

Conference organised by the Bosnian Chairmanship of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers entitled “Monitoring the implementation of the Istanbul Convention: new synergies”

Sarajevo, 20 October 2015

Opening address by Marja Ruotanen, Director of Human Dignity and Equality, Council of Europe

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour and a pleasure for me to represent the Council of Europe at today's Conference on “Monitoring the implementation of the Istanbul Convention: new synergies” organised by the Chairmanship of Bosnia and Herzegovina of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in this beautiful city of Sarajevo.

Sarajevo is not just a beautiful city, but it is also a symbolic one for the Istanbul Convention. Almost exactly four years ago – on 24 October 2011 - the very first promotional event organised after the opening for signature of the Istanbul Convention in May 2011 took place here in Sarajevo. Some of the persons present four years ago are with us again today. Dubravka Šimonović, United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, who just spoke before me, addressed the 2011 event as co-chair of CAHVIO, the group that drafted the Istanbul Convention. Ismeta Dervoz participated in her capacity of Vice-President of the Committee for Gender Equality of the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Samra Filipović-Hadžiabdić, was the motor behind also of the 2011 event. All three of you have made a remarkable contribution to our common effort to combat gender based violence through the Istanbul Convention.

The Istanbul Convention has often been described as a promise – a safety-net - to all women victims of violence or at risk. But experience shows that such a promise can only be turned into reality through a strong and effective monitoring mechanism – through efficient implementation.

The drafters of the Istanbul Convention clearly bore this in mind. The entry into force of the Istanbul Convention last year, in August, triggered the setting-up of a powerful two-tiered monitoring mechanism: the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), the Council of Europe's watchdog on violence against women and domestic violence – and I am pleased that Marceline Naudi, Second Vice-President of the GREVIO together with four other members are able to attend today's Conference, and the Committee of the Parties, which not only elects the members of GREVIO but also follows up on their findings. We have the honour to have Rudolf Lennkh, First Vice-Chair of the Committee of Parties, with us today.

Much of the credit for having initiated the setting-up of the monitoring mechanism is due to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, which adopted rules on the election of members of GREVIO in November 2014. This enabled the Parties to select highly qualified candidates and the Committee of the Parties to elect the very first 10 members of GREVIO last May. The newly elected members of GREVIO held their first meeting just about a month ago. We can all proudly say today that the Istanbul Convention's monitoring mechanism has been successfully put into operation. But, as we all know, this is only the beginning of a long story.

A lot is at present in the hands of GREVIO. By the first quarter of next year, GREVIO is expected to adopt a questionnaire which will serve as a basis for the evaluation process.

Today's Conference sends an important signal: GREVIO and the Committee of the Parties will not – nor do they want to - be left alone in their challenging tasks. Synergies with all key stakeholders are needed. And today's Conference – I am confident - will contribute towards achieving this objective.

Who are these stakeholders?

Let's start with government co-ordinating bodies designated or established under Article 10 of the Convention. They are the driving force of the national machinery on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. As such, they have four fundamental tasks: co-ordinating, implementing, monitoring and evaluating government action. The Convention leaves much discretion to the Parties as to the type of body or bodies that should carry out these tasks. And we know that countries are working hard – and sometimes struggling - to meet this crucial Convention requirement. Today's conference provides a great opportunity to share experiences from different countries and highlight challenges and good practices. It is very important to use this occasion.

Second, parliamentary structures. Their role is another important element of the Convention that needs to be carefully thought through. Both GREVIO, when adopting its rules of procedure last month, and the Parliamentary Network "Women free from violence", at its latest meeting a few weeks ago started to reflect on this unique feature of the Istanbul Convention. GREVIO will need the input of national parliaments, not only in their law-making function, but also in their oversight of governmental action. This will, in turn, strengthen the internalisation of principles derived from the Istanbul Convention at national level and enhance democratic accountability of the Parties.

Third, civil society. Needless to say that its active contribution to the monitoring process - through shadow reporting for instance - will be instrumental for GREVIO to get a full picture

of progress made by the Parties and the actual problems encountered on the ground. Their input into GREVIO's work will be really essential.

Fourth, our valuable partners in other international and regional organisations. I cannot emphasise enough how much I look forward to co-operating with Dubravka Šimonović in her capacity as the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, as well as to continue our excellent collaboration with our partners in UN Women. Also, the Organization of American States and its Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (Belém do Pará Convention) continues to be an important partner for us.

And finally, national human rights institutions. They are unequivocally important in contributing to an effective monitoring of the Convention. They are the cornerstone of national human rights protection systems and, increasingly, serve as relay mechanisms between international human rights standards and national authorities. They could help in "bridging" between civil society actors, GREVIO and the Committee of the Parties. This might indeed be the right point in time to explore new roles and activities for these institutions in the context of the Istanbul Convention monitoring process.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We must widen the circle of countries in Parties to the Convention and, at the same time, tighten the circle around perpetrators of gender-based violence. To achieve this double-objective we need:

First, to make sure that as many Council of Europe member States as possible become Parties to the Istanbul Convention. While I congratulate the 18 member States which have already done so, I call on the other 29 to follow suit as soon as possible. I should also like to welcome the ongoing discussions within the European Union for it to become a party to the Convention. We stand ready to discuss the modalities with our EU friends in due course.

Second, we need to make the standards of the Istanbul Convention a reality in everyday life of every woman and girl. I trust that today's conference will greatly contribute to create the necessary partnerships and synergies among government, parliamentary, non-governmental, other international and regional organisations and other independent actors in order for the promise of this "gold standard" to become true across the Continent.