



Strasbourg, 8 June 2012

GEC (2012) RAP 1

**GENDER EQUALITY COMMISSION
(GEC)**

1st meeting

6-8 June 2012

Strasbourg

LIST OF ITEMS DISCUSSED AND CONCLUSIONS

1. OPENING OF THE MEETING

The *Gender Equality Commission (GEC)* held its 1st meeting at the Council of Europe, Strasbourg, from 6 to 8 June 2012. The Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Mr Thorbjørn JAGLAND and Ms Filloreta KODRA, Deputy Minister of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities of Albania, representing the Albanian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, opened the meeting and welcomed the participants. They recalled that the promotion of gender equality is a priority for the Council of Europe and reaffirmed their support to the GEC in making gender equality a reality. (Speeches enclosed in Appendix III). The agenda, as adopted by the GEC, is set out in Appendix I. The list of participants is attached in Appendix II.

2. ELECTION OF THE CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

The GEC proceeded with the election, by acclamation, of its Chair and Vice-Chair in accordance with Article 12 of *Resolution CM/RES(2011)24 of the Committee of Ministers on intergovernmental committees and subordinate bodies*, their terms of reference and working methods.

- Ms Carlien SCHEELE (Netherlands) and Mr Sergyi KYSLYTSYA (Ukraine) were respectively elected as Chair and Vice-Chair. The Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH) will be invited to confirm the election of the Chair.

The GEC discussed the opportunity of establishing a Bureau. The members felt that the open-ended nature of the Commission and the interest and diversity of its work might indeed justify the creation of a small bureau (Chair, Vice-Chair and three members) which could meet once between the two plenary meetings. A number of solutions to allow for the functioning of the Bureau within the existing budgetary appropriations were evoked.

- The GEC agreed that it was too early to assess the interest of establishing a Bureau. It instructed the Secretariat to assess the feasibility and implications of such a measure and decided to resume consideration of this point at its next meeting.

3. THE TRANSVERSAL PROGRAMME ON GENDER EQUALITY AND THE GEC'S MANDATE

The GEC held a preliminary exchange of views on its terms of reference and its relations with other elements of the transversal programme on gender equality.

The debate included an exchange of views with the Deputy Secretary General, Ms Maud de BOER-BUQUICCHIO, on GEC's mandate and the new measures taken to promote gender mainstreaming in the Council of Europe work. The members of GEC expressed satisfaction with the dynamics created through the launching of the transversal programme and praised her personal contribution to the gender equality agenda. While welcoming the open-ended nature of the GEC, the participants regretted, the fact that only 16 government representatives were entitled to the reimbursement of expenses, as this was felt to have a negative impact in the attendance of meetings. Members agreed that any documents distributed to the members of the GEC should be sent to government

representatives in the previous meeting and the remaining member states via the Permanent Representations.

Participants discussed the implications of the focus on fostering implementation of existing standards and mainstreaming of Gender Equality in the various Council of Europe sectors. They also discussed GEC's and its members interaction with the Committee of Ministers Thematic Coordinator on Equality and Trafficking, the Network of Focal Points, the Gender Equality Rapporteurs appointed in the various steering committees and other bodies (working document GEC(2012) 3) and the Inter-secretariat Mainstreaming Team. The interest of co-operating with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Parliamentary Network "Women Free from Violence" was also highlighted. The discussion included an exchange of views with two gender equality Rapporteurs, Ms Elisabetta Simeoni, Gender Equality Rapporteur at the Pompidou Group and Ms Nadezhda Harizanova, Gender Equality Rapporteur at the Committee of Experts on the rights of people with disabilities (CS-RPD).

The conclusions can be summarized as follows:

- The GEC should identify opportunities to communicate with, and support the work of the various elements of the transversal programme, including through meetings, information sessions, sharing of documents and joint activities;
- governments should be invited to identify a Focal Point and encouraged to foster team work at national level, involving all relevant stakeholders so that these can also contribute to and benefit from the work at the Council of Europe;
- the GEC should help the Gender Equality Rapporteurs in their task, in particular by providing examples of gender impact assessment or gender mainstreaming work. This could also be done by the establishment of informal tandems (a GEC member and a Gender Equality Rapporteur). Members of the GEC are invited to provide the Secretariat with their personal wish in this regard. The GEC invited the Secretariat to prepare and circulate a document including the various proposals prior to its meeting with the Gender Equality Rapporteurs (date to be decided);
- gender equality should be visible at the Committee of Ministers, also thanks to the role of the Thematic Coordinator and the inclusion of Gender Equality in the priorities of the Presidencies of the Committee of Ministers.

4. THE GENDER EQUALITY AGENDA: SETTING PRIORITIES

The GEC discussed the challenges that the gender equality agenda is facing at national and international level. The needs expressed by the members and the contributions by international organisations resulted in the identification of a number of topics considered to be of particular relevance for the Council of Europe. The list of themes evoked included violence against women, combating sexism; gender stereotypes in education and the media; the promotion of gender equality standards and mechanisms; multiple discrimination against women; the role of men and enhanced participation of women in decision-making. The GEC underlined the importance of always keeping in mind gender equality as an integral part of human rights and a fundamental criterion of democracy.

The GEC also considered the possibility of undertaking a feasibility study on women's access to justice. Judge Françoise TULKENS, Vice President of the European Court of Human Rights, made a presentation on women's access to the European Court of Human Rights and drew attention to the low number of applications filed by women, pointing out that these difficulties possibly reflected obstacles experienced by women at national level.

Following a discussion, the GEC agreed to:

- Suggest collecting information on the implementation of *Recommendation Rec (2002) 5 of the Committee of Ministers on the protection of women against violence* by using a revised questionnaire;
- propose "Women and the Media" as the topic of the first annual meeting of the network of focal points to be organised in 2013 taking as a basis *Recommendation No. R (84) 17 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on equality between women and men in the media*. Two countries (Azerbaijan and the Netherlands) expressed interest in hosting this event. The GEC will agree on the contents and the venue of the conference at its next meeting. The GEC asked the Secretariat to prepare a preliminary draft concept paper on the conference and circulate it to members before its next meeting;
- prepare a feasibility study on access of women to justice with support from the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ). To this end, a drafting group would be set up. Three names have already been proposed by the CEPEJ, members of the GEC are invited to provide the names of specialists in this specific issue by 16 July 2012.

In terms of process, the GEC agreed on the interest of developing a medium term perspective and facilitating the preparation of a Council of Europe Strategy on Gender Equality for the years 2014-2017. The GEC discussed the possible various stages of the process leading to the adoption of the strategy by the Committee of Ministers at the end of 2013 which included a broad consultation prior to the submission of a draft strategy to the CDDH. The GEC also underlined the need to increase the visibility of gender equality within and outside the Council of Europe through a communication strategy which should take into account the need to highlight positive messages.

- The GEC invited the Secretariat to take into account the needs and wishes expressed by its members and prepare a draft outline for a strategy in consultation with the inter-secretariat mainstreaming team. The draft outline should be circulated in time for a discussion at the next GEC meeting.
- The GEC welcomed the Secretariat intention to review the website and to develop a visual identity for the transversal programme on gender equality.

5. SUPPORTING IMPLEMENTATION OF STANDARDS THROUGH COOPERATION

Co-operation projects could also be developed to support the implementation of standards. This could include capacity-building, such as training, awareness-raising activities, gender equality policies reviews, as well as providing legislative expertise, bearing in mind that in order to carry out a Council of Europe legislative review/expertise, an official request must be made either by the relevant Minister or by the President of Parliament to the Secretary

General of the Council of Europe. Members mentioned a number of topics that they would be interested in exploring, including gender mainstreaming in health policy, or the role of men in the advancement of the Gender Equality agenda.

- GEC members are invited to inform the Secretariat by mid-October 2012 of their interest to benefit from co-operation projects. The GEC will examine these proposals at their next meeting and agree on priorities, taking into account the available resources.

The members of the GEC exchanged views with the Secretariat of the Office of the Director General of Programmes on the policy of the Council of Europe towards neighbouring regions and the neighbourhood cooperation priorities of the Council of Europe in respect of Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, specially as regards the proposed activities in the field of gender equality. They also took note of the activities of the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity - North-South Centre of the Council of Europe on strengthening the role of women in the Southern Mediterranean.

- The GEC welcomed on-going activities, confirmed their members availability to provide support and expertise if so requested and highlighted the importance of synergies and cooperation.

Regarding co-ordination and joint planning at international level, the representatives of UN Women, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the European Union (including the European Commission and the European Institute for Gender Equality) and the OSCE / ODIHR presented their activities.

- All participants agreed on the interest of maintaining a regular exchange of information, in particular on topics (such as violence against women) in which the potential benefit of complementarity and joint efforts appears to be evident.

6. REPLIES TO PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY RECOMMENDATIONS

The GEC took note of the reply from the Committee of Ministers to Recommendation 1977 (2011) of the Parliamentary Assembly on *"More women in economic and social decision-making bodies"*, adopted on 15 February 2012. It also took note of the reply to Recommendation 1990 (2012) of the Parliamentary Assembly on *"The right of everyone to take part in cultural life"* (document GEC (2012) which included the result of a written consultation with members of the GEC submitted to the Committee of Ministers via the CDDH.

- The GEC agreed on a position concerning Recommendation 1996 (2012) of the Parliamentary Assembly on *"Equality between women and men: a condition for the success of the Arab Spring"*. It instructed the Secretariat to prepare a draft opinion on the basis of this position which will be sent to members of the GEC for approval, prior to submitting it to the CDDH.

7. DATES OF NEXT MEETING

The suggested dates for the next meeting of the GEC to be held in Strasbourg are : (7-9 or 14-16 November 2012 - tbd).

APPENDIX 1 AGENDA

- I. Opening of the meeting
- II. Adoption of the agenda
- III. Elections
- IV. Preparation of a Council of Europe Strategy on Gender Equality (2014-17)
- V. Implementing Council of Europe standards on gender equality
- VI. Co-ordination and Joint Planning at International Level
- VII. Access of women to justice (activity)
- VIII. Integrating a gender equality perspective into activities of the Council of Europe
- IX. Any other business
- X. Date and place of next meeting

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APPENDIX III SPEECHES

**Speech by Thorbjørn Jagland,
Secretary General of the Council of Europe
Opening of the first meeting
of the Gender Equality Commission
Strasbourg, 6 June 2012**

Deputy Minister,
Ambassadors,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Some years ago, many of us looked to the 21st Century as the century of progress. We could now say that the 21st Century is, so far, dramatically failing to meet our expectations. In fact, we should rather admit that WE are failing to live up to our own commitments.

The 20th Century was a century of discovery in many aspects, but the most important lesson humanity learnt was that guaranteeing human dignity, freedom and equality were prerequisites to any meaningful progress and, obviously, to sustainable peace. This lesson cost us millions of lives. We thought it was learnt forever. And yet; Political speeches here and there undermine the importance of human rights. Migrants, Roma people and other minorities have become the target of hate speech, racism and intolerance. Homophobia is on the increase in some countries.

Access to basic rights is becoming increasingly difficult for children, people with disabilities and the elderly who are also paying a heavy toll for the austerity measures in many countries. Women continue to earn less, decide less, and count less than men. There is one area where women count more than men: in the records of victims of violence.

You are here to discuss gender equality and, in particular, how to bridge the gap between the many – excellent - standards we have tried to set, and our reality in the 21st Century. If I have referred to the broader human rights picture, it is because I am convinced that achieving gender equality will also help us to address many other challenges in the field of human rights. We simply can't afford to exclude half of the population from the efforts that we should undertake to achieve social and economic progress and to guarantee lasting peace.

My ambition as Secretary General of the Council of Europe has been to increase the relevance and the efficiency of this Organisation so that it can better serve its important mission. When it comes to the Gender Equality field, this implies reassessing priorities, adapting working methods and mobilising all our resources in the most efficient way. Within the next two years, I expect the following results:

- First, the Gender Equality perspective should be integrated in virtually all Council of Europe areas of work;

- Second, member States should report progress in the implementation of standards thanks to the support and expertise mobilised through the Gender Equality Commission and the new Network of Focal Points;
- Third, the Council of Europe should further develop its co-operation with our partner Organisations, in particular the EU, UN-Women and OSCE. I hope we will be also able to offer our support to countries in the neighbouring regions that so request;
- Fourth, we should witness the entry into force of the Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence;
- Fifth, Council of Europe standards and results should be more visible and accessible so that we can increase their impact;
- Finally, I want to be able to report on progress of gender equality also within the Secretariat.

To achieve these objectives, the work of the Gender Equality Commission is of vital importance. Our expectations are indeed high, but I have already taken some important measures to contribute to the success of our joint effort. For instance:

- As a result of the restructuring of the secretariat, a Division of gender equality and violence against women has been set up, bringing together very motivated and qualified people;
- An inter-secretariat gender mainstreaming team has been created with colleagues from all Council of Europe sectors;
- Trainings have been launched for members of the secretariat to develop an understanding on gender mainstreaming and gender equality issues;
- information sessions will be organised this Autumn to support the role of gender rapporteurs appointed in the various steering committees.

New ideas and proposals will certainly come out of your discussions these days that I shall be happy to consider how to support them with the resources at my disposal.

I am convinced that we have created the conditions for a successful transversal programme. I am very pleased to note that the Albanian Chairmanship of our Committee of Ministers has included the promotion of gender equality and the support to the work of this Commission amongst its priorities.

Article 1 of the Council of Europe Statute reads as follows:

“The aim of the Council of Europe is to achieve a greater unity between its members for the purpose of safeguarding and realising the ideals and principles which are their common heritage and facilitating their economic and social progress.”

Let us make sure that women fully benefit from and participate in this enterprise. For the sake of us all.

Speech by
Mrs Filloreta Kodra
Deputy minister, Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and equal Opportunities, Albania
Opening of the first meeting
of the Gender Equality Commission
Strasbourg, 6 June 2012

Dear Secretary General,
Dear Ambassadors,
Dear members of Gender Equality Commission,

Albanian authorities attach great importance to the promotion of Gender Equality and to the elimination of violence against women. This is reflected in the inclusion on both topics within the priorities identified for our Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

The Council of Europe can be proud of the standards it has set in the field of Gender Equality. Most Recommendations adopted by the Committee of Ministers have had a measurable impact, becoming the key reference document for changes in legislations and policies at national level, both in Europe and beyond. All the recommendations adopted by the Committee of Ministers have been collected together in a compilation entitled "Make equality in law a reality in fact",^[1] a source of inspiration for all those wishing to promote gender equality as an essential precondition for protecting human rights and achieving genuine democracy. Two outstanding conventions have also emerged from the Council of Europe's work in the field of gender equality: the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings and the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. These are two Conventions that my government supports wholeheartedly.

The Committee of Ministers shares the Secretary General's vision for the reform of the Organisation which implies focusing further on implementation of existing standards and adapting our working methods to the evolving needs of our member States. This is particularly much needed and much expected In the field of gender equality.

In its Declaration "Making gender equality a reality", adopted in Madrid in 2009, the Committee of Ministers urged member states to commit themselves fully to bridging the gap between equality in fact and in law . This was also the call of the Ministers of the States participating in the last Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Equality between Women and Men (Baku, 2010).

My government therefore fully supports the timely launching of a transversal programme on gender equality as suggested by the Secretary General. Albania has already in place a revised strategy for equal opportunities and against discrimination 2010- 2015. Albanian government among top priorities has put economic empowerment of women as a basic element for women participation in public and social life. Albania is also among first countries to sign the European convention against any form of discrimination(Istanbul

Convention), and actually is in the process of costing as a preparatory process to its ratification.

I believe that the work of the Commission of Gender Equality will bust further the process and progress of equal opportunities throughout Europe and further.

The new Gender Equality Commission (this Commission) is expected to play a key role in helping our Organisation to assess the needs and identify the best ways to remove the obstacles to implementation of its standards in the field of gender equality. Your advice will be particularly relevant also in the context of a mainstreaming effort which will aim at incorporating the gender equality dimension in all decisions and measures taken by our Organisation. I trust that your work will also inspire and facilitate progress in other regions of the world, in particular thanks to co-operation with UN-Women and the EU. Not surprinsignly, the promotion of women's rights and the elimination of violence against women are amongst the main topics addressed through co-operation with our neighbouring countries.

As deputy minister of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities I am fully aware of the difficulties that many of you may face when trying to push the Gender Equality agenda in your respective capitals. This is all the more difficult in the current economic context, but the new transversal Programme and this Commission should precisely help all member states in their efforts at national level.

I wish you a very successful meeting and, what is much more important, a very successful mandate.

Speech by Maud de Boer-Buquicchio
Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe
Closing of the first meeting
of the Gender Equality Commission
Strasbourg, 6 June 2012

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 constraints, 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.