

Panel 5 – High Level Panel: The way forward

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First, I would like to thank each one of you here in the room personally. Not only because you have found a possibility to enjoy the Nordic version of summer here in Tallinn, but I would like to thank you from my heart for the work everybody here has done – the work that has been done with your heart, passion, dedication and deep expertise in helping Europe and world to achieve gender equality.

- I think that we all agree that regardless of steps taken and improvements achieved, all five strategic objectives of the present Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy still stand as a challenge before us. Similar challenges face us at the national level.
- All girls and all women need to have a life free of violence. They are entitled to an equal pay for the equal job, they should not be the ones who alone carry the care burden and do the unpaid housework and so on. Not only because it's humane, respectful and economically wise but because it will lead to a more stable and safer society. Looking the world today, this is our way forward.
- Estonia is known for many records – according to the Eurostat we have the highest gender pay gap, we also have the highest share of women teachers in the world, we have the highest share of women students, we have the highest share of women students in technologies and communication, we have one of the highest life expectancy gap between women and men and we have the lowest gender gap in pensions. So far. Our government takes all those problems, including

stopping violence against women and combining work and family life, very seriously. Yesterday a Welfare Development Plan for the years 2016 to 2023 was adopted by the Estonian government that also includes a strategic view on gender equality policy. On a national level, creating and supporting institutional capacity to mainstream gender into all our policies and activities is one of the focuses of our new development plan. We have always been a country taking fundamental rights very seriously and I believe that there is not even a possibility for fundamental rights without gender equality.

- We specifically plan to target people's awareness of the need and positive impact of sharing both – the care burden and the unpaid housework more equally between women and men. In order to support this, I soon plan to present an analysis to the government on how to improve the system of parental leaves to make the opportunities more equal for women. The recommendations of the analysis include reserving a part of parental leave only for fathers, as this is one of the best means to support gender equality, but it also enhances the relationship between fathers and their children. The change would give more fathers the opportunity and motivation to stay home with a child and at the same time support women's participation in the labour market. The change would also make the parental leave system more flexible, so the combining of family life and work would be easier. More equal task sharing at home also provides children with positive role models.
- We strongly believe that tackling limitative gender stereotypes should be kept in focus also at the Council of Europe level policy and action planning and that a close co-operation should be built between media,

education and gender equality experts to bring forward de facto changes.

- In Estonia we firmly do believe in wider positive impact of ICT. The women and the girls who have access to Internet and skills to use ICTs have numerous new opportunities in life. From one hand, they have access to information and a possibility to learn about their own rights. On the other hand, this enables women to participate in a modern society on more equal terms with men. But unfortunately violence also takes place in the Internet and social media. Digital world needs to be a tool of empowering women, not a new threat. So here we have a new issue to tackle and we need to find ways to strengthen a safety net to mitigate the Internet threats.
- We propose to continue addressing and tackling even more strongly everyday sexism, be it on streets, at workplaces or online. Gender equality and human dignity are the values that have to be protected and honoured regardless of the environment they exist in. Digital world can and often is unfortunately used to facilitate prevalence of gender stereotypes, online sexism, sexist hate speech, other types of violence against women. Such phenomena can also have a negative impact on women's will to participate in public discussions, in political and public decision making.
- We consider it important to pay more attention to these issues also at the level of Council of Europe and to continue discussing different solutions and practices to tackle them both at national and international level.

- Preventing gender based violence and supporting its victims are also among national priorities of our government. A new comprehensive Strategy to Prevent Violence from 2015 to 2020 includes the plans to tackle the issues of domestic violence, including violence in close relationships, sexual violence and trafficking of human beings. The strategy and its implementation activities take into account that violence towards women takes place more often, is more severe and has graver consequences. The action plan of the strategy is based on co-operation. Although engaging men specifically in acting against the violence towards women is not a part of this specific national strategy, I am of the firm opinion that this should be a part of our way forward. Therefore, just this Wednesday, me together with several other male ministers and high-level officials made a pledge to become Estonian ambassadors in the White Ribbon Campaign of the European Institute for Gender Equality. I would also like to take this opportunity to call my colleagues in other countries and men here today to join the White Ribbon Campaign and commit themselves both publicly and privately to taking firm steps to fight violence against women.
- At the Council of Europe level the focus should stay on helping to realize the standards of Istanbul Convention with the activities planned to provide comprehensive support to Member States both in a preparation process of ratification and implementation. Also the European Union is discussing the accession to the convention which we see as a great opportunity to make use of resources of European level actors to bring forward more rapid and solid change in our societies.
- We firmly believe that gender equality cannot be achieved unless the dual-track approach – both specific measures and gender mainstreaming – is applied. Although gender mainstreaming is not a

new concept, it still needs additional and active impetus to come into reality both on national and international level.

- Additionally, as it is clear that gender mainstreaming on international level lends support also to the same efforts on national level, we support efforts to make its implementation and co-ordination more efficient and systematic in international organizations, including the Council of Europe and the European Union. It is useful to create stronger co-operation links between different international organizations on this issue, to learn from each other and to pool their mutual knowledge, experience and resources to enhance these efforts on all levels of policy-making. I'm happy that our conference also provided an opportunity for this.
- So to conclude, what is our way forward? For the first, we must continue the fight with violence against women be it at home, on street, at workplaces or online. Considering the world without borders we need to be even more coordinated and cooperative in this fight.
- Second, shared responsibilities also need to be brought to family life.
- And last but not least. As it was said in Davos at the World Economic Forum – never has the world changed any faster than it does today and never will the change be any slower than it is today. It means that our goals need to be clearer than ever. Our words need to be clear and understandable, otherwise someone else's are. And in addition to talking we also need to listen more – more dialogue and openness makes us stronger.