

Panel 5 - High level panel: the way forward

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When asked to what they wished to give priority today, the INGOs of our Conference which are interested in gender equality and inter-sex issues unanimously agreed that it was most important to implement actions that already exist. That was vital.

This is a dream for European women such as Sixtine, Victoria, Alexandra, Erin, Ines, Rafaella, Josepha, Sarah, Jana, Aurelia, Clara, Anna, Lea, Margaux, Wilhemine, Aurora and Europa.

Europa places high hopes on the strategy becoming a reality.

Her parents dreamt of having a boy. She was lucky to be born and not to be the second or third child her parents expected as female foetus are often eliminated in many countries on our continent¹. Why do member states not do something about this?

Her very first toys and books with their pictures of sexist behaviour already indicated the submissive role she was expected to play vis-à-vis her father and her future "prince charming". What can be done to change these stereotypes?

Europa received less pocket-money than her brothers; they also asked for raises but she didn't dare to as she was sure it would be refused - according to recent studies this is how the seeds of inequality are sown early on in life. So what should we do?

As a teenager she was brilliant; she continued into post-secondary education but was not encouraged to study sciences, but recommended to enter a profession without any responsibility or need to take decisions. Nevertheless, she continued to post-graduate level where she met a number of wonderful teachers but also others who belittled her, and she encountered the same sexist attitude that she had encountered among students, men in the street and in sports.

She wanted to continue her research into women's rights but she was discouraged from doing so – it would not lead to a fine university career as there are virtually no professorships and no senior positions at the Council of Europe. Why not?

¹ 117 boys born for every 100 girls in Azerbaijan, 115 in Armenia and the same number in Albania etc.

- « La masculinisation des naissances en Europe orientale », C. Z. Guilmoto et Géraldine Duthé, Population & Sociétés, n°506, 2013
- <https://www.ined.fr/fr/tout-savoir-population/memos-demo/fiches-pedagogiques/l-avortement-selectif-des-filles>

She decided to do voluntary work in the human rights field but she was living in a country where all political activity was limited and where nearly all funding for such activities is allocated to major NGOs comprising mainly professionals, who reply to public tenders, or to smaller NGOs whose activities are supervised by the courts and registered on platforms to which they do not always have access. How can one meet the demands of various bodies such as the CEDAW, the GREVIO, and GRETA if there are no longer any free NGOs?

Europa obtained public European funding which she was accused of using for political purposes; she argued that it was being used in accordance with Plato's concept of *res publica* as he analysed it in "Politics", but she was threatened with legal penalties if she did so again. What protection can the CoE offer to protect the process of creating democratic thought in various member states?

Anything other than parity is unthinkable for Europa, 50% is the only acceptable quota for that is what equal means but that is far from what is being recommended with regard to female representation on company boards, in all decision-making places, parliaments, and governments, and even at the CoE.

She started out her career in a business enterprise at the same hierarchy level as her fellow students but she was soon refused one promotion after the other; she worked two months per year free of charge in the same employment as a man and everybody thought that was perfectly normal. Why does it take so long for European strategies to be applied in real life? What confidence can one have in treaties and charters with which signatory states do not comply? What can one say about reports such as "Violence against irregular migrant women"²? Since 1951 the Geneva Convention is supposed to protect them in the event of assault while migrating, and since then European and national regulations have been drawn up on the same subject. But do member states apply them when these refugees cannot even give birth in a hospital?

Very few women in Europe have as perfect a command of information-processing and digital tools as Europa; she looks for comparative European data produced by the CoE and beyond, but the main source of her knowledge, member states' laws, are not all available in English. Europa is kept at a distance by these institutions, which are supposed to serve the citizens; she calls on them for help but cannot obtain the information she requires. Why?

Of course she naively believes that she can have a child when she wants, if she wants and that she will be entitled to reproductive rights and be free to choose to abort if she wishes, but her country, like others, is reneging on established rights that were once taken for granted. However, of course, if a child is the product of sexual intercourse between a man and a

² Smain Laacher, survey carried out for the UNHCR, NEW ISSUES IN REFUGEE RESEARCH Research Paper No. 188 "Violence against irregular migrant women": Algeria, France, Spain and Morocco", April 2010

woman, the woman has to bear all the responsibility. When is this going to change?

A school-friend believed promises made to her and now she is a prostitute who is moved from one country to the next every three months like cattle, as a sex object for whom men are willing to pay money. Another classmate rents out her womb and uses the proceeds of her pregnancies to pay for her studies and to help her family but her husband sometimes confiscates her money, if not worse. Are children objects that can be sold or given away without any further consideration? Children who do not come up to expectations are not delivered; they are objects and therefore slaves, the outcome of a service rendered, but not someone with rights.

For a long time Europa thought that she would achieve self-fulfilment in her religion. She knows that religious organisations are protected by the European Human Rights Convention and Article 17 of the Lisbon Treaty, and yet there are very few religions which comply with the principle of gender equality and they seldom convey the message of equality. More often religions promote the submission of girls and women and a patriarchal vision in which they continue to believe. Is it not time to take a look at these obstacles to equality and consider how they can be removed? Particularly in view of the shortage of public funding in Europe.

Europa's cousin lives in Cologne. On New Year's Eve 2016 she went out with friends. She was raped. Her family did not want her to lodge a complaint as that would publicise her dishonour. Her cousin heard the mayor of the city saying that it was the fault of the young women and the chief of police claimed that there had been no problems. She decided to lodge a complaint with the police but was not given a warm welcome, to say the least.

Europa got married and her husband turned out to be violent, he hit her. It was no consolation to know that every three days a woman is the victim of a fémicide. There are at least 6 000 deaths every year in Europe, in other words the elimination of the total population of Australia in the space of one hundred years.

So Europa decides she has to do something and her nightmare continues. It is difficult for her to gain access to the courts as she has no money of her own for she has given up working because there were no nurseries with suitable opening times to allow her to combine her professional and working life. Her witnesses are vilified in court and the judges refuse to accept her evidence. Europa notes that the judges dealing with her case are ignorant. Where is she going to live with her daughter? She is finally sentenced for false accusations and her husband is delighted. She is brave enough to appeal against the judgment but she loses her appeal.

She reads the reports by the Commissioner for Human Rights and demands that the European Human Rights Convention be applied – she places her hopes in the European Court of Human Rights. She seeks application of Article 3 of the Istanbul Convention, stipulating that: "violence against women' is understood as a violation of human rights".

Europa realises that she is being beaten by her husband under the aegis of human rights!"

She understands that even languages are against her. Why are steps not taken immediately to change European languages which discriminate against women? It would suffice to add *woman* to titles to ensure that they respect women and are not discriminatory: In French "Droit de l'homme et de la Femme", "Convention Européenne des Droits de l'Homme et de la Femme", "Cour Européenne des Droits de l'Homme et de la Femme", "Commissaire aux droits de l'Homme et de la Femme", and if not, why not simply a Commissioner for Women's Rights? Why does the Council of Europe say nothing about these points? Is it just a question of language? No, it is not.

Why does the Council of Europe not do anything about symbols, Europa asks. Why are there no statues of women in the gallery around the Assembly Chamber? Models of European women should be promoted as should the *Clause of the most favoured European*. Is this an idle dream?

And are these values not even becoming completely out-dated in view of the development of transhumanism³. Technological advances⁴, artificial intelligence, and behavioural studies by Google and Co without the slightest supervision⁵, by men in general. What future is there for the bionic women of tomorrow vis-à-vis men who have been made all-powerful and dominant?

³ <https://humanityplus.org/philosophy/transhumanist.faq>

⁴ <https://www.ingress.com/>

⁵ Norbert Wiener « La cybernétique : information et régulation dans le vivant et la machine », éd. Seuil 2014

Francis Fukuyama, « Our post human future : Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution » 2002 ; version française éd. Folio, 2004

Sonia Bressler « Nouvelles technologies, nouveaux publics », éd. Flament, 2015