

Panel 2 – Sharing knowledge and information to advance the gender equality agenda and implement the Council of Europe Strategy: the impact of social media

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The Nordic Council of Ministers – the Ministers of Gender Equality's work against Hate Speech and Sexism

The Nordic Council of Ministers is a co-operation between the five Nordic countries including the self-governed areas of the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland. The five countries hold an alternating presidency – this year its Finland, in 2017 it will be Norway.

The co-operation consists of several councils, including one on Gender Equality.

To execute the policy, a committee of senior governmental officials is established. I am myself a member of this committee.

NIKK – Nordic Information on Gender is a cooperative body for the Nordic Council of Ministers and works according to the assignments given from the Ministers.

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For every period of four years, the Ministers agree on a joint program of co-operation.

Together for Gender Equality – a stronger Nordic Region is the programme for this period, from 2015 to 2018.

The goal of this programme is to contribute to effective work for gender equality in the Nordic countries.

One important topic we will work on this period is

- Gender equality and the public sphere

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With regard to the public sphere, our aim is to ensure that:

- women and men have equal access to and opportunities to influence and participate in decision-making processes.
- women and men in the Nordic countries have equal access to and opportunities to participate in the media and public debate
- We also seek to counter the backlash against gender equality, and fighting gender-based hate speech has become a priority, which will be the topic I will address in this presentation:

Fighting gender-based hate speech became a political priority for the Ministers of Equality last year after their meeting in Denmark.

The awareness of hate speech has risen the last years, not without reason:

Some places there is a quite strong and somewhat growing resistance against women's participation in public life and even in the world of work.

This resistance against a gender equal society is expressed in different ways, and often we see it in hate speech, gender based violence, intimidation and sexism, most frequently aimed at women.

The Council of Nordic Ministers on Gender Equality sees this resistance as a growing challenge because:

1) It is a huge democratic problem if women are not secured freedom of speech on equal terms as men.

2) Even though both men and women are victims of threats and hate speech, the attacks on women are more often of a sexual nature and refer to women's sex and appearance.

3) Moreover, these attacks make women modify, even withdraw from the public sphere, simply changing their behaviour to a larger extent than men.

Thus, this is not only a gender equality issue, it is a challenge for democracy.

So: What did the Council of Ministers decide to do?

Under the Danish leadership in 2015, the ministers decided to start fighting gender based hate speech and sexism.

A part of the plan was to arrange an innovative seminar in Denmark in November 2015.

The seminar held in Copenhagen focused on hate speech and sexism in the public domain, the legal dimensions of hate speech, and mitigation of these.

A Danish research institute, ALS Research, was engaged to follow the seminar, and based on the knowledge presented, a report was made. The institute's job was not only to report on the facts presented during the seminar. The Danish report also includes several recommendations on what to do next.

Agreeing on how to combat hate speech is not easy. One of the most difficult issues to agree on is how to secure freedom of speech and at the same time fight hate speech.

I am sure that this is a familiar discussion for all of you.

For the Ministers of Gender Equality, the UN-meeting for the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is an important arena. That's why the ministers agreed on arranging an expert panel on gender based hate speech in UN, New York, during the Commission on the Status of Women this year (2016).

I am happy to report, and without bragging too much, that this panel turned out to be a great success.

Not least thanks to the excellent participants on the panel, one of whom is here today, Ms Emma Holten.

The common Nordic initiative didn't stop with the expert panel during CSW. In April this year, the committee of governmental officials agreed on new concrete initiatives on behalf of the Ministers.

NIKK has been given the job to follow up the work on hate speech based on what has been done until now

This means that NIKK will do:

- 1) a mapping on hate speech in all of the Nordic countries, including on research based work
- 2) NIKK will also do a mapping on the state of law in all the Nordic Countries in regards of hate speech

But even more interesting and important in NIKKs work will be the following three (3) tasks trying to answer:

- 3) On which areas do we need more knowledge?
- 4) Which legal and political changes could be made in order to prevent and fight hate speech?
- 5) Last, but not least, is NIKK to give further recommendations on what policy initiative that could be taken to more effectively prevent hate speech.
Could and should there be a co-ordinated initiative taken by all Nordic countries?

This report performed by NIKK will be a second (2.) step. Based on the first report made by ALS and the mapping and recommendations by NIKK, Norway, as the leader of the Nordic co-operation next year, will be following up the work.

As one important part of the work, Norway will produce information material for children and teens aged 10-18 in all of the Nordic countries.

In addition to information materials for teens, we also plan for a big international seminar in Norway on hate speech in June 2017.

You are all very much welcome!

Again: The Council of Nordic Ministers on Gender Equality works seriously against hate speech. The aim is to secure a pluralistic public debate and freedom of speech for all.

This way we secure and build lasting democracies.

Thank you.