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Stock-taking conference “Are we there yet? Assessing progress, inspiring action - the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017”, Tallinn, 1 July 2016

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**Closing remarks by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Estonia and  
Chair of the Committee of Ministers of the CoE,  
H.E. Mrs. Marina Kaljurand**

Dear members of the Council of Europe Gender Equality Commission, and Chairperson Mr. Sergiy Kyslytsya, Director General of Democracy, Ms Snežana Samardžić-Marković, General Rapporteur, Ms Pauline Moreau, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

**I**

It is my great pleasure to be here with you [as the Foreign Minister of Estonia and] as the Chair of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (CoE). First, let me thank the Gender Equality Team of the Council of Europe and the Ministry of Social Affairs of Estonia for organizing such an outstanding and timely stock-taking conference here in Tallinn.

We are very honoured that this high-level conference has brought together so many specialists, leaders and speakers from all over the world - not only from the CoE, but from other international organizations as well - to share experiences and best practices. Deepening the cooperation between international organizations on gender equality issues is no less important than sharing best practices between countries

Gender mainstreaming at the international level supports similar efforts at the national level. It is indispensable to bring together both national and international actors at all levels of policy making. However, the responsibility for transforming words into actions lies first and foremost with states. As we are all aware, no country in the world has achieved full gender equality – it remains a challenge for us all.

Estonia recently started its second Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers and one of our main priorities is gender equality. By the end of our Chairmanship, I would very much like to see: firstly, a stronger impetus for closer co-operation among international organisations in implementing gender mainstreaming Secondly, a wider role for the new media in advancing gender equality. And thirdly, the discussions held yesterday and today providing a substantial input to the next Strategy of Gender Equality.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Fundamental change cannot be achieved overnight. Eliminating stereotypes is a long and hard process. Yesterday, the Director General of Democracy reminded us that we have been working on this issue for a shocking 70 years. I dare to hope that we will not do so for 70 years more. I believe that we are witnessing a quickening pace.

Since its establishment 65 years ago, more than 200 international conventions and agreements have been concluded in the Council of Europe. They have formed a solid basis for international co-operation, establishing common European standards and harmonising legislation on our continent. These treaties cover a wide range of subjects such as human rights, culture, education, the media, public health, social security, law and judicial cooperation. They address traditional themes of international co-operation from extradition to the recognition of diplomas) as well as new challenges posed by scientific and technological development (for example, data protection, cybercrime, genetic engineering and bioethics). In many fields, they have not only set standards for Europe, but have also created enforceable rights for all citizens living on this continent.

In the most recently adopted conventions, there is a rather interesting common denominator. The Istanbul convention, also discussed at this conference, confronts violence against women.

Next Sunday, in France, a brand new convention will be opened for signatures. This, the European Convention on security and safety in sports, targets the mass hooliganism that has become an unfortunate part of certain sports events.

Last autumn in Riga we signed the additional protocol to the Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism, dealing with the phenomenon of “foreign terrorist fighters”. These conventions all contain the idea that destructive human behaviour - predominantly enacted by one gender - demands international cooperation. To adequately address this violence, we have first to acknowledge the prevailing cultural phenomenon that views violence as an inherent part of masculinity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In every direction we look, in Europe or globally, we see multiple crises running simultaneously. We are made to believe that war, mistrust and the infliction of misery are an essential part of human nature. This is surely not the case. Achieving gender equality in every field of life, in every corner of the world – the subject we are about to explore - is one possible remedy for this perception.

Our planet has been in the hands of men for too long. In terms of equality, Europe may be more fortunate than other parts of world. Yet across Council of Europe countries, on average only a quarter (26%) of parliament members are women while even fewer (23%) are part of governments. This cannot be considered normal. We have gathered here to make changes.

We are still at the beginning and the challenges we face are huge. We have been discussing the potential of new media as an empowering tool. But paradoxically, it has become at the same time a channel for the most toxic sexist hate speech that history has seen and a platform

for promoting conservative, patriarchal agendas laced with misogyny, homo- and transphobia.

Yet the spirit of our conference has been strong and optimistic. To quote Margaret Thatcher: “In politics, if you want anything said, ask a man. If you want anything done, ask a woman.” We carried out a stock-take of the work in progress, delving deep into the transboundary legal aspects of hate speech in cyberspace. We concluded that the Istanbul convention is a relevant tool for this phenomenon, too. We discussed the nature and meaning of gender mainstreaming. We made new plans for the next gender equality strategy. Although we have a long way to go, our discussions during the last two days have strengthened our resolve and solidarity.

## II

Estonia is committed to promoting gender equality on the national as well as on the global level.

As our Prime Minister informed us here yesterday, the Estonian government has adopted the first governmental-level development and action plan to also include a strategic view on gender equality policy.

We also plan measures to reduce the gender pay gap, to guarantee efficient legal protection against gender-based discrimination and to support institutional capacity to promote gender equality. We plan to ratify the Istanbul convention next year.

The empowerment of women and their equal rights is also one of our development cooperation priorities, with emphasis on access to quality education. Estonia is determined to spread knowledge about the possibilities that ICT brings to the education and empowerment of women. Let me give you just a few examples: 1) Estonia has supported projects to improve the quality of medical and IT education in the Herat, Faryab, Nangarhar and Balkh provinces of Afghanistan, where local women received a thorough six-month IT training fitted to the needs of local entrepreneurs. As a result, the employment rate and subsistence of women in these regions has improved.

2) We are also supporting a project to strengthen the independent economic livelihood of rural women in Ghana and Kenya and people with disabilities in Uganda.

3) The government of Estonia has made a voluntary contribution towards the implementation of those Council of Europe projects, which aim to combat violence against women, domestic violence and violence against children in the South Mediterranean Region.

4) We are going to support the training program of the European Women's Academy of Political Leadership and Campaigning, in order to help women achieve results in elections. After attending the Academy, women will be inspired and enriched with the knowledge and tools necessary to take the next steps towards more influence in politics.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Societies honouring the principles of gender equality also stand out as beacons of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Achieving gender equality is everyone's responsibility. But it is firstly the duty of political leaders – we have both the power and the opportunity to give voice to important topics.

Our discussions today and yesterday have enriched us with new insights and refreshed our energy. We have provided our colleagues in the CoE and other international organizations with valuable feedback – the confirmation that they do a good and useful job. We have taken another small step towards a fairer, better and more harmonious world. I wish you all bon courage!

Thank you for your attention!