



# CEI CONFERENCE ON GENDER EQUALITY AND DIPLOMACY: THE ROLE OF MINISTRIES OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS IN PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE CEI REGION

Podgorica, Montenegro  
24-25 June 2026

Hotel Hilton, Crystal Ballroom A

## PROGRAM

### DAY 1 – GENDER EQUALITY IN FOREIGN POLICY: FROM COMMITMENT TO ACTION

09:00 – 09:30 Arrival, Registration and Networking

09:30 – 10:00 Welcome Remarks

- ◆ **Ervin Ibrahimović**, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Montenegro
- ◆ **Ivana Pejović**, Deputy Secretary General of the Central European Initiative
- ◆ **Ekaterina Paniklova**, UNDP Resident Representative

*Moderator:* **Bosiljka Vuković-Simonović**, Director of Directorate for the OSCE and the Council of Europe, MFA Montenegro, Women Diplomats Network of Montenegro

10:00 – 11:00 Gender Equality and Foreign Policy in a Changing World

**Objective:** *This session sets the strategic framework for the conference by examining the role of gender equality within contemporary foreign policy and diplomacy. Against the backdrop of geopolitical uncertainty, democratic challenges and evolving international commitments, the discussion will explore why gender-responsive diplomacy matters and how ministries of foreign affairs can contribute to advancing equality, human rights and inclusive governance at national, regional and global levels.*

## Part 1 (10 min): Framing the Conversation: where we have been and where we are heading to?

- ◆ **Slavica Milačić**, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Montenegro to the United (UN) and other international organizations in Geneva
- ◆ **Kaća Đuričković**, UNDP Team Leader Gender Equality Cluster and Western Balkans Gender Programme on Gender and Development

## Part 2 (50 min): Moderated Conversation: One Idea – One Recommendation

- ◆ **Aude Maio-Coliche**, Ambassador for Equality, EEAS (vtc)
- ◆ **Irena Guidikova**, Head of Human Dignity and Gender Equality Department, Council of Europe
- ◆ **Andreina Marsella**, Ambassador of Italy to Montenegro
- ◆ **Andreea Ionescu**, MFA Romania, CEI Presidency
- ◆ **Oleh Herasymenko**, Ambassador of Ukraine to Montenegro
- ◆ **Anela Valjevac**, Programme Coordinator for Gender Equality, WBF

11:00 – 11:30 Coffee Break

### 11:30 – 13:00 Diplomacy for Equality: The Role of Ministries of Foreign Affairs in the CEI Region

**Objective:** *Ministries of foreign affairs play an increasingly important role in promoting gender equality through foreign policy, international cooperation and diplomatic engagement. This session will provide an opportunity for CEI member states to exchange experiences, identify common challenges and showcase initiatives that strengthen the integration of gender perspectives into diplomatic practice, international representation and multilateral cooperation.*

## Part 1 (30 min): Tour de table / Representatives of Ministries of Foreign Affairs, members of CEI - kick off discussion by Bulgaria, Moldova, Montenegro, RCC

## Part 2 (60 min): Diplomatic Roundtables Dialogue

*Moderator:* **Maja Simonović**, Director of Directorate for the UN, MFA Montenegro, Women Diplomats Network of Montenegro

13:00 – 14:00 Lunch

### 14:00 – 15:30 From Exchange to Action: Advancing Gender Equality through Diplomatic Cooperation

**Objective:** *Building on the morning discussions, participants will work in thematic groups to identify practical opportunities for strengthening cooperation among ministries of foreign affairs and relevant institutions across the CEI region. The session aims to generate concrete recommendations for promoting gender equality through diplomacy, international partnerships and regional cooperation mechanisms.*

## Part 1 (60 min): Diplomatic Roundtables Dialogue

## Part 2 (30 min): Reporting back in plenum

19:00 Official Reception: Itaka Library Bar

## DAY 2 – ADDRESSING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE: REGIONAL RESPONSES AND SHARED PRIORITIES

09:30 – 11:00 Countering Gender-Based Violence and Femicide in CEI region

**Objective:** Gender-based violence and femicide remain among the most serious human rights challenges across the CEI region. This session will examine current trends, institutional responses and policy developments, with particular attention to prevention, protection, prosecution and accountability. Participants will explore opportunities for stronger regional cooperation and exchange of practices aimed at improving the effectiveness of national responses.

### Part 1 (60 min): Expert panel: How to move from policy commitment to effective prevention?

- ◆ **Irena Guidikova**, Head of Human Dignity and Gender Equality Department, Council of Europe
- ◆ **Dubravka Šimonović**, President, Parity Now for Gender Equality, former UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences
- ◆ **Agron Ibrahim**, State Secretary of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Family Care and Demography of Montenegro
- ◆ **Boris Radanović**, Head of International Development, South West Grid for Learning
- ◆ **Felicia Bechtoldt**, State Secretary of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Republic of Moldova

### Part 2 (30 min): Discussion of Representatives of relevant line institutions from CEI Member States and Ministries of Foreign Affairs CEI countries

*Moderators:* **Marija Blagojević** and **Bojana Tomović**, UNDP Gender team

11:00 – 11:30 Coffee Break

11:30 – 13:15 Towards Regional Solutions: Strengthening Cooperation Against Gender-Based Violence

**Objective:** Through facilitated group discussions, participants will identify priority areas for regional cooperation and formulate recommendations for improving institutional coordination, prevention mechanisms and support services for survivors. The session aims to translate policy dialogue into practical avenues for future collaboration among CEI member states.

### Part 1 (30 min): Tour de table / Representatives of CEI countries –

### Part 2 (40 min): Diplomatic Group work Dialogue of Representatives of relevant line institutions from CEI Member States

### Part 3 (35 min): Plenum reporting back

*Moderators:* **Bosiljka Vuković-Simonović**, MFA Montenegro, Women Diplomats Network of Montenegro

13:15 – 13:30 Closing Reflections and Next Steps

Presentation of key messages and recommendations emerging from the Conference.

13:30 – 14:30 Lunch and Farewell