

**Secretary General, Ambassador Jean-Baptiste Mattei, Chairman of the Minister's Deputies**

**Excellencies,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

- It is a **great honour and a pleasure** for me to be here with you today. My **special thanks go to H.E. Ambassador Mattei, and all of you** for the invitation. **This exchange is special for me as it is the last in my capacity of President of GREVIO**, the body I have had **the honour and the privilege to preside** since its establishment in 2015.
- I would also like to thank **H.E. Ambassador Mattei and through him the French authorities** for their contribution to what I think was an excellent conference **“Women’s Rights at the Crossroads: Strengthening International Co-operation to Close the Gap between Legal Frameworks and their Implementation”**.
- The **participation of Marlène Schiappa, Minister of State for Gender Equality and the Fight against Discrimination of France**, confirms your **commitment to keep gender equality and ending violence against women high in the political agenda of the Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and the G7**.
- Feedback to the Conference last week, from participants and my colleagues representing the global and regional mechanisms on women’s rights has been very positive. They speak about the event as **“ an informing, working**

**and networking opportunity”** – one which allowed participants to talk about challenges but also achievements, to build alliances and partnerships, to learn from each other, to agree or disagree but make sure that we keep the conversation going and most important **keep up the good work to uphold women’s rights and to end discrimination and violence against women**. I believe the Conference also underlined **the leading role the Council of Europe** plays in promoting women’s rights and combatting violence against women in all its forms.

- I would also like to **thank both the Secretary General and the Deputy Secretary General for their contribution and personal involvement**. Under your leadership, the Council of Europe and your colleagues ensured not only a very successful running of this event but also put **on the agenda two very critical substantive topics that will dominate future discussions in preventing violence against women and gender equality**. These were the **‘domestic violence/ child custody’ issue** and the relationship of **“ending gender-based violence against women to reaching the Sustainable Development Goals”**. I will return to these issues later in my intervention.
- **The Council of Europe is often referred to as the lead organisation** when it comes to **gender equality, women’s rights and ending violence against women**. And for the right reasons. CoE is at the origin of some of the most progressive standards such as the **Istanbul Convention** and the most **recently adopted recommendation to tackle sexism**. Gender equality and violence against women have also been **high on the political agenda and the priorities of several presidencies of the organisation**. This is important because it shows that this organisation does not just talk about the issues,

but it **acts**. This, is the kind of **political leadership** that we need at times when the going gets tough and human rights of women face difficult times.

- **Your Excellencies,**
- Progress with ratification and the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, are on track. **34 state parties have ratified and eleven, as well as the EU, have signed.** In this context, I would like to **congratulate Ireland for the most recent ratification of the Convention.** I hope it will inspire other states to do so.
- I have had the possibility to inform you during previous exchanges and the events last week about **the work of GREVIO, the challenges member states face with implementation** and how the **recommendations by GREVIO and the Committee of the Parties are guiding the states in their efforts to overcome difficulties and continue to make progress.**
- When we get **very positive feedback from states that undergo monitoring,** (as we often do), i.e. **when states say that they can make good use of GREVIO's recommendations** to better implement the IC, it is a **sign of not only GREVIO fulfilling its mandate, but also, the system working.**
- **No state has the perfect solution to all the issues around preventing violence, protecting women and prosecuting perpetrators. But working together, they can raise up to the challenge.** And this is what monitoring is doing. When GREVIO's **expertise is combined with the political will of states, it can and is bringing positive change.**

- In this regard, **the exemplary cooperation between GREVIO and the Committee of the Parties chaired by Ambassador Walaas of Norway, has indeed been working flawlessly and pointing to success.**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

- Last Thursday, **I humbly received the Council of Europe *Pro Merito* Medal awarded by the Secretary General during a reception hosted by her excellency Ambassador Walaas.**
- **Secretary General, I would like to take this occasion to thank you and through you the Council of Europe for this honour. As I mentioned in my acceptance speech, the *Pro Merito* medal was awarded to me in my capacity of President of GREVIO. Therefore, I believe it is an award for the whole GREVIO and its Secretariat for their commitment to the Council of Europe values and work. An endorsement of the Istanbul Convention, the work of GREVIO and its role in supporting member states to eradicate violence against women.**

## **GREVIO**

- Four years have passed since the establishment of GREVIO and its first meeting in September 2015. **Four years of hard and intensive work but also four years of great accomplishment.** It may have felt like a long time but in fact it is a rather short history in which we gave the best of our know-how and expertise, passion, patience and motivation **to build the foundation and**

**set the path for a strong, reliable, competent and independent monitoring mechanism as depicted in the Convention.**

- I have always thought of **GREVIO not only as the robust monitoring mechanism of the most advanced legal instrument in the world** to combat violence against women, but also as **a full-fledged women's human rights entity that can take a leading role in the global push for gender equality**. And judging by the work and results of GREVIO so far, that dream is becoming a reality.
- GREVIO members, I as President and the Secretariat are solicited at numerous high level global, regional and national events. Director Markovic reminded me the other day that I personally as President of GREVIO have attended some 50 events. If we add to that the many attended by my GREVIO colleagues and the Secretariat, the numbers are very high. **And they testify to the high visibility and growing influence of the work of GREVIO in the member states and beyond.**
- A look at the **diversity of those that solicited GREVIO in the past four years, also shows that we had a growing interest in our work from many different entities and people. They range from** our partners at regional and global organisations, to government authorities in member states as well as national law enforcement agencies, service providers, the media, academia and civil society, particularly women's NGO's.

## **Backlash**

- Lately, reactionary, populist movements and governments in many countries around the world **are, once again, openly challenging the values and ideals**

**of civil liberties and gender equality** as part and parcel of their **retrogressive agenda**.

- While we have cause to be concerned about these threats levelled against the very ideals enshrined in the Istanbul Convention, **I am not discouraged or disheartened**. In fact, I think with the **passion, dedication and unrelenting work of its supporters** – including all of you here in this esteemed institution - **the Istanbul Convention will play a critical role in countering retrogressive movements**.
- As Europe's "**signed and sealed**" **promise** of its dedication to eliminating violence against women and ensuring gender equality, **the Istanbul Convention and the Council of Europe will always be key players in pushing the agenda forward and setting the bar highest in these areas**.
- History has time and again proved that **the ideals of democracy, equality, justice, inclusiveness, diversity, tolerance, and standing up for human rights for all, have always outlived movements and regimes that have tried to repress and erase these values**.

### **International Cooperation**

- The Conference last week proved once again that **cooperation and synergies with other organisations, national parliaments, regional and international parliamentary networks, fellow human rights defenders, in state mechanisms, civil society and in different global and regional entities around the world is the only viable strategy for success particularly in difficult times**.

- Both in my capacity as President of GREVIO and on behalf of my colleagues who are members of the Platform of global and regional mechanism on women's rights, I would plead with you **to continue supporting such cooperation and partnerships by helping to institutionalise the Platform and by giving it means to enable regular meetings to coordinate strategies and approaches and to meet the challenges faced.**

### Looking ahead

- As I already mentioned, the Conference focused on two matters from a catalogue of issues that beg the contribution of women' human rights entities everywhere.
- **First, child custody in the context of domestic violence.** There is absolutely no doubt that we all have, and should indeed have, in mind **the best interest of the child in any family context**, including in divorce cases or cases of domestic violence where children either suffer violence directly or witness violence. However, in many cases, at the moment **we are failing both children and women.** And frequently with a tragic end – loss of life.
- **The Istanbul Convention and the work of GREVIO have been hailed as the most advanced standard and the only mechanism that carefully investigates the dangerous liaison between domestic violence and child custody.** We continue to gather evidence as we progress with the evaluation of the implementation of the Convention. The evidence is growing fast and calling for a **more diligent approach** to this issue. One that ensures that **states exercise their obligations of due diligence to eliminate threats to women's rights and children's safety upon divorce.**

- While GREVIO will continue to address such issues during the first baseline evaluation report, **we need to proactively consider the preparation of thematic reports and targeted recommendations on this issue and be prepared to allocate resources, as necessary.**
- **Second, ending violence against women and girls as a condition and accelerator towards the achievement of sustainable development goals.** It is evident that to achieve goal 5: gender equality, **states need to end gender-based violence.** Signature, ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention provides **THE** benchmark for CoE member states to measure progress in this area. We should **seize this opportunity and proactively build alliances with other mechanisms and organisations and put the implementation of global and regional standards at the heart of efforts to achieve the SDGs.**
- **In this context, the French campaign to globalise the Istanbul Convention as the most advanced legal treaty to end gender-based violence is very important** as it demonstrates the potential of this Convention to be used as a **blueprint for legal and policy measures** to tackle gender-based violence beyond the European frontiers. **However, this is not enough. We need to consistently promote other legal frameworks too.** Because no matter how good the IC or any other treaty is, if not put in the larger global context where they can support and complement each other, progress will be slow and at best, difficult to measure.
- **Your Excellencies,**



- I would like to single out **the important role of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in this context. PACE has been at the origin of ground-breaking work and standards regarding gender equality and women's rights.** I strongly believe – and have shared this on numerous occasions during my exchanges with the PACE – that there is a broad range of possible actions which are available to parliaments for the purposes of helping states comply with their treaty obligations in the framework of the Convention and to achieve SDGs. These range from intervening in the ratification process and exercising scrutiny over the formulation of reservations, to **contributing to the incorporation of the Convention's principles and provisions in the domestic legal framework including by enacting necessary new implementing legislation and by promoting international cooperation.** I am sure GREVIO can continue to count on the support of PACE to ensure implementation of the Convention and promote it at national, regional and global level.
- As we continue to make progress in our work to end violence against women, new challenges arise. It is **critical to allocate the necessary financial and human resources to GREVIO so that it can raise up to such challenges and continue to deliver effective monitoring of the implementation of the Convention.**
- It is also **essential that states parties to the IC, along with GREVIO, stay united and be unequivocal in their support for the Convention.** We should not allow short term political gains that play to the tune of individuals or movements that hang on to patriarchy and misogyny.

- At times when opponents of the convention have stepped up attacks on the Convention, **we should not shy away from the Convention** - because that means shying away from a reality of discrimination against women. It means turning our back to one in three women that suffers male violence. It means turning our back to the hundreds and thousands of women that are harassed daily. And to the children that suffer or witness violence.
- **The right to live a life free of violence is a basic human right that is violated when half of the population is denied it because of their gender.** Therefore, adhering to, abiding by and upholding the core values promoted by the Council of Europe and its Istanbul Convention is not just an obligation - it's the **right** and **just** thing to do.

**Your Excellencies,**

- Let me end my remarks by reiterating that any positive contribution made or success attained in the cause of combating violence against women in these formative years of GREVIO, owes much to **the passion, expertise and dedication of GREVIO members and the truly excellent support we received from a most able Secretariat.**
- For me, it has been an **honour and a distinct privilege** to serve the Council of Europe because the values and work of this institution and, particularly the values promoted by the Istanbul Convention are very dear to my heart.

**Thank you!**