



CLOSING OF THE FIRST MEETING OF THE
GENDER EQUALITY COMMISSION

8 June 2012

Speech by Maud de Boer-Buquicchio

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Let me start by congratulating all of you for the successful holding of the very first meeting of the Council of Europe's new Gender Equality Commission. My special greetings go to Charlien SCHEELE for her election as Chair, and to Sergiy KYSLYTSYA as Vice Chair.

I would also like to thank Ambassador Luisella Pavan-Woolfe for her presence this week and for the EU support she has promoted. Thanks also to Ambassador Tatiana Pârvu; the expectations of her role as Thematic Co-ordinator are very high, and I am confident that she will contribute considerably to the work of the Council of Europe in the field of gender equality;

I am very pleased to have this opportunity to hold an exchange of views with you today. Some of you were present at one of the last meetings of the CDEG, when I presented my vision for a Council of Europe Gender Equality agenda. I understand that, as I announced the launching of a transversal programme, some of you feared a dilution of the Organisation's Gender Equality work. I hope that these two days have

convinced you that we are doing quite the opposite.

I spent many years working at the European Court of Human Rights. I found it natural for the Court to be independent, but I also regretted the lack of opportunities to liaise with the rest of the Council of Europe, since I was convinced that transversal work would increase the impact of the Organisation as a whole. Therefore, when I was elected Deputy Secretary General, I decided to promote team work at the level of the Organisation. A very good way of doing so is through the launching of thematic transversal programmes. We started with the children's rights programme in 2005, then there was a migration programme, followed by Roma and internet governance programmes. Although efforts were made also in the field of Gender Equality, a specific transversal programme was never set up.

Eventually, the areas where such programmes were set up proved to achieve much better results in promoting team work and co-ordination across the Organisation. I remember an internal assessment from 2008 on the results of the mainstreaming effort achieved in the fields of gender equality, youth and children. Despite the fact that the children's programme was then only three years old, the impact of the effort in this field was considered much higher and far more visible than the impact achieved by the other, much older programmes.

I realised then that something had to be done to make also the work of the Council of Europe on Gender Equality more efficient. I have always taken great care to promote the Gender Equality agenda of the Council of Europe, both as an activity and within the Secretariat, and my doctoral thesis from 1969 on the topic of equal pay for equal work, shows that my devotion to Gender Equality was present very early. I am extremely proud of the standards developed by the Council of Europe in this field and would like to pay tribute to the CDEG for their valuable contribution. Now there was a need to do more and better to increase their visibility and impact, to achieve meaningful mainstreaming and to support governments' work in their implementation.

This convinced me of the need to launch a transversal programme on Gender Equality. When I discussed this idea with the Secretary General, he immediately supported it. His presence at the opening of your meeting two days ago shows his commitment to the programme and the importance he attaches to promoting Gender Equality.

We have started mobilising the whole organisation around the issue of Gender Equality. This raises expectations and you may be tempted to put too much on your plate. I therefore advise you to be selective and pragmatic.

I was very pleased to learn that you have identified the very topical issue of "Women and the media" as the theme of your focal points conference next year. Your work in this field will no doubt contribute to address sexism and gender stereotypes, which are also closely linked to the problem of violence against women.

Yesterday, I returned from a conference in Istanbul on violence against women. I had the pleasure of meeting with Baroness Scotland, former Attorney General of England and Wales and a key player in the fight against this scourge both in her country and internationally.

We discussed among other things the importance of presenting also in a positive way the achievements made in combating violence against women. We must never forget that the overwhelming majority of men respect the integrity of women and are our allies in this struggle, and we need to bring them fully on board to be effective.

A further issue we discussed was the impact of the economic crisis in effectively combating violence against women. The Istanbul Convention has so far only been ratified by one member state and economic considerations seem to be one of the main reasons for this delay in ratifying. Baroness Scotland has been able to show the enormous economic savings largely surpassing the cost of implementing the measures contained in the Convention. She told me she would be delighted to be invited to one of your future meetings to share with you this experience and discuss the possibility of extending such economic impact assessments to other countries.

But now I am getting carried away by the passionate topics under your responsibility! Let me return to the working methods of your Commission;

I would like to underline that - and you know it better than I do - to be successful at mainstreaming, you really need others on board. In my opinion, good co-operation only is only achieved when the three following conditions are met:

- there is trust amongst partners,
- each partner knows the other partners' expectations, needs and constrains, and;
- all partners can contribute and benefit from the process and the outcome.

I therefore encourage you to open your dialogue with the various sectors of the Council of Europe, with other international organisations and, obviously, with your partners at national level.

Finally, I would be very happy to have your feedback on the dynamics we are trying to create with the secretariat. You have a very good team supporting your Commission and I am sure they will welcome guidance on how to support your work.

As some of you might be aware, my mandate as Deputy Secretary General is soon to expire. I feel reassured by the solid legacy I leave behind in the field of Gender Equality. I hope to be able to follow your work closely also in the future and wish you a very fruitful continuation.