of democratic governance, social cohesion and sustainable development. Across Europe and beyond, inclusive policies and equal participation of women in political, economic and public life are increasingly recognized as essential elements of resilient and democratic societies.

While important progress has been achieved across the CEI region, challenges related to unequal representation, limited participation of women in decision-making processes, gender pay gap, gender-based violence and insufficient integration of gender perspectives into public policies continue to persist. Addressing these challenges requires stronger institutional cooperation, coordinated public policies and sustained regional dialogue. In this context, Ministries of Foreign Affairs play an important role in promoting international standards, fostering regional cooperation and strengthening coherence between foreign policy priorities and domestic reform agendas. Diplomacy constitutes an important platform for advancing dialogue, exchanging experiences and promoting inclusive approaches to contemporary regional and global challenges.

The CEI Plan of Action 2024–2026 recognizes gender equality and empowerment of women as important components of sustainable and inclusive development. In parallel, gender equality remains an integral part of the EU *acquis* and broader European standards. Therefore, a sustained and meaningful commitment is called for.

The Conference on Gender Equality and Diplomacy: “The Role of Ministries of Foreign Affairs in Promoting Gender Equality in the CEI Region” aims to provide a platform for dialogue and exchange of experiences among representatives of CEI Member States, international organizations and relevant stakeholders on strengthening the role of diplomacy and foreign policy in advancing gender equality, democratic resilience and sustainable development.

#### **Objectives**

The main objective of the Conference is to initiate a focused regional dialogue on the topic of the role of foreign policy in advancing gender equality, with the aim of identifying a future common course of action within the CEI region. Within this wider topic, a particular emphasis will be placed on closer coordination of MFAs and national institutions responsible for gender equality issues, more consequential regional cooperation on the topic, and the role of MFAs in advancing the fight against gender-based violence (GBV), as a shared and pressing challenge for the CEI member states.



## **Main Topics**

Despite clear evidence of the link between gender equality and sustainable growth and prosperity, dynamic political shifts, economic uncertainty, large-scale migration, declining trust in democratic institutions and demographic challenges are increasingly contributing to insufficient political commitment and limited allocation of resources for the implementation of the EU *acquis* and broader European standards. The consequences of these trends are particularly visible in the area of gender-based violence.

Despite political commitments and significant efforts aimed at combating violence against women and girls, the CEI region continues to witness an alarming rise in femicide, alongside the proliferation of technologically facilitated violence in the online sphere. These developments require urgent and coordinated action.

In its most recent annual reports, the European Commission has acknowledged growing political fatigue regarding the gender equality dimension of the European integration process, reflecting broader trends within the EU itself. Among other concerns, the Commission notes the marginalization of gender equality on political agendas, partial or insufficient alignment of legal and institutional frameworks with the EU *acquis* and European standards, as well as weaknesses in the implementation of gender equality strategies.

Persistent gaps in achieving established gender equality objectives call for renewed reflection on the role of institutional and societal actors, as well as a refocused approach that recognizes gender equality as essential for building resilient societies capable of fully utilizing their human potential in pursuit of sustainable development. In this context, the Conference will also explore the role of Ministries of Foreign Affairs as important actors in promoting these objectives through diplomacy and regional cooperation.

The Conference programme will include discussions on:

- gender equality as an integral component of democratic governance and foreign policy;
- integration of gender perspectives into policy-making and diplomatic processes;
- regional cooperation and exchange of good practices within the CEI region;
- coordinated institutional and diplomatic responses to gender-based violence;
- the role of women in diplomacy and decision-making processes;
- diplomacy and multilateral cooperation as tools for promoting sustainable and inclusive development.

The programme will consist of high-level opening remarks and three thematic panel discussions: on the role of MFAs in promoting gender equality – exchange of experiences and challenges; on countering gender-based violence; and on perspectives and recommendations for joint actions in the CEI region.

## **Participants**

The Conference will gather representatives of CEI Ministries of Foreign Affairs, national institutions dealing with gender equality issues, in particular gender-based violence, international organizations and stakeholders from CEI Member States.



### **Expected Outcomes**

The event is intended to provide a platform for exchanging approaches, experiences and lessons learned regarding the gender equality dimension of foreign policy, with the aim of identifying common challenges, opportunities and possible avenues for more impactful regional engagement.

The Conference deliverables, including the exchange of practices, strategic recommendations and strengthened networking among participants, are expected to serve as a valuable reference point for future regional cooperation, CEI programming and coordination among women diplomats' networks. The event is also expected to contribute to the development of future initiatives and policies at both the regional and wider international level.