



Strasbourg, 25 October 2012

GEC (2012) 9

**GENDER EQUALITY COMMISSION
(GEC)**

REPORTS OF EVENTS ATTENDED BY MEMBERS OF THE GEC

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Events jointly organised by the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe

(Rabat and Tetouan, Morocco, 5-7 July 2012)

Sophie Del Corso: Member of the Gender Equality Commission
Office of European and International Affairs
Directorate General of Social Cohesion
Ministry of Solidarity and Social Cohesion

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| Date: 5 – 7 July 2012 | Venues: Rabat – Tetouan (Morocco) |
| <p>RE: EVENTS JOINTLY ORGANISED BY THE NORTH-SOUTH CENTRE OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE</p> <p>“Multidisciplinary summer school on gender relations”, international colloquy on “Gender equality in the reforms and revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)” University Mohammed V Agdal-Rabat <i>(chairmanship of the workshop on “new faces of gender-based violence”)</i></p> <p>Conference on “The gender approach in the development of women in the Mediterranean” during the Women’s Voices festival in Tetouan, organised by the VOIX DE FEMMES association chaired by Karima BENYAICH, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Morocco to Portugal.</p> <p><i>(statement on Council of Europe action for balanced participation of women and men in political decision making and on the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence)</i></p> | |

Summary:

Significant increase in research on the use of the gender approach in public policy at Mohammed V University (Rabat, Morocco), notably in association with French and Canadian universities. Considerable interest in these issues among students.

High level of support (sometimes tinged with concern over the rise to power of the PJD party and the growing strength of conservative forces) in a civil society that is extremely dynamic and determined to preserve past achievements (reform of the family code and the legislation on nationality; references to equality and non-discrimination in the new Constitution) and, above all, to continue advancing women’s rights in Morocco.

Council of Europe convention seen as a source of inspiration when it comes to shaping policies and measures to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence. NGO advocacy for the enactment in Morocco of outline legislation to combat gender-based violence.

Launch of a network of Euro-Mediterranean women by the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe.

Call from participants in the Tetouan conference to make this an annual event during the “Women’s Voices” festival and to set up a centre to monitor the status of women in the Mediterranean.

DETAILS:

1 –Multidisciplinary summer school on gender relations

This first-ever multidisciplinary summer school on gender relations was held as part of the research programme “Work, Women and Cities of the Maghreb” (TRAFEMVIL). Initiated in January 2012 with the support of PEERS (Programme of excellence for education and research in the South) run by the IRD (Institut de recherche pour le développement), this tripartite programme - Morocco, France, Canada – gives a more formal structure to existing links between University Mohamed V Agdal-Rabat, the University of Ottawa and Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne university. It also draws on a recently established partnership with the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe¹.

Spanning various disciplines and organised in the form of a colloquy, the summer school continued the process of reflection on “feminism and multiculturalism” begun at the 5th Congress of Francophone Feminist Research held in Rabat in October 2008 and resumed in the wake of the events of 2011. Bringing together researchers and feminist activists, it looked at the issues and challenges involved in women’s full participation in the reconfigurations resulting from the reforms and revolutions sweeping the MENA region. Quite apart from women’s extensive involvement in events, social networks and blogs, it was important to consider how they could capitalise on the current changes to achieve gender equality in the region.

This quest for gender equality, defined here as equality in terms of rights, social conditions, decision-making power and responsibility between men and women in all spheres of public and private life, reaffirms the pressing need for an informed debate on the exercise of full citizenship, as encapsulated in the slogan adopted by Tunisian women “No democracy without equality”.

The colloquy aimed more specifically to explore the following questions:

- ☐ Did the ongoing reforms and revolutions provide an opportunity to advance women’s rights?
- ☐ What were feminists (secular and religious) in the MENA region demanding and how did their resistance translate into everyday life?
- ☐ What policy and legislative measures were needed in order to meet these demands?
- ☐ How to report on the practices of social change and the reappropriation of public and private space from a feminist research perspective?

The multidisciplinary summer school on gender relations endeavoured to give a scientific and technical underpinning to the PEERS project, in terms of research and initial (students) and further (researchers) training, while promoting long-term networking with scientific communities in the partner countries and the MENA region. It was based on the participation of students from the master’s degree course in “Gender and public policies” at University Mohammed V Agdal-Rabat.

The summer school was open to master’s students, PhD students and young researchers from the project’s partner countries (Morocco, France, Canada) and the MENA region, who were engaged in gender studies, notably in the humanities and social sciences.

¹ **Official partners:** Institut de recherche pour le développement (IRD); North-South Centre of the Council of Europe; the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ); Centre Jacques Berque pour le développement des sciences humaines et sociales de Rabat (CJB); Conseil de la communauté marocaine à l’étranger (CCME); Agence universitaire de la francophonie (AUF).

Main conclusions and recommendations of the round table and workshop on “New faces of gender-based violence”

Naima Chikhaoui (sociologist), lecturer at University Mohammed V Agdal-Rabat, made the point that violence against women had its roots in the patriarchal culture. Such violence could take various forms (customary violence, cyber-violence, etc.). It was engendered by permanent mechanisms of gender-based discrimination, appropriation of women’s bodies by men and portrayal of otherness that involved either denying women’s bodies or reducing them to a purely animal level.

Gender-based violence was suffered in silence and was perpetuated because of taboos, denial and the culture of concealment that still surrounded such phenomena.

Violence against women was not a private matter; it needed to be seen as a political issue within the public domain.

Fouzia Assouli, women’s rights activist and head of the Federation of the Democratic League for Women’s Rights (Casablanca), gave an overview of Moroccan legislation and its compliance with international conventions. She said that the progress made in this area was the result of advocacy and activism by civil society and welcomed the new constitutional provisions on equality.

She referred to the findings of the survey conducted in 2011 by the Haut Commissariat au Plan (HCP) on violence against women in Morocco. She mentioned the limits encountered when applying the Criminal Code and the Mudawana (numerous under-age marriages allowed by the courts) and the lack of financial resources allocated to combating violence against women.

Nawla Darwiche, activist and head of the New Woman Foundation (Egypt), said that, like other women all over the world, Egyptian women were often victims of violence and that over the past thirty years, this violence had assumed increasingly pernicious and humiliating forms (e.g. the collective harassment to which women were increasingly subject). Despite women’s active participation in the revolution, from the first stirrings in 2005, once the initial euphoria following the overthrow of Mubarak had subsided, women were pushed aside and excluded from the public arena. Their role was deliberately ignored and they were subjected to serious forms of sexual and physical violence, often committed collectively. According to Ms Darwiche, “the women of Egypt” were not prepared to remain quiet any longer and were organising “various forms of resistance”.

The students attending the workshop drew on the structure of the Council of Europe convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence to formulate the following **recommendations**, based around three areas: prevention, protection and prosecution.

Prevention:

Raise public awareness about violence against women.

Change attitudes and cultures: foster a culture of gender equality and human dignity through education (revise school textbooks using a gender approach) and the media (develop alternative media).

Strengthen the partnership with civil society.

Adopt a code of practice for teaching staff in universities to combat sexual harassment.

Encourage people to report any acts of violence.

Improve the operating environment for women’s and feminist organisations engaged in combating violence against women.

Encourage and support research and case studies in universities and build bridges with civil society.

Combat the stereotypes peddled by the media and society at large.

Tackle the cultural roots of male domination (socio-cultural violence, culture of violence, social development of the child, etc.).

Protection:

Strengthen the legal armoury to protect women from all forms of violence.

Fully implement the equality and non-discrimination provisions contained in the new Constitution.

Withdraw the remaining reservations to the Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDEF/CEDAW).

Enact outline legislation on violence against women.

Improve existing crisis centres for women victims of violence and open new ones.

Set up advice and support services in universities for student victims of violence (including notably sexual harassment).

Prosecution:

Make effective and efficient use of the existing legal armoury and bolster it by enacting and enforcing new outline legislation to combat gender-based violence.

Ensure that culture, tradition or so-called "honour" are no longer regarded as acceptable excuses for acts of violence.

Take the necessary steps to ensure that victims are properly protected by the courts.

General conclusions of the Rabat summer school:

The history of Moroccan feminism has been an unusually dynamic one, initially crowned by numerous successes such as the widely publicised revision of the family code (which, at the time, was fiercely opposed by Islamists) and now the reference to parity in the new Constitution, which makes several allusions to equality and combating discrimination.

Today, however, the feminist agenda risks being derailed. Although there are more women in parliament, their situation is complicated by the decision to eschew the quota system in favour of a "separate" list reserved for women and young people. An Islamist party now heads the government. With the newly acquired legitimacy conferred by victory in democratic elections, their views could well undermine the feminist movement, which has always opposed them. Their rise to power seems to have reignited resistance to feminist demands and lent new weight to the idea of the "complementary" nature of men's and women's roles, the cornerstone of conservative thinking. These changes are prompting forward-looking NGOs to develop new ways of mobilising and advancing claims.

The North-South Centre of the Council of Europe took the opportunity to present its network of Euro-Mediterranean women:

At the end of the conference on "Women as agents of change in the South Mediterranean Region", jointly organised by the North-South Centre and the Italian parliament (Rome, October 2011), it had been decided to create a "network of women for democratic governance" called "the North-South process for the empowerment of women", bringing together the various players who were working to promote women's rights in the Mediterranean. This electronic platform would help to enhance the role of women by providing members with a tool for sharing ideas, opinions, suggestions, etc.; if need be, the network could also serve as a launch pad for joint projects and new collaborative arrangements, etc.

The site was currently in English only: www.nswomennetwork.org but Arabic and French versions would be available shortly.

2. The Tetouan conference, organised by the Moroccan association *Voix de Femmes* in partnership with the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe

General description:

The Moroccan authorities were represented by Youssef AMRANI, Minister-Delegate for Foreign Affairs and Co-operation; the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the European Union, the Union for the Mediterranean and the Alliance of Civilisations were also represented. NGOs working in the field of women's rights and human rights in general took an active part in the proceedings.

The goals set by the conference organisers were as follows:

- examine the progress made in implementing the recommendations of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDEF/CEDAW) in public policies;
- explain the Moroccan Constitution's contribution to women's rights and look at ways of implementing the relevant provisions;
- identify the main barriers to achieving full gender equality
- consider what measures needed to be taken to enable women to learn about and exercise their fundamental rights
- highlight civil society's contribution to improving the status of women
- examine women's image in the media in Morocco
- prepare recommendations for improving the socio-economic status of women and their participation in political and public life.

These issues were addressed at three round tables focusing on the following topics:

- gender mainstreaming in public policies and the socio-economic status of women in the southern Mediterranean
- increasing women's participation in public and political life
- the place of women in the media and cultural life

Conclusions- Recommendations:

Participants underlined the scale of what had been achieved in Morocco in terms of women's rights by the country's very active feminist movement, referring in particular to the reform of the family code and the rules on the transmission of nationality, the National Initiative for Human Development, the new Constitution's gender equality provisions, and the introduction of quotas to encourage the representation of women in politics.

Several speakers, however, drew attention to the danger that these achievements could be undone, and to the need to be vigilant so that the Arab Spring did not "turn into an autumn for women". Regime change and access to democracy did not automatically mean a shift in society towards a more egalitarian relationship between women and men. Some were worried that women's rights would in future be seen as a "secondary" issue.

Gender equality was important on several counts, however:

- First, it was important for democracy, the idea being to preserve individual rights and freedoms, not least by combating violence against women and domestic violence. Second, from an economic perspective, women's participation in the labour market was a key factor in economic development, generating revenues and creating added value. And third, the improvement in the status of women was a factor in social and cultural progress, benefiting society as a whole.

A number of recommendations were made:

- 1/ Introduce a gender mainstreaming strategy. Draw up a national action plan for equality between women and men so that the goal of gender equality is embedded all public policies.
- 2/ Professionalise this approach by conducting audits and gathering statistics broken down by gender.
- 3/ Encourage the development of networks and join existing networks / Create “address books / lists of experts”.
- 4/ Enable women to access all levels of education and training.
- 5/ Promote women’s participation, as an essential condition for good governance. Train women to participate in the regionalisation process which the Moroccan authorities are anxious to boost.
- 6/ Encourage women’s participation in economic decision making (inclusion of women in company boards) and in political decision making (experience shows that women need a minimum representation of 30% if they are to influence the political agenda; the political parties should encourage women’s participation and there should be statutory quotas).
- 7/ Combat stereotypes and ensure that the media do not present a degraded image of women. Promote women who have the potential to serve as role models for the young, in order to encourage them to get involved in political, social and economic activity, etc.
- 8/ Include strict observance of the principles of parity and equality of opportunity among the licensing requirements for media companies.
- 9/ Set up a centre to monitor the status of women in the Mediterranean. Institute an annual conference on equality between women and men, during the Women’s Voices festival in Tetouan.
- 10/ Generate broad, cross-gender support for equality. Campaign to change attitudes, bearing in mind that this is a very long-term process.

The Tetouan Appeal:

At the end of the conference, participants issued a call for the application of the parity principle, as stipulated in Morocco’s new Constitution.

This appeal for parity aims to promote the cause of women throughout Morocco, building on existing achievements in domestic law, the special relationship that we enjoy with the Council of Europe and the European Union and our close ties with the North-South Centre and other international institutions.

The Tetouan Appeal is a call for democracy, protection of women’s rights and freedoms in Morocco, and indeed throughout the southern Mediterranean, for the inclusion of women in the employment market, in policy making and in decision-making bodies in general. The idea is that this conference should become a regular event during the Women’s Voices festival, with the focus on women raising their voices in defence of their rights.

**Preparation Meeting for the 4th International
Roma Women Conference - Autumn, 2013, Helsinki, Finland**

(Bucharest, Romania, 3-4 October 2012)

Isabel Romão – Member of the Gender Equality Commission

The preparatory meeting for the 4th International Conference of Roma Women was held in Bucharest on 3rd (afternoon: 15:30-19:30) and 4th (morning: 9:00-12:30) October 2012. This meeting was hosted by the Romanian Government through the National Cultural Centre for Roma - ROMANO KHER (Ms Mihaela ZATREANU, Director) and was organized in cooperation with the Finnish Government and the Council of Europe.

So far, the Council of Europe has taken the responsibility to keep Roma women's issues on the agenda of Governments through organising International Roma Women's Conferences together with interested governments. The Finnish government has agreed to organise the 2013 international conference together with the Council of Europe and Roma women's associations. The Conference will take place in autumn 2013; the precise date is still to be defined.

The basis for the 4th International Conference's agenda were the replies to a questionnaire drafted by the Finnish Government with the assistance of the Romanian National Center for Roma Culture, and sent in early August to all Roma women national associations and networks in the Council of Europe member States in order to gather informed opinions on the themes and the key issues to be addressed at the conference.

The meeting held the 3rd and 4th October 2012 gathered 17 participants, mainly Roma women representatives of international networks. Representing Finland: Mrs Hannele SYRJÄ, Senior Officer-Advisory Board on Romani Affairs Ministry of Social Affairs and Health – Finland. Representing the Council of Europe, the meeting had the participation of: Jeroen SCHOKKENBROEK, Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues; Eleni TSETSEKOU, Administrator, Support Team of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues, Robert RUSTEM, Secretariat of the European Roma and Travellers Forum. Isabel ROMÃO, participated in the quality of gender equality expert and member of the Gender Equality Commission. Bernard SADAKA, EuroDig Remote Participation Coordinator, participated also in order to present the arrangements made for the remote participation at the Conference.

A previous technical meeting to discuss this issue had already taken place at the Council of Europe (Agora Building) in Strasbourg, on the 15th of June 2012 with a smaller number of participants, including Ms Johanna NELLES, Administrator, Directorate of Justice and Human Dignity, Gender Equality and Violence Against Women.

Goals of the Conference

J. SCHOKKENBROEK introduced the aims of this meeting and explained this conference wants to lead to something more strategic than the previous ones. The conference should lead to the empowerment of Roma women, both at national and European level, but does not intend to organize the civil society since this is not the role of the Council of Europe, who provides instead political support for empowerment. It should be therefore perceived as being part of a process, should include a reflection on its follow up and future monitoring and implementation of the outcomes of the Conference, and allow for an enlarged level of participation of Roma women all over Europe.

For the Finnish Government, co-organiser of the Conference, the strategic aim of the conference is to lay the groundwork for a European Action Plan for Roma Women. Having a strong Roma women's movement is a prerequisite to negotiating a European Strategy on Roma Women with stakeholders.

J. SCHOKKENBROEK started by asking the participants what would be important to get as a result from the conference. This is a brief resume of the main ideas and concerns put forward by the participants:

- Ensuring that the issues and concerns expressed at the previous International Conferences of Roma Women are fully integrated in commitment documents adopted by international organizations. For instance, the "Strasbourg Declaration on Roma" adopted at the Council of Europe High Level Meeting on Roma, Strasbourg, 20 October 2010, does not include many of these concerns. There should be more coordination between the experts and the elected.
- Ensuring that Roma women whose human rights have been violated can rely on entities/persons to present complain and ensure their defence. (Access of Roma Women to justice).
- There is very little done in between conferences of Roma Women in terms of implementation of initiatives or policy work, since nobody takes responsibility over this process. Need to identify an entity/organization who will take the lead of this process in between conferences of Roma Women.
- The implementation of many micro projects for Roma women does not produce long lasting and structuring effects.
- Expectation of concrete results such as actions to be implemented by NGOs, by the Council of Europe; the consolidation of the Roma women organizations.
- No conference for the sake of another conference. No need for another Declaration, since the language of the Declarations seems to get worse.
- Mainstreaming of gender equality in Roma issues and mainstreaming of Roma issues in gender equality.

My expectations for this Conference are:

- To gain more visibility for Roma Women issues in the national and international political agenda.
- Roma Women issues integrated in action plans and strategies at national and international level, namely the inclusion of Roma Women issues in national reports to CEDAW.
- A more positive approach to Roma Women issues. Usually the exclusive focus on multiple discrimination and human rights violations leads to the representation of Roman women solely as victims or a vulnerable group. Although not leaving aside these very important dimensions, the Conference should adopt a more positive approach – rendering visible successful cases and promising practices leading to the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of Roma Women human rights – as a means to change societies' representations of Roma Women and to contribute to their own empowerment.
- Reinforced articulation and cooperation between bodies responsible for gender equality and for social cohesion at the Council of Europe, including on the issue of Roma Women.

- The identification and engagement of important allies/stakeholders and already existing mechanisms needed to implement initiatives or policy work for reinforcing the human rights and the empowerment of Roma Women. (For instance: in the area of the media, justice and education).

Results of the consultation process

Mrs Hannele SYRJÄ , Senior Officer- Advisory Board on Romani Affairs Ministry of Social Affairs and Health – Finland presented the results of the consultation process undertaken by Roma Women NGOs in order to define the themes for the 2013 Conference and to ensure their involvement in the preparation of the Conference. The analysis was based on 63 replies to the questionnaire addressed to them (58 women and 5 men) from various countries, mostly from NGOs and from specific organisations for Roma Women. The main themes proposed for the Conference were:

1. Promoting the rights of Roma Women in education
2. Promoting the rights of Roma Women on the labour market
3. Promoting the rights and gender equality of Roma Women
4. Promoting active citizenship of Roma Women
5. Strengthening the Roma Women networks at national level
6. Promoting the rights of Roma Women in access to healthcare; ...

A power point with a detailed analysis of the replies to the questionnaire was presented but a copy of the document was not made available to the participants at this meeting.

Following this presentation a discussion for translating these results into agenda proposals should have taken place during the first day of the meeting, but it led to discussions on more general issues.

My interventions focused on the following questions:

- The analysis of the replies to the questionnaire gives information about the aspects of their lives Roma Women would like to change or to improve. This information should be organized in a more strategic and action oriented way in order to achieve change.
- Roma Women's Human Rights are Women's Human Rights. The Conference should adopt a Human Rights approach - recognition, enforcement of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. It should take into account and increase the level of awareness about: the main standards and mechanisms of the Council of Europe aimed at achieving equality between women and men as an integral part of human rights and a fundamental criterion of democracy; the major international instruments establishing principles and rules and constituting a framework of reference for the defence of human rights, including Roma Women rights; the already existing organs and mechanisms for the monitoring of the implementation of international human rights instruments. We need to identify international human rights documents and areas where Roma Women are targeted.
- We should also take into account and discuss the fact that the context of financial and economic crisis we are living in can contribute to aggravate the situation of Roma Women.

Other issues discussed were:

- The need to identify who will back up a future European Action Plan for Roma Women prior to its elaboration (government, civil society, Council of Europe?) and to identify economic support for its implementation.
- The need to establish a common agenda on Roma Women, by mainstreaming the Roma Women issues into Women and Gender agendas, namely by cooperating with other international women conferences.
- The need to use the Declaration and Beijing Platform for Action when establishing an agenda for Roma Women.
- Ensure that the conference results in concrete recommendations for the authorities at national and regional level.
- Need to define a framework for the conference' agenda.

The Conference agenda**Hannele SYRJÄ proposed the following approaches for the Conference agenda:**

- Human rights perspective
- Empowerment perspective
- Policy perspective

The Conference approach should also be action oriented and allow the definition of an agenda for change.

These approaches were approved by the participants in the meeting.

Hannele SYRJÄ called the participants attention to the need to discuss the format of the Conference, to create a reference group to lobby each one of the above perspectives inside and outside international organisations, to think about a long term strategy and a follow up and evaluation strategy.

The group had a preliminary discussion about the content of each of the three approaches for the Conference agenda and recognised the need to prioritise the main themes proposed for the Conference. "Promoting the rights of Roma Women in education" was very consensual and seen as a possible transversal theme to the three approaches adopted. Violence against women, including domestic violence could be another possible transversal theme. Following the proposal of this theme by the French representative, I stressed that Roma Women often bear the double burden of ethnic and gender discrimination by the majority society and by their own communities and that the Conference should address these two dimensions in order to overcome the obstacles hindering the enforcement of women's human rights and fundamental freedoms. In fact, the role of patriarchal schemes within the community as a key factor of Roma Women's oppression is seldom acknowledged/openly expressed and addressed by them or integrated in previous conferences. I proposed "the role of men" to be another transversal theme.

This discussion provided a good opportunity for me to bring up the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, to give visibility to the recent study on “Combating the isolation of Roma women and girls and promoting their empowerment. Invisible lives - Roma women in Greece”, promoted by the CDEG (found out it was not known!) and at the same time to refer the compilation of the Council of Europe’s recommendations in the area of gender equality. I have proposed also to make these documents available in a USB key to be distributed to the participants in the Conference.

Background papers

1 - Already at the previous meeting (June 2012) a Finnish proposal for a **background paper on the situation of Roma women in every country** had been presented but it was left open for further discussion at the meeting in Bucharest. The discussion took place on the issues of: Who will prepare each national background paper and what should be its content. The Roma Women organisations attending this meeting rejected the possibility to have these documents prepared by national authorities like focal points on gender equality who would gather the information and cooperate with Roma Women NGOs. Instead, it was decided they should be elaborated by national Roma women NGOs, organizations and networks since they could constitute a shadow report alongside the official reports submitted to international organisations by the Governments. In order to ensure the quality of the work and accountability, the payment of these documents was suggested.

The national background papers should have no more than six pages and should focus on the following topics:

- Socio-economic situation (statistical data)
- Research on Roma Women
- Inclusion of Roma Women in the reporting of implementation of international commitments (like CEDAW)
- Roma Women organisations and bodies in charge of Roma Women issues at governmental level
- What actions should be taken by the Governments
- Good practices in Roma Women’s capacity building

I think it would also be important to identify the projects for Roma Women who have been financed by national funds, structural funds or other international funds (such as E-Grants).

2 – There was also a preliminary discussion on a second type of **background papers aimed at giving a framework for the three approaches adopted for the Conference agenda:**

- Human rights perspective
- Empowerment perspective
- Policy perspective

Once again it appears that the Roma Women organisations attending this meeting want to prepare these papers themselves. The national background papers should be made available to the people in charge of writing these three background papers.

Languages – Interpretation - Will be available in three languages: English, Romani and Finish.

Participants at the Conference

Finnish Government has estimated the capacity to organise a conference of 60 to 80 participants from abroad including the self-financed participants. In addition there will be 50-60 Finnish Roma women and other domestic participants.

There was a discussion about the issue of the participation of governmental experts and I have also raised the issue of the participation of representatives of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly specialized commissions and of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, but the majority agreed to keep the emphasis on the participation of Roma Women.

It was agreed that meetings with governments of Member States should take place in between conferences. Follow up discussion with governments could be organised in order to put forward the conclusions and recommendations of the Conference and the Council of Europe, the Finnish Government and other Member States could help pushing the agenda of the Conference (e.g Committee of Ministers, Ad hoc Committee of Experts on Roma Issues (CAHROM) thematic discussion, Gender Equality Commission, joint events with other international organisations, agencies (European Commission, FRA, OSCE/ODIHR, European Platform for Roma Integration).

Consultation and remote participation

Internet Site of the Conference: For the purpose of transparency and consultation, a conference web page will be created by the Council of Europe, namely for posting information of the preparation process, the questionnaires and relevant documents. It can also host a forum for consultations.

Remote participation: Bernard SADAKA, EuroDig Remote Participation Coordinator presented the arrangements made for organising a teleconference or remote participation at the Finnish conference in order to allow all interested Roma women NGOs and Roma Women in Member States, including at community level, to bring their ideas based on the national reality. The precise format of the remote participation calls for further discussion.

Already I think this facility allowing for an increased participation of people who will not be able to attend the conference in Finland raises some organisational issues in the Member States:

- Dissemination of information and raising awareness about this conference and the possibility of remote participation among Roma Women NGOs, Roma Women and relevant stakeholders in Member States.
- Previous identification of remote participants including mediators at local level.
- Ensuring the participation of Roma Women from different generations and socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Previous identification of entities or facilities where remote participants can gather and access equipment for remote participation.
- Previous identification of remote participation moderators or English speaking in order to transmit the questions/interventions.

Status of the group in charge of preparing the Conference

Some participants at this preparatory meeting expressed the wish to have a more formal and permanent Preparatory Committee established on a European level for the organisation of this Conference. So far it seems that no decision has been taken on this issue by the Council of Europe Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues.

Next steps

1. The preparation of the Conference seems to be perceived by the Roma Women as an integral part of their empowerment process – They want to be the ones who decide about the conference agenda, about the participants and the ones who will prepare the background documents, but they want also to make sure that this will not be just another conference and that what it is discussed and agreed on during the Conference is taken forward by someone else (Council of Europe, Finnish Government, other Member States' Governments).
2. The type of cooperation/articulation expected from GEC before, during and after the 4th International Conference of Roma Women was not formally expressed yet (both by Roma Women organisations and the Council of Europe Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues). Nevertheless, it should be expected that, considering the interest shown by the Council of Europe Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues in ensuring gender equality expertise at this preparatory meeting, GEC involvement at some stage of this process will be requested.
3. This report allows GEC to discuss this issue further and to identify already ways to promote the mainstreaming of gender equality and GEC's agenda in Roma issues and to mainstream Roma Women's issues in gender equality and GEC's activities.
4. Once again, this discussion reinforces my conviction about the quality, actuality and the permanent usefulness of the Council of Europe documents in the area of equality between women and men, including the ones produced and promoted by the CDEG, and the need to devise strategies to ensure their visibility.

**2nd Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Social Cohesion
(Istanbul, Turkey - 11-12 October 2012)**

Carlien Scheele – Chair of the Gender Equality Commission

On October 11 and 12 the Chair of the Gender Equality Commission of the Council of Europe participated in the above mentioned Ministerial Conference.

The participants of the conference were welcomed by Ms Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni, Deputy Secretary General of the CoE.

Mr Faruk Celik, Minister of Labour and Social Security of the Republic of Turkey, touched upon the effect of the economic and financial crisis on vulnerable groups including women. It is only through social cohesion that inequalities could be minimized and a more homogenous and harmonized social structure having a common feeling of belonging could be created. He emphasised the importance of education of girls, which should lead to less maternal mortality. And he especially expressed his worries on the young people, of whom in some countries the unemployment rates are over 50%.

Ms Fatma Sahin, minister of Family and Social Policies of the Republic of Turkey underlined in her speech the challenges in the field of gender equality. One of the top priorities is combating violence against women. Turkey is the first country that signed and ratified the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. Another challenge is to speed up the level of education of girls.

Ms Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni underlined the crucial role of social cohesion and cited Mr Jagland, SG of the CoE: *“Social Cohesion is at the very heart of deep security and democracy”*.

Mr Nils Muiznieks touched upon the dangers of stereotyping and did an appeal for punishing those who discriminate. He underlined the importance of the European Social Charter and called upon member states to sign and ratify protocol 12 of the Convention on Human rights.

After these speakers several ministers and chairs of steering committees and commissions held their speeches. Several amongst them mentioned women as a group that deserve special attention and stressed the fact that women are the cement of society. The chair of the GEC also held a speech (see annex). Other vulnerable groups that had an important place in the speeches were handicapped persons and Roma.

At the end of the conference the ministers adopted a Ministerial Declaration: *“Building a secure future for all”*. This declaration contains a paragraph on their commitment *to achieving a more equal society, promoting, inter alia, gender equality and the empowerment of women as integral parts of human rights; to combat discrimination and to develop and promote policies that allow individuals, and in particular young women and men, as well as parents and carers, to reconcile their professional, private and family life as well as their civic engagements.*

Statement by Ms Carlien Scheele
Chairperson of the Council of Europe Gender Equality Commission to the
2nd Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Social Cohesion,

(Istanbul, 11-12 October 2012)

Within its new transversal programme for gender equality, for which the Gender Equality Commission was launched, the Council of Europe is continuing with the gradual implementation of gender mainstreaming in all its programmes and activities in order to achieve gender equality and promote the process of social and cultural evolution which equality dictates. It is doing so in co-operation with players at different levels of governance in the Council of Europe, with its member states and with other International Organisations, in order to bring equality out of isolation and make it central to the preparation of different policy decisions and their implementation processes.

To this end, the Council of Europe recommends to governments to systematically review public sector expenditures, and adjust budgets to ensure gender equality concerning access to expenditure. The gender budgeting strategy, a gender mainstreaming tool which the Council of Europe has been promoting since the late 1990s, is now considered by many states as a vital component of equality policies, which are now recognised as being vital in the context of the current financial, economic and social crisis. The Council of Europe through this work has emphasised that the lack of gender budgeting in public finances implies personal, social and economic costs higher than costs incurred in implementing this strategy, and that there are social and economic benefits to be gained from its implementation which in this time of crisis could contribute to counter the negative consequences of the downturn.

To prepare policies and programmes, to implement specific strategies, we need also specific mechanisms. Our Recommendation on gender equality standards and mechanisms adopted in 2007 is an important tool for our member states to take up this challenge to fully implement gender equality principles and standards to bring positive changes into people's lives and achieve de jure and de facto gender equality. The new thrusts of the Action Plan adopted at the 7th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Equality between Women and Men in Baku, in May 2010, proposed further developing the consideration on the role of equality standards and mechanisms; exploring the possibilities for more effective use of such strategies as positive action and gender mainstreaming. This is necessary, because some vulnerable groups of women, such as migrant and Roma women and girls, lesbian and bisexual women and girls and transgender persons, and women and girls with disabilities, still face multiple forms of discrimination.

The Council of Europe has been able to create solid foundations for equality between women and men. These sound foundations will enable us to innovate by exploring other avenues and achieve genuine sustainable equality between women and men with a view to sustainable social cohesion.