



TÜRKİYE BÜYÜK MİLLET MECLİSİ

**North-South Centre  
of the Council of Europe**

NSC/Inf (2012) 25

Lisbon, 27 November 2012

**2nd INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
NORTH-SOUTH PROCESS FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN**

**CONCLUSIONS**

---

**The Political and Socio-economical Empowerment  
of Women  
Based on Women's Stories**

---

**Istanbul**

**4-6 November 2012**

**Hotel Divan**

In partnership with the United Nations Alliance of Civilisations



During the Conference on “The Political and socio-economic empowerment of women based on women's stories”, participants have, based on their own personal stories, highlighted some questions to be raised in order to increase women empowerment and to ensure their participation in political and socio-economical life. Following the recommendations made by the rapporteurs of the sessions, we propose a number of actions to be implemented in the framework of the Action Plan 2013 of the North-South Process for the Empowerment of Women and its Euro-Med Women Network:

1. To promote the change of mentalities in all segments of society concerning gender equality issues, as change of mentality is prior to change of regulations. It is necessary to bridge the gap between rights on paper and their effective enforcement. Moreover, the Network acts for the promotion and development of a culture of mutual solidarity and trust among women;
2. To reinforce the networking established through the Euro-Med Women Network and offer opportunities for sharing experiences and best practices between all the countries of the Euro-Mediterranean, in order to boost the empowerment of women through increased access to political and socio-economical life. The platform of the North-South Process for the Empowerment of Women, and its Euro-Med Network will integrate the experiences shared during these days on its website, through links, articles and special folders of documentation, in order to facilitate the access to the best practices identified. With this purpose, all participants who are official members of the Euro-Med Women Network will be invited to actively participate in the activities of the website or sharing experiences through its public forum and online discussions to be organised in 2013;
3. The Euro-Med Women Network will contribute on a daily and continuous basis to the process of the empowerment of women by informing its members about experiences and opportunities presented in the area, but also about the main issues to be addressed in the changing Euro-Mediterranean region. Weekly newsletters will be presented to all members of the network, including information about opportunities for entrepreneurship, trainings, capacity-building, and awareness raising campaigns for the empowerment of women;
4. To take action every day for the promotion of the role of women and contribute to the process of consolidating gender equality. The Euro-Med Women Network should involve academia and university experts on gender equality in the activities of the Euro-Med Women Network and the North-South Process for the Empowerment of Women and link them to civil society organisations and other representatives of the quadrilogue, to promote reflection and networking. Moreover, the Network will support the second edition of the Feminist School of Rabat in co-operation with the University of Mohamed V Agdal, the University of Ottawa - Canada and Paris I Diderot, as well as by involving the EMA Women Network in other opportunities for training;
5. To reinforce the activities of the Euro-Med Women Network in social media (Twitter, Facebook, and other tools) in order to raise awareness about the importance of empowering women in the region and to combat all forms of violence and discrimination against women as violations of human rights;

6. To promote the involvement of women in politics and in the political decision-making processes by promoting awareness-raising within government, local authorities and parliaments through campaigns and activities in the framework of the Council of Europe, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and its institutions; by organising activities of exchange, visits and dialogues;
7. To continue promoting the signing and ratification and the lifting of all reservations by the countries of the Euro-Mediterranean region concerned, to international and European conventions such as the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Istanbul Convention;
8. To combat the stereotyping of women by training media on gender equality and women's rights in the Euro-Mediterranean region as well as promoting the changes of curricula in the education system to overcome stereotypes and promote the combat to violence against women;
9. To guarantee the yearly follow-up event to this Conference, with the venue alternating between a member country of the Council of Europe and a country of the southern Mediterranean shore. A consultation process via the on-line forum on the topics to be discussed during the conference will be launched prior to the event in the public forum of the Euro-Med Women Network Platform in order to receive proposals from its members;
10. To encourage more parliaments, particularly on the southern shore of the Mediterranean, following the recognition of partners for democracy status of the parliaments of Morocco and of the Palestinian Authority, to commit themselves to a structured co-operation with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and to encourage more countries to join the North-South Centre, following the example of Morocco, that is a member of the Centre since 2009.

The actions proposed will be integrated in an action plan, which will be validated by the Steering Committee of the North-South Process for the Empowerment of Women. The main recommendations of the Conference of Istanbul and the Action Plan 2013 validated by the Steering Committee, will be presented in the Lisbon Forum 2012, "The Arab Season: from changes to challenges" (Lisbon, 3-4 December) organised by the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe and the United Nations Alliance of Civilisations with the support of the European Union and in close cooperation with the League of Arab States, the Union of the Mediterranean and the governments of Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan.

Last but not least, all participants of the conference are members *ex officio* of the Euro-Med Women Network and an invitation to actively participate in the Network will be sent to all. We hope you will take action and be committed to this Network as has been highlighted several times during the conference.

**ANNEX I**  
**Report of the 1<sup>st</sup> session:**  
**Promoting the political and social empowerment of women**  
Rapporteur: Federica Mogherini Rebesani

1) Promoting the active and full participation of women in social and political life is not a "women issue" but a general interest of the entire society. First of all because it can help filling the gap between institutions and society, guaranteeing a fair representation; second, by "freeing" a huge potential (economic, social, political, cultural) that would otherwise stay silent. The challenge of completing the democratic transition after the "Arab spring" lies in the full role of women in politics and society.

2) The priority is creating a positive, empowering environment for women: investing in education, training, services, access to work, but most of all promoting a deep and long-lasting change in culture, in society, in families. The change, in order to be sustainable, needs to go in depth. The revolutions of the "Arab spring" and democratic processes have unveiled the distance between the theory of institutional equality (the "feminist dictators") and the reality of societies where women's full participation in political life was and is not yet completely accepted. We have to work at filling this gap.

3) In this framework, quotas in electoral laws (for parliamentary, regional and local elections) and in political parties are needed - but they are not enough. Broader measures are needed. Many relevant recommendations can be found in the resolution 1898 adopted at the last Parliamentary Assembly of the CoE on the role of political parties in promoting women's political representation.

4) Quotas for national parliaments and for local and regional assemblies are crucial. So is the full participation of women in the governmental level - both national and local. In this regard, we should for sure keep looking at "quantity" (number of ministers), but it is time to start discussing "quality": not only responsibilities on "equal opportunity" or "family" issues", but also and mainly "finance", "interior", "foreign affairs", "defence"... Similarly, we should make sure that both at national and local level, women do not only "fill in" secondary roles, but primary ones: we cannot always be "deputy something"!

5) Measures and policies are the cornerstone of change, but their impact is (almost) none if they are not properly implemented. As one speaker said: "stop concentrating on numbers and words, and let's start focusing on facts!"

6) While our societies make some progresses in the field of women's participation to political and social life, we should never forget that there is nothing that is granted forever - neither in the institutional level nor in society. We have to stay vigilant and constantly work to consolidate progresses that have been made: no step back!

7) What is particularly crucial is promoting and facilitating forms of networking among different experiences, stories, and forms of active women participation in political and social life. The key to success is creating synergies among different actors: governments, parliaments, local and regional authorities, political parties, NGOs and civil society, media (new/ social and traditional ones). In this concern, the North- South

Centre has an expertise that can become a model.

8) Let's talk to, with, and about men! As women's participation in political and social life is not a "women's issue" but an opportunity for the entire society, we need to involve more and more men in the work, if we want to get to the result. Furthermore, no real, deep change in society will take place without their full and convinced involvement. Political and social empowerment of women is strictly linked to a more balanced "burden sharing" of family responsibility: we can turn things upside-down and say that we need to empower men "at home", in order to fully empower women in political and social life.

**ANNEX II**  
**Report of the 2<sup>nd</sup> session:**  
**The participation of women in economic and financial life**  
Rapporteur: Murat Daoudov

The session panel has debated about the role of women in the economic life and the discussion was based on their personal experiences and individual stories. The discussion can be summarised in the following points:

First of all, serious obstacles to women's equal rights and full inclusion in the life existed until relatively recently even in the European countries and many still exist in other regions. The struggle for equal rights for women has surely come a long way, as illustrated by the example of recent lifting in Jordan of the obligation of consent by male relatives (husband, father) for women willing to obtain a passport, while similar limitations were abolished (only!) few decades ago in France. Various other obstacles that still exist should be definitively overcome.

Obstacles are of double effect when they hit women from disadvantaged minorities. Confronted to such negative environment and inappropriate treatment women in many circumstances are obliged to develop various survival strategies. Women's rights should be seen as an integral part of human rights and not only as a gender issue.

The panel has paid a due tribute to mothers, whose role in successful integration of girls in the social and economic life has been qualified as crucial. In many individual stories mothers clearly appeared as those who actually "put the drive" in their children, who, though themselves deprived of many chances, supported the upward mobility of their girls, invested time and energy in them, thus allowing them to become what their mothers could not afford to be. Here of course the role of supportive fathers and husbands is also not to be underestimated.

The deeply rooted state of inequality and the sometimes desperate feeling of being citizens of second zone with which women start their life are well illustrated in this answer given by a small girl. Asked about who she would like to be when grown up, she answers "a boy". So a relentless struggle should be done so that no girl in this world ever dreams to be born a boy.

Women have to double or to triple their efforts to succeed in the economic life and when they do so sometimes they face sexist resistance at the work place. The inequalities in the economic life are ever more important when it goes about working mothers. Under the current conditions, women are often constantly pushed to choose between working and raising children, between career and family. Women who are courageous enough to embrace both paths are seen "out of sequence", unusual and even incongruous, like in the bitter example of one panellist, who, when member of a delegation to visit the President of Tunisia after the revolution, was kept away by the security staff from her presidential rendezvous... because she came to the Palace with her small baby. Even more saddening has been the fact that no one from the present officials, seemed to be offended by such attitude.

The encouraging example of this young activist and a young mother (the “itinerant ambassador” of working women) who made all her way to another country in another continent in order to share her experience and to make her professional contribution, offers several lessons:

- A working mother must be recognised and given due tribute to and not seen as “uncomfortable rule-breaker”. This reality should be recognised not only in the South but also fully in the North.
- The institutional approach and the internal policies of international organisations should also be revised and adapted to this reality, with necessary accommodations. Thus, for example, when a professional woman is called to deliver or to share experience abroad and she is a young mother, she should be allowed to travel with her baby, with all logistical and financial arrangements.

The working mother phenomenon is to be fully taken into account at any working environment, especially in the private sector. Some panellists have shared their efforts and interesting initiatives aiming at creating “women-friendly” work place policies. “Clauses of most favoured worker”, to paraphrase the famous diplomatic term, should be adopted in companies in general if we wish to see a greater contribution of women to the economic and social development.

Final but probably the most striking remark was that the women’s rights are not exclusively a women issue. Men should be fully and actively involved in this struggle and “all problems will be solved when men will work for women’s issues”.

**ANNEX III**  
**Report of the 3<sup>rd</sup> session:**  
**Combating violence against women**  
Rapporteur: Ms Fatiha Saïdi

Durant cette dernière table ronde, à l'instar des deux autres, les récits de vie sont venus illustrer de manière concrète les violences subies par les femmes. Les différentes oratrices et l'orateur ont mis en exergue, chacun dans leur domaine, les actions à déployer pour éradiquer ces violences. Il a été rappelé, à juste titre, combien la violence domestique a des conséquences collectives en termes budgétaires. Des violences qui touchent toutes les couches sociales et pas seulement les plus vulnérables comme on serait enclins à le penser.

Il est important d'œuvrer également au niveau judiciaire et faire en sorte qu'aucune violence exercée à l'encontre des femmes ne tombe dans l'impunité. La prévention et la sensibilisation doivent cependant être mises en œuvre, parallèlement à ces actions répressives préconisées, ainsi que le soutien aux femmes pour leur permettre de sortir de la spirale de violence et se reconstruire. Si l'on parle des femmes victimes de violence, on aimerait aussi, du côté des intervenants que l'on parle des auteurs.

Qui viole ?

Qui brime ?

Qui bat ?

Qui persécute psychologiquement ?

Poser les questions c'est déjà y répondre et il importe dès lors que les hommes soient plus actifs dans les dispositifs de lutte contre les violences faites aux femmes, en ce compris par leur présence dans des assemblées comme celles-ci. On ne pouvait évidemment, dans le cadre des débats relatifs aux femmes dans le bassin méditerranéen et son pourtour, passer sous silence la question des femmes dans les printemps démocratiques. Le temps qui m'est imparti ne me permet pas d'en parler plus longuement mais nous retiendrons cependant cette belle formule de Sophie Bessis qui résume beaucoup de choses «les femmes attendent leur printemps féminin».

Du côté du Liban, notre interlocutrice nous a fait part du cheminement difficile d'un texte de loi sur la lutte contre les violences qui, à ce jour, n'a pas encore été voté par le parlement libanais et qui, durant son examen, a été toiletté de manière très vigoureuse par des parlementaires zélés.

Du côté du Maroc, on attend aussi avec impatience la traduction de la nouvelle Constitution dans les textes légaux et plus particulièrement l'installation de la Haute Instance pour la Parité.

Fouzia Assouli a également plaidé pour l'universalisation et l'uniformisation des normes au niveau international pour permettre entre autres des évaluations plus globales et donner plus de cohérence aux actions menées.

De manière objective et objectivable, il convient de reconnaître que le viol, la violence physique, morale, les mariages forcés, précoces ou subis, les mutilations sexuelles, la privation de l'accès à l'enseignement, à la santé sous prétexte de l'appartenance au



sexe féminin sont des faits vécus au quotidien et non des exceptions.

Et on peut donc constater : les femmes continuent de subir des comportements cruels et dégradants et subissent ces assauts parce qu'elles sont femmes. Il s'agit donc de violence sexiste et la Convention affirme, à cet égard, que la parité et l'égalité ne deviendront jamais des réalités tant que cette violence sexiste persistera à grande échelle, au vu et au su des organismes publics et des institutions.

La Convention appelle à la responsabilité des Etats qui se doivent de mettre fin à la violence à l'encontre des femmes et la sanctionner, qu'elle se produise dans le cercle familial ou en dehors car aucun argument culturel, historique ou religieux ne peut être invoqué pour la justifier, l'excuser ou la relativiser.

Toutefois, pour que cette Convention atteigne son objectif et ait un impact sur la vie de millions de femmes, il ne suffit pas qu'elle soit couchée sur le papier: elle doit entrer en vigueur et être appliquée en tant que loi, le plus rapidement possible. Les femmes, victimes de la violence, ont déjà attendu trop longtemps. Je vous remercie pour votre attention.

**ANNEX IV**  
**Report of the 4<sup>th</sup> session:**  
Empowerment of women through culture, media and arts  
Rapporteur: Sahiba Gafarova

The Parliamentary Assembly is fully aware of the important role that media can play in women empowerment.

One particular area in which remarkable work has been carried out is gender stereotypes in the media. A resolution and a recommendation on this issue were adopted in 2010 [Resolution 1751 (2010) and Recommendation 1931 (2010)].

The Parliamentary Assembly noted that women are under-represented, almost invisible, in the media. Furthermore, when they are represented, it is in a sexist, stereotyped way: confined to the roles traditionally assigned to them by society, at home, or as sexual objects, particularly in advertising.

Sexist stereotypes are too frequently tolerated under the banner of freedom of expression. This freedom is of course a pillar of any democratic society. However, it should not be misused to convey an incitement to gender-based hatred or even violence, nor to harm women's dignity.

The media represents a vital constituent of democracy and has a particular responsibility to promote respect for human dignity, the fight against discrimination, and equality between women and men. Something that should be clear to everyone is that sexism, just like racism and other forms of discrimination, has no place in the media. As mass media is pervasive and has an impact on people's mindset, the risk is that, by resorting to gender stereotypes, they perpetuate a traditional, immutable image of women and men and their respective roles in society. In other words, they may become a means of discrimination.

On the other hand, media can play a positive role in promoting gender equality. The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe has highlighted this potential as far back as 1984, in a Recommendation to member states on equality between women and men in the media [No. R (84) 17]. Back then, it was recommended that member states ensure equal treatment of women and men in the media, encourage the presence of women in an equitable proportion in media supervisory and management bodies, encourage wider participation of women in talks and discussions broadcast by the media. Also, it was recommended that in publicity campaigns sponsored by the public authorities, the dignity of women is safeguarded and a positive image of them is projected.

When the Council of Europe held in my own country, Azerbaijan, a Conference of Ministers responsible for Equality between Women and Men, in May 2010, the role of education and the media in combating stereotypes was on the table.

Generally speaking, European media has achieved progress in this respect. However, changes are occurring very slowly and, as shown by the research that I have mentioned, the situation is still far from ideal. Much more needs to be done.

First of all, media should break the existing vicious circle: today, their silence (or insufficient coverage) on women as decision-makers makes it more difficult for women to have access to elected offices. This is evident in media reporting on elections: women are not equitably represented during electoral campaigns, which has an impact on the outcome of the elections. In turn, fewer women in office means fewer women in the news.

The website of the Euro-Med Women Network created by the North-South Centre is an example of best practice: it provides information on women in the Mediterranean area, targeting an audience of women (of course also accessible to men). It helps women create an efficient network: it is therefore not purely an information tool, but also an interactive support to their activities.

Reporting on women is tremendously important: suffice to mention the case of the countries of the Arab revolutions, where women gave a substantial contribution to the uprising and then disappeared from the scene. Now, to a certain extent and at least in some of the countries involved, we have lost sight of them. The press and the media in general should now investigate and present the general public with an update on what women do today in those countries, what they need, what their expectations are, and how these could be fulfilled.

A large proportion of the population of those countries, including most women, was traditionally forced to silence by their difficult access to the media. Now they found a way to communicate effectively thanks to blogs and social networks. However, traditional media such as the press and television should also give them adequate coverage.