

VERBATIM RECORDS
of the Interactive Panel discussion and the exchange of views
in the framework of the Event on the Vigdís Prize for Women's Empowerment
which took place in Vaduz, Liechtenstein, on 28 November 2023

Ms Mariia Mezentseva, Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly

Dear President, dear Secretary General, honourable members of PACE, dear Secretariat, we are continuing the existing tradition of me having the pleasure to moderate the Vigdís Prize ceremony for Women's Empowerment. And today indeed, we are finalising our initiative and it is going to be the first time we are dedicating this Prize to amazing women. And I would like to start this part of our session with the intervention of the President of the Assembly, Mr Tiny Kox. Dear Tiny, the floor is yours.

Mr Tiny Kox, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Thank you very much. Six months ago in Reykjavík, I had the honour of launching the Vigdís Prize for Women's Empowerment, in the presence not only of Iceland's Prime Minister Katrín Jakobsdóttir, of Council of Europe Secretary General Marija Pejčinović Burić and of PACE Equality Committee Chairperson Mariia Mezentseva, but also alongside the woman who has given her name to the Prize, former Icelandic President Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, the first woman in the world to be elected as a Head of State. As we did so then, we pay tribute to her as a champion of women's rights and a model for us all, men and women alike. I truly believe that we are progressing towards a world where women leaders will no longer be an exception, or even a minority, and for that we can be eternally grateful to women like Vigdís. She and others have shattered the glass ceilings in all parts of society, in all of our member States and partner countries, and have paved the way for gender equality which must be at the heart of genuine democracy. Today, we are launching the all-important second stage in the process, which is the call for candidates for this new annual Prize, designed to reward outstanding initiatives to promote the empowerment of women in all their diversity. My thanks to the Liechtenstein Parliament for hosting this event and for raising its visibility through the meeting of the Standing Committee. Dear colleagues, I ask all of you to share the call for applications and to propose candidates from among your relations in civil society, those who are working tirelessly to promote gender equality, equal access to participation and decision making, economic equality and inclusive policies and practice. You will be contributing to making the Prize a meaningful success and putting these people in the spotlight, where they should be. The 60 000-euro award will certainly help the winner to multiply their action for the good. As I said back in May, taking my inspiration from Vigdís' own words, women's empowerment has progressed from "impossible" to "inevitable". The Parliamentary Assembly has been a forerunner in advocating for women's independence, autonomy and indeed, empowerment. The creation of the Prize with the generous financial and political support of Iceland is another tool in our toolkit for building a better future. I take this opportunity to congratulate and thank the six members of the Selection Panel of the Prize, which I will personally preside. The panel is represented here today by our dear friend and ally, Rósa Björk Brynjólfssdóttir, with whom we are delighted to be co-operating again. The call for candidates will close next February, and the Prize will be presented during the Assembly's June part-session. It will be very exciting to follow the process and I am really looking forward to seeing a good number of deserving candidates, thanks for all your proposals! Now before our interactive panel discussion begins, we will watch a video on Vigdís Finnbogadóttir and on "her" Prize, produced by the Assembly's Communication division using footage from Icelandic archives. Enjoy the view!

[Video projection]

Ms Mariia Mezentseva, Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly

Indeed, dear friends if the world will be saved, it will be by women. This is what President Vigdís' message is to all of us, specifically in the challenging times, while several of our member States are going through the international armed conflicts. We hope for the victory and for the peace. And of course, it was such a great pleasure to know the President, even before we launched this Prize, when Iceland started ranking annually the most advanced policies in gender equality in the world. Now, I would like colleagues to come back to our program and we have distinguished panellists today with us. We will have them answering each, two questions and I would like to ask to do it briefly. I will be asking those questions. I would like to present the speakers. We have among them not only President Tiny Kox, but also Ms Bernadette Kubik-Risch, Equal opportunities expert, Liechtenstein. We have Mr Wilfried Marxer, President of the Association for Human Rights, Liechtenstein. We have Ms Rósa Björk Brynjólfssdóttir, member of the Selection Panel of the Vigdís Prize for Women's Empowerment, Office of the Prime Minister of Iceland. So, I would like to not waste the time so we can have discussions with parliamentarians further on. And the first question goes to President Tiny Kox. We will make a small

pause while our distinguished panellists will take their seats at the podium. Please, dear guests take your seats [...] Thank you, dear friends, we may continue now. Dear Tiny, together with the government of Iceland, Parliamentary Assembly is in the heart and in the origin of this Prize by creating it and naming it after President Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, the first woman in the world to be elected as Head of State. And we've seen how many achievements she achieved. This was to ensure equal access and the participation of women in decision making. How do you possibly see the contribution of the Prize to the empowerment of women and young girls?

Mr Tiny Kox, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Thank you very much. I think that the Prize helps us to understand that women's empowerment is not a given, but it's acquired. Women empowerment is not given by us, good man, "here you got the bit of power", no, you acquire. And it is up to men to accept it, to understand it and to understand that by empowering women you also improve the position of men. So, in the end, there is something in for us as well. And I think this is very important in the Prize. We saw this beautiful video. Thank you very much for making it. It says it all. If we want to save the world, it will be done by women. This does not say too much because men are quite good in organising chaos and problems and a lot of misery. So, we need women to save the world. And I hope that men are able and will understand that we can play our role by empowering women. Nobody loses, everybody wins.

Ms Mariia Mezentseva, Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly

Dear Tiny, I think you have started answering my second question. How can men support this process of empowering women and girls?

Mr Tiny Kox, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

First, by being a bit humbler than we normally are, and secondly, by understanding - as I said - you do not lose anything by making it possible that women acquire empowerment. They do it by themselves. And of course, it is good and great if there is support from everybody who understands that you do not lose anything, you win something. And when we use big words like we have to save the world, if we forget about half of humanity, all women and girls on earth, then it surely will not function. So at least you could say, let us give it a try. So, let us be humble men. But if we can play a role and we are invited to do so, I would be most grateful to do my fair share.

Ms Mariia Mezentseva, Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly

Thank you very much, dear Tiny. I think you are a role model not only as a president, but also with this frank and simple advices which every man and boy can do. Dear Ms Kubik-Risch, you have been working on gender equality for many years, including as Head of Equal Opportunities Unit with Liechtenstein State Administration. How has your country evolved over the years? Could you share about some milestones in Liechtenstein's gender equality policy, please? The floor is yours.

Ms Bernadette Kubik-Risch, Equal opportunities expert, Liechtenstein

Thank you very much. First of all, I just want to say that when the Head of the Liechtenstein delegation asked me a few weeks ago whether I would be prepared to take part in this event and say a few words, I was really keen to do so because Liechtenstein embarked on the process of equality very late in the day. And I think that this Prize is a very strong and hard-hitting signal for private organisations and others here in Liechtenstein. So, I am very grateful indeed to you for that. I mean, remember that we only introduced voting rights for women in 1984. Since then, however, we have made great strides forward on all levels. Now, specifically on your question on the various milestones in our country, there are very few really for me to home on into, but I think that the most important, of course, was enshrining equality between men and women in the Constitution. And in the same year, the Liechtenstein Parliament, the Landtag, directed a motion to the Government which called on it to ensure that any provisions which were not yet in alignment with the principle of equality should be brought into compliance. And I think that that constitutes a significant milestone. Now, we also adopted specific legislation on the equality of men and women in the workplace and that specific law was then further expanded and we transposed EU directives. A third milestone that I would just like to mention is that in 2001, Liechtenstein introduced a comprehensive law on protection against violence. And then in 2020, the Liechtenstein parliament ratified the Istanbul Convention and subsequently the Government constituted a co-ordination group to enforce that convention. But we have done more than just pass laws. We have also put in place a raft of different proposals and measures in a variety of different areas. And often, that process was done in conjunction with NGOs. I think that Liechtenstein has a thriving civil society, a host of different women's organisations as well, which have been active in this process.

Ms Mariia Mezentseva, Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly

Thank you very much indeed for that. And I have another question for you. Historical fact, dear colleagues. Women's suffrage was only introduced in Liechtenstein in 1984 and this was an important step in achieving full and effective gender equality, followed by many other measures. Do you see, Ms Kubik-Risch, a need, an extra need for action in Liechtenstein today? And if so, which are these areas? Thank you.

Ms Bernadette Kubik-Risch, Equal opportunities expert, Liechtenstein

Thank you very much. Well, obviously, even though a great deal has been done over the last 40 years, clearly Liechtenstein still has work to do. We need to have balanced representation of men and women in decision-making roles. We also need to decriminalise termination of pregnancy in Liechtenstein. We also need to have better division of paid and unpaid labour in Liechtenstein. We are also waiting for paid parental leave and have been waiting an awful long time for that as well. So, fair distribution of labour. Now, we have a legal basis for these things, but I think much remains to be done in terms of awareness raising for that to catch up. And I think that that has a lot to do with trying to break away from stereotypical roles. So obviously, we want to involve politics as well as the business world in order to push forward even further with equality.

Ms Mariia Mezentseva, Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly

I would like to remind dear colleagues, the latest countries to be ratifying the Istanbul Convention were Ukraine, then the United Kingdom, and we expect more to follow because indeed, women's rights are human rights, and it involved deeply in the research that it contributes the developments of our economies and some of our member States currently are going through stagnation, but also with the new-born babies. The law that can emphasise the right of parental leave not only for women, but also for men in Ukrainian parliament. It was practically implemented by our members, for instance. Thank you very much. And we move on to our next distinguished speaker, Mr Wilfried Marxer. Dear Mr Marxer, you are regarded as THE human rights expert in Liechtenstein, having worked extensively on key issues such as minority rights, religious tolerance and the fight against extremism, which is also at the heart of our work in the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination. And this is just a few areas, there are many others where you were involved. You have also investigated women's political participation, political and social equality between women and men, and the challenges that remain to be addressed. In this context, can you tell us more about transformative power of the gender equality and women's empowerment which you gathered in your experience?

Mr Wilfried Marxer, President of the Association for Human Rights, Liechtenstein

Well, no, that is very difficult to do. Talking about the transformative force, I mean, we have already heard that you cannot get very far without women and Liechtenstein came to women's equality very late in the day. So, we have got an awful lot of catching up to do. Now, over the last 40 years, since women have had the right to vote, we have, I believe, been pioneering and an awful lot has changed in society. Ms Kubik-Risch talked about the various milestones, something that would have been scarcely conceivable 40 years ago. And that is why we are so very grateful that pressure came from outside. The international community never gave up pushing a country to improve. We have got a monitoring process, for example. I mean, it is not that everything was orchestrated from the outside, rather it came from within. A growing awareness amongst people in Liechtenstein in recent decades. So, there has been a shift in mentalities which has given rise therefore to those milestones and the force of women. Now, of course, it would be a great thing if we could raise women's voices even more and try and increase women's representation because we've got a great deal to do. We have got 60% of government members who are women. That is a terrific achievement. Of course, we have got the Government elected by parliament, but we have got only 20% in parliament. And if you look at local authorities, you can see that only twelve out of eleven posts are occupied by women. And so, there is a great deal of catching up to do there. Now, women, of course, often heavily involved in their families and do not have equal pay. A great deal to be done when it comes to equality in the workplace. So again, we have got still a way to go. And men, of course, I think need to become more involved in the whole process and make sure that they do their bit when it comes to work in the care sector, for example.

Ms Mariia Mezentseva, Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly

Dear Mr Marxer, you said that is impossible to answer such complicated question. I will put another, even more complicated question now and that might need PhD research, but what would be the measures that should be taken, if we dream about it, to achieve fully the women's empowerment?

Mr Wilfried Marxer, President of the Association for Human Rights, Liechtenstein

So, looking at Liechtenstein, there was a popular initiative. We have direct democracy here, of course. We have these civic initiatives and referendums, and we had initiative on introducing quotas in politics. So, you would have, say, equal representation of men and women in parliament. Now, that was rejected, and we have to live with that. And so, we have now to embark on a laborious process, try to raise consciousness and we have to put women into leadership positions. But that of course is the job of political parties in politics. They have to promote women and make sure they are given prominence in election campaigns, for example. But you have to make sure that all the various preconditions are in place. If you look at local authorities, for example, meetings are held in the evening and a lot of women say, well, I cannot take part in meetings in the evening. So, all kinds of small changes that would be helpful and that I think, would bring about greater representation. I remember in 1968, for example, when you had the first girls attending grammar schools because prior to that date it had only been boys and you actually had then higher proportions of girls passing their school, leaving examinations. But again, this is a process. I mean, you have to look at the root causes. You mean, are there some careers which are not particularly attractive to women? Are women not promoted sufficiently within companies? Is it possibly difficult to reconcile a part-time job with a leadership role? Is it difficult to work from home and have leadership jobs? I mean, look at all the potential that is there, particularly look at education. It is something that we should capitalise on for society but also make sure that people are able to fully realise their personal potential. So, make sure they can be involved in politics as well as work perhaps in the care sector as well as in their families. But again, that is something where men have to do their bit and not simply expect all of that to fall to women. It is not sufficient simply to have equality of opportunity at legal level. You have to make sure that is possible at a practical level and women can fulfil that potential.

Ms Mariia Mezentseva, Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly

Thank you, Mr Marxer, to mention one important thing, and this is, of course education. How do we present the understanding of young girls to be addressing the issue of their further jobs and workplaces? That a girl can become an engineer, IT specialist, fly to the space and many other technical issues. Funny to say, going from Zurich here, I saw in the parking lot special spaces. It says ladies and they are painted in red. There are different ways of encouraging women being part, being active part in the society. But the final effect of every member State is coming also from educating our population. And this is extremely important. Thank you for being a promoter of women's rights and empowerment while being a man. Thank you so much for your professional work. We go ahead to our dear friend and speaker who is very well known to you, dear colleagues. And this is Rósa Björk Brynjólfssdóttir, our dear colleague and she's a member of the Selection Panel of the Vigdís Prize for Women's Empowerment and currently works in the Office of the Prime Minister of Iceland. Dear Rósa, you were closely involved in the creation of the Vigdís Prize, and I can only imagine what it symbolises personally to you, but also for all Icelandic women. And this is named after your President. We have seen in this important short movie how she empowered not only the office, the institution of the President, but also all the women around, being meanwhile the only woman at the table. How do you think we can see the award meaning generally for such country as Iceland?

Ms Rósa Björk Brynjólfssdóttir, member of the Selection Panel of the Vigdís Prize for Women's Empowerment, Office of the Prime Minister of Iceland

So first of all, I want to express my gratitude for being here with you, dear colleagues and on this occasion, it is wonderful when we are opening the calls for candidates for this important award. So, Madame Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, she is actually regarded in Iceland as a national treasure. So, whenever she and her legacy are rewarded, we all feel extremely proud. And as our Prime Minister, Ms Katrín Jakobsdóttir said when we launched the Prize in Reykjavík, in Iceland, this spring at Vigdís Finnbogadóttir House, Katrín said Vigdís is the role model of a whole generation, my generation. And her influence is still great as she continues to be an important figure and presence in Iceland. She was a beloved President who influenced the public discourse in Iceland on many subjects. And as you mentioned, Mariia, it's not only the statues, but also what you achieve and what you put your accent on which issues. So, Madame Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, she had most influence, as we saw here in the video, on gender equality, environmental issues, cultural diversity and not least in the field of languages. So, her election as the first woman elected Head of State was of course phenomenal. But we have to remember it did not come out of the blue. Five years earlier, the first women's strike in Iceland had occurred and that resulted to the Icelandic Parliament issuing and passing a gender equality bill in 1976, thus adopting an official gender policy in the country. So, these were the events that led up to her election. But her election also made huge changes. It was not only symbolic. When she was elected as a divorced single mother, women only made up 5% of parliamentarians in Iceland. But when she ran

and became the first female elected Head of State anywhere in the world, it changed everything in Iceland and also elsewhere, I hope. And just by looking at numbers, we can see that after her election, the number of women parliamentarians rose from 5% to 15% in the coming term, and the next coming term it rose up to 20.6%. So, her election made marks because the increased number of women in parliament meant that they fought for issues that was not considered real issues before, such as parental leave, such as day care and to diminish the gender pay gap. So, none of these issues were seen as major issues before that. So, I also want to mention because we have talked a little bit about men and their support. Vigdís herself mentioned quite often how important the support of men was during her campaign, especially fishermen and sailors. They came out openly to support her so in these typical male dominant sectors, because they realised how important the role of women back home was. So that was quite beautiful.

Ms Mariia Mezentseva, Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly

Thank you very much. That is very interesting to know how it was developing and of course we know that was the really first step electing Vigdís as a President to the today's achievement seen in Iceland as a championship in gender equality. But Rósa, what do you think can be a powerful message to the younger ones, to the younger generations? As we see in our member States, sometimes they do not even come to elections. Not even talking about being a candidate for local or national elections.

Ms Rósa Björk Brynjólfssdóttir, member of the Selection Panel of the Vigdís Prize for Women's Empowerment, Office of the Prime Minister of Iceland

So being an Icelandic woman who was five years old when Vigdís Finnbogadóttir was elected and 21-year-old when she quitted her post, I know personally how me, and my generation were influenced by the fact of having a woman as a Prime Minister. So, the main reason, for example, this Prize and putting into the limelight the hard work that champions for gender equality are working day by day is, of course, for promoting role models, because the role models have to be there for the generation to come. And it is very interesting to see my colleagues here from Liechtenstein who has been fighting recently in our view this fight for gender equality. And I hope they will look at us and we are always open to give advice and share our experience. But even in Iceland we have great challenges still. We have domestic violence, we have a system that we have to improve better for the gender equality but I really want to emphasise the importance of being a role model, have as many role models in front of us for the generation to come and for other women who passes on to the younger generation that everything is possible. And as Madame Finnbogadóttir told herself to Guardian in an interview in 2017, she said "women thought, if she can, I can". So, the aim of these prizes is to reward outstanding initiatives promoting the empowerment of women in all their diversity, to create role models for other women and girls who are fighting for gender justice. And it is therefore very fitting for the Vigdís Prize to be named after her. And I want to finish, if I may, Mariia, on behalf of my country and my Prime Minister, Ms Katrín Jakobsdóttir, who is the second female to be Prime Minister of Iceland. I want to give my sincere thanks to the members of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination that have facilitated the launching of the Prize, with, of course, the tireless support of the President of PACE, Tiny Kox. Thank you so much. And to his dedicated staff. So, thank you so much for this support.

Ms Mariia Mezentseva, Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly

Thank you very much indeed. I experienced that phrase myself. I met Vigdís in 2017 in Reykjavík for the Women Parliamentary Platform, and at that time I was a city Council member, being under constant challenges from the mayor and his ruling majority back then, God bless his soul, made many jokes about young women in local parliaments where Ukraine was struggling, the new generation of politicians. And currently, we're also numbering them, not only in numbers, but also the quality. You are very right, dear Rósa. This is the role model that young leaders, young generation might have, or so-called mentors who can advise so that they don't waste time on such stories which I have had in my past. Thank you very much for your interventions, dear panellists, but this is not over yet. We will now give the floor to our members of the Assembly for their remarks. I have already in my list three colleagues who indicated a wish to speak. And this is, of course, our dear friend Franziska Hoop, the Chairwoman of the Liechtenstein delegation. Franziska, the floor is yours.

Franziska Hoop (Liechtenstein, ALDE)

Thank you, Mariia. Mr President, speakers, dear colleagues, on behalf of the Liechtenstein delegation, I would like to thank the panellists most warmly for the important and interesting things that they have said. I am delighted to see so many Liechtensteiners here today. Particular thanks to Ms Kubik-Risch and Mr Marxer. Thank you for agreeing to come along. Gender equality still has not been achieved. The orange days that are taking place at the moment show us just how frequently domestic violence

still occurs and how often we see gender inequality across Europe. And combating this requires our hardest work, and I believe that civil society plays a central role here. They are often at the front line when it comes to promoting equality and to fighting for that, and we must thank them most warmly for that and, of course, show our greatest respect. I am delighted that the Council of Europe is honouring this by launching the Vigdís Prize. And it is great to see that we will be awarding the Prize for the first time in the year that we will also celebrate the 75th anniversary of our Organisation, which is wonderful. Thank you very much.

Ms Mariia Mezentseva, Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly

Thank you, dear Franziska, for your leadership and, of course, yet again for having us all here. Next on my list is the Chairwoman of Latvian delegation. Zanda, are you here? The floor is yours, please.

Ms Zanda Kalniņa-Lukaševica (Latvia, EPP/CD)

Thank you, Mariia. And thank you all for this very important discussion. Indeed, gender equality and women empowerment are very topical. We have achieved important milestones in these issues already. But nevertheless, the road ahead is long and consists of many, many challenges even in the most developed and equal countries. Countries where we can witness progress in equality must show benefits from openness and inclusion and by that, encourage and inspire others. And this is why the initiative like the Vigdís Prize for Women's Empowerment is very significant indeed. The first woman elected Head of State in the world, president of Iceland Vigdís, as well as her successors and here allow me to mention for me personally a very significant person, Latvian first woman president, Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga. They are excellent examples of women empowerment and serve as inspiration for many, many women and men around the world in everyday life. So, allow me also to linger on memories of this spring when together with women at PACE and in the leadership of Despina, we organised breakfast meeting in Riga with distinguished Dr Vīķe-Freiberga. And I think indeed these women who already have their experience as leaders, like Latvian President, Icelandic President and also including you, Mariia, here, are strong and respectful symbols of equality and women empowerment. And if we have more of these examples, we can achieve more. And that is why I think such meetings and such initiatives like Vigdís Prize for Women's Empowerment give us strengths and believe that there is nothing that we cannot achieve, and it shapes a better future for all of us. And allow me to share with you a hope that this week Latvia will be another country joining the club of those who ratified the Istanbul Convention. We will have a vote in two days - on Thursday - in our parliament. We are going through a difficult kind of discussions because the level of disinformation that our country is facing right now, it is quite incredible and enormous. So, I hope that we will succeed the vote and I hope that all of you will be in your thoughts with us on Thursday and keeping your fingers crossed. Thank you.

Ms Mariia Mezentseva, Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly

Brilliant news. And I wanted to say that we will all pray, but then I remember these religious organisations in many member States who were going through this war against the ratification. But we still will pray you will make it. Thank you, for your leadership and we are going to the next leader, the Chairwoman of the Culture Committee, Yevheniia Kravchuk, who has the floor.

Ms Yevheniia Kravchuk (Ukraine, ALDE)

Thank you, Mariia. Thank you to all the guests in the panel. I think it is a very important topic and I would like to thank again the Equality Committee for the leadership in this process. And I would like to refer to the resolution to the report that I did in the Equality Committee. It was about the role of women during conflicts and peace reconciliation. And I want to underline again that of course, during conflicts, during the wars, women are in most vulnerable group, but at the same time women are leaders. I think Ukraine has been setting an example having three women in Bureau and Standing Committee of PACE and I think it is a vivid example of what women can do, women from Ukraine. And as well I would like to underline that very important topic is ensuring that women participate in economic development in building of the economies. In Ukraine, we are discussing now the facility plan for 50 billion euros to receive from the European Union and together with our cabinet ministers, we made sure that gender aspect is one of the criteria to judge to receive this money because women have to be in the front line of the economic development. And for sure we together with Mariia and Olena Khomenko will make all possible that women will be in all the active roles in the recovery plan and reconstruction of Ukraine. Thank you.

Ms Mariia Mezentseva, Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly

Thank you, dear Yevheniia for mentioning this case and the instrument of gender equality in State funds and the funds of international partners, which is very important. Next on my list is our Swiss friend and representative who was re-elected recently and congrats to her, Ms Sibel Arslan. Please, the floor is yours. Welcome back.

Ms Sibel Arslan (Switzerland, SOC)

Thank you very much Mariia. I would like to ask my question in German. So, I would like to thank the members of the panel. Thank you very much. Somebody mentioned the role of women in business. Well, in Switzerland, Liechtenstein's neighbouring country of course, we are also discussing the shortage of skilled workers and talking about the need to ensure that women who have the necessary skills also have the necessary family support so that they can become more involved in the workplace. And perhaps we can hear a little more advice about how we might draw on the potential of women. Now I also want to talk about peace processes, women being involved in peace process negotiations. We know that negotiating or discussions tend to last longer. These processes go on for longer when women are involved. 30% longer. And so, I think it is a very good idea to ensure that our foreign policy is also firmly anchored on the principle of gender equality. Thank you.

Ms Mariia Mezentseva, Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly

Three more speakers and then we come back to the panel to answer a very important question on peace resolutions and economic elements. The next on my list I have Fiona from Ireland. Please, dear Fiona, the floor is yours.

Ms Fiona O'Loughlin (Ireland, EPP/CD)

Thank you Mariia and thank you of course for your leadership in relation to this. And when we think of female leaders, we only have to look at the top table and look at Despina also in terms of her encouragement and support, particularly of the women's group that has formed. Two of the most genuinely inspirational moments that I have had since becoming a member of PACE have been the meeting with Vigdís and with the former President in Latvia. And I just want to say that is just incredible news that within two days we are going to have the vote in relation to the Istanbul Convention. But I think the wisdom and the experience, and I am very conscious that we are where we are because of standing on the shoulders of women like those two incredible women. So, we should never stop looking for inspirational role models. And I think that is true within all of our own countries, maybe not to the same degree. And I think it would be interesting if from every one of our 46 member States that we were able to look at providing centrally into the women's group, just maybe one or two women within our own countries and something about them that has inspired us on our own role and on our own path. And I can immediately think of two in my own country. Constance Markievicz, who was not just the very first woman elected to the Irish Parliament, but the very first woman elected to the Westminster Parliament and the second female minister in the whole world. And the other would be Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, who it took 60 years for another minister, female minister, and she decriminalised homosexuality in Ireland only 30 years ago. So, again, really, really strong women. And I think that we all learn so much collectively from these women that are inspiration to all of us. In terms of the Vigdís Prize, I think is a great thing to do and I am just wondering how we can communicate it, how we can encourage women to enter, what the process is going to be. As the Chair of the Women's Caucus in Ireland, I am conscious that as of yesterday, the gender pay gap kicked in and as we say, women are working for free for the rest of the year from yesterday. Being a member of a parliament where we still only have 24% women, we all have a lot to do. So, we have to inspire one another, we have to learn from one another, and we have to, I think, collectively support women where we can. The previous speaker spoke about the peace process and the voice of women in peace. The peace process in Ireland would never have come about if it wasn't for the National Women's Coalition and for women like Eileen Paisley, who was wife of Dr. Ian Paisley, who said that eventually she was able to when she saw her grandchildren being born, she was able to persuade her husband that she wanted her grandchildren to grow up in a time of peace. So, the voice of the women both elected in positions, but also the voices of women who had influence over men who were elected, were really, really important. But thank you. I think this is a wonderful initiative and I really wish you the very best of luck. Thank you.

Ms Mariia Mezentseva, Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly

Thank you very much, dear Fiona, thank you for bringing concrete examples. And I think all 46 parliaments are united in the endeavours for better representation of women, and not only. Finally,

friends, we are going to hear from our men members. And this is the chairman of the Social Committee, Mr Simon Moutquin. You have the floor, Mr Moutquin.

Mr Simon Moutquin (Belgium, SOC)

Thank you very much. And I am honoured to be the first man to take the floor. Now, I heard people talking about improving the conditions for women to be able to take power. Well, that depends on men as well. I think it is often quite striking to see how much more frequently men take the floor than women in our Assembly, for example. But let me ask a question to the President. What is being done within the Organisation on the staffing side to ensure that we have a better balance between men and women? And then secondly, I want to talk about the environment because my committee has looked into the link between breast cancer and environmental issues, and we have also looked at the high prevalence of breast cancer among women who work night shifts. We also know that there are other aspects here as well. Just one simple example. Women seem to learn to swim less frequently than men, therefore they are more likely to drown. So, all sorts of things that we need to look at and one thing I would like to point out is that in Belgium, and I don't always go around blowing my own country's trumpet, but we have set up some excellent centres for victims of domestic violence where women can go. They can go and bring their case because the police are there, they can get counselling and psychological assistance. We have the necessary professionals all in one place. And I think it is a really excellent model that ought to be spread out across Europe. I would invite you most warmly to come to Belgium and have a look at what we are trying to do for women who suffer such domestic violence. We have had 24 such murders of women just this year alone so far.

Ms Mariia Mezentseva, Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly

Thank you for bringing up the issue of breast cancer. And by the way, this is not only women who have it is also men with a lower percentage, but still, it is very dangerous disease. I have two more brilliant colleagues on my list and the first one is Iulian Bulai, the President of ALDE. Please, Iulian, the floor is yours.

Mr Iulian Bulai (Romania, ALDE)

Thank you so much, Mariia, thank you and congratulations for this great leadership on this initiative. And I would also welcome amongst us Rósa Björk Brynjólfssdóttir and thank her and the government of Iceland for this great decision of this Prize. I was in that room six months ago and it was extraordinary to be there to see how history was written. And there are, of course, many things to be proud of within this Organisation when thinking of this extraordinary fight that we all have to fight, not only women, but also the partners for this cause, including men. And it is right to give credit to the women in the Assembly who are doing a great job and I think the first and the greatest credit should go to Despina. So, Despina, I want to thank you for what you are doing for this Assembly. You are doing really great. Now, look at this table. Yes. There are four women and three men. And I can guarantee that each of them is doing a fantastic job. And it is not just at random, because we don't believe in equality, but in equity. And just think of this. The only woman that we can recall in ages, being a chair of an Election Observation mission that took place this year to Poland was a woman from ALDE. So, it is possible to give the right amount of space and possibilities for those who can, including women, because they are equal to men in this. It is a matter of also men putting a bit ego down and to allow this happen. Now, if we should practice what we preach, we should look a bit in the retrospective of this Organisation's 70 years of existence. Mariia, you said 29 male Presidents. I am sure they were all brilliant, but I am not that sure that men would have been always a better option than women. Just three women. Imagine this. That is too little. Now, in two months' time, we have a great opportunity to practice what we preach. I will not go more into that. I will just say that if we mean what we are doing, if we really mean it, then we should look at the value of men and women, but also especially of women. And to be given the exact amount of attention, space, power, to be active and to demonstrate that they can be equal to men. And I hope we can do this together in January. But not only that, but also when going home, practice what we preach, both at PACE, but also in our national parliaments. And then we have got a woman Chair from the Liechtenstein delegation. We have got the present Chair from Ukraine within this group chairing the Culture Committee, we have got Fiona being the rapporteur on the Reykjavík Summit. So many women that have shown that they are doing a great job, even better than men. Why are we afraid to do more of this? That is an open question that I am looking forward to getting more answers on. Thank you.

Ms Mariia Mezentseva, Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly

Thank you, dear Iulian, for being very straightforward and supportive to women leadership at PACE. We have chairman of the Migration Committee, Sir Theodoros Rousopoulos, followed by Madame

Gardini. And that would be the end of interventions, friends, because I am sure you got a little bit hungry, and we will have lunch afterwards. Please, dear Theodoros, the floor is yours.

Mr Theodoros Rousopoulos (Greece, EPP/CD)

Thank you, Mariia. First of all, I want to express my gratitude that men are allowed to speak during this session. But of course, you will reply that men were talking for long, for decades. I just want to say that in my country, Greece, the first woman who was elected in the parliament was almost 70 years ago and the first woman who was appointed as a Minister of health care system was almost 70 years ago. And it was my party. That is why I am very proud to say that, which is a right wing party and it is very progressive, in my opinion. Now we have a president of the Republic who is a woman, and we have a lot of women working and producing ideas not only in politics, but in business, etc. If I wanted to provoke you, I would ask if there were a competition which is similar to the men's competition between women. Do women help other women? Do women support other women? Before that, allow me to say a short story from 2015 which is about Iceland. And I found it very interesting. The very well-known, the famous documentarist Michael Moore, the American documentarist, he produced a documentary under the title "Where to Invade Next?" saying the Americans a lot of interesting things about Europe and what do they have to copy if they want to be like Europeans. So, he went to Iceland, and he was talking about the crisis. And during the crisis, as Michael Moore mentioned, all banks were closed, bankrupted, except one bank, which he said was ruled and then the camera turned to these three women: CEO, CFO and the HR department were women. Which is a very exceptional paradigm of what women can do. Yes, I really believe what Vigdís Finnbogadóttir had said that women can change the world and can make it better. Thank you for this initiative. I want to congratulate you all. You do a great job, and I will try to find a woman from my country to propose as a candidate for this Prize. Thank you.

Ms Mariia Mezentseva, Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly

Thank you very much, dear Theodoros. Madame Gardini will be finalising the question time and the panellists will answer because we are a little bit running of time.

Ms Elisabetta Gardini (Italy, EC/DA)

Thank you very much. I will be brief. I too should like to thank the panel, would like to thank all the panellists and all the speakers in the discussion so far. A discussion which has been ongoing for a number of years now, but one which is still sorely needed. Now, I am from a city, Padua, close to Venice, and we had the first female graduate anywhere in the world. And so, this really has been a source of pride for us and something that we have sought to replicate. And the way in which she worked, she took her degree in 1678. She was a polyglot. She wanted to study theology, but she was not allowed to. So, she was not able to take a degree in theology but in philosophy, which at the time was the only route available to a woman. Now, the fact of the matter is that we are from all kinds of different countries. We have different histories and backgrounds and different dates of course and milestones when women got the right to vote. Fairly recent in the case of Liechtenstein and in Italy as well, a fairly recent achievement in the wake of the Second World War. But since then, a great deal has been done. But there are a number of contradictions which still reign. In Italy, for example, I do not know whether you have seen this for yourselves or read it in your newspapers, but we have had a very lively debate because a young girl, aged 22 was killed by her ex-boyfriend, same age, both university students. And this is the product, I think, of a different culture, not a culture of parity, but in Italy we are going a little bit deeper into this, people struggling to understand how this could be and why it had happened. Because we have got some research going on which suggests that there is no correlation between women's achievements and a reduction in violence against women. So, I think this is a phenomenon which is still in the shadows and something that we have not investigated sufficiently. We need to shine a light on that because you would have thought that as women achieve equality, there would be a reduction in the levels of violence that women suffer. But that is not true. And in fact, in the most advanced countries, in countries in which the highest levels of equality, in which equality has been a given for the longest time, there seems to be a greater level of aggression and aggressiveness. And it is not simply because women are more willing to report violence against them, because if a woman is killed, well, she cannot denounce a perpetrator. It is too late. So, I think we need to look at what we can do because above and beyond parity or equality, which, I mean, we have still got a way to go. Why is there still this degree of aggressiveness towards women? Why do women still have to put up with this? I mean, this is what colleagues have talked about. We have talked about levels of violence, we have talked about psychologists dealing with this. But what about prevention? I think we need to do more when it comes to prevention. We have got to try and forestall these acts of violence. And so, I wanted to ask panellists whether they think that that is possible, whether the Council of Europe can perhaps delve a little deeper into this phenomenon. I mean, I don't get the feeling that we have looked at this closely enough, you know, in Italy and elsewhere. We are struggling to understand why these situations

crop up time and maybe we are lagging a little bit behind in Italy when it comes to equality. The problem is that we are seeing high levels of these instances of violence or deaths in those countries which are very much advanced when it comes to equality. So, I don't know whether we can do something on this front. I mean, as I say, this has sparked a whole debate in Italy and it is something that I think that we might collectively want to pursue. Thank you very much.

Ms Mariia Mezentseva, Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly

Mr Seyidov, the chairman of Azerbaijan delegation. If you can be very, very brief and that would make 50-50 parity in questions between men and women.

Mr Samad Seyidov (Azerbaijan, EC/DA)

Yes, Mariia, I will be very brief. Just wanted to express my gratitude to you and to excellent panellists for this amazing discussion. Actually, this is really very important to take into account that we are always talking about democracy, rule of law and human rights. But I think that there is a precondition for all three sacred values that's a woman empowering. And that is why maybe it would be better to include to these three one more: woman empowerment. Because together with them, democracy, rule of law and human rights will be protected much better than we have today. And from this point of view, I think this is the way where we should go. I mean, Council of Europe. On my personal experience, we have a lot of problems and sometimes even with Mr President, we have some discussions, tough discussions, and Madame Secretary General, dear Despina, always try to find way out from the very difficult situations. That is another vivid example, the role of women and the role of those who are looking for way out from difficulties and problems, which sometimes not only we, but Council of Europe itself is. That is why thank you very much for these excellent discussions.

Ms Mariia Mezentseva, Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly

Thank you. I thought we would save some time, but discussions are rolling and rolling. Now, I know Mr Marxer would want to give a brief answer and comment. If anyone else would want to do so, please indicate. Otherwise, we would finalise the panel. Thank you.

Mr Wilfried Marxer, President of the Association for Human Rights, Liechtenstein

Thank you very much. I will pick up on the question from Switzerland in particular, because as you will have gathered, Liechtenstein works very closely with Switzerland. I mean, you will have paid here in Swiss francs, of course. And you will know that we are very close neighbours and that is why it is good if Switzerland can serve as a kind of model for Liechtenstein. I have my doubts, however, because the question was what has to happen in the economy for women to be in leading positions? I mean, I don't think it is sufficient just to legislate, because I think that there will be some resistance or pushback to that. I mean, it is society in and of itself that needs to recognise women's potential and look at what it needs to do to make sure that women stay in their jobs, that they get a good education and then further training so that they can then access those leading posts. I mean, I think there is terrific potential. I don't think we should be talking about just women, by the way. We should be talking about migrants as well. We need to look at those people who come to Europe and find that their qualifications are possibly not recognised. So once again, we need to make sure that we capitalise on potential across the board. And Liechtenstein has a lot of companies which operate globally and certainly we have to make sure that people are educated to operate in an international environment. And I very much hope that at some point in time the penny will drop and people will realise that it is important to promote women within companies. And when I made my introductory remarks, I alluded to the fact that the needs of employees, workers have changed rather. Because women, for example, might want to work part-time, perhaps 50%, they would want perhaps additional leisure time. And so, the economy, business will just have to respond to that. I mean, obviously the State can make its contribution. Ms Kubik-Risch will probably be able to give us a few examples of that and talk about preventing violence, talk about women's refuges and similar institutions. I will pass on to her, if I may.

Ms Bernadette Kubik-Risch, Equal opportunities expert, Liechtenstein

Okay, well, thank you very much. Yes, I think you need a whole raft of measures when you are talking about business. We talked about paid parental leave earlier, about a better balance between paid and unpaid work. Better balance or more women in leadership positions. We need a lot of measures. Equal pay for equal work, of course, is extremely important too. You need a comprehensive concept. You may need to change the framework conditions to ensure that you can best foster these things. And Liechtenstein has, among other things, introduced an equal opportunities Prize for families and businesses across Liechtenstein. It is very recent, so I can't report on the results yet, but perhaps I will be able to another time. Thank you.

Ms Rósa Björk Brynjólfssdóttir, member of the Selection Panel of the Vigdís Prize for Women's Empowerment, Office of the Prime Minister of Iceland

Thank you so much for your good questions. I just want to, if I may, just short remarks from several of you. Our most powerful tool in Iceland - just to share the experience that we have - is regarding the working market is shared parental leave and then prolonging the parental leave. And we have had also the experience of free or low-cost day care, public day care, high quality public day care, and that we need to educate people and persons within the day care sector to be able to provide high quality, free or low-cost day care. And believe me, we have had many committees and delegation from abroad to come to Iceland to do research on the parental leave, the shared parental leave, the experience and what measures we have done to do so. This has been one of the most powerful tools that we have experienced in Iceland. So, yes, we can wait for another hundred years that the free market will realise that they have to give women more the same salaries and the same benefits. But the official governments and the municipal must come in and step in and provide day care and fight for parental leave. I just also want to say to my Irish friend here from the Caucus of Women in Ireland. The Irish public show a remarkable victory, I would say, when the Irish people voted against or to legalise abortion a few years ago. That was a remarkable campaign and a turnover of many decades of a very difficult and hard story. So, this can be done. You are thinking about the pay gap. Believe me, we in Iceland, we had decades of mapping and researching and reports on the pay gap between genders. And when we peel everything away, we have in general recent report shows us we have 12% pay gap difference between men and women who is not explained by any other things than their gender. Not the length of the work, not the type of the work we have done all this work and this is the only explanation left. 12%. So, women are paid 12% less than men because they are women. So, this is something that you have to tackle, my dear friends. And also, I want to say to my Italian friend here, I have been watching very closely the debate in Italy. And yes, you have the first Prime Minister who is a woman in Italy now, but in the middle of the 16-days awareness project of fighting and raising awareness of gender-based violence you have these terrible cases of gender-based violence and murder, feminicides in Italy. We have that in France, we have that in Iceland and Nordic countries as well. Equality is never given. You have to fight for it, you have to demand it. As with other human rights. The ones who are in power, they will never give human rights or equality. The ones who are marginalised, they have to fight for it. And when it comes to the judge system or a jurisdictional system, the punishment for rape and gender-based violence must be more severe. We have to send clear messages out there that gender-based violence will not be tolerated. We will not agree upon gender-based violence and we have to educate our young boys and then that is where the man has to step in. You have to educate young boys not to use gender-based violence against women. And it is not out of the blue that one of the most powerful slogan for fighting against gender-based violence is "believe the victims". So, you have to believe the victims.

Ms Mariia Mezentseva, Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly

Thank you very much, dear Rósa, that was a very powerful statement. And last but not least, dear President, I will give the floor to you for final remarks and then I will thank two more people in this hall and then I can already feel the smell of food. We will go for lunch.

Mr Tiny Kox, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Thank you very much, dear Mariia, thank you very much all. Let me make five short answers to issues that you have put on the table. First, Simon refers to the fact that misery is unequally divided. Women are far more often the victim of misery than men. We have half of humanity is female, but far more than half of all the misery is first delivered at the doorstep of women. And that means that when it was quoted that if we want to save the world, women have to do it, that is not a fancy idea, it is reality. If women don't do it, it will not happen. So, it is an obligation. Secondly, Simon and also Iulian, they asked more or less what we are doing ourselves in the Assembly, in the Council of Europe. Yes. The good thing is that I think we are managing quite well. Despina and our staff, they check and also the Equality Committee whether we deliver or whether we only have good ideas. There are positive developments and there are quite a lot not so positive developments. We have now seen a lot of positive developments, I think, in our staff, in the Secretariat, where we see ever more women playing an important role. But we still see - Iulian mentioned that - that although we have such nice proposals, in fact it is too many men and too few women. I think this should be indeed the discussion in our Organisation. And also, we have to look carefully to how do we behave. Rósa reminded me we had the MeToo report in 2017. Sometimes we really do ugly things, and we should be held accountable for this. There should be a follow up, I think, of the decisions that we took. Then we had a "Not in my Parliament" campaign, which was a good initiative, but this too needs to be followed up. You cannot do that once. You have to do it on a regular basis, otherwise it will not work. With regard to the so important issue of

violence against women, we are not talking about something. We are talking about the number one or number two crime in the whole of the world. I was just paying a visit to Mexico, and I was reminded there, especially by the two female Presidents of both Houses and nine out of ten female Chairs of committees, that this is number one for the Mexican society. If we cannot deal with violence against women and girls, then talking about human rights becomes a bit idle, I would say. And the good news is that both presidents of the Parliament have issued together with me a statement that we want now Mexico to sign and ratify the Istanbul Convention. And last, in the direction of my good friend Theodoros, he has promised us that he will look whether he can nominate a good candidate. He said a woman. It is not obliged that you have to nominate a woman, but it's not that you should intend to do it. I think that the result of this panel is that we all are obliged. If you do not know someone who would deserve this Prize, then I would say open your eyes, look around. If you then still do not see anything, then you are socially, politically and ideologically blind. So, I hope, and I would like to demand all of you, that you come at least up with one candidate. The selection panel, Rósa and others. They will take care if you come up with hundreds of proposals, they will select one winner. But I think we should feel this obligation, this Prize is more than doing something. It is also to encourage us all that we have to come up with proposals to show that there is not one role model. There are many of them. We only have to open our eyes, identify which group, which person, man, woman, whatever deserves this Prize. And then I think in June we will have a more than beautiful handing over of the Prize of this year. Thank you very much.

Ms Mariia Mezentseva, Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly

Indeed, colleagues, please share the information for those who may become amazing nominees. And among the thanking words given to Despina, President Tiny Kox, our honourable panellists, I would want to thank two more people in this room who are currently and always supporting our initiative. This is Ms Louise Barton, Director of the committees, and of course, the Secretariat of the Equality Committee and Non-Discrimination, Penelope Denu, as the Head of Secretariat and all the members of the Secretariat. Thank you. Dear friends, I see that you would want to extend the discussion further, but let's extend the actions further and have some food for thought, but also food for stomach. Thank you so much. The ceremony is over.