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GENDER EQUALITY COMMISSION (GEC)

Summary information about events attended by
GEC members, Experts or Secretariat members

May to November 2016

Event: Women Deliver conference
Date & place: 16-19 May, Denmark
Participant: Liri Kopaçi-Di Michele

Report

This was a large scale event with over 5,000 participants including plenary sessions, thematic workshops and exhibitions during which a diverse range of subjects was discussed (for example, empowerment of women, gender-based violence, education, sport as an enabler/empowerment tool, gender stereotypes, etc.). All of these subjects are covered by the Council of Europe work in the area of gender equality. This highlights the relevance and link of the Council of Europe/GEC work with the situation in and the challenges faced by member states.

I met various representatives from UN Women, World Bank, OECD, IOC and explored areas of continued and future co-operation and implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy.

Event: EC Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities between Women and Men
Date & place: 26 May, Brussels
Participant: Carolina Lasén Diaz

Report

The European Commission presented its new "Strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2019". I thanked the Commission for having come to present it to the GEC in April, and I reminded members of the Advisory Committee that two priority areas are common in the European Union (EU) and Council of Europe's work on gender equality: preventing and combating violence against women and promoting women's participation in decision-making.

The Advisory Committee was informed about the current status of signatures and ratifications of the Istanbul Convention (stressing that all EU member states have now signed the Convention and 13 had ratified it). I outlined the next steps in GREVIO's monitoring work, including the adoption of the questionnaire in March and the provisional timetable for reporting by parties to the Istanbul Convention (2016-2017). I invited all EU member states to consult this information which is available online.

The mandates of the two opinions that the Advisory Committee will prepare in 2016 were presented. The Council of Europe will contribute to both of them - on "Taking stock of Commission's 2013 Communication towards the elimination of FGM and on its possible follow-up" and "Gender mainstreaming in the European Migration Agenda".

I informed the participants about the forthcoming Tallinn Conference and invited members of the Advisory Committee to visit our website and register online if they were interested in participating.

Event: #Womensvoices - European Dialogue on violence against refugee women
Date & place: 2 June, Brussels
Participant: Ambassador Thorbjørn Frøysnes,
Head of Council of Europe liaison office in Brussels

Report

The event concluded a project on violence against refugee women and girls "From conflict to peace? Women's and girls' voices on the move", carried out by the European Women's Lobby and the Women's Refugee Commission.

In his intervention, Ambassador Frøysnes spoke about how the current crisis is affecting migrant, asylum-seeking and refugee women and how their rapidly growing number raises issues in relation to their vulnerability, given the specific threats they are exposed to during migratory routes and once they reach their final destination: gender-based violence, including sexual violence and harassment, forced marriage and sexual or other form of exploitation. He also highlighted that the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention) establishes the obligation to introduce gender-sensitive procedures, guidelines and support services in the asylum process and that it has been signed by all EU member states, and ratified by 14 of them.

Ambassador Frøysnes also informed the participants about the Secretary General's commitment at the World Humanitarian Summit (Istanbul, 23-24 May 2016), that the Organisation actively seeks the ratification of the Council of Europe Lanzarote, anti-trafficking and Istanbul Conventions by the member states that have not yet done so, as these Conventions will provide greater protection to women and children migrants and refugees.

Finally, he stressed the importance of ensuring co-operation and co-ordination not only among national, regional and international stakeholders, but most importantly, with women and human rights organisations that are at the forefront of providing services to women refugees and asylum seekers on the ground.

Event: International Forum of Women Leaders – Equal Opportunities for Better Future
Date & place: 21-22 June 2016, Minsk Belarus
Participant: Dragan Knezevic

Report

The Forum was organised by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE / ODIHR), in co-operation with the Belarusian State University, Council of Europe Information Point in Minsk, the Executive Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Belarus, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Belarus, and the Raoul Wallenberg Institute for Human Rights and

Humanitarian Law, with support of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Belarus and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus. It gathered about 90 participants from 20 countries as well as international organisations and agencies from the UN.

The purpose of the Forum was to consider women's participation and leadership in the 21st century and how it has changed and evolved over the last few decades. Therefore, it highlighted the current challenges for women leaders in different spheres of public life, discussed the advantages of inter-sectoral co-operation, the role of women's non-governmental organizations as well as the contributions of women journalist and women academics to the efforts to advance the status of women in a society. It also focused on partnership of women and men in institutionalizing gender analysis in public sphere and the role of men in promoting women leaders and contributing to unleashing the full potential of female leadership. As women are still dominantly in charge of house work and care for family members, the Forum explored a number of initiatives, measures and policies which can be utilized to provide for a greater balance in private life and work. There were 3 panels about the Forum's relevant issues, namely, Creating Networks for Women's Empowerment, Institutionalizing Gender Analysis and Introducing Measures to Promote Women's Role and Influence in Politics.

During the Forum, I made a presentation on Council of Europe standards in achieving balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making process stressing the relevance of the Recommendation (2003)3 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and legislative and administrative measures and support measures needed to promote balanced participation of women and men in all sectors and at all levels of society as a part of human rights, essential to social justice and a necessary condition for the improved functioning of a democratic and pluralist society. I also pointed out on the Council of Europe Strategy on Gender Equality (2014–2017) and its measures which relate to electoral systems, parity thresholds, public funding of political parties and working conditions of elected representatives, while also encouraging women to participate in the electoral process by voting and participating in elections at the national, regional and local levels.

At the end of the Forum, Declaration of Women Leaders was adopted, which called for action in order to build regional networks for co-operation in the OSCE area and the CIS region, to further advance women's participation in political and public life while noting, *inter alia*, the Council of Europe Recommendation (2003)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making.

Event: FRA Forum
Date & place: 22 June, Vienna
Participant: Carolina Lasén Díaz

Report

I presented the Council of Europe's work and standards to combat sexist hate speech in Working Group 22 (on "Freedom of expression, hate speech and anonymity online"). I was the only speaker on this topic as the others covered hate speech in relation to cyber-bullying of children, racism and anti-Semitism. I summarised the main features of sexist hate speech, including its main targets,

impacts and root causes, and stressed the link with the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017 (objectives to combat sexism and gender stereotypes, and prevent and combat violence against women) and the Istanbul Convention (as regards stalking, sexual harassment, the general obligation of Art.12(1) and the role of media/ICTs). I also mentioned the GEC decision to prepare a draft CM Recommendation to combat sexism, including sexist hate speech.

Paragraph 75 of the [Chair's Statement](#), the main output document of the Fundamental Rights Forum, referred to sexist hate speech as follows: "*Emergent online phenomena such as 'slut-shaming' and 'revenge-porn', which particularly affect girls and women, needs to be recognised as an extreme form of gender inequality that manifests itself as online hate in the form of both images and text. EU institutions, working with relevant digital providers, could proactively work towards acknowledging, preventing and combating these forms of abuse*".

Event: Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
Date & place: 9 September, Paris
Participant: Sergiy Kyslytsya and Carolina Lasén Diaz

Report

The Chairperson of PACE's Equality and Non-Discrimination Committee invited the GEC Chairperson for a presentation of the current activities in the agenda of the GEC, including the preparation of the next Council of Europe Strategy on Gender Equality, and an exchange of views with PACE's Equality and Non-Discrimination Committee. The GEC Chairperson suggested that PACE may wish to consider appointing Gender Equality Rapporteur in all its Committees to ensure that gender equality issues are mainstreamed throughout the work and activities of the Parliamentary Assembly, in line with the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017.

The GEC Chairperson thanked the PACE Committee's Chair for her participation in GEC meetings and at the conference held in Tallinn at the end of June 2016 to take stock of the implementation of the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy. Both Chairpersons stressed their wish to continue co-operating in areas of common interest.

PACE's Equality and Non-Discrimination Committee is preparing/finalising reports on: "Ending cyber-discrimination and online hate", "End sexual violence and harassment of women in public space", "Women's empowerment in the economy", "Protecting refugee women from gender-based violence" and "Gender equality and child maintenance".

Copies of some of our gender equality factsheets and brochures were made available to PACE members.

Event: Who Cares? Who Shares? Men as actors and beneficiaries in Gender Equality Policies
Date & place: 17-18 October, Luxembourg
Participants: Carolina Lasén Diaz

Report

I replaced the Chairperson of the GEC, who had to cancel his participation due to work commitments. I intervened in a high-level panel on "Caring Masculinities", moderated by a journalist. I spoke alongside representatives of the private sector, EU officials, national authorities and representatives of civil society.

The conference was opened by the Prime Minister of Luxembourg and started with a high-level political panel of six ministers (Belgium, Latvia, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia and Sweden). There were around 300 participants.

The "[Luxembourg Declaration](#)" includes a number of recommendations from the participants of the Conference aimed at promoting caring masculinities through committed fatherhood, male self-care, men in care jobs, male volunteer work, men providing nursing care for relatives, and contributions by men to housework.