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Concluding remarks

It is my great pleasure to conclude, on behalf of the Council of Europe, this Conference and to thank you all for your valuable contribution. I especially want to thank our co-organisers, the Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland, for their hospitality in hosting the event and for their intellectual input in conceptualising the Conference.

The Council of Europe is increasingly focusing on efficient implementation, at all levels, of our standards - whether they are legally-binding or “soft standards”. The standards are important, but they are not enough. We must focus much more on actually changing the mind-set. In this aspect, education plays a vital role in providing our children – from a very early age – with a non-stereotyped image of women and men. Children – in turn - can be detrimental in influencing the attitudes of their parents and grandparents.

In addition to the points the General Rapporteur already mentioned, I wish to underline two issues that I see important to follow-up.

First, the importance of an integrated and holistic approach in combating gender stereotypes. It is clear that gender stereotypes in education - and gender stereotypes in general - cannot be addressed from the perspective of one discipline alone. All relevant sectors must be involved. One of the five strategic objectives of the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017 is combating gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures. This Conference is the first occasion that we discuss gender equality with our colleagues from the education sector and it proved to be useful in terms of sharing experience and practical examples. And, this is only a starting point.

I am convinced that you will go back with the commitment to enhance this integrated approach in your work; we all realise it requires an additional effort. And, we all agree it is worth it. The Council of Europe stands ready to provide you with support, should you require.

Secondly, during this Conference we also discussed the gender stereotypes “online” and the challenge of combating them. In today’s world marked by a revolution of information technologies, our children increasingly own iPads and smartphones; from a very young age they are exposed to and use internet – both for educational purposes but also for their own entertainment and as a pastime. Internet and digital communication devices and digital spaces play a major role in their everyday life; Google, YouTube, games, images from Snapchat, Instagram, Tumbler, Twitter and Facebook and so on influence their mind-sets. And that influence can be very positive, informative and beneficial, as it can be very negative and plain dangerous. The new technologies are there to stay. And to develop to get even more sophisticated. Given a choice between new, exciting, futuristic devices and learning methods and traditional education means, we know which ones they will choose. Therefore it is important to consider how the education sector can play a role in addressing the challenges; how can education use new technologies to foster positive impact, critical and safe usage; how to ask questions, deconstruct messages and tell the “good” ones from the “bad” ones which may amplify gender stereotypes, lead to negative or violent behaviour (e.g. bullying, cyber-misogyny, on line grooming and abuse).

With these words and food for thought I wish to thank you all, once again, for your active participation.